

Bakhtine démasqué [Bakhtin unmasked]: A Reply to Critics

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Abstract: Our book *Bakhtine démasqué* [Bakhtin unmasked] (Droz, 2011) and the two translations published so far¹ have to date led to over twenty reviews (see the Bibliography below), ranging from virulent attacks to the expression of approval and acknowledgement, as well as texts combining reproaches with moderate praise, or merely factual summaries.

In this article we will respond in particular to various reproaches that have been addressed to us, but before presenting our reactions, we think it useful to outline the circumstances which led us to undertake the research that resulted in the book, to restate the three major questions to which we attempt to provide answers, and to reformulate the conclusions we have drawn concerning the status and the importance of the conception of texts and discourse that was developed in the USSR in the 1920s and 30s.

1. The origins of our questions and our research

We both work in the language sciences, in a research group created and led by Bronckart (hereafter JPB) at the University of Geneva, a group which has produced works on epistemology, the psychology of language and language teaching, in an interactionist perspective largely inspired by the work of Vygotsky (see Schneuwly & Bronckart, 1985 ; Bronckart & Friedrich, 1999).

Since the end of the 1970s, JPB and a succession of colleagues have developed an approach to textual organisation, influenced

first of all by the linguistics of enunciation (Benveniste and Culioli), but which subsequently found its main source of inspiration in the works attributed to Bakhtin: *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (the title of the 1973 English translation; hereafter *Marxism*), and the collections *Esthétique et théorie du roman* (1978) and *Esthétique de la création verbale* (1984) [in English: *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin* (1981), *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1986), and *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* (1990)], as well as the translations of Russian texts included in Todorov's *Le principe dialogique* (1981). The concepts, propositions and theories developed in these writings appeared to be of such importance that the group organised, from 1985 to 1987, a seminar devoted to the work of

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¹ Portuguese translation: *Bakhtin desmascarado*, Sao Paulo, Parabola, 2012; Spanish translation: *Bajtín desenmascarado*, Madrid, Machado, 2013.

Bakhtin. This seminar confirmed the profound interest in the concepts of dialogism, the active responsive attitude, intertextuality, etc., as well as the fruitfulness of Bakhtin's concept of textual genres and his methodology of genre analysis; but the participants also noticed that certain Bakhtinian texts ("Author and Hero," for example) seemed to be inspired by a very different theoretical framework than the one underlying *Marxism*, and that the synthesis elaborated by Todorov in *The Dialogical Principle* seemed false or excessive at various points. However these reservations in no way diminished the admiration the group had for Bakhtin and his work, as can be seen from the analyses, commentaries and borrowings, always eminently positive, presented in numerous texts from the 1980s [including *Pour une psychologie du langage* (Schneuwly & Bronckart, 1983); *Le fonctionnement des discours* (Bronckart et al., 1985); *Interaction, discours, signification* (Bronckart, 1987)] and in various texts from the 1990s [the central chapter of *Activité langagière, textes et discours* (Bronckart, 1997) is introduced by a long quotation from Bakhtin, and includes multiple positive references to him]. Like many other people at the time, we were intrigued by the question of the actual authorship of *Marxism*, but without understanding very much and without attaching too much importance to the question. Like many other people too, we conceived of Voloshinov and Medvedev either as metaphorical phantoms, or as obscure disciples who the master had allowed to put their names on many of his own texts. This was because we relied on the diagnoses of specialists in the field, like for example the one put forward by Aucouturier in the *Préface to Esthétique et théorie du roman*:

Bakhtin's first known work [...] completes and illuminates three other books that appeared in 1927 and 1929 signed by N. Volochinov (*Freudianism and Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*) and by P. Medvedev (*The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*) but which, today, are

generally attributed to Bakhtin: even independently of their shared problematic, the style, with its demonstrative rigour, its precision, and the imaginative power of its abstract terms, would confirm, if it were necessary, Bakhtin's authorship. **Here we have the rather rare example of a scholar accepting anonymity, sacrificing his personal reputation for the circulation of his work.**² (1978: 10-11)³

Our attitude in this matter was however progressively transformed around the turn of the century by the effect of three factors. First of all, we noticed that in the German-speaking world, the reattribution of *Marxism* to Bakhtin had never been endorsed and the book was published under the name of Voloshinov, and we became aware of articles that had resisted this substitution, in particular those of Titunik (1984; 1986).⁴ We then had various interactions with the Slavic department of the University of Lausanne, whose director Patrick Sériot undertook the retranslation of *Marxism* with Inna Tytkowski-Ageeva.⁵ We also consulted the many works of the researchers of the *Bakhtin Centre* in Sheffield: despite some differing assessments, all these works returned to Voloshinov and Medvedev the authorship of

² All the highlighting in bold in the quotations in this article is by us.

³ « ...le premier écrit connu de Bakhtine [...] complète et éclaire trois autres livres parus en 1927 et 1929 sous la signature de N. Volochinov (*Le freudisme et Marxisme et philosophie du langage*) et de P. Medvedev (*Le méthode formelle dans la science de la littérature*) mais qui, aujourd'hui, lui sont généralement attribués : indépendamment même de la problématique qui leur est commune, le style, avec sa rigueur démonstrative, sa précision et sa vigueur imagée dans le maniement des termes abstraits, confirmerait, s'il en était besoin, la paternité de Bakhtine. **Nous avons là l'exemple assez rare d'un savant acceptant l'anonymat, sacrifiant sa notoriété personnelle à la diffusion de son œuvre.** »

⁴ Dumitru (2012) points out that another early sceptic was René Wellek (1991: 355-356), who dismissed the theory of Bakhtin's sole authorship as "wishful thinking."

⁵ This led to the publication of a bilingual text, bearing the name of Valentin Nicolaevich Volochinov as the sole author, entitled *Marxisme et philosophie du langage* (Lambert-Lucas, 2010).

the texts published under their names, and in doing so re-established their status as qualified and autonomous researchers, much more productive than Bakhtin during their lifetimes. But the decisive factor in our conversion was the publication in French of *Pour une philosophie de l'acte* (2003), [*Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1990)], a work which, according to Bocharov's Preface, collects the fragments of texts written by Bakhtin from 1921 to 1924/25. Reading this text increased our perplexity, as its religious and phenomenological slant seemed to be in frontal opposition, not only to *Marxism* and other texts of the 1920s signed by Voloshinov and Medvedev, but also to some of Bakhtin's later texts like "Speech Genres" or "Discourse in the Novel": the literary criticism offered by the young Bakhtin was, by the very nature of the arguments used, fundamentally monological. But our perplexity turned into stupefaction at the enthusiastic reception this text got from certain Vygotskian colleagues, who managed to identify in it the premises of a social interactionist approach to literary activity, and even human activities in general. It seemed to us that only a very strange reasoning could explain this type of reaction: "as this text is by Bakhtin, it is necessarily brilliant, and as it is by Bakhtin, it must also necessarily prefigure the theories developed in impressive texts like *Marxism* or 'Speech Genres.'"

2. Fundamental questions, multiple surprises, and writing in wrath

This re-examination of the situation led us to publish a first article (Bota & Bronckart, 2008), arguing that Bakhtin's and Voloshinov/Medvedev's positions on the status of textual genres were radically opposed, and denouncing the abundant "masked" borrowings from Voloshinov's *Marxism* in Bakhtin's later works (Bakhtin having *never* quoted or even mentioned Voloshinov or Medvedev's writings in his own earlier work). This article earned us harsh criticism, sometimes accompanied, in the

case of some of our colleagues, with veiled threats. Rather than quieting us, this encouraged us to continue our work, and to try to find answers to the three questions that follow.

The first obviously concerns the problem of the texts described as "disputed," namely the texts published under the names of Voloshinov and Medvedev, but whose authorship Bakhtin later claimed. To clarify this situation, it was necessary, on the one hand, to gather all the available information about the careers of these three people, and their possible relations from 1920 to 1936/1938 (the respective dates of Voloshinov and Medvedev's deaths), and on the other to find the information that would allow us to understand when, how and why Bakhtin had undertaken to attribute to himself the authorship of the texts signed by his two late "friends."

The second question concerned identifying Bakhtin's real position: what were the relations between the texts he had written in the 1920s (but which were published much later) – *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, "Author and Hero," "The Problem of Content" – and the *Dostoevsky* book of 1930, as well as the other texts Bakhtin was said to have written between 1935 and 1960? How could the two totally opposed tones in these works by the same author be explained, and what had Bakhtin (and/or people close to him) said about this matter?

Finally, the third question concerned the history of the reception, in Latin America, Europe and the USA, of the content of the entire corpus of texts. This also involved examining the arguments put forward by Bakhtin and/or his promoters to justify the substitution of authors, as well as the reactions that this substitution and these arguments had provoked among specialists in the field of literary theories.

To deal with this constellation of problems, we took it upon ourselves at the outset to examine in detail not just the texts signed by the three authors concerned, but also the prolific quantity of secondary literature produced

around the world over four decades (from 1970 to 2010). We believe that this literature (over 300 books and articles) is large enough to show what is really at stake in this affair. This return to the texts signed by the three authors, and their comparative analysis, as well as that of the collected commentaries, was first of all the source of surprises and perplexity, and then the source of incredulity, followed by a stupefaction that rapidly turned into genuinely deep anger. Without rehearsing all the untruths that we denounce in our book (most importantly the ones relating to “authorship”), we will outline four subjects that induce stupefaction or anger.

First of all there is Bakhtin’s own attitude, as reported by all his interlocutors from 1960-1975: he gave multiple and contradictory versions of his hypothetical role in the writing of the disputed texts. He had certainly had a difficult life, and he was in poor health, but he was nevertheless of sound mind at the outset of the affair in the 1960s, and an author cannot have doubts as to whether he wrote, or not, a given book or article. Thus Bakhtin attempted to appropriate the works of his deceased (former) friends, while remaining entirely silent about the intellectual influence they had had on him.

Then there is the procedure of certain biographers, in particular Clark & Holquist (1984) and their followers, which consisted in deliberately besmirching Voloshinov and Medvedev, intellectually and morally, without the merest element of a credible demonstration and with the unique goal of justifying the re-attribution of their texts to Bakhtin. The available facts show that, on the contrary, Voloshinov was a remarkable researcher and that Medvedev demonstrated, both in his political life and in his major book, a particularly courageous ethical position that was clearly not unrelated to his summary execution in 1938.

Next come the texts that glorify Bakhtin’s work, published in conjunction with the circulation and the extension of his *œuvre*:

those of Ivanov (1973/1975) and Clark & Holquist (*op. cit.*), which established the author as the brilliant precursor of all the trends in linguistics to emerge in the 20th century (including diametrically opposed ones), and Todorov’s *Principe dialogique*, which is less extravagant but nonetheless demonstrates a remarkable capacity to make epistemological positions hitherto considered to be antagonistic seem compatible. If we were stupefied by the content of these texts, we were even more stupefied by the laudatory commentaries and the approving silences to which they give rise.

Finally there is the gullibility, indulgence and/or voluntary blindness shown by many specialists in the field. Gullibility in accepting the declarations concerning Bakhtin’s sole authorship without making the slightest attempt to verify them, and thereby blithely accepting the dispossession of two authors of their works and simultaneously glorifying the “immense modesty” of the person who had appropriated them. Indulgence towards the texts that denigrate the personalities and works of Voloshinov and Medvedev (in particular that of Clark & Holquist), when these texts merely peddled gossip. Blindness in the desire to find resemblances and continuities between Bakhtin’s early writings and most of the later writings published under his name, as well as those of Voloshinov and Medvedev; blindness again in the face of the obvious repetition in Bakhtin’s later writings, scarcely even paraphrased, of themes developed in Voloshinov’s original texts. To which we can also add the complicity of certain people in the enterprise that consisted of fabricating, from start to finish, the ‘history’ of the relations that supposedly existed among the three protagonists in the 1920s, a history designed to make Bakhtin the group’s mastermind or leader.

As most of the reviews have mentioned, usually reproachfully, our stupefaction and anger came through clearly in the tone and style of our book, which sometimes contravene the supposed norms of academic propriety. But

while we do of course concede the few factual or interpretive errors that have been pointed out, on the whole we stand by the tone of our book, and would mention in this respect that, as Laurent Jenny points out in his review, “The virulence of the tone does not detract from the seriousness of the analysis” (2012, p. 200).⁶ We will return to this point in section 3, below.

It is also necessary to add, for the sake of certain critics who haven’t read (or don’t want to understand) the second part of our book, that we are still full of admiration for the epistemological position, the theoretical and methodological propositions, and the web of analytic concepts proposed in the writings of the 1920s (Voloshinov and Medvedev’s texts, and the *Dostoevsky* book signed by Bakhtin), and taken up again or reformulated in certain later texts signed by Bakhtin. In our own work we have always been – and still are – greatly inspired by these texts, and we have always explicitly acknowledged our debt in this respect. Moreover, the analyses that led to our book required us to demonstrate even more strongly the internal coherence of this part of the corpus, as well as its evident proximity to the approach that was simultaneously being developed by Vygotsky (e.g. 1934/1997; 1999).

But these same analyses and our own position lead us to clearly dissociate these texts with a social interactionist orientation from Bakhtin’s early writings, as well as certain very explicit positions he took later in life. Even though we strongly criticize the positions developed in these documents, we do not contest their intrinsic legitimacy, and we are therefore prepared to debate with critics like Frédéric François (2012) who give them a largely positive reading. On the contrary, however, we strongly contest any attempt to amalgamate or unify these two orientations, because they imply positions which, quite apart from epistemological divergences, actually lie outside the scientific realm, and are consequently of a religious or sectarian nature,

⁶ «La virulence du ton [...] n’exclut pas le sérieux de l’analyse.»

giving a quasi-mystical aura to the fundamental concepts of dialogism, polyphony and intertextuality.

Related to this division whose necessity we have just stressed, is the problem of what status to accord to four important texts signed by Bakhtin, namely the two versions of the *Dostoevsky* book, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” and “Discourse in the Novel.” We have developed an interpretation in this matter which we still maintain, because it is the most plausible in light of the elements that we have assembled. But although we do not have formal proof of what we are claiming, we strongly maintain that the question of the status of these texts is necessarily linked to that of the attempted Bakhtinian appropriation of the works of Voloshinov and Medvedev, and that this question cannot be dealt with without taking into consideration the extremely negative comments that Bakhtin made at the end of his life about the socio-interactive orientation of these works.

3. On some incendiary reviews, or why Makhlin & Dolgorukova (2013) are doubly right

Four reviews of our book consist of severe condemnations. The first (which was also the first comment on our text) was written by Marc Hersant and appeared under the title of *Bakhtine démantibulé* [Bakhtin smashed to pieces] in the *Magazine littéraire* of December 2011. The author accepts that some of the problems we raise are worthy of interest, but considers that our way of dealing with them, notably our almost libellous⁷ assertions concerning Bakhtin, means that “for a calm, non-partisan study of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov’s respective contributions to the history of thought and a harmonious rebalancing of their posthumous fame, it is

⁷ « proches de la calomnie »

necessary to wait a little longer.”⁸ So be it, let’s wait – but since we now have the time, let’s also ask ourselves why, given that a hundred or more eminent specialists have dealt with these questions over four decades, this serious comprehensive study has never been undertaken, and also ask in what way the result of such a study would, *a priori*, result in “a harmonious balance.”

The reviews by Yan Hamel (2012), Iván Ivánovitch Ivanov (2013) and Vitaly Makhlin & Natalia Dolgorukova (2013) are truly incendiary. Hamel mocks our work, its tone and its style, and describes our book as a “breathtaking new bible of monological truth” (p. 275).⁹ Under the title *Un imposteur nommé Bronckart*, Ivanov takes up some of the arguments put forward over several decades by those who recommend the affair be forgotten – in his eyes, it doesn’t matter who the authors were; the only thing that matters is the meaning of what has been written, and, if we had understood the deeper meaning of the concepts of dialogism, intertextuality, etc., we would have understood the vanity of our detective-like approach. Ivanov again convokes the “specular hermeneutics” permanently exploited by the proponents of Bakhtinianism (i.e. the way he published his works mirrors the concepts contained in them), but the status and indeed the possibility of this argument deserve at least a minimal amount of examination. Makhlin & Dolgorukova are equally severe in a text which takes up a number of arguments that the partisans of the status quo keep trotting out, and which deliberately ignores the contributions of Voloshinov and Medvedev, because he continues to support, against all opposition, the theory of Bakhtin’s sole authorship:

The creative symbiosis of Marxism and formalism, the science of ‘materialism,’ the futurist utopia and the ‘young Russian

poetics’ which began during the post-revolutionary years (a symbiosis that Bakhtin defined in 1924 as a “materialist aesthetics,” which he then analysed, vulgarising this genre “for the poor” in the “disputed texts” in the second half of the 1920s, from the angle of the Marxist he had never been and never would be). (p. 409)

The particular language of the 1920s in which Bakhtin was obliged to write the “disputed texts.” (p. 410)¹⁰

If the persistence of this belief can only be described as baffling, it still seems to us that Makhlin & Dolgorukova are doubly right, firstly in asserting, in the title of his article, that our approach and the tone we adopt proceeds from “the resentment of those who have been duped,” and then in considering, quite explicitly, that this same approach, as well as its authors, illustrate human “stupidity.”

On the first point, let us repeat that our book is indeed full of rage, for the reasons outlined above, but also because we have the feeling of having been profoundly cheated, and because we have been shocked professionally by some people’s eagerness to rewrite history as they please (see the multiple stories of the circumstances surrounding the composition of the disputed texts) or to situate themselves outside any genuine epistemological reflection, so as to be able to concoct an aesthetic approach which for this reason alone appears to be brilliantly new. And this point confirms the prediction with which Lapacherie (2013) ends his review:

⁸ « pour une étude sereine des apports respectifs de Bakhtin, Medvedev et Voloshinov à l’histoire de la pensée et un rééquilibrage harmonieux de leur gloire posthume, il faudra attendre encore un peu. »

⁹ « nouvelle bible écrasante de vérité monologique »

¹⁰ « La symbiose créative du marxisme et du formalisme, la science « matérialiste », l’utopie futuriste et la «jeune poésie russe» qui s’est ébauchée durant les années postrévolutionnaires (symbiose que Bakhtine a définie en 1924 comme une « esthétique matérielle », puis qu’il a analysé, en vulgarisant ce genre « pour les pauvres », dans les « textes contestés » de la seconde moitié des années 1920 et sous l’angle d’un marxiste qu’il n’a jamais été et ne sera jamais). [...] La langue particulière des années 20 dans laquelle Bakhtine a été contraint d’écrire les “textes discutés”. »

Bakhtine démasqué can or will provoke among many readers a genuine malaise or even a vague feeling of shame, because the fantasies it analyses reveal the disastrous state into which the humanities have sunk, in which everything is worth anything and *vice versa*.¹¹

We adopted a style that we had not used in any of our other work, and if, because of this lack of experience, we were no doubt too heavy-handed in certain comments, we continue to believe that this is not as grave as all the frivolous arguments we came across in our work. It seemed to us more generally that the use of decorous terms and courteous phrases was wholly inappropriate for dealing with a situation of the type we had to analyse: academics also have the right to raise their voices, and in this field as in others, excessive engagement seems to us less worthy of condemnation than an excess of deference or voluntary blindness.

And yes, we are “stupid,” as Makhlin & Dolgorukova assert at the beginning of the conclusion to his commentary, indeed even more stupid than he can imagine. To begin with we have the stupidity to take into account all the archival work undertaken by Patrick Sériot (2010), Inna Tylkowski (2012) and the members of the *Bakhtin Centre*, which resulted in restoring to Voloshinov the full authorship of the texts published under his name and simultaneously revealed the nonexistence of any so-called “Bakhtin Circle.” We also have the stupidity to believe in the sincerity and authenticity of numerous authors who, like Jakubinski, Leontiev, Luria, Vinogradov, Vygotsky and many others, attempted, in the pre-Stalinist USSR of the 1920s, to develop scientific approaches freely inspired by Marxism as they understood it (or to which they

had access). In this respect, to describe the works of Voloshinov and Medvedev as “vulgarisation for the poor” is an insult to the texts themselves, to their authors ... and to many of their readers, an insult which – in the measured style we will henceforth adopt – leaves us speechless. We equally have the stupidity to avoid anachronisms, such as those which lead certain people to state that there is nothing Marxist about the texts and their authors because they contest – this much at least is true – various aspects of positions which later became Stalinist dogmas, or which were to be adroitly reformulated by the theoreticians of the French Communist Party! We further have the stupidity to believe that an author of sound mind knows whether or not he wrote a book thirty years earlier, even if the situation at the time was turbulent. And given that the same author gives apparently trustworthy interlocutors multiple different versions of his possible role in the writing of ten or so texts, we have the complementary stupidity to ask ourselves what this is really hiding. Finally, we have the ultimate stupidity not to accept a reading of history or a type of textual analysis for the sole reason that it emanates from prestigious scholars (from Holquist to Todorov) and has been generally accepted. But we have to accept that from the altitude and the epistemological extraterritoriality from which Vitali Makhlin and Natalia Dolgorukova express themselves, such concerns, coming from the *bas monde* in which we reside, must seem contemptible indeed.

Entirely devoted to demonstrating and stigmatising the inanity of our undertaking, Hamel, Ivanov and Makhlin & Dolgorukova’s reviews obviously don’t address any of the historical and textual problems we have dealt with, and although Hersant says he recognises the existence and the relevance of some of these problems, he makes no attempt to specify which ones he means.

However other critics *do* engage with these problems and with the analysis that we have proposed, sometimes in a very harsh manner, as

¹¹ « *Bakhtine démasqué* peut ou va provoquer chez de nombreux lecteurs un véritable malaise ou même un vague sentiment de honte, car ces affabulations analysées dévoilent l’état de désastre dans lequel sombrent les études de lettres, ou tout vaut n’importe quoi et réciproquement. »

is the case, to varying degrees, of the reviews published by Daniela Jakubaszko (2014), Francesca Mambelli (2013), Karine Zbinden (2013) and Serge Zenkine (2011). In the following section we will respond to the remarks and reproaches formulated in these four texts.

4. Replies to specific criticisms

4.1. On mastering the Russian language

Perhaps more alarmingly, they base their painstaking analyses of various Bakhtinian texts, not on the original Russian texts, but on the French and Italian translations, of which some at least are anything but accurate and reliable. Unfortunately, although a heavy volume, Bronckart and Bota's book is not as weighty as one might at first expect. (Zbinden, 2013, p. 431)

Used, as the quotation above shows, to discredit our analyses, this argument has been taken up by several other critics, including Zenkine who states that our lack of Russian "compromises the validity of our analysis: imagine a Hellenist who pretended to solve the Homeric Problem without knowing Greek!" (2011, p. 847).¹² It is true that we do not master Russian, and we have never denied this, but how does this discredit our work?

First of all we will point out that among the numerous commentaries on Bakhtin's work that we have analysed, more than half come from researchers who, despite having no knowledge of Russian, have been able to offer profound and very positive analyses. So far as we know, they have not been reproached for this non-mastery of Russian, which has never even been mentioned. Thus it seems that while it is necessary to master Russian to criticise Bakhtin, this competence is absolutely not necessary to praise him!

¹² « compromet la validité de notre analyse : imaginez un helléniste qui prétende trancher la question homérique sans connaître le grec ! »

Next we will mention that the translations we used have been circulating for years, if not decades, and, except for Todorov's criticisms of the initial French version of *Marxism*, we were not aware that any of them had been questioned. These translations are now being contested on various points, which obviously have to be examined seriously (see below), but it suffices to point out that the translations which, according to Zbinden, are "anything but accurate and reliable," are the work of researchers who in principle master Russian. This shows – paradoxically – that the linguistic competence we lack in no way prevents errors of interpretation. More generally and seriously, all specialists are perfectly aware of the huge difficulty of a pertinent translation (including in today's Russian language) of the Russian of the 1920s and 30s.

Whether or not we personally master the Russian language, the only question that actually arises is whether possible translation errors caused errors of interpretation which would lead us to substantially modify our findings and interpretive hypotheses. We do of course acknowledge the few translation errors confirmed by specialists, and we would like to thank the people who have pointed them out, but so far none of these errors is of the sort that would lead us to modify the conclusions we draw from our study. For example, Zenkine rightly contests our (re-)translation of a passage in the interviews that Bakhtin gave to Duvakin (it concerns the first version of the *Dostoevsky* book, and should be translated "this little book" rather than "his book"), but this error does not in any way alter what was at stake in this passage, which is the revelation of the many reservations or criticisms that Bakhtin had concerning this book, which are also to be found in the (uncontested) translation of the conversations that Bakhtin had with Bocharov in 1970.

4.2. Data concerning the authorship of the "disputed texts"

Zenkine reproaches us for not having added new elements to the dossier (2011, p. 846), which misses the point as what we set out to do was precisely to take stock of what had already been written on this affair over half a century. We were trying to understand the origin of the problem of the disputed texts; trying in this way to understand the nature and structure of the corpus of texts described as Bakhtinian; and trying finally to understand both the history and the process of the reception of this corpus outside Russia. Consequently our approach consisted of collecting as many existing texts as possible, analysing them, and establishing what they meant. Thus we could turn round to Zenkine and ask him the question already asked above: given that the texts we dealt with had been available for a long time, why had no genuine specialist ever tried (or been able) to undertake this work of synthesis?

Zenkine also criticises the fact that we didn't mention the sources by which Bakhtin's promoters were informed of Bakhtin's sole authorship, namely the declarations said to have been made by Vinogradov to Ivanov and then to Kozhinov, those that Shklovsky is said to have made to Kozhinov, or even a passage in Olga Frejdenberg's memoirs (written towards the end of the 1940s) indicating that Voloshinov, "an elegant young man and an aesthete [was] the author of a book about linguistics that was written for him by Bloxin" (see Sériot, 2010, p. 39). We were in no way unaware of these oft-cited "sources," but if we only mentioned the supposed declarations of Shklovsky (*Bakhtine démasqué*, p. 148), it is indeed, as Zenkine supposes, because we have very serious doubts about the status of these late and expedient recollections. And we are sticking to our analysis according to which this affair was only concocted at the end of the 1960s, because the only documented source that might contradict this is the evocation by Frejdenberg of "the elegant Voloshinov" and the person called "Bloxin." But what is the value of this strange phrase in the face of all the arguments that we have put forward and which

Zenkine refrains from mentioning? First of all, after the political changes of 1929/1930, Medvedev and Voloshinov were confronted with numerous enemies as a result of the 'free' nature of their use of Marxism. This manifested itself in harsh attacks, such as that of Borovkov in 1931 – "Voloshinov [...] in his book *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* [...] hides his idealism under a Marxist phraseology," or that of Lomtev in 1932 – "Voloshinov's bourgeois theories obscure the real essence of language as a weapon in the class struggle" (see Sériot, *ibid.*, pp. 54-59). How could one imagine that in such a prying and inquisitive context, Voloshinov's editorial fraud – which Bakhtin's promoters claim was an open secret – wasn't known to and exploited by his political enemies? Moreover, how do we explain that from 1930 to the end of the 1960s, including in the conference held in Tartu in 1968, all the commentators on *Marxism* attributed this book to Voloshinov, without ever mentioning Bakhtin? Finally why does Zenkine (just like Ivanov and Makhlin & Dolgorukova) take no notice of the archival work already mentioned, which has reconstructed Voloshinov's academic career and notably exhumed some of his preparatory manuscripts leading to the *Marxism* book?

Zenkine also argues that if Bakhtin no doubt gave false information about his biography, "at the heart of the question of the 'disputed texts' he never contradicts himself or the facts that we possess [...] he never formally states that he did *not* write the problematic texts, nor that he wrote them *by himself*, without any participation by the others" (2011, p. 849).¹³ How can anyone dare, again and again, to utter such falsehoods? Bakhtin did indeed declare that *he had not written* some of the problematic texts, notably in his letter to Kozhinov of 10 January 1961 published in

¹³ « sur le fond de la question des "textes disputés" il ne se contredit jamais ni ne contredit les faits dont nous disposons [...] il ne dit jamais formellement qu'il *n'a pas* écrit les textes problématiques, ni qu'il les a écrits *tout seul*, sans aucune participation des autres. »

Moskva: after seeming to acknowledge indirectly that he was the author of *Marxism* and *The Formal Method*, he then wrote “concerning the other works of P.N. Medvedev and V.N. Voloshinov, they were situated on another level, they didn’t reflect that shared conception and *I had no part in their creation.*” This did not prevent him from later stating to Bocharov that he had also written the articles published under Voloshinov’s name, including “Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry” (see Bocharov, 1994, pp. 1013-1014). And in the same conversations with Bocharov, Bakhtin did indeed affirm, contrary to what Zenkine states, that *he alone* conceived and wrote the disputed texts, “from beginning to end” (*ibid.*). Finally let us mention once again that in his interviews with Duvakin, Bakhtin also indicated that Voloshinov was in fact the author of *Marxism*, adding, “the book which some people now attribute to me.” These contradictions have been pointed out so often that one can legitimately ask how they have escaped Zenkine’s notice, unless of course he has his own definition of contradiction which escapes us.

4.3. On the “Bakhtin Circle”

Who cares about discrediting Bakhtin’s morals? Whose interests are served by the fragmentation of a “circle” that continues to produce resonances? Why do the authors resist the idea of a circle, a common practice at the time? Why couldn’t Bakhtin have been the most influential person? Why do renowned authors with international prestige see the need to destroy a reputation? (Jakubaszko, 2014, p. 100)¹⁴

¹⁴ “A quem interessa a desmoralização de Bakhtin? A quais interesses serviriam a fragmentação de um “círculo” que continua produzindo ressonâncias? Por que os autores resistem à ideia de um círculo, prática muito comum na época? Por que Bakhtin não poderia ter sido o mais influente? Por que autores renomados e de prestígio

In a review which appeared in the *Revista Espaço Acadêmico*, Jakubaszko, who (unlike Ivanov, Makhlin & Dolgorukova and Zenkine) believes it correct to restore to Voloshinov and Medvedev the paternity of their works, nevertheless questions the motivations underlying our work (and gives her question at least an indirect answer to which we will return in the *coda* to this article). More specifically, as the quotation above shows, she inquires as to the reasons which led us to resist the idea of a Circle in which Bakhtin was the most influential author. However the answer to this question is simple: we resist this “idea” because analysing all the elements available today leads us, like Sériot (*op. cit.*) and henceforth many other authors, to state that such a Circle never existed: this expression was dreamed up at the end of the 1960s (it had *never* been used previously). Bakhtin himself clearly indicated, in his interviews with Duvakin, that such a Circle did not exist, and all the archival work, including that undertaken at a research centre bearing Bakhtin’s name – the Bakhtin Centre in Sheffield – today shows clearly that if Bakhtin did have certain relations with Medvedev and Voloshinov, he was never their leader, nor the leader of any group at all. Thus the question is not to discover “whose interests” might be served by affirming the non-existence of the circle, it is simply to know whether such a circle existed, and the answer is a clear and definite “no.” Are we to deduce from Jakubaszko’s questions that as soon as the truth risks “destroying a reputation” or perturbing pleasant “resonances,” it is better to remain silent?

4.4. The differences between the disputed texts and the genuine Bakhtinian corpus

According to Jakubaszko and Zenkine, the orientations of Voloshinov and Medvedev’s works on the one hand, and Bakhtin’s youthful

internacional veem necessidade de destruir uma reputação?”

writings on the other, are on the whole compatible, or at least less radically divergent than we argue. To demonstrate this, Zenkine first considers our evaluation of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*:

They think they detect “a radical monologism” (p. 410) in contradiction with Dostoevsky’s dialogical principle and Voloshinov’s writings. They don’t realize that the notion of monologism, defined in the *Dostoevsky* book as the domination of a discourse, is inapplicable to works in which the problem of language has not yet been posed, while the dialogical situation is anticipated there by an analysis of communication between people – and not just between man and God – not based on domination but on love. (Zenkine, 2011, p. 851)¹⁵

According to Zenkine then, the notion of monologism is not applicable to texts in which the problem of language is not considered. Such a statement would certainly be contested by the vast majority of specialists, whatever their position on the problems which concern us. But if we accept this logic – that monologism is inapplicable to these texts – its opposite, in relation to which it is defined – dialogism – should be too. Yet Zenkine finds it there, following many other commentators, by stating that it is “anticipated by an analysis of communication.” This is a new contradiction necessitated by the desire to identify a continuity between the two groups of texts, and more generally, affirming that dialogism is anticipated in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* is like saying that any text evoking

communication in any way “anticipates dialogism.”

The second argument, endlessly reproduced by the adherents of Bakhtin’s sole authorship, is that the Marxist orientation of the disputed texts is overestimated. This is what Zenkine reproaches us for, drawing on Sériot’s evaluation in his *Preface* to the French republication of *Marxism*. Voloshinov’s Marxism is described as “rudimentary [...] without dialectics, without class struggle or revolution, without ideas about praxis, work or ideology” (Zenkine, 2011, p. 851).

First we need to remind Sériot and Zenkine that Voloshinov’s work (like that of Medvedev and Vygostky) clearly concerns themes arising from the disciplines of the philosophy (or psychology) of language, textual analysis and poetics, and that they were in no way concerned with Marxism in its broader dimensions, notably the economic and political ones. Why on earth *would* these authors have presented the Marxist framework as a whole and drawn on the concepts of praxis, class struggle, or revolution?

Then again, the statement that the notions of class, ideology and dialectics are absent from Voloshinov’s work can only come from a very inattentive reading of the two texts about Freudianism as well as numerous arguments presented in *Marxism*. And to state that Medvedev did not profoundly base his approach in Marxism, it is necessary not to have even opened *The Formal Method*. With the “stupidity” which characterizes us, and in disagreement on this point with our colleague Patrick Sériot, we hold on to the fact that both authors explicitly stated that they situated their approach in a Marxist perspective (for Voloshinov, see in particular “Beyond the Social”). Since we observe nothing in their texts that smacks of deference or submission, we believe that they undertook their own reading of Marxist themes and used them as a source for thought and research, rather than – like most Stalinists – elevating Marxism to a dogma.

¹⁵ « ils croient y déceler « un monologisme radical » (p. 410) en contradiction avec le principe dialogique du Dostoevskij et des écrits de Vološinov. Il ne s’aperçoivent pas que la notion de monologisme, définie dans le Dostoevskij comme la domination d’un discours, est inapplicable aux ouvrages où le problème du langage n’est pas encore posé, tandis que la situation de dialogue y est anticipée par une analyse de la communication entre les hommes – et non seulement entre l’homme et Dieu – ne se fondant pas sur la domination mais sur l’amour. »

As for the assessment that their Marxism was “rudimentary,” well why not, if you believe that “sophisticated” Marxism is that of Stalinist dogma and the thinkers of brother Communist Parties! More seriously, on this question we would refer to the analysis proposed, in one of his two reviews of our book, by the philosopher Lucien Sève, an uncontested specialist in Marxism (see his books of 2004 and 2008) :

The works of Pavel Medvedev and Valentin Voloshinov are very characteristic of Soviet Marxism of the 1920s, a youthful, exploratory, inventive Marxism that is sometimes several decades in advance of the later movement of ideas – and at the same time a radically non-bookish Marxism, fundamentally non-Stalinist. This is typically case of Voloshinov’s book on *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. (Sève, 2012b, p. 47)¹⁶

... in 1929, the young Voloshinov began an exploration of linguistic territory that was all the more adventurous for being undertaken without a map; as he says in the first line of his Introduction, “To date there is not as yet a single Marxist work on the philosophy of language.” **And the questions that he takes it on himself to elucidate as a pioneer, [...] are the totally new ones posed by dialectical relations – and not to see the dialectical here would be astonishing** – between sign and signification, language and speech, direct and indirect speech, etc., and through these socio- and psycholinguistic questions, more general ones concerning the relations among mental activity, ideology and the social base, which will be put into play by

the explicitly mentioned class struggle... If one remembers that Marxist research had barely begun in the West (e.g. in France) in 1929, one is able to measure what a remarkably pioneering example of living Marxism a work like this is. (*ibid.*, p. 49)¹⁷

4.5. A mystifying demystification?

This is the heading of a paragraph in which, after examining very attentively the analyses proposed in the first part of our book, Mambelli reproaches us for having adopted, in the textual analyses in the second part, two different critical approaches:

When they analyse Bakhtin’s writings and when they comment on Voloshinov and Medvedev’s texts, the authors adopt two opposed critical attitudes. In the first case, they make no interpretive effort to illuminate the less limpid passages, and they trivialize the reflections on art, normativity and responsibility developed in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, “Author and Hero,” and “The Problem of Content”, only seeing in them the expression of their author’s religious convictions. [...] On the contrary, when they analyse Voloshinov and Medvedev’s texts, Bronckart and Bota offer a reading that is not only admiring

¹⁶ « Les ouvrages de Pavel Medvedev et Valentin Volochinov sont très caractéristiques du marxisme soviétique des années 20, un marxisme juvénile, exploratoire, inventif, parfois même en avance de décennies sur le mouvement ultérieur des idées – et en même temps marxisme radicalement non livresque, foncièrement non stalinien. C’est typiquement le cas du livre de Volochinov sur *Marxisme et philosophie du langage*. »

¹⁷ « en 1929, le jeune Volochinov commence une exploration du territoire linguistique d’autant plus hardie qu’il l’entreprend sans carte; comme le dit dès la première ligne son avant-propos, « dans le domaine de la philosophie du langage, il n’existe pas à l’heure actuelle une seule analyse marxiste. » Et les questions qu’il va prendre à tâche d’élucider en pionnier, [...] ce sont celles alors toutes neuves que posent les rapports dialectiques – ne pas voir ici la dialectique serait stupéfiant – entre signe et signification, langage et parole, discours direct et indirect, etc., et à travers ces questions socio- et psycholinguistiques, celles plus générales des rapports entre activité psychique, idéologie et base sociale, lesquels vont s’avérer mettre en jeu – sa mention est explicite – la lutte des classes... Si l’on a quelque idée du point presque zéro où en était la recherche marxiste en Occident, par exemple en France en 1929, on mesurera quel remarquable exemple pionnier de marxisme vivant constitue un tel travail. »

and benevolent, but also excessively indulgent. (Mambelli, 2013, p. 8)¹⁸

As already mentioned, JPB and his team analysed “Author and Hero” and “The Problem of Content” at length in the 1980s, and in the preparation of our book we undertook a meticulous examination of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* as soon as it was published in French. Thus it seems to us incorrect to state that we made no interpretive effort to clarify Bakhtin’s early writings and that we “trivialized” the reflections on art and responsibility to be found in them. We are perhaps less competent than others with respect to the themes addressed in these texts, but we think we have highlighted a series of philosophical positions, theoretical orientations and argumentative styles to be found in these writings. If we firmly criticize these positions, it is precisely because we in no way “trivialize” them. Having said that, if colleagues find a real interest in these writings and develop the approach sketched out by Frédéric François in *Bakhtine tout nu* (2012), and if this type of study would allow us, as Mambelli suggests, to understand the reasons for the permanence of the “credit accorded to the name of Bakhtin,” we would be happy to debate the subject with them.

Neither do we believe that we have given an “excessively indulgent” reading to the works of Voloshinov and Medvedev. In the case of the latter, our analyses and assessments, which are indeed very positive, are not fundamentally different from those to be found in virtually all genuine critical studies. As for Voloshinov’s

proposals, despite the sometimes animated discussions we have had on this subject, we continue to disagree fundamentally with Patrick Sériot in our assessment of their status and their quality. However this divergence does *not* arise because we situate ourselves in the ongoing interpretation of Russian texts “à la française” that our colleague has been criticizing for a long time; given our disciplinary background, we are not part of this interpretive movement. On the contrary, this divergence comes from the fact that, without worrying too much whether Voloshinov was more Vosslerian than Marxist, or whether his criticism of Saussure was justified in the light of what he could have known, we are interested in the relevance, creativity, and heuristic power of his approach to the status and the methodological analysis of textual genres. We are also interested in the potential of the network of concepts he defined and organized to explain the fundamental processes of all textual organization (polyphony, dialogism, the active-responsive attitude, thematics, etc.). In his Preface, Sériot does not really deal with these central subjects of the author’s work, but all researchers who, like us, are concerned with the problematics of discourse analysis, recognize the foundational (or dare we say “revolutionary”) dimension of the conception of genre and textuality that is developed in the three essential texts that are “Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry,” *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, and “The Construction of the Utterance.” Furthermore, in her book *Volochinov en contexte*, Inna Tylkowski presents a detailed reading of the work of this author that is a lot less negative than the one offered by her colleague Sériot.

We just have to admit, quite simply, that we have a genuine admiration for the works of Voloshinov and Medvedev, and find very little that appeals to us in the three texts of Bakhtin mentioned in the quotation from Mambelli, and consequently we can see that these two attitudes might appear unequal in the eyes of

¹⁸ Lorsqu’ils analysent les écrits de Bakhtine et lorsqu’ils commentent les textes de Volochinov et de Medvedev, les auteurs adoptent deux attitudes critiques opposées. Dans le premier cas, ils ne font aucun effort interprétatif pour éclaircir les passages moins limpides, ils banalisent la réflexion sur l’art, la normativité et la responsabilité développée dans *Pour une philosophie de l’acte, L’Auteur et le héros* et *Le Problème du contenu*, en y voyant seulement l’expression des convictions religieuses de leur auteur. [...]Lorsqu’ils analysent les textes de Volochinov et de Medvedev, J.-P. Bronckart et Cr. Bota adoptent en revanche une lecture non seulement admirative et bienveillante, mais aussi excessivement indulgente.]

commentators who try to remain more neutral than us.

However Mambelli goes as far as suggesting that we proceeded, in relation to Bakhtin, in a similar way to that of the Bakhtinians we denounce, by “considerably restricting the extent of the Bakhtinian corpus (to the point where Bakhtin appears not to be the sole and genuine author of any of his texts),”¹⁹ and also that we neglected to deal with the work on Rabelais because this risked “compromising [our] interpretation and restricting the validity of [our] theories.”

So we also need to remind Mambelli that we accept without the slightest reservation that Bakhtin is indeed the author of an early group of texts sharing a similar tone, namely the three manuscripts of the 1920s (*Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, “Author and Hero,” and “The Problem of Content”) as well as of certain later texts (necessarily to a greater or lesser extent revised by his editors), including “The Problem of the Text,” “From Notes Made in 1970-71,” and “Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences.” We also accept that Bakhtin is indeed the author of a second corpus with a very different tone and subject matter, consisting of *Rabelais* (despite the problems of plagiarism that arise here) and the texts associated with it (notably “Rabelais and Gogol” and “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel”). In section 5 below we explain why we do not deal with this Rabelaisian corpus. On the contrary, we believe that the first version of the *Dostoevsky* book clearly shows the imprint of Voloshinov and that “The Problem of Speech Genres” and “Discourse in the Novel” are largely made up of borrowings from Voloshinov’s foundational texts. We would also point out in this regard that we didn’t have the slightest hypothesis of this nature when we started our work, and that it was Bakhtin himself who put us on that track,

by his attitude of stern rejection towards both the revised *Dostoevsky* book and *Marxism*.

Thus we leave to Mambelli the responsibility for suggesting this equivalence between an extended textual analysis and the simple denigration of Voloshinov and Medvedev’s characters that has been going on for half a century with the support of many prestigious authors, and which continues to produce its effects today in virtually all the bibliographies in this field. Meanwhile our very isolated attempt to understand the conditions and the reasons underlying this process has resulted in the disconcerting conclusions summarized above.

5. Pertinent criticisms and open questions

One of the paradoxes of the genre in which this article is written is that we will only comment briefly on authors who have welcomed our approach, such as Laurent Jenny (*Critique*, 2012), Jean-Gérard Lapacherie (2013), Hélène Maurel-Indart (*Les Lettres romanes*, 2012), Vincent Monnet (*Europe*, 2012), Lucien Sève (*Contre temps*, 2012), Catherine Tauveron (*Repères*, 2011) and César de Vicente Hernando (*Marxismo Critico*, 2013). They will know that we are profoundly grateful, and we are sure they will understand that discretion leads us to select a single representative quotation from their evaluations:

Bakhtine desenmascarado is not, contrary to what might appear from the tone of its epigraphs, various expressions that appear in many sections, and even its title, a deranged book. It is rather the opposite: a rigorously constructed book, offering a flawless, clear and richly documented reasoning, a *return to history*. It establishes a contextual framework not only from contrasting data but from the discursive logic that operates in every historical reconstruction. By showing the contradictions among their texts (and even among Bakhtin’s own texts) and their contrasting ideas and ideological horizons,

¹⁹ « en restreignant considérablement l’étendue du corpus bakhtinien (au point qu’à la fin Bakhtin n’apparaît comme le seul et véritable auteur d’aucun de ses textes). »

it establishes a truthful account of what the work of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov really means. (Vicente Hernando, 2013)²⁰

Some of the authors who take a generally positive view of our work have made various critical remarks which appear justified to us and which sometimes (re)open interesting questions, which we will take up in what follows.

Rather than stigmatising our lack of knowledge of the Russian language, Sandra Nossik (2012) regrets that we did not make explicit the methodological difficulties we encountered in exploiting the secondary sources we had at our disposal. To this we simply acknowledge that while a commentary on these methodological problems would indeed have been useful, it would also have weighed down an already heavy book. David Kellog (2012) for his part considers that, concerning the authorship of the disputed texts, we do not sufficiently distinguish Bakhtin's statements from those of his promoters. This is true, but is explained by the fact that, apart from the letter to Kozhinov in 1961, we have no document in which Bakhtin directly takes up a position, but only reproductions of conversations he is said to have had with various interlocutors, in particular those same promoters.

Like Mambelli, Jenny (2012, p. 206) and Katia Vandendorre (2012) regret that the book *Rabelais and His World* was not included in our analysis, which the latter says will leave the

reader feeling unsatisfied.²¹ A thorough account of this part of the corpus would indeed have allowed us to have a more complete idea of Bakhtin's career and the status of his work, but we didn't carry out this work for three main reasons. The first is that we set out to deal with the affair of the "disputed texts" and to clarify the relations that really existed between Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov. Given the dates during which the *Rabelais* book was put together, and the specific theoretical and thematic orientations that it develops, this text didn't seem to have any particular link with the problem we wished to deal with. As our work advanced, we nevertheless thought about extending it to include this book, but we finally decided against it for two other reasons: on the one hand this text has been analysed many times by authors much better qualified than us, and on the other we were able to find virtually no precise information about the conditions in which it was produced. Also in relation to *Rabelais*, we accept Kellog's criticism according to which "we use the term 'plagiarism' a little too freely," but our over-emphasis of the facts revealed by Poole (1998) is no doubt a reaction of the alacrity with which virtually all Bakhtinians have downplayed the significance of these borrowings.

On the question of Bakhtin, religion and literature, we acknowledge Kellog's implicit reproach that we were not precise and prudent enough in the positions we took, and in particular that our use of the word *bondieusard* (something like 'sanctimonious Christian bigot') was unnecessarily crude. But our criticisms are not aimed at religion as such, but at an approach that explicitly argues that literature (and human productions in general) should only be analysed from a religious angle or from religious principles – which means, in the case of Bakhtin, from a particularly ideologically and culturally engaged religious approach. However Kellog states that he has never been totally convinced that Bakhtin was a

²⁰ "Bajtín desenmascarado no es, contra lo que pueda parecer por el tono de los epígrafes, las expresiones que aparecen en muchas secciones y hasta el mismo título, un libro desquiciado. Más bien es todo lo contrario: un libro rigurosamente compuesto, que propone con un razonamiento impecable, claro y profusamente documentación, una *vuelta a la historia*, estableciendo un marco contextual no sólo a partir de los datos contrastados sino de las lógicas discursivas que funcionan en toda construcción histórica; estableciendo por medio de la emergencia de las contradicciones (incluso entre textos de bajtinianos) y del contraste de las ideas y sus horizontes ideológicos un relato verídico de lo que significó realmente la obra de Bajtín, de Voloshinov y de Medvedev."

²¹ « un goût de trop peu »

“practising Christian,” as shown by the fact that he did not attend his wife’s Orthodox funeral, and that he refused the assistance of an Orthodox priest when his own death was approaching. These facts are indisputable, and there are other testimonies showing that Bakhtin had little esteem for most Orthodox priests and no particular taste for religious ceremonies. But Bakhtin’s religious position, as expressed in his theory of the “non-alibi in being” and other similar themes, only has a very distant relation with (or even a frontal opposition to) the more prosaic Christian values about which ministers preach, whatever their persuasion, and which the ordinary faithful put into practice.

6. Coda: what lies behind this research and the book?

Jakubaszko gives an answer to this question which, although prudently indirect, is nevertheless very clear, so we thank her for this frankness which allows us to respond to the insinuations propagated by some Brazilian colleagues:

And what are the real reasons for this attempt to retell Bakhtin’s biography, openly discrediting him? Can the authors’ attitude help us reflect on some current practices involving the struggle for power and the maintenance of the status quo in the [human] sciences? Could it be that what is at stake is a dispute over “academic territories,” the devaluation of the scientific capital of approaches which compete with that of the authors? (2014, p. 101)²²

So we supposedly did all this work (five years of intensive research) to discredit a line of

thought which might be a competitor to a movement in which we are prime movers (under the banner of *socio-discursive interactionism* – hereafter SDI).

First of all, if we look up to the elevated spheres of thought in which some people move, we own up to a form of “stupidity,” but this nevertheless has its limits, and as we know perfectly well how academic approval works and the fate that befell the rare few who have previously contested Bakhtinianism (notably Titunik and Matejka), we knew perfectly well that our book would be badly received overall and that it would lose us friends and support. This is effectively what has happened, and this situation has been perfectly analysed by Maurel-Indart (2012) who, like a few other commentators, has hailed the risk we have taken and described its probable effects in the field of theories of literature:

The conclusions qui that emerge from *Bakhtine démasqué* have important consequences and one can imagine the forces of inertia that it was necessary to combat in order to bring about such a publication. One can easily imagine the criticisms, possibly violent, that it will provoke. The “all-Bakhtin” chorus is ready to draw its swords, and twist the facts one more time. The ideological stakes are high. (2012, p. 692)²³

Next, the SDI movement that we lead is absolutely not in competition with the theories, propositions and concepts emanating from the major works produced in Russia in the 1920s in psychology (Vygotsky) and linguistics (from Jakubinski to Voloshinov); on the contrary we explicitly position ourselves within this line of thought, as can be seen from the itinerary and the publications outlined in section 1. And the

²² “E quais seriam as verdadeiras razões desta tentativa de recontar a biografia de Bakhtin, desmoralizando-o abertamente? Será que a atitude destes autores pode nos ajudar a refletir sobre algumas práticas atuais de disputa de poder e manutenção de status quo no campo científico? Será que está em jogo uma disputa por “territórios acadêmicos”, pela desvalorização do capital científico das linhas concorrentes à dos autores?”

²³ « Les conclusions qui se dégagent du *Bakhtine démasqué* sont lourdes de conséquences et on imagine quelle force d’inertie il a fallu combattre pour en arriver à une telle publication. On imagine sans peine les critiques, peut-être violentes, qu’elle va susciter. Le chœur du « tout — Bakhtine » est prêt à fourbir ses armes, tordant une fois de plus les faits. C’est que les enjeux idéologiques sont forts.»

work that resulted in our book led us to reinforce this heritage, while also, it is true, ridding it of its false friends and the shadows cast by mysteries and mysticism.

Finally, although there are struggles and important things at stake in all scientific fields, as stressed by Bourdieu, who doesn't hesitate to evoke Jakubaszko, it is ridiculous to imagine that the criticism of a supposedly competing movement would suffice to promote one's own movement effectively: SDI, like any other contemporary branch of the human sciences, will prosper or decline because of the quality and the efficiency of its own propositions, and the impetus it receives, or not, from the many (young) researchers now involved with it.

We undertook this work and wrote the book with the single aim of contributing to restoring a bit of truth to a field in which it had become, at the very least, rather stretched, and given the seriousness of the problems we were confronted with, we were obliged to strike hard.

Having said that, if other people have the courage to continue, and this leads them to more nuanced conclusions than ours, we will read them and comment on their work with all due seriousness and respect.

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