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THE "OTHER" AND THE "OTHER": CHRISTIAN ORIGINS OF BAKHTIN'S DIALOGISM

Abstract: *One of the main contributors to the idea of sharing and the creator of the idea of dialogism as a counterweight to monologism has been Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, the well-known Russian 20th-century theorist. Using the concepts of "I and thou" developed by his predecessors, most notably Martin Buber and Hermann Cohen, he fought against the hegemonic consciousness of his day and age, and established the imperative of dialogue between generations, interlocutors and ideas. This paper takes a look at the Christian aspect of the theory of dialogism, increasingly popular in contemporary Western thought. It opens up with Bakhtin's relationship with Christian thought and discourse, and then analyses the concepts of perichoresis, embodiment and the word (logos). The work then focuses on the particular Orthodox strain in Bakhtin's idea of dialogism, the sanctity of the human body, the phenomenon of Fool-for-Christ, and Russian (and Eastern) communality, or sobornost'.*

Key words: *Bakhtin, Christianity, embodiment, perichoresis, communality.*

The twentieth century has seen two world wars, the Holocaust and the "greatest failed experiment of the twentieth century" - the Russian Revolution and the establishment of the first "communist" state. The ideological support for Nazionalsozialismus and Bolshevik Marxism came from philosophical ideas that propagate monological consciousness. As a result of the devastating consequences of the implementation of those ideologies, a number of opposing ideas have emerged in the aftermath. Many of the established concepts share a common thread: they describe our world and personal relations in terms of sharing and conducting a dialogue. One of the main contributors to the idea of sharing as a counterweight to monologism is Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975), a well-known Russian 20th-century theorist. He is the creator of the idea of dialogism, a concept that encompasses all his diverse work produced under ideological pressure and intimidation, including imprisonment and exile. Using the concepts of "I and thou" developed by his predecessors, most notably Martin Buber and Hermann Cohen, Bakhtin fought against the single-thought consciousness of his day and age, and established the imperative of dialogue between generations, interlocutors and ideas.

Non-Marxist philosophy became dangerous after the Russian revolution, and especially after it was completely banned and its proponents violently persecuted in the early 1930s. So Bakhtin, a philosopher according to his education and interest, was forced to find other areas of humanities to express his non-conformist ideas. He first turned to literary theory and criticism, then socio- and cultural linguistics, and finally to anthropology and cultural history. In his book about Dostoevsky, he coined the term polyphony. In his essays about the novel he re-contextualised this notion into heteroglossia (Russ. *разноречье*), and in the book about Rabelais he came up with the concept of carnival. The overarching idea that incorporates all these concepts can be labeled dialogism, named so by the prominent Bakhtin scholar, Michael Holquist, in his 1990 book by the same title.[1] Bakhtin's dialogue

[1] As one of Bakhtin's best-known students, Vadim Kozhinov, phrased it, "What Bakhtin often used to call the 'philosophy of dialogue' lay at the basis of all his literary-critical works: all of life is a dialogue, a dialogue between person and person, person and nature, person and God...

works on several levels: it battles monologism by placing individual utterances and worldviews in a wider, social context; it also gives greater significance to the fellow human being, the other; finally, it opens up a special relationship with the Other, the divine principle. Dialogue is not only a redefinition of epistemology, it is also an existential imperative: "In dialogue a person not only shows himself outwardly, but he becomes for the first time that which he is [...], not only for others but for himself as well. To be, means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends. [...] Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence," Bakthin argues (2006, 252).

In reaction to a recent trend in Western Bakhtin criticism[2], this work takes a look at this concept, in addition to the more obvious interrelationship of humans and their ideas, as a dialogue with God, "a heavenly father who is *above* me and who may justify and love me where I from within myself cannot love and justify myself in principle" (Бахтин 2003, 52). As an increasing number of scholarly articles argues (Contino 2002, Felch 2002, Pechey 2002, Lock 2002), Christ for Bakhtin represents the most profound synthesis of the "ethical-aesthetic goodness toward the other," (Бахтин 2003, 57) and a constant reminder of his governing principle: "What I must be for the other, God is for me" (56). So, this work takes a look at the Christian aspect of the theory of dialogism. It starts with Bakhtin's relationship with Christian thought and discourse, then analyses the concepts of embodiment, word (*logos*) and *perichoresis*. The work further focuses on the particular and often misunderstood Orthodox strain in Bakhtin's idea of dialogism, the idea of the sanctity of the human body, the phenomenon of a Fool-for-Christ (*юродивый*), and Russian (and Eastern) communality, or *соборность*.

Even simply the very existence of a person, if you like, is also a 'dialogue', the exchange of substances between the person and the surrounding environment" (Кожинов 1992, 144–45).

[2] Christianity with Bakhtin did not become a major topic in Russian criticism until the mid-1980s, the time of *glasnost'* and *perestroika*, for obvious reasons. The trend coincided with a great revival of Russian Orthodoxy in the 1990s. In the West, the case was different. In their critical biography, Clark and Holquist (1984) dedicate a full chapter to the religious and ecclesiastical context of Bakhtin's faith, but after that the topic largely waned. In his 1990 study, Holquist admits that he is a non-believer, yet no attempt was made in the 1984 book "to downplay the fact that throughout his life Bakhtin was a deeply religious (if also highly eccentric) man, for whom certain Russian Orthodox traditions were of paramount importance" (xii). Morson and Emerson (1990) dedicate only a few remarks to Bakhtin's relationship to Christianity, but, since the topic was hard to ignore, that same year Emerson published an essay, "Russian Orthodoxy and the Early Bakhtin," in which she noted Bakhtin's adaptation of the relational aspects of Trinitarian theology, his iconic emphasis upon the vitality of seeing, and his rejection of the Cartesian split between body and mind. In 1997 and 1998, two book-length studies on the topic appeared in the United States and Great Britain, Alexandar Mihailovic's *Corporeal Worlds,* with an emphasis on the Russian Orthodox context of Bakhtin's work, and Ruth Coates' *Christianity in Bakhtin,* which explores more general, evangelical themes. Both writers comment on the neglect of the topic. "If at first critical neglect of Christian motifs in Bakhtin was due to pardonable ignorance – certain crucial, early and late, texts being made available only in the mid-1980s (in Russia) and the early 1990s (in the West) – it now seems attributable to a certain, uncanny 'blindness', at least among Slavists, who have had time enough to respond to this particular voice among the many that contend for attention in Bakhtin's work," Coates writes (1998, 1). "Any substantive rebuttal to [Bakhtin's distinctly Russian piety comes] from the majority of Bakhtin's Marxist supporters in the West for two [...] reasons: few of them know Russian, and those who do (such as Hirschkop, Wlad Godzich, and David Shepherd) consider the possible theological references in his work unworthy of examination. The language impediment and the indifference of many of these commentators to Russian cultural realia are considerable obstacles to engaging with the issue of Bakhtin's relation to the traditions—and the often complex and highly varied political manifestations—of Russian spirituality," Mihailovic contends (1997, 2–4). In 2002, Susan M. Felch and Paul J. Contino edited and wrote the introduction to a comprehensive collection of articles that covers various aspects of Bakhtin's Christianity. In one of the essays, Charles Lock comments on the topic: "The task of demonstrating, at the level of the text, the significance of Orthodoxy for the understanding of Bakhtin has fallen to Western scholars, in the past for good reasons, today for no better reason than that relevance is so taken for granted in Russia as to stand in no need of demonstration" (2002, 98). Finally, in 2007 Graham Pechey published the book *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Word in the World*, in which he mostly writes about the influence of Orthodox Christianity on Bakhtin's thought.

Theology in Bakhtin's life and work

Bakhtin's understanding and use of theological concepts did not come only from his interest in the topic, but also from his intellectual and cultural surrounding. He grew up in a religious Russian Orthodox family, and he was intellectually formed in pre-revolutionary Russia, where "Vladimir Soloviev triumphed over Chernyshevsky"[3] (Berdiaev 1971, 221), the age in which the satiation with 19th-century realism and perhaps the proximity of the impending turmoil and tragedy made almost the entire Russian intelligentsia turn to some sort of spiritual yearnings and practices. Bakhtin was no exception. Kozhinov, who knew him well, describes him as being an Orthodox Christian who was critical of Soviet irreligion yet uncanonical in some of his philosophical views, a tendency common in many Russian thinkers who draw on certain theological conceits (Кожинов 1992, 145). Even if his philosophy may have not been entirely in tune with the teachings of the Orthodox Church, one has to look at it in the context of the Byzantine *cultural* tradition.

Bakhtin considered himself a philosopher, and Russia does not have a tradition of philosophy in the Western sense. Most entries in Russian philosophy textbooks, at least until the twentieth century, include theologians or novelists, like Dostoevsky. "Dostoevsky's form-shaping ideology lacks those two basic elements upon which any ideology is built: *the separate thought,* and a unified world of objects giving rise to a *system* of thoughts," Bakhtin writes about his favorite Russian author (2006, 93). Clark and Holquist assert that Bakhtin's life and thought reject the prejudice of post-seventeenth-century European culture that only the neat formulations of isolated categories are valid or "scientific" (1984, 11). His style, nevertheless, seems a lot more structured than that of his Russian peers, and this trait can probably be attributed to the influence of German philosophy he avidly read. His writing in "Author and Hero," for example, adds a German-philosophical idiom to the intellectual heteroglossia of Christianity, Pechey asserts. In Russia, where German idealist philosophy arrived in the company of German mysticism and was read together with the latter as its modern continuation, this was not deemed unusual (2002, 53).

"Only religion can bring about completely unlimited freedom of thought," Kozhinov recalls Bakhtin saying, "because a human being absolutely cannot exist without some kind of *faith*. The absence of faith in God inevitably turns into *idolatry*—that is, faith in something notoriously limited by the boundaries of space and time, and incapable of providing true freedom of thought" (Кожинов 1992, 145). Kozhinov relates how on one occasion, Bakhtin "spoke to me about God and Creation for several hours, finishing long after midnight. He spoke with such inspiration that I came back to my hotel, literally in a state of astonishment and could not fall asleep, remaining in a spiritual state which I had never experienced before" (150). Ever since his first published work in Nevel', the town in Western Russia where he spent the first years after the revolution and where the members of the Bakhtin circle, in the words of L. V. Pumpiansky, had been "doggedly studying theology" (qtd. in Coates 1998, 6), Bakhtin conducted a "dialogue with the Gospels which continued throughout his whole life" (Турбин 1995, 236).

When "philosophising" and religious profession were still not violently sanctioned, Bakhtin and his friends organised philosophical nights, the aim of which was "to rethink all the categories of modern thought in terms of the Russian Orthodox tradition" (qtd. in Clark 1998, 120). In his paper from that period, "On the Problem of Grounded Peace," in which he outlines what he considers to be the proper task of the philosophy of religion, Bakhtin analyses the position of the tax collector from the Gospel parable as one who finds justification not in himself, like the Pharisee, but in an "incarnated Third Person," and posits well-grounded peace as that which is reached when one abandons self-assurance and passes through a period of restlessness and penitence to arrive at a condition of trust in

[3] Vladimir Soloviev is perhaps the most influential mystical philosopher in the Russian spiritual renaissance, and Nikolai Chernyshevsky is a materialist philosopher and critic, one of the leaders of the revolutionary democratic movement, later celebrated by the Bolsheviks.

God (Bakhtin 2001, 207-8). Since Bakhtin had been arrested and almost executed on charges of underground religious activity, and given the climate of terror that prevailed until Stalin's death, it is not surprising that Christian motifs ceased to receive direct expression in his subsequent works (Coates 1998, 9). Even in his later texts, though, theological overtones are not hard to detect, especially in Bakhtin's concept of dialogue, which represents to him the essence of piety (Mihailovic 1997, 15): "Objective idealism maintains that the kingdom of God is outside us, and Tolstoy, for example, insists that it is 'within us', but I think that the kingdom of God is between us, between me and you, between me and God, between me and nature: that's where the kingdom of God is" (Кожинов 1992, 145). In *Rabelais,* Bakhtin condemns the church as a power-wielding institution, but he cannot be labeled as anti-Christian purely on those grounds. After all, he stated, "the Gospel, too is carnival" (qtd. in Coates 1998, 126). He also compares the apotheosis of Dostoevsky's plurality (and, at the same time, preservation of one's own personality) to "the church as the communion of unmerged souls" (Bakhtin 2006, 26).

In "Towards a Philosophy of the Act," the burden of the struggle for life and the blame for the triumph of death is firmly placed on the shoulders of individual human beings.[4] Like St. Paul, Bakhtin asserts we know what is right, but we may choose to ignore it. In full knowledge that he has a unique contribution to make towards the unification of being, the pretender [*самозванец*], by contrast, consciously rejects the moral implication of this for himself, and perpetuates the split between the world of endless theoretical possibility and the world of concrete historical reality (Бахтин 2003, 13). Bakhtin seeks the answer to this monologism in the dialogic relationship with the other. He intends to give a scholarly form to this fundamental law of ethics: "Of course in no way does it follow that this opposition [of I and the other] has never been either expressed or uttered; after all, it is the meaning of all Christian morality...but this moral principle has not up until now been given adequate academic expression, nor has it been fully and fundamentally thought through" (Бахтин 2003, 15).

Dependence on the other lies at the heart of both Christianity and Bakhtin's thought. Bakhtin writes of the absolute fulfilment in opening ourselves to the power of inexplicable grace: "Only in God or in the world is joy a possibility for me, that is to say, only when I justifiably attach myself to being through the other and for the other, where I am passive and receive the gift" (Бахтин 2003, 120). "The denial of justification here and now passes over into the need for religious justification; it is full of need for forgiveness and atonement as an absolutely *pure gift* (not by merit), of pardon and blessing from an axiologically utterly other world," Bakhtin argues, and adds, "My right to a loving reception of my external form descends on me from others like a gift, like a blessing which cannot be inwardly grounded and understood" (125). Bakhtin finds the way out of the separation with our true essence through the dialogic relationship with the other and the joy of carnival. "The living phenomena of carnival and dialogue found their positive significance in the person of Christ, and their highest textual expression in the Gospels," Clark and Holquist assert (1984, 251).

And now we will take a look at a few general Christian concepts and specifically Orthodox ideas in Bakhtin's work.

Embodiment

The motif of embodiment is one of the main images in Bakhtin's works. Incarnation will gradually give way to the utterance as the direct manifestation of an abstract thought or idea, but the second hypostasis will not disappear from his works; the new image will only intensify the connection of the word (discourse) with the eternal

[4] The meaning of the Russian word *ответственность* is split in English into *responsibility* and *answerability,* with a nuance of difference in the meaning of those two words. Bakhtin's translators did a good job translating the word into the latter option to stress the answering aspect of this notion (*ответ* = answer). The word response might bear more of a connotation of a reaction or a feedback, but both include responsibility of a human being to his/her deeds, the principle meaning of the term.

Logos. Bakhtin takes Kant as a representative of all abstract philosophical approaches to ethics dominant in the West since Descartes and Pascal (Morson 1990, 25). In his focus on the concrete deed as an embodiment of an abstract idea, he is guided by Hermann Cohen, who wrote: "It is an intriguing illusion that the solitary thinker is most likely to attain full selfhood. We know, however, that the isolated self exclusively engaged cannot be an ethical self. The ethical self must be engaged in action. For this self there exists no I without a thou" (Cohen 1971, 218). In "Author and Hero," Bakhtin, in a Neo-Kantian tradition, brings Kant down to earth by focusing on actual lived experience and not the transcendental conditions of experience, Randall A. Poole asserts. "Bakhtin is interested in subject and object not as abstract epistemological categories, but as embodied, concrete human beings, each occupying its own unique place in the world" (2002, 153).[5]

The notion carries a soteriological meaning as well, since "even God had to be incarnated in order to show mercy, suffer and forgive, to come down [...] from the abstract view-point of justice" (Бахтин 2003, 113). Bakhtin describes the participation of the subject in history as "pouring flesh and blood" in theoretical time and space (131). "Towards a Philosophy of the Act" employs the terms *воплощение* and *инкарнирование* with striking frequency and consistency to denote the *incorporatio* of the abstract realm of truth into the concrete "event of being" by the responsible human agent (Coates 1998, 33). In personally subscribing to a theoretical truth, this agent rescues it from rootlessness and empty determinism by locating it, not only spatially and temporally, but also axiologically, since every responsible act must take up an evaluative stance towards the world in which it finds itself (86, 108, 114). As Bakhtin wittily illustrates his point, "to look for a real knowing act that is torn away from its meaningful content is the same as lifting oneself by the hair" (Бахтин 2003, 11).

For Dostoevsky, Bakhtin's prime example of this principle in novelistic discourse, the loftiest principles of a worldview are the same principles that govern the most concrete personal experiences. The result is an artistic fusion of personal life with worldview, of the most intimate experiences with the idea. Personal life becomes uniquely unselfish and principled, and lofty, ideological thinking becomes passionate and intimately linked with personality (Coates 1998, 66). "The idea is a *live event,* played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousnesses. In this sense, the idea is similar to the *word,* with which it is dialogically united. Like the word, the idea wants to be heard, understood, and 'answered' by other voices from other positions," Bakhtin explains (2006, 88). Like Dostoevsky's fictional world, "Bakhtin's system never loses sight of the nitty-gritty of everyday life, with all the awkwardness, confusion and pain peculiar to the *hic et nunc*, but also with all the joy that only its immediacy can bring," Clark and Holquist assert (1984, 348).

In the novel essays, truths, or worldviews, are presented as embodied in language rather than in persons. In Bakhtin's discussion of artistic literature as text, the word becomes the flesh of meaning. By shifting from consciousness to language, he expands the field of application of his incarnational principle. Just as a plurality of embodied consciousnesses precluded a reductive monologic ideology from gaining ascendance, the plurality of languages resists discourses with pretensions to dominance (Coates 1998, 170). In Christ the word was made flesh, and a primary feature of Bakhtin's concept of language is his emphasis on the materiality of the word (86). Bakhtin argues that by conceiving words as if no one ever actually spoke them, linguists have turned dialogic signs into monologic signals:

[5] Explaining the difference between the two further, Poole writes that Bakhtin valued Kant's account of subjectivity and objectivity as basic categories of experience, his approach is phenomenological; Kantian transcendental idealism claims that the very possibility of nature depends on the transcendental capacity for objectivity, for differentiation between self and other. Reducing consciousness to nature is therefore something like reducing consciousness to itself. Bakhtinian phenomenology, by contrast, describes the situation of being a subject in the world. Bakhtin proceeds from ordinary assumptions that the subject is a human being already in the world; there is no metaphysical mystery (Poole 2002, 153).

"When we seek to understand a word, what matters is not the direct meaning the word gives to object and emotions – this is the false (*лживый*) front of the word; what matters is the actual and always self-interested use to which this meaning is put and the way it is expressed by the speaker who speaks and under what conditions he speaks: this is what determines the actual meaning" (Bakhtin 1982a, 401). For him, theory has no value without manifestation in life just as there is no God without his Incarnation.

Слово

The philosophical ramifications of the logos doctrine are nowhere more evident than in Bakthin's conception of "*слово*", a term embracing language, discourse, or even the isolated utterance, from which he derives his concept of polyphony. In a series of sketchy yet revealing notes he wrote in 1970-71, Bakhtin explicitly connects both theoretical and applied linguistics to the Johannine philosophy of the word: "Metaphysics and the philosophy of the word. Ancient teachings about logos. John. Language speech, speech communication, utterance [*высказивание*]. The specific nature of speech communications" (Bakhtin 1986, 147). "The Johannine paradigm of the enfleshed word is singularly felicitious in Bakhtins theory of language as both social or supraindividual and subject in its shaping and transformation by the participants in dialogue," Mihailovic writes (1997, 18). Like the divine word, Bakhtin's *slovo* denotes communality of those interacting with it; in its capacity as an embodied phenomenon, it also represents the individual utterance: "In light of this metaphor, the participants in Bakhtinian dialogue begin to emerge as communicants in a eucharistic sense as well as in a strictly linguistic one" (18). Bakhtin deftly shifts from one meaning of *слово* to another, focusing once on the denotation of the term (the individual word or utterance) and then on its connotation (the hypostatic word) (33). Without the context and concrete utterance, the word is destined for semantic obsolescence: "Discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in a living impasse toward the object; if we would detach ourselves completely from this impulse all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or the fate of a given world in life" (Bakhtin 1982a, 292).

As a result of the obvious circumstances in which the book was written, Christianity in *Rabelais* is a little harder to see, but many critics see an obvious presence of the motif of embodiment. "Since carnival, like heteroglossia, is a democratic and material mode of experience capable of providing a counterfoil to the dictatorial power of a monologic, 'official' worldview, it is a clear manifestation of the Incarnational motif in Bakhtin's work", Coates writes. The celebration of grotesque materialism takes place at the expense of the "spiritual," but Bakhtin ascribes it an ideological value: the festivities must be sanctioned by the highest aims of human existence, the world of ideas (Coates 1998, 132). The phrases "bringing down to earth" and "turning their subject into flesh" related to grotesque realism connote the Incarnation in a very specific way, Coates argues. "Christianity may be viewed as a materialisation of God, a debasement of the Jewish/Old Testament worldview, the entering of metaphysical truths into the realm of chronotopic limitations. The Incarnation overthrows a religion based on absence and fear in favour of a familiar God expressed in material terms" (133). God the Father is incarnated in the Son the Word.

Perichoresis

The notion of mutual penetration, or permeation, or *perichoresis* (Gr. περιχώρησις), defined at the Sixth Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon in 462, is perhaps the single most important notion in the discussion of the gradual obliteration of the direct connection between humans and the Divine principle. It is also identified as one of the basic premises of Bakhtin's theory. Its meaning—that the two natures of Christ, the human and the divine, can exist in one body at the same time—is essential for the understanding of God's presence in humans. It is through the *interpenetration* of these two substances—

взаимопроникновение in Bakhtin's linguistic theory—each preserving its own identity "without division or confusion," that the unity of the two natures in Christ is constituted. The Sixth Ecumenical Council was notable in affirming not only the consubstantiality (Gr. *ὁμοούσιος*, Russ. *единосущие*) of Father and Son, but also the two natures [*естества*] of Christ as human and divine, a close mutual influence and even interdependence, "without confusion" [*неслито*], without change, without separation [*нераздельно*]." The human and divine natures of Christ are united in the one and the same person of the "only-begotten" son, the word of God. The Russian translation of this concept [*взаимопроникновение*][6] occurs in many instances throughout Bakhtin's writing as a term and an idea, sometimes through related words such as *проникать* (to penetrate, permeate) and [*взаимо*]*проникновенность* ([inter]penetratability).[7] According to Charles Lock, Bakhtin even names the central concept of his thought, dialogism, by analogy to the Chalcedonian notion of "duophysitism," the two natures of the incarnate Christ (2002, 110).

In his early work, author and hero cohabitate in a single aesthetic value: "Every concrete value of the artistic whole is conceived in two value contexts: in the context of the hero [...] and the finalising context of the author [...], and those value contexts *interpermeate* one another, but the context of the author strives to envelop and close the context of the hero (Бахтин 2006, 88). In "Towards a Philosophy of the Act," an act must acquire an answerability both for its content and for its Being, whereby the former must be brought into communion with the latter as a constituent moment in it; "that is the only way whereby the pernicious non-fusion and non-interpenetration [*дурная неслияность и невзаимопроникновенность*] of culture and life could be overcome" (83). A few years later, Bakhtin conceives of Dostoevsky's discourse as a dyad whose members exert a powerful and fundamental influence upon one another, using the term "word with a sideward glance" [*слово с оглядкой*] for such refracted or socially impacted speech. Giving oneself wholly to each and all individually and without reservation [*безраздельно и баззаветно*] is the highest good; there, the law of *I* merges [*сливается*] with the law of humanism, these opposites mutually annihilating one another in their convergence [*в слитии*] (Бахтин 1994, 155-56).

In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin identifies the "concrete" word with the utterance and states that "no living word relates to its object in a singular way" for "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 object-directed word subsequently becomes "dialogically agitated" in the "tension-filled environment of alien words," and "weaves in and out of complex interrelationships [*взаимоотношения*] with yet a third group and all this may crucially shape discourse [*слово*]" (Bakhtin 1998, 276). For Mihailovic, Bakhtin's use of the word *взаимоотношения* (interrelationships) to describe the networking of the concrete word is homologous to the interpenetration or *perichoresis* of logos with other segments of the Trinity. His comment that the word merges [*сливается*] with some while recoiling from others recalls both lexically and conceptually the conditional fusion of the twin natures of Christ the Word defined at the Coun-

[6] Holquist and Emerson translate the term *взаимопроникновение* as interpenetration because of Bakhtin's overall "aggressive talk" that perhaps reflects "the general militarisation of Soviet life and language during the prewar and war years," and it is "impeccably Marxist" (1982, 431). I would suggest *interpermeation* as a better term because—now outside of the times when texts had to conform to ideologies (at least less than in the Soviet Union)—it connotes the Christian nonviolence and reflects the consubstantiability of the two substances more precisely. The English word "to penetrate" involves a physical act, and the Russian word *проникать/проникнуть* carries more of a psychological connotation (to penetrate one's mind, for example).

[7] The phrase *неслияно и нераздельно* ("not merged yet undivided") is not an idiom in Russian. It is recognisable only as a product of the ecumenical council's decisions, and it assumes a surprisingly high profile in Russian philosophy and literature form the turn of the century to the twenties (Soloviev, Bely, Gumilev, Shklovsky, Mandel'shtam). As shown above, Bakhtin iterates the phrase (or variants of it) in several critical moments of his work, from his earliest writings to *Dostoevsky* (Mihailovic 1997, 126).

cil of Chalcedon. Finally, the word's intersection with a third group of alien words is for Mihailovic "distinctly reminiscent both of the eternity of God and the divine economy in which each hypostasis of the Trinity is said to interdwell with the others" (Mihailovic 1997, 23-24).

Bakhtin often examines the Saussurean coexistence of two elements of a given word, the signifier and the signified, a continuous inspiration for theorists since its inception that has led post-structuralists to focus on language as the most significant expression of consciousness. The concept, which undoubtedly recalls Platonic forms and objects, can be seen as just another manifestation of the visible and invisible world. The principle of difference, that which holds distinct the two parts of the Saussurian sign "without confusion and separation," has been in recent thinking promoted as noncontingent, non reducible to the principle of identity (Lock 2002, 104). For Bakhtin, language is an external entity existing in a living word. His concept of outsidedness, first applied to the nature of the author, explains the arbitrariness of the connection between the signifier and the signified, the preservation of one's personality, and the Chalcedonian non-fusion of two substances in one body.

Body and the Apophatic approach

The specifically Orthodox aspect in Bakhtin's thought is reflected in his celebration of the body, his recognition of the divine spirit in humans that can lead to *theosis*, the distinction between God's essence and his energies, the affinity towards communality (*соборность*), the image of fool or rogue that recalls the figure of Fool-for-Christ [*юродивый*], and his apophatic approach to knowing. In recent years Bakhtin's scholars have recognised the importance of the distinctive view on Christian ideas in the Eastern Church, but due to the lack of understanding of Orthodox theology and tradition, some of those analysis are superficial, even faulty. Limits of space do not allow us to concentrate on all of these concepts here, so the following pages only briefly focus on Bakhtin's view of the body, his apophatic approach to self-consciousness, the figure of fool or rogue, and dialogism as an expression of Eastern communality.

The most obvious concept that most critics have trouble fitting into his overall Christian worldview is the materialism of grotesque realism. Much more than the Catholics and the Protestants, the Orthodox believe in the holiness of matter reflected in the existence of Christ's body and blood in Eucharist, the material representation of Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints in icons, and the veneration of relics. The body has a special function in the hesychast prayer. Charles Lock explains Western perplexity with Bakhtin's juxtaposition of images from his faith with those drawn from biology and sociology as an example of the "globalisation of Protestant paradigms and anxieties": "Orthodoxy never underwent a Reformation, nor any sort of conflict between faith and reason," he argues. A sacramental theology does not find anything reductive in nature, and it celebrates reason as part of creation, as that which links the divine with the human; in Orthodoxy, the conflict between faith and reason only exists as an import (Lock 2002, 101).

In "Chronotope," Bakhtin wages a crusade against negative attitudes to the body. For the reigning ideology, "the life of the body could only be licentious, crude, dirty and self-destructive. Between the word and the body there [is] an immeasurable abyss." According to Bakhtin, Rabelais wants to "return both a language and a meaning to the body, [...] and simultaneously return a reality, a materiality, to language and to meaning" (Bakhtin 1982b, 171). In this leitmotif we detect the pathos of a man struggling to accept his ailing body in a society where millions of bodies were being destroyed as worthless in the name of an ideology, which had completely lost touch with reality, Coates argues (1998, 134). The embodiment of Christ gave a special meaning to the body. Jesus may be said to represent the perfect reconciliation of language with the body; he is the Word of life whom the first epistle of John describes as 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched' (I Jn 1.1)". The body is

real; lofty ideas disseminated for selfish purposes are monstrous constructs of evil minds.

Another trait of Bakhtin's writing that has been a focus of critics arguing in favour of the distinct Orthodox nature of his thought is his apophatic approach. The *apophatic* approach of these writings, i.e. describing God in negative terms (invisible, infinite, incomprehensible) belongs to the tradition of Eastern mysticism. The lack of familiarity with this tradition and the reliance on Roman law in matters of religion stimulated theologians in the West, on the other hand, to develop along the lines of a *cataphatic* ("affirmative") approach. According to Roman law, every argument should be "positive," stating what the case *is*, rather than what it is *not,* including assertions about God (Marangundakis 2001, 247). If man cannot know God, as Bakhtin seems to imply, neither can he know himself, created as he is, in the image and likeness of God. The impossibility of identity of subject and object that precludes knowledge of God also rules out complete self-knowledge. The apophatic moment in Bakhtin consist "in the unknowability of the self to itself, (I-for-myself), and thus in the need for the seeing and knowing other—for 'deity becoming human,' becoming an embodied, grace-bestowing other, Christ, which is Bakhtin's ideal image of the other," (Poole 2002, 159). As Emerson puts it, "apophatic theology might appear to deny and negate, but in fact such an emptying-out of definitions is prelude to the most affirmative plenitude" (Emerson 2001, 179). Bakhtin stresses the orientation of prayer toward the future, the betterment of the self. His unfinalisability also finds a meaning in the immortality of the soul and eternal life.

Fool as *юродивый*

Bakhtin often uses the character of fool or rogue who speaks the truth without a fear of consequences, unmasking hypocrisy and presumption and undermining the authority of unlawful rulers. Many critics have noticed the connection Bakhtin establishes between the mediaeval folk fool and the phenomenon best known in Orthodox Christian -- Fool-for-Christ. This feat consists of feigning madness by people with great spiritual gifts in order to hide their clairvoyance and avoid glory and honour. The basis for the enterprise of Fool-for-Christ is presumed to be the Apostle Paul's sermon in one of his epistles:

> We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honoured, we are dishonoured! To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment (1 Cor. 4.10-18).

Since most people only care about their earthly life, Christians, whose main goal is to earn life eternal through prayer and good works, seem like fools to non-Chistians. They are governed by divine, not human wisdom, which cultivates different values, often completely opposite to the accepted ones. One of the most famous fools-for-Christ in Russia is certainly St. Basil the Blessed (*Василий блаженный*), whose relics lie in the most famous Moscow church, but they can still be encountered in contemporary Russia.

In "Chronotope", Bakhtin describes the fool or rogue as a participant in life found outside of him (in which he does not participate emotionally), and as a perpetual spy and reflection of life that turns the private sphere of life into a public one. For Bakhtin, the fool represents a metamorphosis of the king and god who is transformed into a slave and transgressor, like Christ (Bakhtin 1982b, 161). He is "not of this world" and, therefore, possesses special rights and privileges to unmask hypocrisy and perfidy (159). If he wanted to underline someone's spiritual and artistic capabilities, Bakthin would say he was "not of this world", and his life and work bring the Russian philosopher akin to this group of people. In *Rabelais,* the character of the fool or rogue occupies one of the central places in the concept of folk laughter or carnival. In the middle ages, the fool is the unlawful carrier of objectively abstract personality, Bakthin writes (1984, 93). In the chapter about folk feast forms, he compares the mediaeval parody of the crowning and de-crowning of the king-fool with the scene

from the Old Testament in which Christ is declared the king during his entry into Jerusalem, and then soon mocked and beaten up by Jews and Roman soldiers. "King is the fool. All the people elect him, then all the people mock him and beat him, when the time of his reign has passed", Bakhtin writes. (1984, 197-98).

Comparing Bakhtin's "purifying laughter" with the centuries-old Orthodox tradition of Fool-for-Christ's sake, Vadim Kozhinov warns the critics who in this concept want to see a deviation from Orthodoxy that they then have to disassociate the entire assembly of Russian fools from the Orthodox faith and tradition. The blind force of joy, he writes, is an inseparable characteristic, an attribute of Orthodox in its entirety, and not only the behaviour of fools-for-Christ (Кожинов 1997, 12). Bocharov and Mihailovic confirm the obvious connection, while Western critics mostly do not notice it or ignore it. In the West, the idea of redemption of the soul through a purifying suffering endured without complaint is almost completely foreign. Bakhtin never complained about the tragic fate of his people, his own fate and that of his family (his mother and all three sisters died of hunger during the siege of Leningrad), and he suffered through all the misfortunes with patience and a smile on his face.

Соборность

The concept of *соборность* in the tradition of the Russian church and culture encompasses more than the mere English translation -- communality -- might imply. The word was coined by the most prominent Slavophile of the 19th century, A. S. Khomiakov (1804-1860), who saw in it the counterweight to the individualism of the West and the intellectual aspirations of the so-called Westerners in Russia, with whom he fiercely battled in his writings. The Orthodox understanding of *соборность* is linked to the belief in the Church as the Body of Christ, in which all the members of the Church represent cells in the wholeness of a single divine organism guided by the Holy Spirit. On a social level, this notion purports the voluntary interdependence of each individual human and the unity of society as a whole, in other words, love and dialogue between people.

In an interesting and unusual article, "The Death of the 'Other'," K. G. Isupov argues that Bakhtin's dialogue is fundamentally an expression of love as *eros.* The sense in which every event of reciprocated love is really a manifestation of erotic love is central to many Orthodox conceptions of martyrdom and divinity that foreground *kenosis,* or the emptying out of the self, a process that posits the complete purging of consciousness as a prerequisite for salvation (*И*супов 1992, 106).[8] As the Holy Fathers teach, only an extreme abandonment of all worldly needs can lead to *theosis* in this life. The striking similarity between Bakhtin's dialogic philosophy of consciousness and Orthodox Trinitarianism could not be better captured than in Timothy Ware's description:

> Deification is not a solitary but a 'social' process [...] Humans, made in the image of the Trinity, can only realise the divine likeness if they live a common life such as the Blessed Trinity lives: as the three persons of the Godhead 'dwell' in one another, so we must 'dwell' in our fellow humans, living not for ourselves alone, but in and for others [...] Such is the true nature of *theosis.* (Ware 1997, 237).

Both the Russian Church and the society were always characterised by a high degree of communality, and Bakhtin was a true propagator of this love and ecclesiastical unity between people. In order for the "I" to exist in the first place, the existence of the "you" is necessary. Two are an inseparable part of unity in Christ, and Bakhtin calls their communication dialogue.

[8] Kenosis, or the emptying of the self, described in St. Paul's epistle to the Philippians, has played a formative role in Orthodox spirituality. In "Author and Hero," Christ combines in himself the two acts of the kenotic self-effacement: he strips himself of his glory to appear in the world as a sacrifice for sins, and he acts out the Father's kenotic role by effacing himself in the act of Creation. The latter is described in the nature of aesthetic activity: "This is the external position of the author in relation to the hero, his loving self-elimination from the field of the hero's life, his clearing of the whole field of life for him and his being, the participatory understanding and completion of the event of his life by a cognitively and ethically impartial observer" (Бахтин 2003, 116).

Conclusion

Even though he had to turn to sociolinguistics and literary theory because of Soviet repression, Bakhtin, who started reading Kant's treatises when he was only twelve, always considered himself a philosopher. Most of the definitions that made his works an object of intense study come from his work in metalinguistics, but the difference between his early works, in which theology was more pronounced, and his later works about language chiefly consists of modified terminology. The underlying principle governing his thought, moreover, remains dialogism, a concept, as Bakhtin himself put it, based on Christian morals (Бахтин 2003, 75). In the light of the new interpretation of Bakhtin's works and the idea governing his thought, dialogism, beside a relationship with the other, the neighbour, finds an even deeper meaning in the relationship with the Other, the divine principle. Apart from the more general Christian concepts immediately recognised by Western critiques, there is an underlying layer that can be interpreted through Bakhtin's adherence to the Eastern Orthodox tradition. His dialogism, therefore, can be looked upon as a distinct view on the fundamental significance of Christ's church on Earth through the ecclesiastical and social communion. Finally, by demonstrating that secular forms are transformations of the founding forms of Christian belief (Pechey 2001, 60), Bakhtin connects the traditional moral beliefs with modern ideas in ethics and epistemology.

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ДРУГИ И *ДРУГИ*: ХРИШЋАНСКЕ ОСНОВЕ БАХТИНОВОГ ДИЈАЛОГИЗМА

Резиме

Михаил Михаилович Бахтин, познати руски теоретичар 20. вијека, био је један од главних заговорника идеје дијељења и творац идеје дијалогизма као противтеже монологизму. Користећи концепте *ја* и *тӣи*, које су развили његови претходници, првенствено Мартин Бубер и Херман Коен, борио се против хегемонијске свијести свог доба и установио императив дијалога међу генерацијама, саговорницима и идејама. Овај рад бави се хришћанским аспектом теорије дијалогизма, која постаје све популарнија у савременој западној филозофији. Уводно поглавље обрађује Бахтинов однос према хришћанској мисли и дискурсу, а након тога анализирају се концепти перихорезе, утјеловљења и ријечи (логоса). Рад се потом посебно бави православљем, светошћу људског тијела, феноменом „будале за Христа" и руском (источном) саборношћу

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