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(What the theory of literature is. Grounds and problems, chapter 5
translated by Anna Belladelli)

Chapter five: The non-coincidence principle in Mikhail Bakhtin

> "I am not what I am"
> Shakespeare, *Othello*, I,1, v.65)

1.   *The insipidities of dialogism (and dialectics after Marx) – Coincidence and non-coincidence.*

The title of this chapter is meant to highlight the leitmotif and logical-stylistic principles behind the description of Bakhtin's thought to be presented here. The way the title is worded is not in the least arbitrary, since the non-coincidence principle – that will be explained shortly – recurs several times in Bakhtin's work. This principle should actually be assigned the pre-eminent place in his thought, thus downsizing the 'dialogic principle' to which scholars seem to draw attention continuously.[1] Statistically speaking, terms such as *dialogue*, *dialogic*, and the like, certainly occur more frequently. But frequency is not necessarily a virtue: *dialogue* is a generic term, a word more suitable for describing than theorizing. Of course, we may still use it for the sake of immediacy or as a starting point for further clarifications. But one should always keep in mind the line of reasoning which led Bakhtin to reject a more philosophical term that was extremely popular in the first half of the 20th century, i.e. *dialectics*. This word refers to the method – not only the philosophical conception – of Hegel, Marx, and the philosophers who followed in their footsteps (including Heraclitus, if we go back in time). The 20th century debate on dialectics was lively and

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[1] A slightly different version of this expression appears in the title of a book by Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The dialogical principle* (1981), which is probably, partly owing to its conciseness, the best introduction to Bakhtin's thought: "the greatest theoretician of literature in the twentieth century", Todorov states (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1984, p. IX). This is an opinion one cannot possibly disagree with. Todorov's book will be quoted using the abbreviation Bpd, followed by the page number of the American translation. Another excellent text of a general nature is *Mikhail Bakhtin* (1984) by Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist. For further information, see the bibliography at the end of this volume.

wide ranging, at least up to the 1970s. Nevertheless, despite its popularity, it proved to be inadequate. Then, all of a sudden, it died out, partly due to non-philosophical causes. Anyway, our concern here is with the inner causes. Dialectic thought died for intrinsic causes, and precisely on account of a degree of conceptual poverty that had been masked for some decades by the widespread consensus enjoyed by Marxist discourse in general. This poverty, rigidity and inability to elaborate, concerns basic notions such as the *category* system – which of course plays a pivotal role in any form of philosophy. This is the key point: dialectics is a form of thinking which defines itself as a *theory of opposites*, and yet it has always failed to cope with the polysemy inherent in the field of opposing relations, i.e. the difference between contradictories, contraries, and correlatives.[2] The lack of a typology of opposites did not prevent Hegel and other thinkers from conducting major investigations. However, after Hegel and Marx, ignoring or neglecting the question of the polysemy of opposites was no longer admissible. No advancement in theory could be achieved without focusing on the difference between incompatible opposites (*contradictories*, e.g. 'I am sitting down and standing up at the same time'), compatible opposites that can generate compromises (*contraries*, e.g. 'black and white', with the possibility of a mixed case such as 'grey') and interdependent opposites (correlatives, e.g. 'master and servant'). Failing to understand the need for this distinction caused the 20th century representative thinkers in the field of dialectics to maintain the object of their thought in a state of vagueness and confusion.

Such vagueness and confusion is unacceptable, and can even appear incomprehensible nowadays. However, we should keep in mind the fact that the ideological dogmatism of that time, which also had a considerable following among philosophers, made critical reflection practically impossible. And even those who criticized the stereotypes of dialectics – aiming at proposing a more refined and complex formulation – ran the risk of being treated as an enemy, and accused of attempting to destroy dialectics: the worst of crimes for dogmatic Hegelian Marxists.

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[2] * The typology of opposing relations has been addressed more extensively in Chapter Three. For example, the difference between the square of opposites, formulated by medieval logicians drawing on Aristotle, and Greimas' semiotic square is explained: the former consists of propositions, the latter isolated terms. In this chapter I simply take up the definitions of contradictories, contraries, and correlatives.

In the Western world, this kind of crime was merely philosophical; but in the Stalinist Soviet Union those who opposed dialectics, or the other dogmas of Marxist ideology, were endangering not only their freedom but even their very lives. As a result of his failure to adhere to orthodox tenets, Bakhtin was arrested in 1929 and sentenced to five years in a concentration camp. The sentence was then reduced, because of ill health, to exile in Kazakhstan, on the border with Siberia. Relations with the authorities remained difficult. It was not until 1965 that Bakhtin was able to publish his book on Rabelais, which he had worked on twenty years earlier. The most important collection of his essays, entitled *Voprosy literatury i estetiki*, was published in Russia in 1975, some months after his death.[3]

This specific historical context made it extremely difficult to posit a new, heterodox meaning for the word *dialectics*, a new perspective emphasizing non-coincidence instead of synthesis; using Marx to get to Hegel and non-standard Hegelian dialectics was hardly a feasible task. For official ideology and the frozen philosophy in the blind service of that very ideology, dialectics was the concatenation of the triads (thesis/antithesis/synthesis), the engine of history understood as the history of the class struggle. Simultaneously, ideology was claiming that humanity had just entered a new phase: there was now one country, namely the Soviet Union, where this struggle could almost be considered at an end. Being so close to the final goal increased a suspicious attitude towards any form of dissent. But let us take a look at the timeline. Bakhtin was arrested in 1929; seven years later Stalin was to make his major announcement: "In industry, the capitalist class has disappeared. In agriculture, the kulak class has disappeared. In commerce, both merchants and speculators have disappeared. The exploiting classes have all been swept away".[4] The general mood was: zero tolerance towards those who did not adhere unconditionally to the socialist project, in that they allegedly hindered the realization of a utopia.

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[3] Four essays contained in this collection, translated into English, can be found in *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), edited by M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press).
[4] Stalin, Sul progetto di Costituzione dell'URSS (1936),

Nevertheless, presenting Bakhtin as an instinctively 'dialectic' thinker is arguably still plausible, provided we reassign the appropriate degree of polysemy to the term *dialectics*. Even in Hegel two positions can be said to coexist: scisssional (tragic) thought on the one hand, synthesis on the other. According to 'scissional' Hegel, identity is the identity of identity and of non-identity, i.e. *non-coincidence*.

Scissional thinking unmasks the fallacy of identity as 'coincidence':[5] the two terms are not necessarily synonymous, and there is no reason why one should not think of identity as being what differs from itself. In a nutshell: it is possible that *A* coincides with *A,* but it is also possible that *A* coincides with non-*A*. So, there are two different *ways of identity*, and we must learn to make this distinction.

Chapter III has already clarified that this thesis does not in the least confute the principle of non-contradiction; and therefore, it forces us to question the logical statute of non-coincidence: *what relationship can tie the opposites together, without generating a banal logical error?*

The answer – a glimpse of it, actually – can be found in Aristotle's typology: i.e. the relationship between *correlatives*, or interdependent opposites, which are in conflict with as much as they imply and presuppose each other. A paradoxical relationship, but not a contradictory one.[6] Aristotle's writings also contained an example that was to become famous: i.e. the relationship between master and servant, which Hegel described in terms of instability and dialectic evolution in what is probably the most famous chapter in *Phenomenology*.[7] Yet, in the master/servant example

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[5] This fallacy is insuppressible, and so is the *separative* style of thought, which has its foundation in what Heidegger calls *intra-worldly entity*, and in a tendency to construct an ontology starting from this type of entity. * Cf. chapter VII. It is worth reflecting on the difference between fallacy and mere error: fallacy can always point to a *part of reality*, thus protecting itself from being openly defied or challenged. But this strength may also lead to blindness: by inducing one to persist in fallacy, it becomes a prelude to *bêtise*.

[6] I would like to point out once more that contradictories (e.g. 'X is sitting down and standing up at the same time') are *incompatible* opposites: the presence of one excludes the other. Correlatives are compatible; they exist thanks to their relationship. The fact that dialectics has labeled itself as 'contradiction theory' denotes an unforgivable lack of lucidity. If dialectics had wanted to assign a privileged role to one of the relations between opposites, the most relevant and key for its own research project, it would have called itself *correlatives' theory*. In so doing, dialectics would have presented itself as a 'thought of conflicts and connections', as a polysemic thought which does not privilege synthesis and conciliation, and which is able to recognize the fecundity of conflict.

[7] G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spiri*t (1807) (trans. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). With Alexandre Kojève's mediation, the chapter "Mastership and Servitude" lead Lacan to important reflections on desire: the object of one's desire is less an object, than desire of the other.

the opposites appear to be external to one another: each of them is an undivided subject. For this reason, their correlation appears as mere *interdependence*; in this case, interdependence is not to be seen in terms of equality but of hierarchy, of an intrinsically reversible relationship: one day the servant may become the master. From this point of view, the master/servant relationship loses all its paradoxical features: if non-coincidence is trivialized as mere interdependence and rotation of opposites, it eventually vanishes. We should therefore look for more complex cases, where correlation (the conflict dividing identity, the conflict between *idem* and *alter*) is a relationship which is inherent to the single individual. We will find them in literature.

There are many passages in Bakhtin's work where dialectic relationships appear merely as interdependences or basic interactions. However, if one goes beyond the terminology used, there is no doubt that Bakhtin's goal was to formulate the principle of non-coincidence as a principle which constitutes those entities we call *persons* (be they real or fictional). It refers both to human beings and to fictional characters:

"A man never coincides (*sovpadaet*) with himself. One cannot apply to him the formula of identity A = A". [8]

"Racine's hero is equal to himself; Dostoevsky's hero never for an instant coincides with himself" (D, 51).

Here Bakhtin is being unfair to Racine, as he was to be unfair to Tolstoy for a certain period. But injustice is perhaps unavoidable when the purpose is to create a new vision, a new model. [9] Despite its objectionable rigid schematism, the second excerpt provides us with a fundamental clarification: *non-coincidence* is one possibility; it is a *necessary possibility* (maybe a greater or more likely one), but nevertheless just one possibility, not a fact or a deterministic connection. Therefore, people could even end up betraying their own destiny, their most authentic vocation, and relinquish their chance to overcome their own limits. If this is the case, individuals eventually become stiffer and stiffer: their identity is undivided, perfectly coinciding with itself, and it can be legitimately

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[8] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963), edited and translated by Caryl Emerson, University of Minnesota Press, 1984, p. 59. The first edition was published in 1929. From this point onwards this will be quoted with the abbreviation D, followed by the number of the page in the English translation.

[9] Bakhtin changed his mind about Tolstoy. In 1929 he wrote "Tolstoy's world is monolithically monologic" (D, 56); in *Discourse in the Novel* (1934-35) he states, on the contrary, that "discourse in Tolstoy is characterized by a sharp internal dialogism" (in *The Dialogic Imagination*, edited by M. Holquist, translated by C. Emerson and M. Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin 1981, p. 283).

described by means of their main properties. We will define this type of description as 'property-based description'. Conversely, non-coinciding persons and characters require a different kind of description and analysis. Let us now explore Bakhtin's character theory.

2. *Dostoevsky's Perspective – Self-consciousness as rebellion - Dostoevsky's "cruel talent".*

The notion of *character* is posited as one of the most difficult challenges for critics and literary theory. Faced with this test, traditional criticism has always proved to be limited and naive, while technically aggressive theories (so defined only on account of their linguistic tools) have failed to hide the paucity and insipidity of their very techniques. The problem is too complex to be left entirely to those who study literature: theory must open up, linguistics must yield to philosophy and human sciences – at the very least, to psychoanalysis. Without some serious conceptual reflection on *identity*, this issue will always remain inaccessible.

Bakhtin did not approve of psychoanalysis; conversely, it was philosophy that played a major role in his development as a critic. His explicit judgments on Freud, Nietzsche or Heidegger, however, should not be given too much emphasis: what really counts is the range of affinities we find in their theories. Neither should we think of philosophy as a system of standpoints exclusively defined by their own content; for instinctively philosophical minds such as those of Bakhtin, and Dostoevsky, his most beloved writer, philosophy is first of all a style of thought, a style of logics. It is from this style that the principle of non-coincidence stems.

The book on Dostoevsky, published in 1963, is amazing and breath-taking in its originality – although one should not forget that the 1929 edition already contained many of its key points. Before analysing the main theses of this book (the polyphonic novel, and so forth), we should learn how to get to the initial intuitions that generated it. Bakhtin sees every great writer not only as the author of a certain number of works, but also as a *perspective* on all literature. Thanks to Dostoevsky, we can assimilate a point of view which enables us to make a brand new reading even

of the authors who came before him, besides the authors who came after him and who were more likely to have been directly influenced by his work.[10]

Yet, Dostoevsky is also something else: his writing and artistic vision are marked by 'perspectivism'.[11] Perhaps nobody prior to him had created characters whose identity is so entirely, so intrinsically defined by their *way of being*. When considering Dostoevsky's characters, the 'property-based conception'[12] is as inadequate, trivial, and falsifying as ever. Bakhtin makes this very clear:

> the hero interests Dostoevsky as a *particular point of view on the world and on oneself*, as the position enabling a person to interpret and evaluate his own self and his surrounding reality" (D, 47).

The identity of a hero, therefore, is not to be sought in a system of "fixed and specific socially typical and individually characteristic traits" (ibidem) or qualities; even the question "Who is this?" is not worthy of any real attention, and has no advantage to offer as compared to the question "What is this?", unless the property-based conception is dismissed first. A character is a *way of being*, a *how*. This new notion of character would have remained undeveloped, at the level of mere intentions so to speak, if Dostoevsky had not invented "utterly special methods of discovery and artistic characterization" (D, 48). One essential tool – also in a technical sense – for this new view is *self-consciousness*. But once again we need to be more precise: this is not self-consciousness seen as the characters' capacity to reason about themselves – there would be nothing new about this: even flat or at least monological characters can do this. Dostoevsky does not simply add self-consciousness to the other traits shaping a character; he modifies its *function*:

> At a time when the self-consciousness of a character was usually seen merely as an element of his reality, as merely one of the features of his integrated image, here, on the contrary, all of reality becomes an element of the character's self-consciousness. The author (…) casts it all into the crucible of the hero's own self-consciousness (D, 48).

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[10] As Borges said in the 1951 essay "Kafka and his precursors", "each writer *creates* his precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future". In ID. (2000), *Other inquisitions, 1937-1952*. Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 108.

[11] This is not the only affinity between Bakhtin and Nietzsche. Cf. the outstanding essay by Lev Shestov, *The philosophy of tragedy. Dostoevsky and Nietzsche* (1903), published only three years following the latter's death.

[12] This term indicates a conception according to which each individual (be he/she real or fictional) is adequately defined by a set of properties or qualities. It is very often the case that traditional literary criticism is satisfied with the most evident qualities of a character: Hamlet is undecided, Julien Sorel is ambitious, and so forth. Such examples have a strong didactic function and are purposely banal. Yet, abandoning the property-based conception is harder than it seems, as it is deeply rooted in everyday thinking. Later on we will see that only a logical turn can make one dismiss such a view.

> One must not interpret the self-consciousness of a hero on the socio-characterological plan, and see it merely as a new trait of the character - that is, see in Devushkin or Golyadkin (*The Double*) a Gogolian hero plus self-consciousness (D, 50).

There is a remarkable difference between a 'non-Dostoevskyan' inner transformation and the implacable exercise of self-consciousness which is at play in his novels. Let us try to see this distinction by means of an example from the novel *The Betrothed*, by Alessandro Manzoni, set in 17th century Northern Italy under Spanish rule. Provoked by "a certain nobleman, (…) an arrogant man and a professional bully", the aristocrat Lodovico feels impelled to propose a duel and kills him. For the protagonist of this episode, the death of his adversary is "a revelation of feelings he had never known before. To see his enemy fall to the ground, to see the change in his face, as it passed in a moment from fury and menace to the vanquished, solemn peace of death, was an experience which transformed the soul of the killer".[13] After taking refuge in a monastery, Lodovico undergoes a process of inner crisis leading towards a radical change: he eventually decides to become a friar, taking the name of Father Cristoforo. This transformation is determined by self-consciousness: the character splits in two, observes his past life, and condemns it. Self-consciousness is *added* to the previously existing conscience: therefore, a transformation takes place, yet the character remains *undivided*. There is nothing 'scissional' about the character of Father Cristoforo, nor is there in Jean Valjean, or in other countless cases of conversion.

On the other hand, for Dostoevsky's great heroes, self-consciousness acts like a principle of dissolution of anything stable and fixed, like a principle of tormenting division. The character no longer coincides with himself, nor is he able to want to do so. Dostoevsky's "cruel talent" condemns him to self-torture.[14] Not satisfied with giving his characters a divided identity, the author keeps on tormenting them.[15] This is the authentic Dostoevskyan view of human relationships in all their struggling, tragic nature; and the reader should understand by now why I am so unwilling to use a

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[13] Alessandro Manzoni, *I promessi sposi* (1840), tr. The *Betrothed* (1972). New York: Penguin Books, pp. 80, 83.

[14] The epithet "a cruel talent" quoted by Bakhtin (D, 54) was coined by Michailovsky.

[15] "The special sort of moral torture that Dostoevsky inflicts upon his heroes, in order to force out of them that ultimate word of a self-consciousness pushed to its extreme limits, permits him to take all that is merely material, merely an object, all that is fixed and unchanging, all that is external and neutral in the representation of a person, and dissolve it in the realm of the hero's self-consciousness and self-utterance" (Bakhtin, D, 54).

terminological family – that of dialogue and dialogism – which sounds too oriented towards a certain idea of irenism, of reciprocal exchange, of souls opening up to themselves and to other souls, and so forth. In order to avoid the ethical banalisation of the world created by Dostoevsky, we will therefore have to leave the lexis of dialogism behind and focus on the logics of his characters, and more precisely, on the principle of non-coincidence. This principle generates a non-property based conception according to which the character tests his own freedom against himself and others with a degree of radicalness that was still unknown to literature, and maybe also to philosophy. Let us listen to the Underground Man:

> Oh, if only it was out of laziness that I've done nothing. Good heavens, I should have had so much self-respect. I should have respected myself precisely because I was at any rate capable of being lazy; there would at least have been one seemingly positive characteristic in which I myself could have believed. Question: who is he? Answer: a lazy fellow. Oh yes, you know it really would be extremely pleasant to hear that said of oneself. It implies a positive definition, it means that there is something that can be said about me. 'A lazy fellow'. Why, that's a rank and title, that's a career! [16]

Bakhtin comments as follows: "The Underground Man dissolves in himself all possible fixed features of his person, making them all the object of his own introspection… And for the author as well he is not a carrier of traits and qualities" (D, 51). The greatest danger, for Dostoevskyan heroes, is completeness, is the last, saturating word: "all of you is here, there is nothing more in you, and nothing more to be said about you" (D, 58). That word is uttered by the other – by the *otherness* that the discourse of ethics, of dialogism, sees *immediately* and above all as an opportunity to open up and seek salvation. However, things are not so simple; Dostoevsky's characters

> do furious battle with such definitions of their personality in the mouths of other people. They all acutely sense their own inner unfinalizability, their capacity to outgrow, as it were, from within and to render *untrue* any externalizing and finalizing definition of them (D, 59).

Otherness is thus construed as inner obsession: the voices of others echo throughout the consciousness of the individual with devastating force. How many characters are strong enough to resist and rebel? After all, if an individual is so vulnerable to the power of the other, it is because the relationship with otherness is structural, intrinsic. Bakhtin anticipates Lacan's view: both think that

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[16] Fiodor Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground* (1864), tr. by Jane Kentish. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 20-21; Cf. Bakhtin, D, 50-51.

individuals are subdued and alienated since the very first instant of their existence. What Lacan will see as the function of the Other with a capital O (language, culture, social institutions) is already described by Bakhtin as the dispossessing and invasive action of the words of others.[17] Most of the time, this action goes unnoticed: it is only rarely that we realize that we are being spoken by language, and that our words are deeply penetrated by the words of others. Well, in Dostoevsky's characters this awareness builds up to the level of exasperation.

> What the Underground Man thinks about most of all is what others think or might think about him; he tries to keep one step ahead of every other consciousness, every other thought about him, every other point of view on him (D, 52).

> The hero from the underground eavesdrops on every word someone else says about him, he looks at himself, as it were, in all the mirrors of other people' consciousness, he knows all the possible refractions of his image in those mirrors (…) But he also knows that all these definitions, prejudiced as well as objective, rest in his hands and he cannot finalize them precisely because he himself perceives them; he can go beyond their limits and can thus make them inadequate. He knows that he has the *final word...*" (D, 53).

Conscience and self-consciousness are not properties of the *res cogitans*, i.e. of the person seen as a spiritual being in contraposition to material objects. There is nothing spiritualistic here, either in Dostoevsky or in Bakhtin. It is not a matter of abandoning the term *spirit*: only, this notion must be understood as 'energy', as 'volubility', as a form of pitiless and cruel intelligence. Dostoevsky's novels are novels of cruelty, of a special type of cruelty that will enlighten the more recent formulation by Artaud, and that will, in a sense, be enlightened by it in return.[18]

3. *The polyphonic novel - Activity and functions of the author – Polyphony is not multiphony.*

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[17] "Between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme, and this is an environment that it is often difficult to penetrate (...) Indeed, any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist - or, on the contrary, by the 'light' of alien words that have already been spoken about it ", from the 1934-1935 essay "Discourse in the novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, 1981, Austin: University of Texas Press, p. 276.
  "language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent (…) And not all words for just anyone submit equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property: many words stubbornly resist, others remain 'alien', sound foreign in a mouth of the one who appropriate them and who now speaks them; they cannot be assimilated into his context and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker "(ibid., pp. 293-294).
[18] See the two manifestos of the "Theatre of Cruelty" (1932 and 1933) in Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double* (1958). New York: Grove Press. The term *cruelty* is not, of course, to be interpreted in its usual meaning. "I have therefore said 'cruelty' as I might have said 'life' or 'necessity'", Artaud writes, for example (letter to J.P., 9 November 1932, ibidem, p. 114).

The artistic thought of Dostoevsky is, then, scissional. His characters are divided within themselves and by themselves. The very name 'Raskolnikov' contains this logical principle – *raskol*, schism: and it is only from this perspective that the originality of Dostoevsky's creation can be understood. Bakhtin writes:

> We consider Dostoevsky one of the greatest innovators in the realm of artistic form. He created, in our opinion, a completely new type of artistic thinking, which we have provisionally called *polyphonic* (D, 3).

Bakhtin uses this term, taken from the language of music, not only to refer to a plurality of voices, but to the *way* of their interaction, and first of all the *way* of their identity: an interaction among *undivided voices* is still 'multiphony', not polyphony.[19] But after all, the fact that a single voice ends up coming so radically and profoundly into contact with other voices happens because no voice can ever shut itself off from the rest of the world. Otherness is what determines it right from the start. However, this does not imply that every conscience, and every voice, is totally and constantly dialogic. Neither does it mean that shutting off is not feasible. Rather, it means that, by not opening up towards other voices, the individual condemns himself to *being spoken* by the voices that *already live within himself*. In other words, he shuts the door after alien voices, belonging to some anonymous otherness, have already entered. Therefore, opening up and conflicting become the necessary conditions for the character to achieve a word and viewpoint of his own.

Everyday conversations are dominated by closure, by stereotypes that we have internalised and that are in any case a form of social interaction. What really happens – which is also substantiated by several studies in Conversation Analysis – is that even in everyday conversations we do not simply send out messages devised on the basis of a shared code and decode the ones that we receive (as Jakobson's communication model describes): conversation is interaction, and

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[19] For this reason, some provisional definitions formulated by Bakhtin need to be completed. For example: "The important thing in Dostoevsky's polyphony is precisely what happens *between various consciousnesses*, that is, their interaction and interdependence" (D, 36).

language is always an interactional activity. By the same token, the invention of metaphors is not only limited to artists. In a nutshell: there is no ultimate boundary line between everyday and literary language. Still, art has the power to reach the most complex and flexible modes of elaboration. The line between these two languages is not to be found at the level of space or time, but rather in the differences between linguistic constructions: despite overstepping the threshold of mere information, and despite being forms of interaction, most of those constructions remain chiefly *monological*.

Here lies the great, unbridgeable conflict which determines the identity of language: the conflict between the monological and the polyphonic principles. In literature this conflict takes on and tries out all kinds of forms – especially the ones we would call *extreme*. Polyphony, then, means *plurality of divided voices*, of cracked, intrinsically dialectic or dialogical voices. It can easily be deduced that no voice will ever manage to top the other ones, and that no point of view will ever manage to take over and silence the other ones. Rebellion against the other, nevertheless, is always possible. There is one more fundamental aspect of polyphonic construction which is worth discussing, i.e. a change in the author's position. He does not define his characters, neither does he limit them; he converses with them, listens to them: the character, in turn, "hears him (the author) and is *capable of answering him*" (D, 63):

> In Dostoevsky's larger design, the character is a carrier of a fully valid word and not the mute, voiceless object of the author's words (…)
> Thus the author's discourse about a character is discourse about discourse (...) By the very construction of the novel, the author speaks not *about* a character, but *with* him (D, 63).

One may wonder how this is possible: Bakhtin's description seems somewhat forced, hyperbolic. Since the character is a creation of the author, how can he converse with him? Is it not always the author who ultimately leads the dance? Bakhtin is aware of this objection: in his view, the "relative independence" of the characters may cause a misunderstanding (D, 64). While it is obvious that the character's words are created by the author, it is also true that

> A character's discourse is created by the author, but created in such a way that it can develop to the full its inner logic and independence as *someone else' discourse*, the word of the *character himself*. As a result it does not fall out of the author's design, but only out of a monologic authorial field of vision (D, 65). **

The author, then, is not a character like the others. His novelty and role in the polyphonic novel can be described as follows:

a) the author's advantage over the other characters concerns information, not semantics (D, 73)[20]. The information advantage is necessary to carry the story forward (only he knows what will happen and how things will turn out in the end); conversely, by relinquishing his privileged position from a semantic point of view, the author does not objectify his characters, thus enabling each of them to develop his own *inner logic*;

b) the author is by no means passive. He could never be passive. Dostoevsky's consciousness

> is constantly and everywhere present in the novel, and is active in it to the highest degree. But the function of this consciousness and the forms of its activity are different than in a monologic novel: the author's consciousness does not transform other consciousnesses (that is, the consciousnesses of the characters) into objects, and does not give them secondhand and finalizing definitions (...) It reflects and re-creates not a world of objects, but precisely these other consciousnesses with their worlds, re-creates them in their authentic *unfinalizability* (which is, after all, their essence)" (D, 68) **

As you may notice, the formulation of this discourse owes much to the great season of Russian formalism: function and forms. *How* does polyphonic consciousness *function*? What are its *expressive modes*? This is what has to be understood;

c) the author's active role, albeit never a limiting or objectifying one, manifests itself in what we will call *superiority of articulation*. In his 1961 notes Bakhtin writes:

> Our point of view in no way assumes a passivity on the part of the author, who would then merely assemble others' points of view, others' truths, completely denying his own point of view, his own truth. This is not the case at all; the case is rather a completely new and special interrelationship between the author's and the other's truth. The author is profoundly *active*, but his activity is of a special *dialogic* sort (…). Dostoevsky frequently interrupts, but he never drowns out the other's voice, never finishes it off 'from himself', that is, out of his own and alien consciousness. This is, so to speak, the activity of God in His relation to man, a relation allowing man to reveal himself utterly (in his immanent development), to judge himself, to refute himself.[21]

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[20] "For himself Dostoevsky never retains any essential "surplus" of meaning (…)" (D, 73).
[21] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Toward a Reworking the Dostoevsky book* (1961), *Appendix II* in *Problems on Dostoevsky's Poetics*, cit., p. 285.

Drawing on Auerbach, we argue that the role of the author consists in leading the character's emotions and thoughts "to full linguistic maturity".[22] Without his intervention the characters would be prisoners of everyday language, of its redundancy, deficiency, vagueness: their voice would either be weak or emphatic, banally mimetic. A bad actress, as Barthes observed, is the one who exclaims "How horrible!" in a horrified tone.[23] It is the elaboration made by the author which assigns tension and drama to the voice of the character. Paradoxically, the author's intervention makes the character more authentic and free.

Therefore, the polyphonic novel is not simply a novel with many voices: *polyphony is not multi-phony*. A relatively short text may be more polyphonic than a novel with dozens and dozens of characters. Indeed, one should always avoid relying on a 'numerical conception' or on other pitfalls such as the external form: a novel or a film narrating many alternating stories, which at times interweave with one another, and featuring characters who take their turn in speaking and speak in the first person, may be as far as ever from polyphony.[24] And the polyphonic effect does not even depend on mere lexical heterogeneity, i.e. on the co-presence of a variety of expressive registers, from learned to bureaucratic to slang. From whatever angle one looks at it, one point is clear: conflict, not multiplicity, is the ultimate *condition for the possibility of polyphony*. Multiplicity may become polyphonic only if it is elaborated from – and dominated by – a scissional perspective.

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[22] „Flaubert tut nichts als das Material, das sie bietet, in seiner vollen Subjektivität sprachreif zu machen"
        Erich Auerbach ([1946] 2002), *Mimesis. The representation of reality in Western literature.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[23] This does not, however, exclude the possibility of a mimetic performance: however, even a mimetic performance, in theatre or cinema, has a problem with measure. And with verisimilitude. There is a risk of being hyperbolic and ridiculous.

[24] One example. On the inside flap of its Italian edition, Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993; Italian translation 1996, Parma: Guanda) is defined as *polyphonic*. Actually, it is a *multiphonic* novel, in which the novelist allows one character, called Renton, to speak in the first person for approximately twenty five pages; in the following four pages, the first person is taken over by Sick Boy; then there is a narration in the third person for nine pages, which introduces an episode in the life of Nina; and so on. This is merely a succession of voices, with the novelist who records the conversations and adds a word of his own every now and then.

4. *Translinguistics -   The repeatable and the unique – Intertextuality*

"I was lucky and unlucky like no other", Orson Welles once said of himself, alluding to the privilege of working in absolute freedom on his first masterpiece, *Citizen Kane*, in 1941, and to the enormous difficulties that he later encountered when dealing with Hollywood producers. But Bakhtin could have applied the same consideration to himself, and in a more painful way too: his intellectual education developed in very lively and stimulating years, when Russian formalists were reading Saussure and planning a science of literature, when the debate between Formalism and Marxism was at times authentically theoretical; this was Bakhtin's 'luck', besides having a mind which was instinctively philosophical, which could enable him to build a more complex and more original theory than the ones devised by the Formalists. In contrast to this, he witnessed the end of an unrepeatable historical period,[25] and suffered the consequences of this situation in his private and professional life. As mentioned earlier, 1929 is the year of his book on Dostoevsky, but it is also the year of his sentence, of his exile, of an enforced silence which was to last for thirty years. Prior to this, Bakhtin had contributed to the birth of an intellectual circle, first in Nevel, a whistle-stop town in the countryside, then in Vitebsk, and finally in Petersburg in 1924. Among his friends were Vološinov and Medvedev, who later published essays which were so closely influenced by Bakhtin that some scholars even attributed them entirely to him.[26] However, one is more likely to agree with Todorov's balanced position, according to which – given that Bakhtin never claimed authorship of these books, not even at the beginning of the '70s – there are noteworthy differences between these works and those actually written by Bakhtin. Therefore, considering Vološinov and Medvedev merely as pseudonyms would be incorrect. At the same time, it is hardly possible not to acknowledge the unity of thought displayed in these publications. Todorov suggests that they be

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[25] Regardless of the political evaluations that can be assigned to those times, one cannot but be impressed by certain testimonies, for example Shklovsky's: "Whatever one did, whether it was to open a school of prompters for the theatre of the Red Fleet or to organize a course on the theory of rhythm in a hospital, there was always an audience, the public were always there. People, at that time, were extraordinarily receptive" (*A Sentimental journey: Memoirs 1917-1922* (1923), trans. by Richard Sheldon (1970/2004) London: Dalkey Archive Press.

[26] Valentin Nikolaevič Voloshinov (1894-1936) wrote *Freudism* (1927) and *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929). Pavel Nikolaevič Medvedev (1891-1938) wrote *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (1928). As Todorov observes, "In fact, the three books are as many condemnations and executions: psychoanalysis, formalism in literary studies, contemporary linguistics (especially then nascent structuralism) all draw fire" (Bdp, 9).

cited using double last names, separated by a slash, e.g. Medvedev/Bakhtin, or Vološinov/Bakhtin (Bdp, 5-11).

Bakhtin's future tenets emerge only partially in these publications. Nevertheless, one can already notice his dissatisfaction with this new linguistics, which is a point of no return in language studies. What is then Bakhtin's opinion about Saussure? He does not agree entirely with the new research programme; in fact, he points out its limitations and suggests new horizons:

Language and the word are almost everything in human life. But one must not think that this all-embracing and multifaceted reality can be the subject of only one science, linguistics, or that it can be understood through linguistic methods alone. (…) Linguistics studies only the relationships among elements within the language system, not the relationships among utterances and not the relations of utterances to reality and to the speaker (author)". [27]

The critical reference to structural linguistics is clear; but can it be extended to the whole of linguistics? To a great extent, it can: Chomsky's linguistics has not in the least modified the research approach which is being criticized here; conversely, the study of utterances has undergone a considerable development in the last few decades; it is likely, however, that Bakhtin would still judge it incomplete from a 'dialogic' point of view. Therefore, it is worth examining the program that Bakhtin calls *metalingvistika*, a term which Todorov suggests should be referred to as *translinguistics*[28] - the prefix *trans* indicating expansion, or the act of going beyond. Twentieth-century linguistics is based on a process of abstraction that, albeit initially legitimate, becomes eventually reductive: by essentializing the real, individual actions of each speaker, one is able to single out that area of virtuality which Saussure called *langue* and Chomsky called *competence*. But what is temporarily left out should be later re-included in the analysis; in spite of this, modern language science considers the concreteness and vitality of speech as variables that deserve no specific attention.

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[27] Michail Bakhtin, *The problem of text in linguistics, in philology and in other humanistic sciences*) (1959-61), in *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, cit., p. 118.

[28] Todorov, cit., pp. 24-25 e 54. The term had already been used by Julia Kristeva in a seminal article, *Le mot, le dialogue et le roman* (1967), now in Σημειωτικη *Rechercher pour une sémanalyse* (1969) p. 149: a concise presentation of Bakhtin's ideas, which had just started to become known in the West. Whatever terminology is chosen, the one thing that must be clear is that Bakhtin's *metalingvistika* is completely different from metalanguage.

At this point some difficult questions need to be asked: how does translinguistics build on linguistics? What is its precise object of study? We may try to sketch out an analogy, considering Bakhtin's hesitations: translinguistics leans and builds on linguistics in the same way in which sexual drives lean on self-preservation drives, according to Freud's theory. Self-preservation drives (or Ego drives) such as hunger and thirst are stiffer, less inventive; sexual drives are more flexible and subject to metamorphosis, both in their aims and choice of their objects. But the latter rely – not externally – on the former: what is first and foremost a life function, sucking from the mother's breast, brings excitement to one area of the body, namely the mouth and the lips, which eventually become erogenous zones; so the mother's breast becomes the first object of sexual drive. By the same token, while linguistics studies systems of relationships, syntax, and the pragmatic actions of an idealized speaker, translinguistics is concerned with discourses and *genres* in their concreteness and malleability. The relationship between these two disciplines is not external, like the figures of a mathematical addition, but rather inclusive, like a body which includes its own skeleton.

What should be meant by the term *concreteness*, the meaning of which is seemingly obvious? Is it a synonym of 'individuality'? At a first glance, it would seem that Bakhtin uses the Saussurian distinction between *langue* and *parole* to claim the greater importance of *parole*, i.e. of individual language production. Is it perhaps that translinguistics is the linguistics of *parole,* the linguistics of *performance*? Instead of studying a system of signs, it studies discourse. Instead of clauses, utterances; whereas the syntagmatic units of language, sentences, are repeatable, utterances are always unique:

> The utterance (speech work) as an unrepeatable, historically unique individual whole (…)
> Units of language that are studied by linguistics can in principle be reproduced an unlimited
> number of times in an unlimited number of utterances.[29]

Todorov comments: "I can certainly repeat the sentence that I have just uttered, but in spite of all apparent identities, the two utterances will not be identical: the status of the second is nearer to

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[29] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis* (1959-60) in *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, pp. 127-128.

that of citation " (Bdp, 26). The difference between linguistics and translinguistics is then clear: the former would consider the two realizations as being substantially identical, and their difference as being, say, *indifferent*; individuality is an optional variable, that science has the right not to be interested in; conversely, the latter would consider the two utterances as being two different acts, and their diversity as being insuppressible.[30]

Literature provides us with an extreme example confirming this theory – as well as the presence of logical and theoretical problems in literature, of puzzles challenging interpretative intelligence. We find this in a fascinating short story written by Borges, *Pierre Menard, Author of the* Quixote. After listing the texts that make up the visible work left by this novelist, Borges informs the reader that another one is there:

> I shall turn now to the other, the subterranean, the interminably heroic production - the *oeuvre nonpareil*, the *oeuvre* that must remain – for such are our human limitations! – unfinished! This work, perhaps the most significant writing of our times, consists of the ninth and thirty-eighth chapters of Part I of *Don Quixote* and a fragment of Chapter XXII. I know that such a claim is on the face of it absurd; justifying that 'absurdity' shall be the primary object of this note.[31]

The task, or rather the undertaking, which was only partially completed by Pierre Menard, must be understood in its conceptual truth.

> "Pierre Menard did not want to compose *another* Quixote, which surely is easy enough – he wanted to compose *the* Quixote. Nor, surely, need one be obliged to note that his goal was never a mechanical transcription of the original; he had no intention of *copying* it. His admirable ambition was to produce a number of pages which coincided – word for word and line for line - with those of Miguel de Cervantes". [32]

So, neither did Menard attempt a duplication or a simulation, nor a resurrection, but rather an impossible coincidence. This is the paradox outlined by Borges, and this is its meta-literary value: *the relationship of literature with the impossible*.[33] Let us leave the whole of this short story to the reader's analysis, and focus on its climax for the time being:

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[30] The object of translinguistics is not the identity of two acts (*parole*, *token*, *performance*) compared to *langue*, to *type*, or to *competence* – to use Saussure's, Peirce's, and Chomsky's terminology, respectively. It is rather a difference which reverberates against our very conception of language as a system, as a set of rules or collective habits, thus forcing us to find a new formulation for it.

[31] Cf. Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones* (1944); *Fictions*, translated by A. Hurley, Penguin Books, 2000, p. 36. Abbreviation: PM.

[32] Ibid, p. 37.

[33] An inclusive or unifying relationship (a conjunctive relationship), as opposed to the separative one that usually exists between possibility and impossibility.

"It is a revelation to compare the *Don Quixote* of Pierre Menard with that of Miguel de Cervantes. Cervantes, for example, wrote the following (Part I, Chapter IX):

... truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor.

This catalogue of attributes, written in the seventeenth century, and written by the "ingenious layman" Miguel de Cervantes, is mere rhetorical praise of history. Menard, on the other hand, writes:

... truth, whose mother is history, rival of time, depository of deeds, witness of the past, exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor.

History, the *mother* of truth! - the idea is staggering. Menard, a contemporary of William James, defines history not as *delving* into reality but as the very *fount* of reality. Historical truth, for Menard, is not "what happened"; it is what we *believe* happened. The final phrases – *exemplar and adviser to the present, and the future's counselor* – are brazenly pragmatic.

The contrast in styles is equally striking. The archaic style of Menard – who is, in addition, not a native speaker of the language in which he writes – is somewhat affected. Not so the style of his precursor, who employs the Spanish of his time with complete naturalness". [34]

The two quotations from Cervantes and Menard are identical, but only when considered as *sentences* instead of *utterances*. When uttered, their identity and unity are split apart. To draw on Bakhtin, this is the difference between "natural uniqueness (for example, a fingerprint) and the semantic (signifying) unrepeatability of the text." The mechanical reproduction of a fingerprint is possible, of course, and in any number of copies too; the same holds for the mechanical reproduction of a text, if we consider reprinting, for instance. Well, translinguistics is concerned with another type of reproduction, i.e. the reproduction of a text by the subject (a return to it, a repeated reading, a new execution quotation). This is "a new, unrepeatable event in the life of the text".[35] Translinguistics, therefore, includes a theory of interpretation.

Let us now return to the question: is translinguistics the linguistics of *parole*, i.e. of individual language acts? Is the emphasis, here, on individuality rather than the system, seen as a set of elements and rules? Is Bakhtin turning Saussure and the whole of modern linguistics upside down? The answer is: not really. Allowing that utterances, or the individual acts of uttering, regain their dignity as *objects of analysis* is doubtlessly a first step. But if Bakhtin were to insist unilaterally on

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[34] Ibid., pp. 40-41.
[35] Mikhail Bakhtin, *The problem of the text* (1959-61), in *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, cit., p.106.

individuality (*versus* sociality), this analysis would ultimately be impossible. He would confirm the

principle according to which *individuum est ineffabile*, i.e. the traditional principle underlying

philosophical and scientific theories which aim at formulating laws and constants, and which

consider variables and individual features as some annoying friction that needs to be eliminated. In

Bakhtin's opinion, on the contrary, the individual is the one who provides – at least potentially – the

good friction from which theories are developed.

The opposition between social and individual is misleading. The next theoretical step consists

in claiming back the 'sociality' of everything which presents itself as individual. As Todorov

observes, for Volosinov/Bakhtin "there is nothing individual in what the individual expresses" (Bpd,

43). But is this really the case? It would seem that Todorov has been caught in a pitfall, ending up

by confusing 'individual' with 'ineffable'. Although there is nothing ineffable in an individual, i.e.

nothing escapes analysis (at least in principle), this does not mean that there is nothing individual

there at all – if that were true, one would end up by suppressing once again the individual in favour

of 'sociality'. By claiming that the individual is subject to analysis, Bakhtin is in complete

agreement with Freud, and also with Heidegger.[36]

The true reversal of structural linguistics consists in extending the *relational view,* conceived

and used by Saussure to investigate the system, to the field of individuality as well. Relationships

between individuals, and between their utterances or texts, are not accidental or casual,

disseminated in countless historical contexts. They create interactional and dialogic textures. Texts

always exist in an *intertextual* dimension.[37] However, this does not imply that their individuality is

bound to dissolve into an infinite number of references – one of Derrida's mistakes. We are not in

the least trying to defend the so-called 'integrity of the text' – an undertaking that easily glides from

philology to fetishism. It is the rights of theory and of textual analysis that we are defending. Why

should we have to put aside conflictual *definiteness*, that is the moving and metamorphic identity of

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[36] In order to investigate the essence of poetry, Heidegger does not choose an inductive approach – a path that leads to the *general*, to what holds indifferently true for many things, to an *indifferent* (therefore inessential) essence – but rather chooses one poet only: Hölderlin.

[37] The term *intertextuality* was suggested by Julia Kristeva in *Le mot, le dialogue et le roman* (*The word, the dialogue and the novel*) (1967), cit.

the text, in favour of intertextual *indefiniteness*? As intertextual references accumulate, the non-coincidence of the text is weakened, to the point that it just stops working, eventually. There is a loss of complexity, and flexibility.[38] Intertextuality, in its unlimited version foreseen by deconstructionism, should not be blamed for its excesses - here is the 'moralism' of traditional criticism and of a kind of stagnant and insipid semiotics - but for its inadequacy.

Unlimited intertextualism is, in fact, a type of cumulative, short-sighted empiricism: the possible intertextual relationships, even when vague or equivocal, are converted into *data*, thus making any analysis of textual strategies simply impossible.

5. *The work of art and the great time – Typology of texts and dialogic relations.*

The artistic text is a combination of an artefact and a virtual object. This conception of the work of art, as explicitly formulated by Mukarovsky in a 1936 article,[39] can be considered a point of convergence for the most important theories of the twentieth century, Bakhtin's included, of course. What does 'combination between an artefact and a virtual object' really stand for? It means that the immobility of the artefact, whose *integrity* must be respected, coincides with the dynamism of the virtual object, which lies in the *integrations* provided by interpreters. These integrations, which are all first and foremost new articulations, make the work part of the *great time*:

> Works break through the boundaries of their own time, they live in centuries, that is, in *great time* and frequently (with great works, always) their lives there are more intense and fuller than are their lives within their own time (…) Everything that belongs only to the present dies along with the present.
> It seems paradoxical that, as I have already said, great works continue to live in the distant future. In the process of their posthumous life they are enriched with new meanings, new significance: it is as though these works outgrow what they were in the epoch of their creation. We can say that neither Shakespeare himself nor his contemporaries knew that 'great Shakespeare' whom we know now. There is no possibility of squeezing our Shakespeare into the Elizabethan epoch".[40]

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[38] This is why we have the right to claim, in opposition to Derrida, that 'there is always an outside-text'.
[39] Mukarovsky's view was explained in Chapter Three.
[40] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Response to a Question from the* Novy Mir *Editorial Staff* (1970) in *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*, translated by Vern W. McGee, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1986, p. 4.

Interpretation too is an intertextual relationship; yet, it would seem to be neither legitimate nor productive to confuse this with other types of intertextuality. If everything is intertextual – a statement which could be attributed to Bakhtin -, if everything is dialogic, then making a distinction between different modalities is more necessary than ever. We must create a *typology*, and this is precisely what Bakhtin tried to do. However, we must be aware of the limitations inherent in any typology. To a certain extent, a typology is a taxonomy, i.e. the classification of a variety of forms: for instance, intertextual relationships include forms such as quotation, allusion, paradox, caricature, pastiche, forgery, satire, irony, controversy, metalanguage, interpretation, and so forth. This variety might be reduced to a few fundamental types, but the question is, according to what criteria can one operate such a reduction? Can one provide general methodological guidelines? This is probable not possible. But in any case, one point must be made clear: a typology is useful only when it is included in the process of interpretation; otherwise it is merely a description, curious yet fundamentally sterile. Genette's typology, for instance, is numerically richer than Bakhtin's, but at the same time it is conceptually poorer.[41] Just like any technique, a typology becomes arid and insipid when the problems for which it was originally devised are no longer there. Bakhtin's typology, in its temporary form, was closely linked to his analysis of Dostoevsky's texts, and it was from there that it drew its energy; an energy which is still largely intact. We will now try to understand its conceptual value, postponing a more detailed technical discussion and the proposal for a better articulated overview to another occasion.

A typology is a series of distinctions (in the simplest case, a forking): their necessity and heuristic power can be judged experimentally when they are employed in the concrete analysis of texts. The most complete proposal formulated by Bakhtin is found in his book on Dostoevsky, and it originates, above all, from the distinction between monologic or monophonic (undivided) discourse

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[41] Gerard Genette, *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, Seuil, Paris 1982 ; trans. By Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky (1997) *Palimpsests. Literature in the second degree*. Lincoln : University of Nebraska Press.

and dialogic discourse (double, divided). New articulations are introduced later. A simplified scheme, which is still, however, more precise than Todorov's, is provided below:[42]

	monophonic (single-voiced)	referential (directed towards its referential object)	
		objectified (the represented character's voice)	
discourse			
	diphonic (double-voiced)	convergent (*stylization*)	unidirectional
		divergent (*parody*)	vari-directional
		undecided, two-faced (*hidden* or *open polemic*)	

There are two types of monophonic discourse:

- *referential* discourse, which directly and immediately refers to the object (regardless of whether it is uttered by one of the characters or by the author). In many cases this type of discourse has a tendency to neutrality; sometimes it is just a proper noun (or the minimal expansion of a proper noun), such as "The Sea-reach of the Thames". [43] Sometimes it appears in a more elaborate form, according to a precise will or desire of the author, thus fully becoming "an expression of the speaker's ultimate semantic authority" (D, 199). One example: "Watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you - smiling, frowning, inviting, grand,

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[42] Cf. all of Chapter Five, entitled *Discourse in Dostoevsky*, with a summary table (D, 199). Todorov's reformulation is found in Bdp, p. 70.

[43] J. Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1902), edited by Paul B. Armstrong, Norton Critical Edition, 2006, p. 3.

mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering, Come and find out" (Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*);[44]

- discourse which is placed on the character's lips by the author, and which is therefore *objectified* (represented) like any other feature. One example might be the following: "Are there any witnesses?", inquired Mr. Fang. - "None, your worship", replied the policeman" (*Oliver Twist*).[45]. Note that, in cases of this type, the dialogue is a mere exchange of lines, a sequence of turn-takings: therefore, it is a dialogue where the word is always monologic, exchanged as it is between complete characters, well defined and contained by their own perimeter. Dialogue, then, is an *external form* lacking any dialogism.

Polyphonic discourse requires a minimal prerequisite, namely a double or split word: two voices, at least. Bakhtin defines as *unidirectional* a word which takes hold of another word, and of all its intentions, while keeping going in the same direction: this is the case of stylization. In parody, on the other hand, the two voices diverge:

"Here, as in stylization, the author again speaks in someone else's discourse, but in contrast with stylization parody introduces into that discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one (…) Discourse becomes an arena of battle between two voices. In parody, therefore, there cannot be that fusion of voices possible in stylization" (D,193).

These two devices provide the best results when they inspire whole texts or single episodes. As far as minimal contexts are concerned (i.e. those which do not exceed the sentence), it should be noticed that one can hardly (yet not impossibly) recognize stylization, i.e. the assimilation of the discourse of another, of the style of another, by analysing a single utterance. The difficulty is due to the convergence of the two styles – the author's, and the one the author draws on: the two voices are blended. Parody, on the other hand, can even be perceived at a microtextual level, because it is based on divergence. Microtextual parodies include, for example, the reversal of a maxim – a technique used systematically by Lautréamont: 'Great thoughts always come from the heart' (Vauvenargues) becomes "Reason is the source of all great thoughts!". "Man is but a reed, the

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[44] Ibid., p. 13.
[45] Ch. Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, (1837), Oxford World's Classics, edited by K. Tillotson, Oxford U.P., chapter XI, p. 79.

weakest in nature, but he is a thinking reed (…) But were the universe to crush him, man would still be more noble than that which kills him, because he knows that he dies; and the universe knows nothing of the advantage it has over him" (Pascal) becomes "Man is an oak. There is nothing more robust in all of nature (…) The universe knows nothing; it is, at the very most, a thinking reed".[46]

There is then a third type of dialogic discourse, that Bakhtin refers to as *active*, thus giving rise to the possibility of a little misunderstanding. He does not deny that stylisation and parody are 'active' words, since they become so when the author takes hold of the words of another, with varying degrees of rapacity and violence. Passivity is the condition of the stylised or parodied word. [47] In both cases the author "takes, so to speak, someone else's meek and defenceless discourse and installs his own interpretation in it, forcing it to serve his own new purposes" (D, 197). Conversely, internal dialogisation, or interaction, acquires more emphasis in hidden internal polemic (but it can be sometimes found in open polemic, as well). [48] Therefore, "In such discourse, the author's thought no longer oppressively dominates the other's thought, discourse loses its composure and confidence, becomes agitated, internally undecided and two-faced" (D,198).

We are not going to provide examples of the latter type; the simplest ones happen to be the most banal. The unresolved discourse, threatened and tormented by another word, deserves to be studied in more complex cases, such as the great Dostoevskyan monologues. Laceration and volubility are the Furies that persecute Dostoevsky's heroes. They are deities of discourse, not only of the psyche, invading the character and opposing any solution whatsoever. And it is in this sense that Bakhtin's statement must be understood: "Consciousness is far more frightening than all unconscious complexes". [49]

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[46] "Les grandes pensées viennent du coeur" (Vauvenargues) – Les grandes pensées viennent de la raison!".
  "L'homme n'est qu'un roseau, le plus faible de la nature; mais c'est un roseau pensant. Il ne faut pas que l'univers entier s'arme pour l'écraser; une vapeur, une goutte d'eau suffit pour le tuer. Mais quand l'univers l'écraserait, l'homme serait encore plus noble que ce qui le tue, parce qu'il sait qu'il meurt; et l'avantage que l'univers a sur lui, l'univers n'en sait rien" (Pascal) – "L'homme est un chêne. La nature n'en compte pas de plus robuste (…) L'univers ne sait rien: c'est, tou au plus, un roseau pensant", Lautréamont, *Chants de Maldoror et Poésies* (1870); trans. by Paul Knight (1978) *Maldoror and Poems* (London: Penguin Classics), pp. 268-269.
[47] This is precisely why I have chosen to modify Todorov's table, which creates uncertainty if not confusion.
[48] As a matter of fact, what Bakhtin defines as 'active' discourse also includes "polemically colored autobiography and confession" and "any discourse with a sideward glance at someone else's word" (D, 199).
[49] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book* (1961) in M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1984), cit., Appendix II, p. 288. Regardless of the intentions, is this really an anti-Freudian statement, as

6. *Ideology – The debate on Postmodernism – Stylisation (pastiche) and parody - Difference between style and stylemes.*

At this point, we would like to return to stylisation and parody, subjects which are of renewed interest in contemporary debates, even those of an ideological nature. One may wonder if it is worth taking the time to underline the poverty of ideology; isn't theory the best confutation ever? Those who experience or perceive – those who are able to perceive – the rigorous, stimulating nature of research do not usually feel the need for a criticism of ideology (by the same token, if I happen to see a good film, why should I punish myself, once I get home, by watching a bad television programme? To ascertain how bad it is? This is a pleasure that I can easily do without). Ideology, however, cannot be completely ignored. Every so often, a quick recognition of the current ideological debate may allow us to realize, on the one hand, the spread of prejudices and misunderstandings that theory is no longer concerned with, having already got rid of them, and on the other, how old ideas and banalities rear their ugly heads, in new forms.

To criticize ideology, we must be able to recognize it in the first place. Therefore, we must have an adequate notion of what is understood by *ideology*. If, for example, ideology is thought of as being a sort of anti-historical discourse, i.e. as 'the transformation of history into nature', every discourse that highlights historical becoming will be considered non-ideological. This is a serious error, which is mostly common to left wing culture, be it more or less closely connected with Marx. Actually, two diverse notions of ideology are to be found in Marx and Engels' works: in *The German Ideology* (1845-46), the emphasis is on the tendency of bourgeois society to consider its own as the ultimate form of social organization (once there was history, but there is no longer any), whilst in the 1848 *Communist Manifesto* bourgeois society is characterized by its limitless dynamism, its tendency to change endlessly the shape of things: in the capitalist era, "all that is

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Todorov believes? (Bpd, 33). If we understand that the unconscious is not the hidden director of the psyche, the conception of the 'divided subject' brings Freud extremely close to Bakhtin.

solid melts into air".[50] This claim is also the title of a fine book by Marshall Berman, thus proving

that it has not been completely forgotten.[51] Yet, this view has been almost totally ruled out in favour

of the other one, made known also thanks to Barthes, who adopted it in one of his most outdated

and unconvincing essays published as an appendix to *Mythologies*, a piece of writing that many

literary scholars nevertheless still take seriously. "Myth turns history into nature", Barthes wrote.[52]

This idea has also enjoyed noteworthy attention in debate on Postmodernism. A book by Hutcheon,

for example, begins with this statement: "the postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some

of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly

experience as 'natural' (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact

'cultural'; made by us, not given to us. Even nature, postmodernism might point out, doesn't grow

on trees".[53] We can see here an example of the banalities, albeit sensible and reasonable ones, which

certain literary scholars, in their incompetence, attribute to philosophy. An ideologist, of course,

may draw on prestigious sources; *auctoritates* are always available: just one click on the

'Heidegger' icon, and one can access an idea to quote like a slogan: "Higher than actuality stands

possibility".[54] This thesis was formulated in *Being and Time* in 1927 – so was Heidegger already

postmodern? Was he a prophet of postmodernism? Some may even think so, since the primacy of

culture equals the prevalence of possibility over a stable reality. This is not the case at all.

Possibility is a modal concept that Heidegger analyses from an ontological perspective, and it is

connected with the distinction between ways of being (e.g. between Being-there (*Dasein*) and intra-

worldly Being, etc). These distinctions will be addressed more thoroughly in the next chapter. For

the time being, however, it is worth underlying the distance between Heidegger's thought and post-

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[50] "Alles Ständische und Stehende verdampft" (literally: everything that has a stable nature and is subject to class hierarchies evaporates), in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848), *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, trans. 2007 Minneapolis: Filiquarian Publishing LLC, p. 10.
[51] Marshall Berman (1982), *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
[52] Roland Barthes ([1957] 1972), trans. by Annette Lavers, *Mythologies*. London: Jonathan Cape, p. 141. Conversely, the writing exercises contained in this book – the articles on soap powders, on catch, on the face of Greta Garbo, on *Nautilus and Bateau ivre*, etc. – do retain their charm.
[53] Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Routledge, London-New York 1989, p. 2.
[54] Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (1927), Eng. trans. *Being and Time*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh, State University of New York, Albany, 1996.

modern banalisation. According to Heidegger (and Nietzsche, as well), man should be defined as 'being-able-to-be-there'. But the primacy of possibility implies that man will have to experience the conflict between his lower and higher possibilities. So Nietzsche's *Ubermensch* – an overcrossing, overflowing being – opposes the diminution (*Verkleinerung*) of man, i.e. a fate which is not ineluctable but rather the result of several components and powers of modernity – and, we may add, of post-modernity. Diminution: relinquishing higher possibilities.[55]

Post-modern ideology simplifies this issue quite drastically and grossly: possibility (and multiplicity) are 'good', whereas actuality and the One are 'bad'. In so doing, ideology narrows down the polysemy of complex notions, turning it into clear-cut oppositions and binaries.

Let us now consider the matter from a different viewpoint and focus, albeit briefly, on another crucial point in the current debate, i.e. the question of identity. The relationship between this problem and that of possibility should be clear. Our question should therefore be as follows: can we change our own identity? We certainly can. That is actually what we tend to do. As psychoanalysis claims, we are beings *who go beyond*, we are *overflowing beings*, and our identity consists of a set of identifications, i.e. of relations with otherness; we are *threshold beings*, we do not have an outside and an inside, we live along our borders: this is what Bakhtin states. But we are also prone to inexorable counter-forces, that Nietzsche calls *reactive forces*, that Freud calls *compulsion to repeat*, that Bakhtin locates in the reifying power of the discourse of others. It would be unrealistic, simplistic and false to believe that our identity – our identity style – can be changed as easily as one puts on new clothes. However, it is exactly on this promise that the postmodern ideology of multiplicity (or of possibility) is based. Therefore, the primary character of ideology is not the transformation of history into nature, given that an opposite ideology exists on this matter, i.e. the ideology of historical omnipotence or total historicisation. First and foremost, ideology is the

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[55] The Prologue of *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (trans. by Thomas Common, 1891/1998, New York: Forgotten Books) foresees the coming of the last man, of a race which is unable to launch "the arrow of his longing beyond man": "The earth hath then become small, and on it there hoppeth the last man who maketh everything small" ("Die Erde ist dann klein geworden, und auf ihr hüpft der letze Mensch, der Alles klein macht"), p. 7. By reformulating Nietzsche's hypothesis, we might say that the last man – "the most despicable" (p. 9) – is he who cannot pick out possibilities, who cannot choose *overcrossing* possibilities, thus deceiving himself because he only multiplies lower possibilities. He emphasizes multiplicity to avoid the conflict between possibilities.

negation of all complexity, a 'promise of easiness'. This is also the *constant* element of ideology

beyond the mutability of its contents, nonchalantly substituted by History.[56]

Let us now see how the ideology of multiplicity may influence a more specifically literature-

oriented debate. In an ambitious attempt to sketch out a map of Postmodernism, Jameson offsets

pastiche against parody. The assumption underlying this opposition is the decline of subjectivity in

postmodern times. What does Jameson mean by this? He considers the subject a monadic container

of thoughts and emotions, closed in by the borders of the person: the subject is the individual, in all

his uniqueness. This kind of subject no longer exists, according to Jameson: he has been replaced by

a fragmented subject, in which emotions – better defined as 'intensities'- fluctuate around freely

and are impersonal. The decline of individual uniqueness implies "the end of style, in the sense of

the unique and the personal, the end of the distinctive individual brush stroke (as symbolized by the

emergent primacy of mechanical reproduction)".[57] The two phenomena are closely interconnected:

and besides, the progressive disappearance of personal style causes the proliferation of a new

linguistic practice, *pastiche*.

Pastiche eclipses parody, whose use implies the existence of shared norms that are easily

recognizable; and since "the advanced capitalist countries today are now a field of stylistic and

discursive heterogeneity without a norm", parody ends up losing its object, and finds itself without

a vocation:

> it has lived, and that strange new thing pastiche slowly comes to take its place. Pastiche is,
> like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a
> linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry,
> without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter
> (…) Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs".[58]

Certain formal features of this typically ideological argumentation should be noted: it is a

form of *shrunk* discourse, a portable micro-universe which summarizes a vaster universe within; it

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[56] As Bertolt Brecht wrote in a 1931 poem, Communism is easy, and anyone can understand it (*Lob des Kommunismus,* trans. *In Praise of Communism*). One comment could be made: obstacles stem from praxis ("It is the simple which is so difficult"). From the conceptual point of view, ideology must, by definition, be accessible to all.

[57] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*), Verso, 1984, p. 15.

[58] Ibid., p. 17.

is round like a ball – so that it can roll easily in all directions -, it is bloated, obese. To show its constitutive poverty, we would have to recapture all the distinctions that it 'summarizes' like a *terminator.* The description provided by Jameson is also an unintentional confirmation of what Borges said about sociology, namely that it is a branch of science fiction. Glued to tangible actuality, in its presumption of concreteness sociology is – or may be – very different from actuality because it picks it out quite arbitrarily and univocally. So, Borges' statement could be revised – good sociology certainly exists – without losing any of its original validity. If Jameson's description is distorted and fallacious, this flaw does not necessarily depend on the sociological framework, but rather on its *pre-theoretical* nature.

Let us point out quickly the main distinctions that Jameson forgot or believed could be ignored:

- the individual, personal subject no longer exists. Is this true? We, the readers of Nietzsche and Freud, think it never existed in the first place: we are convinced that the individual (*individuum*) has always been a *dividuum* (Nietzsche),[59] that subjects have always existed as divided subjects, living in different historical contexts, of course, with different chances and ways of being healthy and of being ill. For example, hysterical women and obsessive neurotics have (or seem to have) disappeared. Today we have new symptoms and new illnesses to take care of: anorexia, bulimia, drug addiction – still we keep interpreting them from the perspective of the divided subject because this viewpoint is the richest. Here, the mistake lies in subordinating the distinction between divided and un-divided to the 'one/multiple' pair (the era of Oneness has come to an end, and the era of the Multiple, of the fragmented subject, has begun). The shift from one era to another determines a change in the forms of description, while some of these head towards a final decline. After Nietzsche and Freud we know that the alternative between the One and the Multiple is a variant of the un-divided; therefore, from this perspective, postmodern ideology is pre-Freudian discourse; *we know that*, or should know;

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[59] Friedrich Nietzsche (1878), aphorism 57, in *Human, All-too-Human* (2006). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, p. 54.

- the end of style as an individual brush stroke, of style as "what is as unique and unmistakable as your own fingerprints".[60] Here two mistakes overlap: a) style is conceived of as being a *factual* phenomenon, and not a logico-linguistic one (this *mistake* is shown by the comparison with the fingerprint); b) style is reduced to stylemes. Jameson himself gives some examples of this: "the Faulknerian long sentence, with its breathless gerundives; (…) the fateful (but finally predictable) swoops in Mahler from high orchestral pathos into village accordion sentiment; Heidegger's meditative-solemn practice of the false etymology as a mode of 'proof'…" .[61] Well, these are *stylemes*, i.e. features which characterize style as individual 'property' and which make it stiffer and stiffer because they are removed from the dynamism of the text, thus becoming the elements of a private code which is also, at the same time, de-personalized and available to imitation. Style is something else: *style is divided language*, it is the conflict between heterogeneous logics and regimes, not a collection of stylemes. For example, Proust's style cannot be reduced to his asthmatic syntax, to his taste for triple adjectives, and to other manifest features of his prose. If style could be reduced to stylemes, then these features would really amount to a sort of fingerprint: but this is not the case. The identity of style (of great style) is linked to non-coincidence, to conflict.

- reducing style to stylemes is not simply a mistake: it is a *social practice* which is considerably widespread, encouraged, for instance, by tourism; it is on this reduction that the market of souvenirs is based. We visit Notre Dame and, on the way out, we can buy an unrealistic little model that offers a vague perspective of evocative memories: basically, a synecdoche. For many people souvenirs are nothing but objects revealing the bad taste of buyers or, in the best scenario, a forgivable naivety on their part; but how should one judge another type of souvenir buyer, i.e. the literary critic who collects stylemes? Does he really believe that he has pinned down Faulkner's style in those long sentences with gerunds that do not allow the reader to draw breath, or Heidegger's style in his brave etymologies? Such naivety would be in no way forgivable. However,

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[60] F. Jameson, op. cit., p. 17. **
[61] Ibid., pp. 16. **

pointing out the stylemes of an author is not illegitimate as long as this is done as the prelude to an interpretation; describing a style through its stylemes is only valid as a preparation of the way.[62]

    - end of parody in the era of pastiche? Pastiche corresponds to what Bakhtin refers to as *stylisation*, i.e. a type of 'converging intertextuality'. This practice consists in assimilating a style, usually simplified and reduced to its stylemes, and letting such stylemes echo in the background. The main feature of postmodernism is probably the unchecked plundering of styles, available like objects in a supermarket. Now Jameson's description becomes more plausible: this is due to the fact that, for the first time, he is not using vague, impalpable notions but, rather, a well-defined criterion and a textual practice (a linguistic and semiotic mechanism) like stylisation. Does this practice manage to grasp the mass of postmodern cultural behaviours? Perhaps it does, but only insofar as these behaviours had already been considerably widespread in previous ages. As a matter of fact, at the end of the eighteenth century, modernity could already be defined in terms of reproduction and concurrence of styles, the variety of which coincides with their reduction to being masks, costumes and disguises. It coincides with a multiplicity of styles which happen to exist *nebeneinander*, one next to the other, in a contiguity which is the prelude to eclecticism and contamination. This is how Friedrich Schlegel describes the aesthetic shop of modernity (what we would call a superstore or a megastore nowadays):

> Here one finds – as if one were in a general store of aesthetics – folk poetry and courtly poetry next to each other. (…) There are Nordic or Christian epopees for the admirers of the north and Christianity; ghost stories for the lovers of mystical horrors, Iroquoian or cannibalistic odes for the lovers of cannibalism; Greek costume for antique souls; knightly poems for heroic tongues; and even national poetry for the dilettantes of Germanness![63]

A description which can constantly be updated, on the basis of its very founding principle; the possibility to add and replace: this is what *nebeneinander* is. Schlegel, of course, was not in a position to foresee what new genres would come about in the future cultural market. i.e. detective

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[62] When description occurs systematically in a wide-ranging way, as is the case in Thibaudet's and Spitzer's essays on Flaubert and Proust respectively, it creates an inevitable expectation of interpretation.
[63] Friedrich Schlegel, *On the study of Greek poetry* (1797), transl. by Stuart Barnett (2001). Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 20-21.

stories, science fiction, horror, cyberpunk etc. However, he had brilliantly identified a certain mechanism of cultural production and the link between market needs and stylisation. Stylisation is the fastest and most effective way of renewing a fashion, in an era that worships fashion. Whatever Schlegel's opinion may have been, he understood that the need for quantity and renewal, as well as the need to offer the widest possible variety of input to a public which becomes sated more and more quickly, can only be met with the help of stylistic eclecticism. *Stillosigkeit*, the lack of style, i.e. the principle which rules modernity, is not the 'end of style' as described by Jameson. It is true that, in Schlegel's language, there are plenty of privative expressions, which hint at his nostalgia for a lost unity "in this strange realm of confusion".[64] However, one should wonder whether such dissatisfaction comes from a lack of unity or one of necessity – and whether necessity is a dimension that a work of art cannot do without.[65] Where will the aesthetic anarchy of our age lead to, Schlegel wonders. His question is more phenomenological than moralistic, and it is a question that is to be returned to by a young Nietzsche in his *Second Untimely Meditation*;

- if stylisation, or pastiche, is actually a fundamental cultural mechanism of modernity and postmodernism, can we maintain with Jameson that parody is in a state of eclipse? Or is there a new, postmodern parody that we are yet to understand? To answer these questions we have to move away from the ambiguities that Jameson finds so convenient. Are we speaking of decline from the numerical point of view or with reference to aesthetic value? Well, there is a feeling that – after the Middle Ages and Renaissance – parody has become less widespread than other devices, especially fictional ones. Quantitative variations may be interesting, and no doubt the avant-garde movements of the first half of the twentieth century found a source of inspiration and pleasure in the *parody principle*; perhaps it is not by chance that the following thought is formulated in a work belonging to that very period:

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[64] Ibid., p. 20.
[65] We cannot analyze the concept of 'necessity' here, removing it from the rigidity to which it is normally confined. What we can do is simply mention Proust's phrase, according to which a work of art depends on "the necessary links of a well-wrought style" (*les anneaux nécessaires d'un beau style*)" (*In Search of Lost Time*, vol. 6: *Time Regained*. New York: The Modern Library, 2003, p. 290): a point of departure for an investigation into the link between necessity, flexibility, and artistic construction.

Why must it be that virtually every, no, each and every device and convention of art strikes me as suitable nowadays only for parody?[66]

But even if we think Jameson is right from the quantitative point of view, what should we conclude? That parody expresses an attitude of rebellion, and therefore it is less widespread in more conformist times? Are we sure, though, that parody always acts against authority and order?

Let us now consider parody from the aesthetic point of view. In order to verify Jameson's thesis we must find out whether postmodernism is still able to produce *good parodies*. Jameson thinks that this is not really possible, and that the only practice which is alive and suitable for our times is pastiche. This viewpoint can easily be confuted. I will now refer to a recent work that should be known to most readers (it does not matter if it is not a literary example, since we are considering the culture of the last few decades): all we need to do to prove Jameson wrong is consider a film, which is extremely well-conceived, with exhilarating gimmicks, such as *Shrek 2*.[67] The film makes a wide-ranging use of contaminations, it brings together characters belonging to different fairytale imageries (Sleeping Beauty and Prince Charming, Pinocchio, Puss in Boots etc.); it is full of quotations and has a strong intertextual quality to itself. The device that, as the Russian Formalists would have said, *dominates* and provides the drop of oil that gives flavour to all the food (Jakobson) is, in any case, parody. The main character of this story is a princess who prefers the love of an ogre to that of Prince Charming; who loves her horrendous partner to the point of becoming physically like him - here is one example of how love leads to identification (Freud). As soon as Shrek and Fiona are invited by Fiona's parents to visit them in the kingdom of Far Far Away, whose gigantic letters appear on the side of a hill just as in Hollywood, the couple has to fight to defend their love. At one point Shrek is chained up, inside a tower. Some friends arrive to help him, and one of them being Pinocchio. And here comes parody: Pinocchio slips down from above, through an iron grate, hanging onto a rope. For those who recognize the music and the

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[66] Thomas Mann, *Doktor Faustus*, 1947; transl. *Doctor Faustus* (1994). Cambridge: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, p. 32.
[67] Directed by Andrew Adamson, Kelly Asbury, Conrad Vernon, USA 2004.

reference – in *Mission: Impossible* it is Tom Cruise who comes down a rope to dribble a sophisticated alarm system – the effect is irresistible.

And the effect will continue to be irresistible for the 'competent' viewer who is able to recognize this intertextual mechanism. On the other hand, those who do not know De Palma's film cannot possibly enjoy the scene at all. These obvious observations on the pragmatics of communication may be useful to understand the relative rarity of the parody process.[68] A parodying text has less autonomy than a fictional one, since it requires the reader to be familiar with at least one other text, if not with a whole genre and its conventions. It is therefore more and more vulnerable as time goes by and as competences changes. One more reason may be added to all this: in parodies, just like in *slow-motion* movie scenes, language is at the forefront much more than it is in fiction: parody replaces the suspension of disbelief required by fiction with the awareness of artificiality and the unveiling of its very devices – it is like telling the reader or viewer: 'all of this is language'. We are not always willing to accept the rise and intensification of language, and, above all, we do not like what lasts too long, or a single process used all over (a film which relies too frequently on *slow motion* might end up becoming irritating and tedious).

- As *Shrek 2* shows, Jameson is wrong when he says that the objects of parody are norms, conventions, and general beliefs. This is not necessarily true. Jameson forgets or ignores an important distinction formulated by Lotman with regard to the semiotic description of cultures: according to him, there are *grammaticalised* cultures and *textualised* cultures; the former shape themselves as systems of *rules*, which determine the creation of texts; the latter present and define themselves as a system of *texts*. Since this distinction is typological, it does not exclude mixed phenomena. It is, however, possible to distinguish entire cultures, or smaller groups, on the basis of their different semiotic orientations.[69] Therefore, we might hypothesize that the culture which we

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[68] This comment still refers to Post Renaissance times. We will soon be dealing with Bakhtin's book on Rabelais and Medieval and Renaissance traditions.

[69] Yuri M. Lotman (1977), "Problems in the Typology of Culture". In: Lucid, Daniel P. (ed.). *Soviet Semiotics: An Anthology*. Transl. by Daniel P. Lucid. Baltimore-London: Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 213-221; Yuri Lotman, Boris A. Uspensky, and George Mihaychuk (1978), "On The Semiotic Mechanism of Culture", *New Literary History*, 9 (2), pp. 211-232.

call, as a matter of convenience, *postmodern*, is mostly 'textual'. We would then understand why

parody has continued to exist, even at a time where normative systems and shared codes are losing

their authority and being pushed into the background. It is texts that are being parodied.

So, understanding intertextual relationships is of enormous interest when related to great

literary works as well as to everyday culture;[70] we must, however, draw on precise concepts, on

tools which are available in our toolbox, constantly enriched by theory. The typology of dialogic

relationships, initiated by Bakhtin, must be perfected (but also considered in its wholeness: here, we

have just sketched out its conceptual framework);[71] a great deal of progress is possible. In any case

– the reader will be convinced by now -, the road of theory and the road of ideology go in

completely different directions. To sit down around the same table and have a talk would simply be

impossible.

7. *Translinguistics and divided language - The Carnivalesque as the language and logic of*
literature - From the paradigmatic axis to the 'rain of styles'.

Let us consider once again the research programme that Bakhtin refers to as *translinguistics*.

A research programme is first of all a vision, a perspective; and every perspective is strongly shaped

by the conceptual pair which it gives supremacy to. We should add that every perspective has an

involuntary tendency to create certain distorting effects which eventually damage it. Modern

linguistics, not only the structural type, inspired by Saussure, but also Chomsky's, favours the

'social/individual' pair: the single speaker draws on a common treasure, a common field of

virtuality (which is called *paradigm* by Hjelmslev and Jakobson). However, this view fosters a

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[70] In the language of advertising, which is a type of popular (or mass) culture – not a new art form, as postmodern *bêtise* generally claims – the parody device is not rare; in fact, it is sometimes very effective. Most readers will probably be familiar with the TV commercial for Peugeot 106. The car is being driven by two girls who, rather than giving their automobile to others, drive towards the edge of a cliff – of papier-mâché. This is a parody of the finale of Ridley Scott's *Thelma & Louise* (USA 1991).

[71] It is worth adding, at the very least, the distinction between parody in its most usual sense, i.e. parody with comical or satirical aims, and homage-parody, such as that of Thomas Mann towards Goethe, and, to give a more readily accessible example, of Woody Allen towards Humphrey Bogart in *Play it again, Sam* (USA 1972).

somewhat distorted – albeit not altogether illegitimate - image of speech communities as made up of atomized individuals, each of whom seems to obtain his own identity more from his relationship with language (as a collective institution) than from his relationship with other individuals.[72] It is absolutely obvious that, from a Saussurian and a Chomskyan point of view, individuals speak to each other. Nevertheless, all of this appears as being a mere accidental fact; the basic relationship is that of each individual with anonymous language, i.e. with the anonymous part of language (Saussure's *langue*, Chomsky's *competence*, Jakobson's *code*, and so forth). It is only this part, however, which enables each individual to communicate with others. With regard to this point, it has already been pointed out that for Saussure the relational view concerns the system, rather than individual relationships. Well, this perspective has great merits: without temporarily putting aside individual elements, chances are that a description of language as system would never have been possible. However, Bakhtin clearly sees its limitations: the relational view must be extended to individuals as well, and above all, we must rethink the whole concept of 'relationship' in the light of relations between individuals. 'Dialogic relationships': this is the research field Bakhtin is never tired of investigating. Let us not forget that dialogism is not the relationship between shut-down subjects who later open up and automatically see in others an opportunity for growth (as believed by the ideology of dialogue): otherness is a part of us right from the start, and it affirms itself as the domination of the discourse of others over our lives; rebellion against this domination is not an easy task. It is a matter of breaking away from a dependence which can never be cut off (at least, not completely). The inner dialogicity of discourse is therefore a place of permanent conflict.

There is another reason for downsizing the 'individual/society' pair. Society is not a common core shared by all the individuals that live in it, and neither are their identities completely anonymous and solid: rather, we should think of society as a heterogeneous entity. According to Bakhtin, the language of every society is a plurality of languages, discourses, and voices:

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[72] "Philosophy of language, linguistics and stylistics (…) actually know only two poles in the life of language (…): on the one hand, the system of a *unitary language*, and on the other the *individual* speaking in this language", M. Bakhtin, *Discourse in the novel* (1934-35), in *The dialogic imagination*, edited by M. Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin 1981, p. 269.

Language - like the living concrete environment in which the consciousness of the verbal artist lives - is never unitary. It is unitary only as an abstract grammatical system of normative forms … ".[73]

(...) Thus at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions (…) These "languages" of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying 'languages'.
(…) Therefore languages do not *exclude* each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways (…) It might even seem that the very word "language" loses all meaning in this process - for apparently there is no single plane on which all these "languages" might be juxtaposed to one another.[74]

The difference between linguistics and translinguistics must by now be very clear: linguistics only recognizes two poles in the life of language, namely the system (the collective rules) and the individual; translinguistics splits each of these two poles by means of the 'divided/undivided' pair or the 'coincident/non-coincident' pair. It does not abolish them: it 'cuts' them, thus rediscovering their originary divisions.

Assuming that this is Bakhtin's true thought, we must learn to recognize his temporary setbacks and the times in which translinguistics does not manage to break free from tradition and from age-old stereotypes. For instance, when Bakhtin opposes individual stylistics with social or genre-related stylistics,[75] he seems to be held captive by the very opposition (conceptual pair) he criticised and whose supremacy he rejected. Indeed, he goes back to the two (undivided) poles of language, namely the social and the individual one.

In Bakhtin's writings one still cannot find a theory of style; for this reason, seeing relationships as conflicts often ends up by emphasising the social dimension rather than the individual one, and focusing all the attention on "the great and anonymous destinies of artistic discourse itself".[76] Or, once the controversy against individual details has been talked over, seeing relationships as conflicts ends up appearing in a simplified form, i.e. as a *conflict between levels* - high vs. low, official vs. popular language. This is the thesis expressed in the book on Rabelais. In

[73] Ibid., p. 288.
[74] Ibid., p. 291.
[75] "Any stylistics capable of dealing with the distinctiveness of the novel as a genre must be a *sociological stylistics* " (ibid., 300).
[76] Ibid., p. 259.

Medieval and Renaissance culture, there was a second world and a second life which existed outside officialdom:[77] carnival life, a "world inside out", a parody of extracarnival life. [78]

Note the drastic difference between conflict which hinges on non-coincidence, and conflict between levels, each of which may remain undivided, coinciding with itself. And if popular culture really arose from a separation between languages which reject and overturn each other, while obeying the same logic, Bakhtin's hypothesis of a *carnivalisation of literature*, of a penetration of forms in the least complex genres (the adventure novel, for example) as well as in the works of great writers, such as Dostoevsky, would not sound very convincing. Bakhtin's pages on Carnival risk being read in a trivializing way unless enough attention is paid to his real thesis: Carnival is a *language* and a *logic*. It is the language of reversal, of free blends, of hybridisations, of contact between spheres that were previously separate. It is confusive language, characterized not only by its themes (turned upside down when compared to those of official culture), but also by new logical relations. At one point, the book on Rabelais foregrounds the fact that simple reversal or simple contamination between high and low are limited practices. The true enemy is not high culture, neither because it is high nor because it is separate: the true enemy is the "stupid coincidence with himself",[79] regardless of the culture in which such coincidence takes place. This formulation is far

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[77] M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his world* (1965), translated by Hélène Iswolsky, Indiana University Pres, Bloomington, 1984, p.6.

[78] Ibid., p. 11.

[79] Ibid., pp. 39-40. I have modified Hélène Iswolsky's translation ("conformity to itself") since I consider it questionable for two reasons:

    a) if we translate *sovpadenie* (coincidence) as 'conformity', we run the risk of trivialising or even hiding the main issue which arises here once again – that of identity. It is worth explaining once more that, according to Bakhtin, identity exists in the conflict between two modes of identity, namely coincidence and non-coincidence. If this conflict vanishes – as is often the case for many human beings, unfortunately – because the former mode takes over the latter, the human being relinquishes his higher possibilities;

    b) Hélène Iswolsky's translation suppresses the adjective *tupoe*, which means 'obtuse, narrow-minded'. I consider this choice questionable because I believe that Bakhtin's thought implicitly includes a theory of mind and intelligence, and therefore a theory of *bêtise*. There is no doubt about it: for Bakhtin, *bêtise* is the 'stupid coincidence with oneself' (my translation proposal).

    Finally, it is worth noting that the notion of *sovpadenie* found in this excerpt can also be found (as a verb) in some of the passages quoted above from the book on Dostoevsky: "A man never coincides (*sovpadaet*) with himself. One cannot apply to him the formula of identity A = A" (D, 59). "Racine's hero is equal to himself; Dostoevsky's hero never for an instant coincides with himself" (D, 51).

    So, Bakhtin never relinquished his great intuition. Here is some more evidence. In the last pages of his 1938-41 essay "Epic and Novel" he states: "A dynamic authenticity was introduced into the image of man, dynamics of inconsistency [although Bakhtin says *nesovpadenie*, 'non-coincidence'] and tension between various factors of his image; man ceased to coincide with himself, and consequently men ceased to be exhausted by the plots that contain them" (in *The Dialogic Imagination*, cit, p. 35). Here, Bakhtin gives an extraordinary cue that narrative theory – as far as I know – has not developed, yet: the distinction between characters who are 'contained' (closed, delimited) in the

from being a definitive solution, as it leaves room for one to mistake coincidence for staticity (as if there were no such things as silly dynamism or nomadism). However, no formulation is ever a definitive solution, safe from misinterpretation.

If the 'social/individual' pair is cut into two by the principle of non-coincidence, it is then correct to read Bakhtin according to the definition we have put forward: style is divided language. The relational view, inhabited by conflict, can be extended to Saussurian *langue* as *thesaurus* or as the field of virtuality which makes up a system. One can therefore reformulate and refine the non-linear model of a work of art, described by Jakobson as the projection of "the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination".[80] The linearity of the text becomes "a labyrinth of linkages (*labirint sceplenij*)" (Tolstoy):[81] not simply a multiplicity, but rather a plurality of articulations, which are typologically different, and which fight to shape initial chaos, to find "the shape of chaos one has within oneself" (Nietzsche).[82] In this way, the paradigmatic axis becomes what we might call 'the rain of styles', as illustrated below:

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plot, and who act and move within it, and dynamic characters, whose identity 'exceeds' the plot. This "happy surplus of their own" (as Caril Emerson and Michael Holquist translate *veselyj izbytok*, p. *36*) is not only the distinctive feature of the most complex characters, but also of many folklore ones. I think that a different and better-known notion of Carnival, i.e. of 'joyful relativity' (*veselaja otnositel'nost* – please notice the use of the adjective *veselyi* in the feminine form) should never be disjointed from the notion of 'happy surplus', if one aims at avoiding the trivial forms of relativism which are so widespread in *cultural studies* and anti-theory.

This is a crucial passage, partly because it suggests an answer to a possible objection. The reader could question my assertion that coincidence with oneself is tantamount to *bêtise*, or at least the gateway to *bêtise*. He could claim that, since Bakhtin considers epics and tragedy characters as expressions of the 'A = A' principle, then they should be placed in the sphere of stupidity. This is not in the least acceptable, even if the tragic hero's blindness and crazy obduracy may evoke some kind of 'tragic *bêtise*'.

So, all this discussion means that Bakhtin's theory of epics and tragedy needs to be strongly reworked, at least as far as the notion of character is concerned. And as we have already clarified in the first section of this Chapter, Racine's heroes cannot be connected with the principle of non-coincidence: all great tragic heroes, from Antigone to Phaedra, are exceeding characters (therefore, non-coincident). Literary theory must account for their complexity, for their peculiar 'surplus'; and it will do so thanks to Bakhtin and to the extraordinary conceptual innovations introduced by him. At the same time, however, literary theory may partially move against Bakhtin and some of his unilateral views (which all great innovators inevitably have. We must acknowledge this, if we wish to avoid dogmatism). Obviously, this is not the time and place to address this issue in any depth.

I express my gratitude to Stefania Sini for checking Bakhtin's sources in the original language and for her valuable linguistic advice.

[80] R. Jakobson, *Linguistics and Poetics*, in *Language in Literature*, ed. by K. Pomorska and S. Rudy, Harvard U.P., 1987, p. 71. Cf. Chapter Three (Section Ten) of this volume.

[81] Russian Formalists were very fond of this fine phrase by Tolstoy. Cf. Victor Erlich, *Russian Formalism*, 1954, p. 241. A comment on this quotation can be found in Chapter Two of this volume.

[82] "über das Chaos Herr werden das man ist; sein Chaos zwingen, Fom zu werden" (*Nachlass 1887-1889*, herausgegeben von G. Colli und M. Montinari, de Gruyter 1999, p. 247).
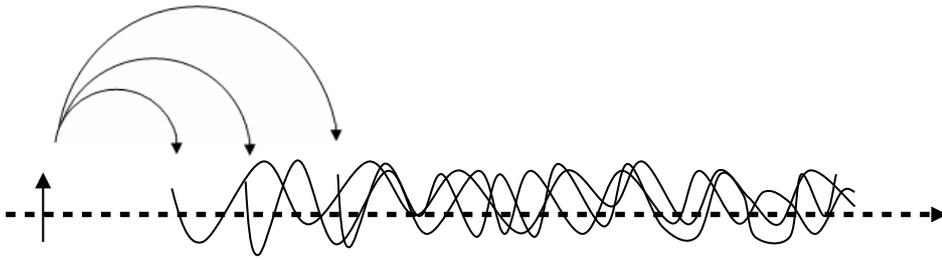
Texts and messages do not originate from the stereotyped forms of a code, even though this might be a possibility, but rather from "a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language",[83] from a plurality of articulations and borders.[84]

8. *Summary*.

The following key points are necessary for those who wish to read Bakhtin not only as one of the major literary theorists of the XX century, but also as a thinker of the XXI century:

a) the need to get rid of the insipidities of 'dialogism': this does not mean that the lexis of dialogism, dialogic relations, and dialogic imagination (and so forth) should be dismissed altogether; it means that we must understand 'dialogue' by acknowledging, first of all, the *primacy of logic*;

b) the logic intuited and described in literature by Bakhtin is not a 'separative', stiff, univocal logic (as it is in the tradition of formal logic, from Aristotle to Frege, up to its most recent developments).

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[83] M. Bakhtin, *Discourse in the novel*, cit., p. 272.

[84] The above reformulation of Jakobson's visual scheme is needed to express the higher complexity of Bakhtin's thought compared with some standpoints of Structuralism; at the same time, it is a way to acknowledge and do justice to complex Structuralism. For example, Barthes understood that the actual function of the paradigmatic axis consists in breaking the linearity of the text, thus allowing its virtualities to proliferate and giving way to new interpretations. For this reason, Barthes reaffirmed the primacy of the paradigmatic axis in Structuralist criticism
(comments on this point have been already made in Chapter Three).
Failing to understand this crucial novelty in methodology eventually led to the decline of structuralism and the return to old linear reading models. The theoretical (and cultural) poverty of cultural studies mainly derives from the return to linear comprehension: the text is no longer a "labyrinth of links", and goes back to being a flat road, a conduit along which meaning (as water) is forced to flow one-way. Such stiffening has devastating effects on great works of art, as they are unable to break free from the 'small time' and get stuck in it. Mediocre works are favoured instead, especially if they are 'politically correct'. 'Rain of styles' stands for the spurting of all relations, both irenic and conflictual, and for the possibility of creating *complex hybridisations* (not only those related to the variety of social dialects, of jargons, and so forth).

It is rather a logic of conflict, where opposites – *idem* and *alter*, primarily – are reciprocally linked: they fight with each other, but at the same time they refer to each other. Therefore, it is a 'conjunctive' logic' evoking the tradition of dialectic (from Heraclitus to Hegel, to Marxism). However, Bakhtin chose to use the term 'dialogue' instead of 'dialectics': in so doing, he refused the idea of synthesis, of overcoming, of conciliation of the opposed, all notions that were thought too highly of by Hegel and Marx. Bakhtin acknowledges and reaffirms the primacy of conflict, of laceration, of dissonance;

c) ever since his first great work, Bakhtin was able to pinpoint the principle ruling this logic; he simply sketched it out, though, giving readers the task of developing his intuition. Drawing on some excerpts from his Dostoevsky book, we called it *principle of non-coincidence*. This principle states that A does not coincide with A, i.e. *any complex entity – be it a man, but also a great work of art – expresses a tendency to exceed its own boundaries*;

 d) thus, *idem* lives in its relationship with *alter*, and it cannot be concretely thought of outside this very relationship. This is Bakhtin's conception, although it is not an irenic conception at all – not many have understood this, though, at least not adequately so. The other can appear in two ways: as a depersonalising power, as the anonymous part of language, as the crowd of stereotypes, which tents to trap us into the stupid coincidence with ourselves and let the A = A principle triumph; or as that who exalts our desire of non-coincidence;

e) when applied to language, the principle of non-coincidence fosters a new view: language appears *divided*. This is the way in which "the internal dialogism of the word" [85] should be intended. However, many scholars who study Bakhtin have trivialised his conception, emphasizing the social dimension of discourse, i.e. "the social life of discourse outside the artist's study". [86]

Well, it is true that, by criticising old-fashioned tropes-based stylistics and the Saussurian notion of langue as an abstract system, Bakhtin highlighted "the internal stratification of any single national

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[85] M. Bakhtin, *Discourse in the Novel*, cit., p. 79.
[86] Ibid., p. 259.

language" (p. 71) and "the distinctive social dialogue among languages that is present in the novel". [87] However, if he had just done so, without adding anything else, it would be hard to distinguish his standpoint from that of any other pragmatist or sociolinguist. In Bakhtin's dialogic-conflictual view, language is not simply divided between the social and the individual element, or between different levels (or layers) corresponding to different social groups, different professions, and so forth. The real meaning of 'heteroglossia' (multi-discursivity) is not to be sought in stratification, multiplicity and variety of contexts. It has to be sought in struggle. And even more important than the struggle among genres is the internal struggle within each single genre: it is a struggle against the powers which tend towards the most simple, least fluid, and least lively (i.e. least dialogic) forms within each genre.

We do not need Bakhtin to realize that many different 'languages' are spoken in a given society, or that genres vary in diffusion or importance as times and epochs go by: decline of epos, rise of novel; decline of parody, proliferation of pastiche, and so forth. We need Bakhtin if we are not satisfied with short-sighted descriptions, if we are keen on understanding, for instance, that the decline of parody as a genre is not necessarily the decline of the *parody principle*, i.e. of the power that discourse uses to take hold of a stiffer and more conventional discourse, in order to transform it creatively. Bakhtin suggests studying the ways in which discourse rebels against the discourse of others, seeking its own truth: by torturing itself, as in Dostoevsky's monologues, or by destroying the seriousness of dominant languages and values with the help of laughter and humour, as Rabelais does, or in many other ways. In any case, language is divided in its very identity: it struggles against the part of itself which voices the oppressing discourse of others.

The result of this struggle is the plurality of styles, fighting and intertwining with each other at the same time. Thanks to this struggle, the hero can cross over its own boundaries and makes experiments with his own identity; and the author can experiment new forms, break the limitations of empirical time, and enter *great time*;

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[87] Ibid., pp. 262-263.

f) conducting a rigorous development of these intuitions, such as the logic of non-coincidence, conflict and complex hybridisation among styles, the 'overcrossing' view of identity, is the most authentic way to understand and offer Bakhtin's thought to others nowadays.