

ТЕМА ДЛЯ РАЗМЫШЛЕНИЯ

Статья Клайва Томсона, одного из крупнейших западных исследователей М.М.Бахтина, публикуется впервые как на английском, так и на русском языках. В качестве «Темы для размышления» читателю предлагается, быть может, самая загадочная работа Бахтина. Перевод интервью с Юлией Кристевой, по замыслу редакции, поможет лучше понять и работу Бахтина, и её трактовку в статье Томсона.

Clive Thomson

**Mikhail Bakhtin's
Toward a Philosophy of the Act.
Performance and Paranoïa**

Or perhaps we have to recognize doubt as constituting a quite distinctive sort of value. It is precisely doubt that forms the basis of our life as effective deed-performing, and it does so without coming into contradiction with theoretical cognition. This value of doubt does not contradict in any way the unique and unique truth (pravda): it is precisely this unitary and unique truth of the world that demands doubt.

(Mikhail Bakhtin, «Toward a Philosophy of the Act»)¹

Introduction

The past several years have been more productive than ever for the field of Anglo-American Bakhtin Studies, with the publication of Caryl Emerson's *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (1997) and her edited collection, *Critical Essays on Mikhail Bakhtin* (1999), Carol Adlam's (et al.) *Face to Face: Bakhtin in Russia and the West* (1997), Sue Vice's *Introducing Bakhtin* (1997), Alastair Renfrew's *Exploiting Bakhtin* (1997), David Shepherd's edited collection, *The Contexts of Bakhtin: Philosophy, Authorship, Aesthetics* (1998), Peter

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Hitchcock's special issue of the *South Atlantic Quarterly* (1998), Ruth Coates' *Christianity in Bakhtin: God and the Exiled Author* (1998), and Anthony Wall's special issue of *Recherches Sémiotiques-Semiotic Inquiry* (1998) and Ken Hirschkop's *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy*. Whether or not we are at another «turning point in the reception and understanding of Bakhtin», as Charles Lock² suggests in a recent review article of some of this material, is a perplexing question. For those of us who have spent considerable time trying to identify and describe the ups and downs in the evolution of Bakhtin Studies, we might tend to be skeptical at the notion of yet another special moment. My own sense of things is that Bakhtin Studies in the West, for the past thirty-five years and ever since the seminal work of Julia Kristeva in France and André Belleau's work on the other side of the Atlantic, is perhaps better seen as one long, extraordinarily and consistently exciting period.

This recent scholarship raises new issues and controversies and, in this sense, it does renew the field. My reason for referring to this latest work, as a way of introducing my article, is not to give it a full critical review. Because my focus here is on Bakhtin's *Toward a Philosophy of the Act (TPA)*, I read the above-mentioned studies to see what kind of attention they gave to Bakhtin's early text. Strangely enough, *TPA* receives relatively little critical comment, or at least less comment than other works by Bakhtin. Carnival, genre, postmodernism, the chronotope, religion, etc., are some of the main focuses in these studies.

If one looks at the electronic bibliographical database at the University of Sheffield Bakhtin Centre, one finds that more articles on *TPA* have been written in the 1990s by Russian scholars whose primary interest has been either in exploring the genealogy of the text or in situating it in relation to the rest of Bakhtin's oeuvre. In an article published in 1988, Vitallii Makhlin, for example, believes that the notion of dialogism is already very much present in *TPA*, a position which emphasizes continuity between the work of the early and late 1920s³.

My interest in *TPA* is neither genealogical, textological, nor historical. In the commentary that follows, I look selectively yet closely at the reception of this little text in the Anglo-American context and then I attempt to appreciate it on its own terms.

Part I: Crisis

Bakhtin's diagnosis of the state of modern philosophy, as he found it in the 1920s, is devastatingly blunt. It is in a state of crisis:

My participative and demanding consciousness can see that the world of modern philosophy, the theoretical and theorized world of culture, is in a certain sense actual, that it possesses validity. But what it can also see is that this world is not the once-occurrent world in which I live and in which I answerably perform my deeds. (p.20)

This quotation and others from *TPA* («Contemporary philosophy fails to provide a principle for such inclusion, and this is what constitutes its state of crisis.» p.21) express a profound dissatisfaction with the general state of contemporary philosophy, an «airless space» which fails to deal with crucial issues, such as the «process of my thinking» (p.21).

The present article takes as its starting point my dissatisfaction with the ways in which *TPA* has been received within English-language scholarship. *TPA* was published in English translation in 1993 and has been commented on, interpreted, and appropriated in the West by critics who demonstrate some specific and problematic tendencies.

Three English-language commentaries on *TPA* are the focus of my attention here: 1) Chapter 3 («The Architectonics of Answerability») in *Mikhail Bakhtin* (1984) by Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist; 2) Part One (20 pages) of the *Introduction to Rethinking Bakhtin*, a collection of essays edited and introduced by Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, published in 1989; 3) Chapter I of *The Dialogics of the Oppressed* by Peter Hitchcock, published in 1993. I choose these three examples of the reception of *TPA* because they are, in my view, among the most influential or the most sustained commentaries published in English and each of the three is significantly different from the others. Despite the very different modes in which these commentaries work, they are all, nevertheless, appropriations, and, for this reason, are worthy of being compared.

The Clark and Holquist commentary appeared in the dark and

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murky textological days even before the first Russian edition of *TPA*, but it is clear that Bakhtin's American biographers had direct access to the manuscript of this work because, on page 365, note 1, they refer to it directly albeit vaguely as «an untitled text on moral philosophy.» One assumes, perhaps incorrectly, in light of their vague and brief treatment of *TPA*, that Clark and Holquist were working under severe constraints imposed by the directors of the Bakhtin archive in Moscow during the early 1980s.

Clark and Holquist's Chapter 3, «The Architectonics of Answerability,»⁴ which is their invented title for all of Bakhtin's writings from the 1918–1924 period, is a thirty-page, over-arching gloss on all of this work. It is not always entirely clear to which individual work from this period they are referring in their summary. But their Chapter 3 is much more than a simple gloss or summary because it undertakes to classify the text generically, to put it into biographical and genealogical context, and to emphasize selectively certain topics at the expense of leaving others unmentioned. It is, in other words, an appropriation and an interpretation. Bakhtin's early work, for example, is placed under the sign of a certain unity: «These texts (from 1918 to 1924) do not constitute fragments of different works. Rather they represent different attempts to write the same book...»; «... the appearance of sameness emerges from the reality of difference...» (p.63). The key terms here are «same» and «sameness.» Clark and Holquist classify the early works as «patently philosophical,» as a «treatise on ethics in the world of everyday experience, a kind of pragmatic axiology» (p.63). There follows the claim that: «The terms «architectonics» and «answerability» best encompass the principal subject of the work»(p.64). The Clark and Holquist gloss on Bakhtin's early works, curiously enough, contains no footnoted quotations from *TPA*. It is impossible, therefore, to know when they are referring specifically to it. They do quote extensively, however, with footnotes, from the «Author and Hero» essay.

Bakhtin's thinking, during his early years, according to Clark and Holquist, has affinities with that of Kant, Heidegger, Ernst Bloch, L.P.Karsavin, and Sartre, but it is also placed in opposition to that of Hermann Cohen (and Neo-Kantianism generally). The connections or

affinities between the kenotic tradition and Bakhtin's Christology are also underlined (pp.84–85). Statements like the following one convey images of unity and cohesion: «The act of authorship dealt with in the Architectonics is the master trope of all Bakhtin's work...» (p.64). It is this particular tendency that I want to question in my article, as well as the tendency that allows certain topics to be foregrounded while others are lost, neglected, or underestimated. I do agree with Clark and Holquist as regards their overall biographical strategy which is stated in their Introduction. «Different Bakhtins» (p.1), they state, emerge from each of Bakhtin's texts throughout his career. Bakhtin's texts can be seen to represent, however, I would want to add, an even more radical heterogeneity and fragmentedness, in the sense that there may well be a variety of «different Bakhtin's» within his individual texts. *TPA*, as I show below, is a case in point.

Morson and Emerson's presentation of *TPA*, in *Rethinking Bakhtin*⁵, is not merely a gloss, nor is it a description, as they suggest: «To this end, we will first describe in some detail the contents of «Toward a Philosophy of the Act» ... We will then indicate why we are now inclined to think that Bakhtin did not write the three books whose authorship is in dispute» (p.5). This latter comment suggests that, for Morson and Emerson, *TPA* is a pre-text — in both senses of the term. First, it allows them to find new evidence and support for their position on the disputed texts and Bakhtin's relation to Marxism and Communism. In their introductory remarks to their «description» or outline of the «contents» (p.4) of *TPA*, they write: «Toward a Philosophy of the Act, along with the essays written in his last years, also illustrates one feature of his thought that appears constant — his lifelong dislike of Marxism» (p.2). Morson and Emerson's global claim, at the outset, that *TPA* is anti-marxist, is not substantiated in any detail, however, as one would legitimately expect it to be (given the import of such a claim). There are two passing references to this issue further on in their essay. On page 19, it is suggested that Bakhtin's comments on «pretenders» are a «possible allusion to Russian Communism...»: «In a possible allusion to Russian Communism, Bakhtin criticizes the "pride" of those who become pure representatives of some large whole".» On page 23, Bakhtin's

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comments on «economic materialism» in *TPA* are compared to Sartre's «similar critique of traditional Marxism in his *Search for a Method*» (note 23, p.204). What Morson and Emerson's comments on Bakhtin and Marxism add up to is not a sustained argument or a demonstration. We have, rather, a series of speculative comments that cast Bakhtin into the role of an opponent of Marxism and Communism.

Morson and Emerson's presentation is also a pretext for situating *TPA* as a pre-text in the sense that, as they point out, *TPA* «serves to highlight themes of Bakhtin's better known work in a new way» (p.6). Certain ideas in *TPA*, in other words, foreshadow what comes later: for example, Bakhtin «verges here (in his notion of the unrepeatability of the act) on what was soon to become a global concept of his thought, "unfinalizability"» (p.16). Like Clark and Holquist, Morson and Emerson see *TPA* as an originary moment.

Morson and Emerson choose to emphasize certain aspects of *TPA*, at the expense of others, which, one might assume, are taken to be less important for them. In agreeing with Clark and Holquist as regards the general category or genre to which the early works belong, Morson and Emerson state that they are largely philosophical writings about ethics and aesthetics. They further state that *TPA* «is concerned with the primary ethical obligations of consciousness» (note 5, p.262) and they then add that: «A number of interesting features of this work are immediately apparent» (p.6). This is a surprising comment given that so many other scholars experience *TPA* as a particularly opaque text. There are six «interesting features» in *TPA*: 1) «...language plays at best a secondary role»; 2) «...the center of Bakhtin's concerns is clearly ethics»; 3) Kant is «a target» in Bakhtin's «polemic with the dominant trend ... of Western ethical thought...»; 4) «...the work barely touches on theology»; 5) there is «no special hostility to lyric poetry»; 6) «...the text is highly existential in tone.» Morson and Emerson conclude that «Bakhtin aims to offer a theory not only of ethics and aesthetics, but also of all human life ... treated from an ethical standpoint» (pp.6-7). Bakhtin's «concern is with the individual agent's perspective» (note 10, p.263).

My argument here is not to suggest that Morson and Emerson

are wrong as regards the features of *TPA* that they choose to highlight. It's what they leave out that matters to me, and what gets left out is the focus of the second part of my article.

Peter Hitchcock's brief, one-page treatment of *TPA* in *Dialogics of the Oppressed*⁶ is very different from that found in the two accounts just discussed, in that he avoids any «strategy of containment» by insisting that this little text has many «provocative possibilities» (p.4):

In an early essay fragment, «Toward a Philosophy of the Act» (never completed or prepared for publication by the author), Bakhtin implies a dualism that in fact his subsequent writing will refute: the opposition of act (*postupok*) to word. Nevertheless, there appears to be a philosophical strategy at stake in his investigation — namely, to critique the excesses of theoretical abstraction. This strategy, of course, from the later more fluid positions of the dialogic allows Bakhtin to attack many theoretical camps (including, most notably, Saussure's and Freud's). In this early exploration of the act Bakhtin seems resolute in his defense of the uniqueness of an action or an event by stressing the irreducibility of «eventness» to abstract law. If we can overlook the obvious abstraction with which Bakhtin makes his point, a provocative notion of agency emerges.» (pp.15–16)

This quotation makes several points that bear underlining: that *TPA* may be seen in opposition to Bakhtin's later work; that the notion of dialogism is not yet present in Bakhtin's thinking; that one of the key ideas in *TPA*, is the opposition between the irreducibility of «eventness» and abstract law; that *TPA* has lessons to teach us about agency. Following his theoretical introductory chapter, Hitchcock goes on to study four women writers in function of a revised or newly problematized idea of the dialogic and the oppressed. Bakhtin helps, in this project, to identify «the salient characteristics of a counterhegemonic cultural sphere» (p.xiv), to understand «in what sense ... the cultures of the oppressed dialogize» (p.xv), and how dialogism is a form of resistance» (p.xvi). Dialogism is at the centre of Hitchcock's argument: «Rather than assume subaltern subjectivity forever the concern of what has been derisively called «victim studies,» a dialogic approach emphasizes the cultural agency of the

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oppressed and also shows what political implications this might have for literary analysis in general and cultural studies in particular» (p.1).

My brief account of three examples in the reception of *TPA* reveals two opposing tendencies. On the one hand, the two earlier commentaries, written essentially in exegetical mode, work to contain, limit, and define how this text is to be read. My third, briefer example, on the other hand, written in an exploratory mode, recognizes what Hitchcock calls elsewhere «a trenchant undecidability» («Introduction,» p.534) in Bakhtin's work. This quality is what has made Bakhtin's writing of special interest to those who work on issues relating to marginality.

***Part 2: «Toward a Philosophy of the Act»:
A Performance Text***

TPA is a strange little text that has continued to fascinate me for the past seven years since its appearance in the 1993 English translation. Why should this little text hold such an attraction for me and others? This is one question I try to answer in the second part of this article. Other questions I explore are: Who is writing this little text? Does the writer have a subject position that I can describe? What is my subject position as reader of this text?

Perhaps *TPA*, as Michael Holquist and Katerina Clark have suggested in their biography of Bakhtin, is a fragmented part of an attempt to write a larger book (p.63) whose coherent overarching shape we should attempt to imagine. Perhaps *TPA* is, above all and after all, a privileged, originary text within the Bakhtin canon that allows us to see, in a particularly revealing way, certain themes that appear in the later work. Perhaps Peter Hitchcock is more on the right track when he suggests that *TPA* contains «provocative possibilities» or lessons for us within the framework of a materialist critique of the subject, agency, and political action or resistance. Perhaps more recent commentaries by Anthony Wall («A Broken Thinker») and Neil Gohill («Thinking in Broken Images»), which see *TPA*, and other texts such as the chronotope essays as «broken texts»⁷, is more relevant for our turn-of-the century philosophical preoccupations. Many of

Bakhtin's texts, in this view, are literally broken, existing only as shattered pieces, and whose reconstruction or reconstitution into a whole we can never hope to achieve. The search for a magic glue, an over-arching master plan, and a strategy to put the pieces back together is futile. We must learn to live with the anxiety of this uncertain state and learn to find ways of making it productive.

The subject who writes *TPA* is involved in an urgent and desperate rescue operation, the ambitious goal of which is nothing less than to change the course of philosophy and the fundamental philosophical paradigms of his day. Bakhtin's assessment of the state of contemporary philosophy is that it is «deplorable» (p.23): «Contemporary philosophy fails to provide a principle for such an inclusion, and this is what constitutes its state of crisis» (p.21). The crucial «inclusion» to which Bakhtin refers here is the faulty framework within which contemporary philosophy places the subject. Contemporary philosophy is profoundly confused and confusing because it mixes up, in accounting for subjectivity or subjecthood, perspectives from fields such as the «psychology of consciousness» (p.21), other sciences, and «the prejudice of rationalism» (p.29). Modern philosophy is seen as existing in a state of crisis but more importantly, since Bakhtin is not at all interested in rewriting the history of philosophy, his focus is, in fact, the modern subject in its state of crisis:

The contemporary crisis is, fundamentally, a crisis of contemporary action (postupok). An abyss has formed between the motive of the actually performed act or deed and its product. But in consequence of this, the product of the deed, severed from its ontological roots has withered as well. (p.54).

I see *TPA*, then, as a double acting out and as a way of performing in a crisis. The good, beauty, and truth are the touchstones of this subject's world, but evil, ugliness, and falsehood never disappear completely from his horizon (p.63). In what is perhaps one of the most revealing moments in *TPA*, the writing subject gives voice to a profound and troubling sense of fear (Ken Hirschkop, in his *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy*⁸, entitles one of his chapters «Fear and Democracy»):

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Thus instruments (of technology) are perfected according to their own inner law, and, as a result, they develop from what was initially a means of rational defence into a terrifying, deadly, and destructive force. All that which is technological, when divorced from the once-occurrent unity of life and surrendered to the will of the law immanent to its development, is frightening; it may from time to time irrupt into this once-occurrent writing as an irresponsibly destructive and terrifying force. (p.7)

The subject who writes *TPA* performs as philosopher in analytical, prescriptive, and synthetic modes, but his particular voice is full of the tones and accents of restlessness:

The world of content-sense is infinite and self-sufficient; its being valid in itself makes me myself useless, and my acts or deeds are fortuitous from its standpoint. ...This world has no centre, it provides no principle for choice; everything that is could also not be, could be different, if it can be thought simply as something determinate in respect to its content-sense. From this standpoint of sense or meaning, only the endlessness of valuation and absolute restlessness are possible. (p.43);

He is impatient:

Any kind of practical orientation of my life within the theoretical world is impossible: it is impossible to live in it, impossible to perform answerable deeds. In that world I am unnecessary; I am essentially and fundamentally non-existent in it. (p. 9)

He is without hope:

All attempts to surmount — from within theoretical cognition — the dualism of cognition and life, the dualism of thought and once-occurrent concrete actuality, are utterly hopeless. ... To look for the actual cognitional act as a performed deed in the content-sense is the same as trying to pull oneself up by one's own hair. (p.7);

He lives in world of lovelessness and indifference:

Lovelessness, indifference, will never be able to generate sufficient power to slow down and linger intently over an object, to hold and sculpt every detail and particular in it, however minute. Only love is capable of being aesthetically productive; only in correlation with the loved is fullness of the

manifold possible.» (p.64).

The voice of this writing subject also expresses itself repeatedly and obsessively through the dramatic metaphors of emptiness (p.59) and death:

One can live in aesthetic being, and there are those who do so, but they are other human beings and not I myself. This is the lovingly contemplated past life of other human beings, and everything situated outside of me is correlated with them. But I shall not find myself in that life; I shall find only a double of myself, only someone pretending to be me. All I can do in it is play a role, i.e, assume a mask, the flesh of another — of someone deceased. (p.18)

The restless, frightened, and agitated subject who writes *TPA* could be seen, following the psychoanalytic theories of Julia Kristeva, as paranoid and as having suffered trauma. Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory attributes an essential role to paranoia as regards the constitution of subjectivity: «Sans cette dimension paranoïac, il n'y a pas de sujet. Il n'y a pas non plus d'écriture» («Without this paranoid dimension, there can be no subject. Without it, writing is also impossible»)⁹. Kristeva has theorized the modern subject in a particular way and the writing subject in *TPA* might be seen as an illustration of her view of subjectivity:

D'abord, le «moi» n'est pas le sujet; le «moi» est une unité imaginaire, tandis que le sujet est une dynamique... C'est une composante imaginaire d'une dynamique...(le sujet) est constamment en crise, et l'idée que j'ai développé du «sujet en procès» montre justement qu'il ne s'agit en rien de puissance, mais d'une constante mise en cause de l'unité pour qu'il y ait production de sens et, à partir de là, de culture¹⁰.

(First of all, the «I» is not the subject; the «I» is an imaginary unity, whereas the subject is a dynamic... . It's an imaginary component of a dynamic... . (the subject) is constantly in a state of crisis, and the idea that I have developed of the «subject as process» shows precisely that this is not a question of power, but of a continual questioning of unity in order for there to be the production of meaning and, as well, culture.)

Process and crisis are the key terms in Kristeva's theory. As I have shown above, *crisis* is a key term in *TPA* and process or becoming are key terms throughout this text, as in the following passage:

An act of our activity, of our actual experiencing, is like a two-faced Janus. It looks at the objective unity of a domain of culture and at the never-repeatable uniqueness of actually lived and experienced life. But there is no unitary and unique plane where both faces would mutually determine each other in relation to a single unique unity. It is only in the once-occurrent event of Being, in the process of actualization that can constitute this unique unity... (p.2)

«Activity,» «experiencing,» «once-occurrent event of being,» and «process» are the symptomatic signifiers that the writing subject deploys, in obsessively repetitive sequences, to perform his subjectivity, as he writes, and to re-invent himself. In this sense, and following another key element in Kristeva's theory, *TPA* is a story of a subject in revolt: «La révolte est ce qui garantit notre indépendance et nos capacités créatives»¹¹ («Revolt is what guarantees our independence and our creative capacities»). Michel Foucault, in his own and different way, describes this modern subject, of which *TPA* can be seen as a performance, in the following way:

L'attitude volontaire de modernité est liée à un ascétisme indispensable. Être moderne, ce n'est pas s'accepter soi-même tel qu'on est dans le flux de moments qui passent, c'est se prendre soi-même comme objet d'une élaboration complexe et dure. ... L'homme moderne, pour Baudelaire, n'est pas celui qui part à la découverte de lui-même, de secrets et de sa vérité cachée; il est celui qui cherche à s'inventer lui-même. Cette modernité ne libère pas l'homme en son être propre; elle l'astreint à la tâche de s'élaborer lui-même¹².

(The willful attitude in modernity is indispensably linked to an asceticism. To be modern is not to accept oneself as one is in the flux of passing moments; it is to take oneself as the object of a complex and difficult elaboration... Modern man, for Baudelaire, is not the man who goes off to discover himself, his secrets and his hidden truth; he is the man who tries to

invent himself. This modernity does not free man within his own being; it forces him to undertake the task of working out who he is.)

The writing subject in *TPA* dreams of a «single unique unity» (p.2), a place where object and subject are one but rejects such transcendental theorizing, preferring the historical, concrete, once-occurrent eventness of his Being, a Being always in a process of reinvention.

Participative thinking and the participative subject receive special attention in *TPA*. When Bakhtin writes about participation, he gives special meaning to the term in a diversity of contexts. Participation is a dynamic process, the opposite of passivity: «It is only from my own unique place in Being that I can be and must be active. My confirmed and acknowledged participation in Being is not just passive (the joy of being), but is first and foremost active...» (p.60). Participation is what makes love possible: «In aesthetic seeing you love a human being not because he is good, but, rather, a human being is good because you love him» (p.62). Participation, like the dialogic, for Bakhtin, is a quality of all great novels, and is also a privileged quality or dimension in all great philosophies: «Participative thinking predominates in all great systems of philosophy, either consciously and distinctly (especially in the Middle Ages) or in our unconscious and masked form (in the systems of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries)» (p.9). But participation takes on a very special meaning as Bakhtin writes prescriptively about this topic. The participative subject needs the other, has no alibi in Being, cannot pull itself up by its own hair. The participative subject, if I look at the varieties of meaning given to the term by Vadim Liapunov, the translator of *TPA*, is engaged, committed, involved, concerned, interested — the opposite of indifferent or detached (p.86). The subject who writes *TPA* is clearly all of these things. The subject writing *TPA* is engaged in the philosophical debates surrounding Neo-Kantianism, Husserl, the work of Nietzsche and Bergson. This subject is committed to action, the action of writing philosophy and writing philosophically; he is also

concerned about other subjects and about the possibility of love.

But the participative subject, while needing the other, is also a restless subject whose only certainty is «the endlessness of valuation». This subject lives in a world with no centre, where there is no principle according to which choices are possible: it is a world in which everything that is could also not be (p.43). It is a risky world haunted by death: «In that world (of theoreticism) one would find ourselves to be determined, bygone, and finished, that is, essentially not living» (p.9). The subject who writes *TPA* dreams of the possibility of a loving other, but also projects a world that is hostile, threatening, and indifferent.

According to Michael Holquist and Katerina Clark, *TPA* is a text which might not have been if Bakhtin's other — his wife — had not written or copied parts of it for him during his illness (p.52). The manuscript, in this sense, is a particularly interesting example of a double-voiced performance in which the respective contributions of each of the two voices may remain forever mysteriously entwined.

Conclusion

My brief commentary on *TPA* demonstrates my bias, in the sense that I choose to emphasize certain of its dimensions — crisis, process, participation, while leaving others aside (such as language, ethics, religion). I choose my biases in order to avoid the pitfalls that turn this text into something that it is not. It is a broken text articulated and performed by a doubting subject:

Or perhaps we have to recognize doubt as constituting a quite distinctive sort of value? Yes, we do recognize doubt as a distinctive value. It is precisely doubt that forms the basis of our life as effective deed-performing, and it does so without coming into contradiction with theoretical cognition. This value of doubt does not contradict in any way the unitary and unique truth (*pravda*): it is precisely this unitary and unique truth of the world that demands doubt. (p.45).

The subject of *TPA* performs his text poised on a sort of oxymoron — valuable doubt — in fact on a whole series of oxymorons and contradictions and conflicts: impossible, conflicted love, the participative self, «the never-repeatable uniqueness of actually lived and experienced life» (p.2), pulling «oneself up by one's own hair» (p.7), losing oneself in the other (p.16), or pretending to be the other (p.18). If *TPA* is a rescue operation, it is also the performance of a high-wire balancing act, full of tension, anxiety, and excitement. We watch this writing subject whose writing, perhaps, is as much a function of his doubts, his paranoia, and marginality. But the doubts, the paranoia, and the contradictions are not a sign of failure. They are what, ultimately, enable this piece of performance writing to fascinate and to invent new meanings. Above all, *TPA* is a lesson and a reminder that paranoia is both the permanent condition of the writing subject and what creates the permanent possibility of resignifying processes.

This article contains in revised form some of the ideas originally presented at the international Bakhtin conferences held at the State University of Vitebsk, Belarus in 1996 and 1998, and in Berlin in 1999. I thank my listeners for their comments and discussion.

¹ Bakhtin, M.M. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Trans. and Notes Vadim Liapunov. Eds. V. Liapunov and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993, p.45.

² Lock, Charles. «*The Bakhtin Scandal-L'Affaire Bakhtine*,» // *Literary Research-Recherche littéraire* 31 (1999), pp.13-20.

³ Makhlin, Vitalii. «*Dialog kak sposob novogo myshleniia: (Kulturologicheskaia kontsepsiia M.M.Bakhtina i sovremennost)*,» // *Chelovek v zerkale kultury i obrazovaniia*. Moscow, 1988, pp.82-91.

⁴ Clark, Katerina and Michael Holquist. *Mikhail Bakhtin*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984.

⁵ Morson, Gary Saul and Caryl Emerson, eds. *Rethinking*

Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges. Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1989.

⁶ Hitchcock, Peter. *The Dialogics of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

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