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Language. Polyphony. Carnival
(Michail Bakhtin)[1]

Undoubtedly, in order to portray the whole of the unusual views of Mikhail Bachtin, future interpreters will also have to take into account his earliest books published under the name of W. N. Voloshinov. The books I have in mind here are *Freudism* (1927)[2], a volume not available in Polish libraries, and *Marxism and Linguistic Philosophy* (1930). It seems that all Bachtin-Voloshinov's texts, despite their so different subjects of study, combine common methodological directives and a consistent system of values.

Already in his first two works Bachtin shows himself as someone consistently opposed to the positivistic idea. He attacks psychologism, biographism and, especially, mechanical transference of the natural science models into the area of humanistic facts. The problem of the interpretation of sign systems is at the very centre of Bachtin's research, from the criticism of Freud to the concept of the folk culture of laughter. The underlying issue of that interpretation is the concept of the metalanguage of descriptions of cultural phenomena. The relations between the object described and the methods of description constitute a basic problem of humanistic thought for Bachtin. Both linguistic analyses of "one's own words" and "someone else's words", criticism of the homophonic reading of Dostoyevsky's novels, and the polemics with the modernistic reading of the folk culture of laughter.

In Bachtin's first works, the theory of the meaning of the verbal (so-called semiotic) declaration is already complete. Such a message is not an isolated creation but is of a social and dialogic nature, and the basis of understanding it is to allow for a semantically active context. The concept of Voloshinov's semantics anticipates the excellent studies of Jan Mukařovski about the semantics of a literary declaration. However, Voloshinov goes beyond the limits of linguistics. The analyses of denotations in language are used by him as an archetype of more universal matters: mechanism of denotation of the creations of culture (ideology, science, literature) and, at the same time, they become a concept of an "understanding" of those creations. Thus, in Bachtin's first works, a clear sociological dominant appears; it consists of reconstructing social communication situations as elementary parameters of all information transfer acts. From that point of view, there is only one Bachtin: whether he formulates the basics of "linguistic philosophy" or whether he reconstructs the social system of functioning of carnival texts. The declaration is always determined by the contexts of social communication situations. This sociological dominant constitutes also clear polemics with all forms of isolationism and psychologism in culture sciences. Bachtin opposes dialogue to monologue, sociologic method to psychologism, the postulation of structurally understood holism

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[1] Polish version: *„Język – polifonia – karnawał"* in: „Teksty" 1977 nr 3. Reprint: W.Bolecki, *Polowanie na postmodernistów (w Polsce)*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 1999, p. 285 – 308. English version unpublished so far.

[2] See article by B. Żyłko in "Teksty" 1976, No. 4-5. Further in the paper I will be using the following abbreviations: *MLPh – Marxism and Linguistic Philosophy*, Leningrad 1930; *PD – Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*. Translation by N. Modzelewska, Warszawa 1970; *WFR – The Works of François Rabelais*... translation by A. and A. Goreń, elaboration and introduction by S. Balbus, Kraków 1975. – I will not provide other footnotes.

to the studying of isolated elements (language, literature, cultural texts), spoken language ("live") to "dead" language understood as the system of language considered outside any specific acts of speech. Thus Bachtin's interest is in the idiomatic content of a message.

Bachtin-Voloshinov's theses strive – if one can say so – at reaching for each "semantic ontology" of a statement. This is also the purpose of Voloshinov's certainty that language is not an "empty", abstract system – this thesis, of course, makes sense in its polemic context – but is always ideologically filled. Language, therefore, (literature, ideology) has meaning for Voloshinov only in its specific usage. Here is the reason for his emphasising repeatedly the personality, the explicit s u b j e c t i v i t y of verbal statements. That is why the thesis that each statement is axiologically charged plays such an important role in Voloshinovs meditations.

In his book, Voloshinov formulated also a concept of a "science of ideologies" which is the "science of culture" because – as he writes – "ideological creation" includes the basics of the theory of science, theory of literature, study of religions, study of morality, etc. (*MLPh*, pages 12-19). However, because all ideological creations are – according to Voloshinov – expressed in signs, the problems of language as a semiotic system form the basis of the "science of ideologies". It is only a step from the postulate to study the specific statement in its social situation of communication, to the description of the specific character of the speaking subjects. As a matter of fact, Voloshinov's concept of communication, understood as a specific (by rules or presence) contact "of man with man", leads straight to Bachtin's analysis of relations between the heroes of Dostoyevsky's novels (*Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*) and to mutual relations between people in a carnival square (*The Works of François Rabelais).*

In Voloshinov's work, besides the historically focused sociologism, one can find theoretical intuitions which will be fully confirmed in Bachtin's book on the folk culture of laughter. The main idea behind it is to show that, in culture, a language message functions in communicational non-verbal situations. This is probably where the programme of description of the carnival culture as a phenomenon composed of heterogeneous texts comes from; according to Voloshinov – it is about "studying the relation between the specific mutual influence (of a work) and extra-verbal situation" (*MLPh*, pages 97-99). Voloshinov's theoretical thesis – that each new situation of communication imposes a new meaning on the texts of culture (*MLPh*, page 97) and that in culture, as an area of social communication, we encounter extra-verbal texts which may have the same meaning as verbal ones and may modify the function of the latter – already contains methodological foundations of a work on creations of François Rabelais and the folk culture of laughter. On the other hand, the transfer of the emphasis from language understood as a form of individual awareness (or "objective ideology") (*MLPh*, pages 13-47, 84-100) and from language as a system of linguistic forms, to language understood as a medium of communication between specific subjects and, at the same time, as an area of continuous axiological battles, enabled Voloshinov to formulate another invariant rule of his methodology. It is the concept of c o - e x i s t e n c e of all elements of culture (literature, language, ideology, etc.) and, at the same time, their on-going, active co-influence. The culture – such a concept already takes shape in Voloshinov's work – is an area of permanent changeability and, in consequence, a territory of the production of innovations. That is why the problem of understanding novelties and differences of communication messages is at the centre of all of Bachtin's analyses. "New" implies also "open-

endedness", "unfinishedness" of verbal statements, dialogue, consciousness or various cultures.

In the work entitled *Marxism and Linguistic Philosophy*, not only are Bachtin's concept of language and the glossary of terms formulated, but also a broad, anthropological sense of such terms as "dialogue", "monologue", "language", "social communication" appears. One should remember, however, that at the base of this category are axiological divisions which are strongly present in the works on Dostoyevsky and Rabelais. One of the standing topics weaving through all of Bachtin's works is the problem of human consciousness in the world of culture. That is why also Voloshinov starts with an analysis of relations between consciousness and ideology, consciousness and language, in order to arrive at the statement – fundamental for all of his work – that human consciousness manifests itself mainly in language (in words). The word is the basic object of relations between people. "The word virtually forces its way into all interactions and interrelations of people" (*MLPh*, page 22). By analysing the mechanism of language communication, Voloshinov arrives at a conclusion that "in reality we never hear the word but we hear a truth or a lie, a good or an evil, something important or unimportant, pleasant or unpleasant, etc. The word is always filled with ideological or worldly-wise contents and meaning" (*MLPh*, page 71). For Voloshinov, all denotations are related to the existence of various axiological emphases in a statement. "The problem of multiple accents – he writes – should be strictly related to the problem of multiplicity of denotations" (*MLPh*, page 82). Each statement – declares Voloshinov – functions also in a certain area of social communication, that is why "the word is a common territory between the speaker and his interlocutor" (*MLPh*, page 87). In other words, the word – and this refers also to the statement as the text of culture – has a denotation always in a certain cultural-communicational situation. It is the territory of struggles and tensions in meaning (axiological), the area of constant clashing of dialogic replicas. That is why the listener, recipient, or the auditorium in the carnival square are indispensable elements of each reconstructed social situation of communication, and the latter defines the semantics and the pragmatics of the statement (i.e. culture text). Bachtin's later (in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* and *The Works of François Rabelais*) analyses of the loud, direct acoustic contact between heroes of literary situations or "acoustic" analyses of squabbles in a market place amazingly complement the theoretical concepts contained already in Voloshinov's paper.

The axiology of Bachtin's theoretical pondering is so intense that it intervenes in the structure of the object of analysis. It would be impossible to neutralise and reduce the analytic categories developed by Bachtin simply to an instrumental function. Accepting them fully means adopting all their axiological burdens. They are ones which – as it seems to me – besides the object of study (Dostoyevsky's poetics, carnival culture), constitute a specific model of Bachtin's world.

Vyacheslav Ivanov emphasises that Bachtin was primarily a "wise man", that in his works he solved both theoretical and philosophical problems, using categories whose status is at the same time theoretical and philosophical. The thesis expressed above may be formulated in a different way: intersubjective applicability of the category of poetics is possible when it is possible to translate categories from one language to corresponding categories of other languages, i.e. when categories, in a certain theoretical order (e.g. Bachtin's) may be treated as translatable to other orders. One may ask, therefore, whether the basic categories used by Bachtin (author, hero, idea, voice, word, polyphony, homophony, dialogue) are equivalents of

categories commonly used in poetics or, despite their undoubted theoretical status, are in some sense absolutely unique and, thus, idiomatic, specific enough that the translation the purpose of which is the analytical (instrumental) use is totally impossible? That's one thing.

In theoretical practice it is not reprehensible to use operationally categories from various theoretical orders in one work, explaining their denotations. Terms which are easily adapted in various study languages and do not drag the weeds of their contextual semantic and axiological entanglements behind them are a blessing for science and any communication. Can one, then – this is another thing – use Bachtin's categories in such a way that does not imply the necessity of including his other terms? In other words, do Bachtin's categories used outside the system of his meditations still remain the categories of the author of *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* and *The Works of François Rabelais?*

Thirdly, do both those books remain in a closer relation with each other or is it that one of them should be admired by literature specialists – due to the subject (historical poetics) – whereas the other, mainly by scholars studying medieval culture? The answer to this question requires that both those books are considered jointly.

It is a fact that Bachtin's categories of "polyphony" and "homophony" enjoy the largest popularity in all meta-literature-based statements. The basic adaptive measure used was their identification with F. Stanzel's terms, i.e. the "personal" and the "auctorial" novel. This adaptation – in which Bachtin's and Stanzel's categories become equivalents – is the basic and most frequent context in which the terminology of the author of *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* is used. It is used both for describing narration techniques (as F. Stanzel does) and for describing the evolution of the narrative prose. Thus, such a scheme of explanation is adopted according to which the evolution of the fictional prose went "from homophonic novel to polyphonic novel", which means "from prose with an auctorial (omniscient) narrator to prose with personal narrations". But it is impossible to forget that Bachtin's "polyphony" is a remarkably valuing category, i.e. that the "polyphonic novel" is for some reason something more perfect for Bachtin than the "homophonic novel", whereas Stanzel is about the separation of narration techniques! Thus, the fact that both groups of terms refer to narrative attitudes does not authorise their interchangeability. In other words, Bachtin's "polyphony" concerns also the narrative technique but this does not exhaust its meaning, whereas Stanzel's term has a narrow, strictly "narrative" usage. I am not a terminological purist. The term "polyphony" fulfils a semantically clear function in each of the new contexts. However, one should remember about the fundamental theoretical differences of the denotation of that term in non-Bachtin contexts in order to speak about the specificity of Bachtin's category.

What Bachtin calls the "polyphonic novel" is not simply a novel without an omniscient narrator, because polyphony – which will be discussed below – is not a strictly fictional or – more broadly – literary phenomenon. Therefore, it is not possible to draw – without departing from Bachtin's notions – a strict analogy between a homophonic novel and an auctorial novel, between a polyphonic novel and a personal novel, co-ordinating many points of view of the same fictional world. I also believe that the method of using such basic categories of poetics as "author", "narrator" or "hero" indicates that – for Bachtin – their sense can be found not so much on the level of morphology of prose but in the specific a x i o l o g i c a l t e n s i o n s within the world presented. Thus, those categories become signs of

problems which are more general than the "purely" theoretical-literary ones. The "polyphonic novel" captivated Bachtin's readers so much that one can have an impression that the work of the author of *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* is devoted only to this class. Based on the theory of literature, discussions of Bachtin's concept are most frequently an explanation of the phenomena of the polyphonic and dialogic character of Dostoyevsky's prose. But Bachtin describes jointly two types of prose, i.e. "polyphonic novel" and "homophonic novel", and it does not seem that the latter is only an illustrative example of the earlier, not very interesting stage of the evolution of poetics. When using Bachtinic categories of poetics of narrative prose – mainly the "polyphony" – one cannot disregard the fact that they are all complementary to each other.

The mutual, axiological connection between "polyphony" and "homophony" in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* and between "carnival" and "official culture" in *The Works of François Rabelais* means that this method of describing the studied object (complementariness) is the basic methodological directive for Bachtin. It is present at all levels of Bachtin's analyses, starting from the distinguishing of the objects of description (polyphony – homophony; carnival – official culture; one's own word – someone else's word) to their interpretation. Bachtin draws a conclusion from the thesis that any sign has meaning also as a n o n - s i g n . Thus, Bachtin's description of "internal features" of the particular object is not enough because it introduces semantic relations with its negation, with everything which is its negative realisation, with the "all-wrong object". The axiological sharpness of the division of objects described, i.e. division into those which are assigned a loud *afirmo* (polyphonic novel, carnival) and those which deter with their negative realisations (homophonic novel, official culture), commands that criteria used by the great literature specialist are observed closely.

In the introduction and the ending of *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* Bachtin writes openly: "In our opinion (Dostoyevsky) created a completely new t y p e o f a r t i s t i c t h i n k i n g [emphasis by W.B.] which we conventionally called polyphonic. It was expressed in Dostoyevsky's novels but its meaning g o e s b e y o n d t h e f i c t i o n a l o u t p u t [emphasis by W.B.] and it refers to certain basic principles of European aesthetics. One may even say that Dostoyevsky created something in the shape of a new artistic model of the world [emphasis by W.B.] [...]. We believe that the creation of the polyphonic novel was a large step forward n o t o n l y [emphasis by W.B.] in the development of fictional prose, together with all classes evolving in its orbit, but generally in the development of the a r t i s t i c t h i n k i n g of mankind. It seems one can even speak about a specific p o l y p h o n i c a r t i s t i c t h i n k i n g [emphasis by W.B.], reaching beyond the limits of the works of fiction. This thinking is able to detect those areas in man – above all, the t h i n k i n g h u m a n c o n s c i o u s n e s s a n d d i a l o g i c s p h e r e o f i t s e x i s t e n c e – which cannot be presented artistically from homophonic positions (*PD*, page 407).

Similarly, Bachtin repeatedly mentions the broad meaning of his notions. For example, "dialogic relations – are a much wider phenomenon than the system of replicas of a compositionally marked dialogue, it is a phenomenon almost u n i v e r s a l , inseparable from human speech, from all experiences and forms of relations between people, from everything which has sense and meaning" (PD, page 64).

Bachtinic relativisation of theoretic literary categories into an order which may be provisorily described as "p h i l o s o p h i c a n t h r o p o l o g y " is not a measure

added to the musings of a theoretician and literature historian. That is why to denote "polyphony" (and "homophony") I will be talking about the polyphonic reality as a certain m o d e l o f t h e h u m a n w o r l d which is presented o n t h e b a s i s o f a n e x a m p l e of Dostoyevsky's prose. This means that I consciously subordinate here Bachtin's theoretic-literary pondering to his axiology. This is because I believe that all of that author's categories (homophony, polyphony, author, idea, carnival, dialogue) describe two worlds of values out of which only one (polyphonic reality, carnival) ensures the authentically human, free existence. More strictly speaking, I think that Bachtin uses only two categories (i.e. homophony and polyphony) out of which each is defined in more detail in the course of analyses by adding features specific to it. One might talk about a series of semantic-axiological discriminants constituting both types of reality. For both those realities, Bachtin constructs a common glossary (hero, idea, author and derivative ones) whose elements function differently in each of them. What are both of those realities, then?

Bachtin notes: "The texture of music and the texture of a novel are things too different from each other to indicate something more than a visual a n a l o g y , i.e. an ordinary m e t a p h o r . We use that m e t a p h o r [emphasis by W.B.] as a term «polyphonic story» because we cannot find a more appropriate name. However, we have to remember about the metaphoric genesis of this term" (*PD*, page 35).

Let's not disregard this declaration. Bachtin clearly emphasises that he uses two metaphoric terms ("polyphony" and "counterpoint"). I believe that this is one of the most important methodological peculiarities of his work: all Bachtin's terms complement one another continually. "Counterpoint", "polyphony", "dialogue" are exemplary terms which function as quasi-synonyms. They do not replace each other fully, although they are almost completely identical. Each of them shows "new problems" from a different perspective, adds a new grain of information to the knowledge of the existence of reality called globally the "polyphony".

This basic term of Bachtin's has two semantic explications. "Polyphony" as a "multi-vocality" and as a "counterpoint". In the first case, "polyphony" means that in the particular world (e.g. in a novel) there is a pluralism of contents and subjects (PD, page 42), meaning that all heroes have the right to speak about everything. In the second case, it means the pluralism of positions of subjects towards the same contents (PD, page 66). The former term accentuates the multiplicity, the latter, variety. Both – freedom of speech. All other meanings of this term are of a contextual nature, but only all of them taken together create the Bachtinic connotation of "polyphony". In other words, I believe that it is not enough to say that Bachtin's "polyphony" is the same as "multi-vocality" or "dialogicality", because they are only some features from a great paradigm of Bachtin's book. Thus, by "polyphony" one can understand the paradigm of features – v a l u e s which constitute worlds described by him: the model of reality in Dostoyevsky's novel and the folk culture of laughter.

Bachtin's ponderings are undoubtedly close to those twentieth century methodological orientations which, in analyses of semiotic declarations, specially underline the communication role of the issuer and the recipient of information. However – in analyses of Dostoyevsky's literary output – Bachtin is interested mainly in the heroes of the presented world. Strictly speaking, he always refers to the axiological relation between the author (as a superior instance) and heroes (as participants of a certain reality). That is why Bachtin considers mainly the place of his heroes in the world around them (in Dostoyevsky's novels, in the carnival culture). Thus, he analyses the "position of the hero" towards the author, towards other

heroes, towards ideas and towards himself, and he tries to determine the basic values which characterise all those relations. Dostoyevsky – he wrote – "creates not wordless slaves but independent people, capable of taking place right next to their creator in order to disagree with him or even – to rebel against him" (PD, page 10). It is obvious that analyses of the morphology of Dostoyevsky's prose are not subordinated to the requirements of correctly understood poetics but to a consistent axiological system whose elements can be seen with each expression. Therefore, Bachtin is interested in heroes not as objects of the author's word but as subjects of their own statements. Because Bachtin's word is always a defined expression of consciousness, the opposition of one's own and someone else's word in Voloshinov's work corresponds with the analogous opposition of one's own and someone else's c o n s c i o u s n e s s in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics.*

The world of values as described by Bachtin is put into order by two superior categories, i.e. homophony and polyphony. As I have already mentioned, both function in contexts of various ranges, because now they precisely refer to morphological, genological or semantic phenomena, now again they are metaphors of the most universal matters. For Bachtin, both models of novel are also a vision of societies subordinated to various systems of values. Thus the bilateral penetration of the use of metaphors. Bachtin, when writing about the homophony – besides the class of prose – defines also a certain procedure of o b j e c t i f i c a t i o n o f h e r o e s , which he calls the homophonisation. Thus the homophony is a certain t y p e o f i n t e r p r e t a t i o n , a translation and metalanguage of description of someone else's world. From the point of view of homophony, the polyphonic world (as from the point of view of the official culture – the carnival) turns out to be full of chaos, contradictory and nonsense elements. For Bachtin, the homophonisation is a procedure of artistic and connected with the outlook on life translation of semiotic phenomena. The homophony always corresponds with the author's superior consciousness, whereas polyphony – the co-ordinate consciousnesses of heroes and the author as partners in the outlook on life. This tension between the superior instance (the author) and subjects subordinated to it (heroes) delineates the basic conflict of values between two cultures about which the author of carnival will write. Brzozowski was right when he wrote that "a value may only be overcome from the point of view of values". The search for determinants of ontological denotations, the status of characters, idea, etc. is present in all Bachtin's works. By analysing the artistic status of the idea, Bachtin arrives at a conclusion that homophony is only a world of postulates, whilst polyphony – a real principle of existence of those postulates in the reality. Thus, the polyphonic world is one in which the "new status of the hero" is a set of real parameters of his existence and not e.g. a sum of an author's assurances about the value of human personality (*PD*, page 21). The metalanguage perspective of description appears wherever Bachtin describes the hero's right to his freedom in a literary work, his independence from defining him (his biography) from outside. The analyses of existential freedom of heroes in Dostoyevsky's works are ahead of analogous reconstructions of the carnival system.

As an artistic phenomenon, polyphony turns out to be a new aesthetics, a reality filled with heterogeneous phenomena. However, the reality of the polyphonic world does not lie so much in its substantive concreteness but in the construction of the set of r u l e s defining the status of existence of a statement in language (*Marxism and Linguistic Philosophy*), subjects and ideas in the social world (*Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*), world and texts of culture in culture (*The Works of François Rabelais*). The analysis of the role of the context in the dynamics of

semantic phenomena leads Bachtin into emphasising the contextual meaning of homophony. The homophonic set-up from this point of view is a type of a softening context, drowning the dialogue dynamics of polyphonic phenomena. When the "polyphony" forms contextual relations understood as the principles of coexistence, contiguity, and close contact within the system, then homophony is as if it were a foreign context, an imposed, unwanted one. The polyphonic context indicates relations of mutual pull and approximation of elements, making them "one's own", the homophonic context turns out to be the frontier between "one's own" and "someone else's", between what is made dynamic from within and which petrifies from the outside (*PD*, chapter III). Thus, Bachtin emphasises that the homophony encloses a hero, restricts him, imposes a stable observation point from the outside. It is not difficult to notice here a way of thinking c l o s e t o t h e e x i s t e n t i a l p h i l o s o p h y, because – both for Bachtin and for Sartre – a man (i.e. literary hero) "not even for one moment equals his dimensions" (*PD*, page 78).

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The first type of contact (polyphonic) will be used to describe familiar contacts in the carnival square, the other (homophonic), to analyse the relations between the elements of the official culture. Bachtin's dialogue is also a method of existence of contexts as t y p e s o f c o n t i g u i t y. Whereas the principle of the polyphonic world are the contacts understood as i n t e r a c t i o n s, as mutual co-influence (coexistence) of all elements of the system, in the homophonic world, the contact is always of a nature of an i s o l a t i n g b o r d e r, is a hermetic barrier which causes the non-permeability of voices, consciousnesses, languages, ideas, meanings. Thus, the homophonic world turns out to be a gigantic glossary, whereas the polyphony draws from that glossary, builds its own statements, uses elements from the homophonic world for its own semantic purposes. The first world can be found in *The Works of François Rabelais* as the reality of the official culture, the other – as the folk culture of laughter. Because language is a type of self-knowledge for Bachtin, the main valuing accents in his works spread around the fight for l i b e r a t i o n (polyphony) or s t i f l i n g (homophony) of human consciousness. It is also – for an expert on Dostoyevsky – man's basic and closest equipment. In all metaphoric descriptions ("one's own word", the hero versus the author in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, carnivalised consciousness in *The Works of François Rabelais)*, the homophonic, ending context (of someone else's word, author's superiority, constraints of official culture) crumbles under the pressure of active human consciousness. "The self-knowledge as the hero's dominant – writes Bachtin – this choice itself is enough to burst the homophonic uniformity of the world created" (*PD*, page 78).

The metaphor of polyphonic rules describes various objective domains. Now, it is about the specificity of the literary type, now again, about a certain comprehensive construction of a single literary work, in another situation, about language as a mechanism modelling the human world or about the new vision of man (*PD*, pages 87 and the following). The situation is similar in the case of homophony which can be related both to the theory of novels and to the concept of cognition, conditions of existence of consciousness, or methods of describing human existence. Also the status of a literary hero turns out to be a status of man in general, and the realities of the fictional world – a model of relations in the (un)real world.

The concept of dialogue formulated in the work Marxism and Linguistic Philosophy, developed both in the book about Dostoyevsky and in the book about Rabelais, has been extended by categories of the new realism the purpose of which is to be the "author's new task", i.e. noticing other characters besides the author himself; this is about a "different treatment of man in man" (*PD*, page 93). In *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* Bachting axiologises his basic category showing that as t w o   t y p e s   o f   d i a l o g u e   exist, i.e. homophonic dialogue (closed, in which the hero does not have an opportunity to reply) and polyphonic dialogue ("large", "open", in which the hero always has a chance to reply) (PD, page 96), there are also two types of realism: homophonic realism and polyphonic realism. The latter, as a "grotesque realism", will be come a constitutive equipment of the carnival aesthetics.

A dialogue is a constitutive element of Existence, just as carnival (as the realisation of the dialogue) is a form of existence. The presence of dialogue turns out to be the fundamental condition of life, the existence to its authentic fullness. If we were to sum up the features creating the oppositions between the homophonic and polyphonic reality, the border would be found between isolationism and coexistential interaction, between the opening and closing context, between the objectified objects and subjects, between anonymity and personality, between homogeneity and heterogeneity, domination of the superior instance and co-ordination of heroes, between the monoideism and pluralism of the attitudes regarding the philosophy of life, between the domain of solemnity and fear and the domain of laughter and freedom. It is obvious that *The Works of François Rabelais* continues all previous methodological rules and hierarchical values which were constituted by Bachtin's preceding works. However, the work on the folk culture of laughter goes far beyond the objective scope of previous meditations. It is not a single semiotic system (language, works of one writer) which becomes its hero, but a complete m o d e l   o f   c u l t u r e   filled with a multitude of various texts, objects and sign systems. Thus, this book is both a proposal for the science of culture and for the science of literature, and – as all other works by that author – does not cease to be a universal model of understanding humanistic facts.

As long as Bachtin described the poetics of Dostoyevsky's works, he analysed them as d e c l a r a t i o n s , however, describing the tradition concerning classes of prose by the author of Idiot (carnival, carnivalised literature), he already reconstructs the s y s t e m   o f   c u l t u r e . In the morphology of poetics of unitary works, Bachtin separated elements of systemic significance and then searched for their grammar wider than literary grammar, i.e. he separated elementary carnival categories, i.e. the very same "logic of this extraordinary world" (PD, s. 192). It was formed mainly by "familiarity", "eccentricity", "misalliances" and "profanations". "Graphically speaking, we are interested in the word as an element of language and not an individual use of the word in a particular, unique context, although – naturally – one does not exist without the other" (PD, page 240).

The category of a carnival word as an element of a system was replaced in *The Works of François Rabelais* with the category of an image. Not accidentally, five (out of seven) chapters of that book refer to carnival images. It would be a mistake, however, to assign the remnants of the "reflection theory" to Bachtin, or to connect him with studies searching for homology between the literary structures and reality. Bachtin describes a certain "model of the world" in the s e m i o t i c   sense although he does not use the semiotic terminology. However, it is worth remembering that the terminological glossary of the researchers from Tart ("text", "model of world", etc.)

has a lot to thank the works of the author of *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* who – many years before the theses of those researchers – introduces the semiotic perspective to thinking about the creations of culture. That is why the emphasising of the semiotic perspectives of Bachtin's methodology by Stefan Żółkiewski in his numerous articles was well-aimed.

The carnival – says Bachtin – is not a literary phenomenon but a syncretic show form of a ritualistic character in many variants differing from the point of view of time and geography. The carnival created its own abundant language of specific sensual symbols, from games to carnival gestures, and the language – articulated differently – expresses a uniform "carnival world-sensing" (PD, page 188). In other words, carnival is a system of heterogeneous images which differentiate the semiotic systems in which they are transcribed, and they are connected by the "uniform aspect of the world" (*WFR*, page 61). That is why it is impossible to avoid the specificity of this basic category of Bachtin's. And so – as it seems – the "image" does not have anything in common with the naively plastic interpretation which may be imposed by the word itself.

Bachtin's "image" (figurativeness, representation, etc.) is, firstly, an i n t e r s e m i o t i c category, because it refers both to sculpture, painting, scenes in literature (events, situations, motives, plots), abusive language, literary plots, exclamations, and to the "play of meanings" between words (*WFR*, page 268). Secondly, it is a semantic-a x i o l o g i c category, because it expresses the same semantic-valuing system. The semantic "procesuality" of images is symptomatic here, i.e. the fact that in all Bachtin's descriptions they fulfil the function of transmitting tensions, clashes, alternations, etc. Thus, the essence of the "carnival image" is not in the substantiality of the element but in the sphere of functions fulfilled and meanings expressed. All images – as Bachtin repeatedly emphasises – "connect into an organic whole, uniform from the semiotic and stylistic point of view" (*WFR*, page 346). And this style, understood either from the linguistic perspective, or in the spirit of the culture's semiotics, is always united with a uniform "aspect of outlook on life", it is always – as is the carnival laughter – the h i s t o r i c a l c o n s c i o u s n e s s type(*WFR*, pages 131 and following).

The tradition of positivistic-naturalistic thinking with its concepts of culture evolutionism, straight-line progression, ethnic and geographic criteria of separation and typology of cultures, is one most foreign to Bachtin. In the very constitution of an object, Bachtin departs from the tradition of axiological dualism constituted by the oppositions "ours-yours", "one's own-someone else's", "valuable – not valuable".

The question about the criteria of separation of the "folk culture of laughter" is one of the first questions which is thrown at the reader of that book, the more so as Bachtin hides the rules of his methodology in the process of description of the phenomenon of carnival. Therefore, it is rarely an explicated methodology and its consistency ensures mainly the same style of interpretation or – wider – thinking about the facts of culture. To name Bachtin's methodological assumptions, it is convenient to use the terms introduced a long time ago by Stefan Żółkiewski, i.e. differentiation between the type and the style of culture. I understand this in such a way that within the medieval culture Bachtin describes its two major styles, i.e. the style of official culture and the style of folk culture of laughter called the carnival. The whole sequence of Bachtin's reasoning is constituted by the opposition of those two styles – official and carnival – this is Bachtin's starting thesis: t h e t y p e o f c u l t u r e i s n o t h o m o g e n e o u s .

In the opposition to all isolationism, the rule of complementary analysis – used in the work about language – comes back. Its second face, although not a Janus-like one, is the command to use the s y n c h r o n i c description of the selected phenomena. Bachtin describes this type of culture as the fact of coexistence and active co-operation of the competitive styles of culture. That is why he manages to separate kinds of interstyle interactions which define the basic tensions of the cultural dynamics of the particular type. The basic relations used by Bachtin in his description – although he does not name them directly – could be presented schematically in the following way.

Firstly, between the official culture and the carnival culture a relation of s e p a r a t i o n takes place. The folk culture appears here as a shelter, the destination of an escape and isolation of those elements of culture which have been banished in the state of official culture. The folk culture would be erased from the official map of the world in this approach, i.e. in the modelling entirety of the social circulation of information it does not exist at all. From this point of view, the folk culture is not – as one might believe – a set of waste from the lord's table of the official culture. Those arriving from the outside are immediately offered equality of rights, they are ennobled in another dimension of the circulation of culture.

The second relation is the relation of mutual permeability, "physical" contact of competitive styles of culture. That is why one should talk about the o s m o s i s of the styles of culture in Bachtin's description. The border between the style territories is virtually liquid, it is difficult to draw a demarcation line: texts, objects and participants of the official culture take part in carnival and *vice versa*.

The third relation is the relation of fight, the constant relentless a n t a g o n i s m of rules, functions, values, arguments and outlooks on life. The folk culture, by fighting for its autonomy, destroys, changes functions of the forms of the official culture, and one of the centres of the fight would be the element of fair-time laughter. In this relation, the official culture appears as a foreign culture, an imposed one, a culture of violence. This creates the reflex of the carnival aiming towards independence, the acts of destruction, rejection, denying the picture of the age which the official medieval culture tries to pacify in its monophonic philosophy of life. Under this relation one can observe an expansion of carnival into the domain of the official culture and repressive quests of the latter. The carnival culture almost forces its way into the official world. It annexes its attributes and accessories for its own use, it uses them, changes their functions, ridicules and applies them in accordance with its carnival rules.

Another relation would be the acts of suspension of both those styles on both sides. By agreeing to this act of suspension of the binding rights, hierarchies and rules, the official culture sanctions the legality of the carnival element.

The last relation, but no less important than others, would be the relation of grotesque translation. Carnival appears as a p a r o d y t r a n s l a t i o n , as a false mirror put before the official culture as before a Basilisk. If the carnival is considered as a translation and, at the same time, both styles – as languages, one can indicate their common dictionary (signs, texts, objects), a list of the same cultural objects and behaviours but functioning on the basis of various grammars. In the carnival, one of such grammars (more accurately: anti-grammars) would be the grotesque realism. It is symptomatic that almost all relations of links between styles are described by Bachtin as relations of distortion: grotesque degradations, twisting and distorting of sense, comic travesties, violation of norms, parody doublets, hyperbolisations, changes of functions, materialisations, dethronements, renewals and many other.

As you can see, Bachtin's category of folk culture differs significantly from the conventional understanding of this term, often closer to the term "folklore". It is symptomatic that Bachtin e x c l u d e s   t h e   r u s t i c understanding of folklore, because the carnival, as a "phenomenon of many centuries" is related exclusively to a t o w n   s q u a r e (WFR, pages 231 and following). The folk culture in Bachtin's works is then an "all wrong" version of the official culture. It is separated on the basis of an a x i o l o g i c a l   c r i t e r i o n . That is why it is impossible to describe the particular type of culture in a way which would disconnect, isolate individual competitive styles of cultural dynamics. And this is another assumption made by Bachtin: the type of culture is always axiologically heterogeneous, and its description must allow for the interstyle link. Therefore, it is impossible to talk about the separateness of one's own and someone else's word in Voloshinov's work, the homophonic and polyphonic novel in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, or the carnival and official structure in Bachtin's work. The basis of this is the indication of functional differences in the treatment of the same cultural material, the more so as in each of Bachtin's descriptions we meet interstyle translations.

The difference between the official style and the carnival style would be – on the one hand – in different articulations of the same cultural contents (objects and behaviours), and on the other hand – in the similar articulation of extremely different contents. The same elements, therefore, are assigned different pragmatics and semantics in different styles of culture.

The difference between styles also turns out to be a specificity of the carnival world. But – thus – the similarity with two basic polyphonic rules described in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* may be recognised in the grammar of carnival. The first (different articulations of the same contents) was called by Bachtin the "counterpoint", whereas the other – the "multi-vocality". The principle of the carnival articulation is the incommensurability of the expressed contents with the way of expression, its subject and functions. In other words – each time the rule of the translation is the enlargement or reduction of the translated contents and, at the same time, assigning them different pragmatics and denotations. The sense of incommensurability of the cultural "what" and the cultural "how" explains – if one can say so – the poetics and aesthetics of carnival.

In the carnival aesthetics there is no room for indirect forms, for transitional links. Carnival privileges extreme points of the realised system. And so, for example, in the concept of time – festivity, in the organisation of space – up/down, in the existence – life/death, in the language – curses, in the concept of body – bulging and hollow parts, among carnival heroes – dwarves and giants. To mention more: food – defecation, youth – old age, wisdom – stupidity. Such a e s t h e t i c s   o f   c o n t r a c t frees the sense of g r a d a b i l i t y of the world, the possibility of its varied articulation and interpretation and, in consequence, enables one to see that each culture is only an i n t e r p r e t a t i o n   o f   r e a l i t y . Thus, the dispute between the styles of culture is at the same time the dispute between outlooks on life, and the object of that dispute are specific concepts of the world, the society, an individual, freedom and history.

For Bachtin, carnival is the vision of a world which is axiologically ambivalent, i.e. one in which valuing judgements do not exclude one another, they coexist and do not oppose one another as alternatives. The official culture, on the other hand, turns out to be a monoaxiological reality, the world of exclusive values. That is why the first style of culture leads to visions of the universal whole, whereas the second style – to rigorous isolationism. As if the whole life, history and social process exist in the

former one, and only the privileged extremes in the latter. Bachtin's carnival is a certain discreet system, its realisation falls only on the specific time sequences. It lasts "from – to" or "between", it constitutes fissures in the compact strip of the official culture, whereas the official culture wants to be all-embracing and continuous, it wants to include all existing time in its area and subject it to its unifying norms. But this continuity of the official culture is only seeming – from the perspective of carnival – it is only the official version of the prepared history in which a number of links are missing. The official cultures is constituted – on the one hand – by the aspiration for embracing all, a peculiar "style imperialism", and by a "style racism" and selection on the other hand. The aspiration of the official culture for hermetic closing of large areas is reflected – according to Bachtin – i.a. in treating the past as a complete and closed sequence. The official culture, in the reconstructed medieval model of reality, is assigned the function of the "police of the past". It is not a coincidence that it is the reigning culture.

However, in the peculiar historiosophy of carnival, both the past and the present do not want to be closed but are constantly taking shape and happening. That is why the carnival – always unready and open – rehabilitates the old forms, often irreversibly doomed to oblivion. It is therefore a place of shelter both in the synchrony and the diachrony. In the carnival, not only the continuously modelled present is important, but also how the past will be described. That is why Bachtin's concept of tradition or species accentuates that all states of the past should be constantly updated at each stage of the historical evolution. "The species lives with the present but always remembers its history, its origins. That is why it can ensure the unity and continuity of this development" (*PD*, page 164).

The official culture wants to be h o m o g e n e o u s , whilst carnival is always h e t e r o g e n e o u s . The homogeneity of the official culture leads to the s e l e c t i v i t y of its participants, whereas carnival is universal. In carnival there is no room for separating the mass culture and the elite culture, no demarcation line can be drawn between the culture and life, and even more than that, there is no opposition between soul and body, man and nature, etc. Carnival is constituted by the eternal non-readiness, non-closedness of all levels: the carnival culture does not know rigid hierarchies of the participants of culture, the variation of social and cultural objects is unknown to it, as is the variation of high and low species, the official language and unofficial codes, and, finally, the division into creators and recipients of culture is unacceptable in carnival. Therefore, carnival virtually excludes passive reception. To be in the culture – I interpret Bachtin – is to be its co-creator and co-recipient at the same time. The carnival culture does not know any utilitarianism, occasionalism and particularism. One might even say that carnival is a peculiar w o r k o f a r t in itself and, as art, is used to express transcendent values.

It is worth emphasising that Bachtin's carnival is characterised by spectacularity. It is hardly surprising, as carnival is the form of "joyful recreation" in which all elements (low and high) are linked in a "brotherly train of words" (*WFR*, page 249). The carnival culture is a s p e c t a c l e , t h e a t r e without foot-lights, without actors or an audience; there is no stage or the house. Everyone is aware of their roles and rules of the game, life and art in one. But this is the internal carnival perspective. On the outside, the world is polarising: the official culture plays the role of the unaware collective actor, whereas the carnival – the role of the observing and mimicking viewer.

Bachtin's anthropology is the closest to the "existential phenomenology", and especially to the descriptions of mutual relations between people of Jean-Paul Sartre

or Martin Heidegger. Bachtin's (and Voloshinov's) analyses presenting the dialectics of presenting and presented words find their analogies in the phenomenology of "someone else's view" and "my view". And the description of the view in Sartre's works is, of course – just as the description of the word in Bachtin's work – always a problem of interpersonal communication. Bachtin-Voloshinov's analyses p r e c e d e t h e p h i l o s o p h i c a l u n d e r s t a n d i n g o f t h e l a n g u a g e a s t h e m e e t i n g a r e a (Paul Ricoeur) by dozens of years. For Bachtin, dialogue is always a meeting and it is not a coincidence that he introduces the terms "event in speech" and "meeting in speech" (*MLPh*, page 97). In Bachtin's books, as in the works of the philosophers mentioned, an authentically human world is one in which man, being "in the world" is mainly "in his own place". This world, as a human world (polyphonic, carnival) is "mine", "ours", is the "house of man", freeing from fear and moving closer to people (*PD*, page 243). On the one hand, carnival announces the return of the "golden age" of freedom available for everyone; on the other hand, it is the projection of a certain vision of the future, "The new reality: world of laughter and truth" (*WFR*, page 255). In both cases, it is the classic historiosophy of u t o p i a : either the lost paradise, or the promised land.

Bachtin's historiosophy undertakes classic trends of European philosophy. In other words, it answers the question not asked *expressis verbis,* about the condition of man in history, about the world as it should be as a human world. The novelty of Bachtin's reply consists in the radical breaking with vulgar ways of thinking about the alienated history. The belief in the leap from the empire of the constrained world into the state of promised disalienation was often the system-creating hope. Bachtin's descriptions lead to different conclusions: the empire of alienation is not a tender spot appearing at a certain stage of history, which – with a little effort and repudiation – may be finally overcome at the next stage, but not during our life. However, it is the universal human situation in each point of the time universe. That is why it is not a coincidence that the end of Bachtin's book is inspired by the last words of Boris Godunov: "A l l acts of the drama of history of the world happened in the presence of the laughing folk chorus. [...] In Pushkin's work the last word always belongs to the people. Our picture is not only a simple metaphoric comparison. E a c h epoch of the history of the world was reflected in the folk culture. Always, during all ages of the past, there were p e o p l e l a u g h i n g i n t h e s q u a r e , w h o a p p e a r e d t o t h e u s u r p e r i n a n i g h t m a r e [...]" (WFR, page 634; my emphases).

(1977)