Bakhtin's Semiotics as Philosophy of Language

Alterity of Bakhtin's word

In the preface to the French edition of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (signed by Voloshinov but attributed to Bakhtin), Roman Jakobson (1977: 8) says of Bakhtin what Bakhtin said of Dostoevsky: "rien ne lui semble accompli; tous problèmes restent ouverts, sans fournir la moindre allusion a une solution definitive".

From this viewpoint, Bakhtin's style recalls that of another great master of signs, Charles S. Peirce, who significantly declared that only once as far as he could remember had he experienced the pleasure of being praised, even if it was meant as a reproof in the intention of the author: this happened when a critic accused him of not being absolutely sure of his own conclusions.

Bakhtin's tendency to continually recommence his research is what Todorov calls "repetition": "un ressassement eternellement recommencé" (1981: 25). Bakhtin's work, says Todorov, does not know development in the true sense of the word: the centre of interest and formulation changes, but despite certain changes and shifts (even if they are hardly perceptible), Bakhtin's discourse continually returns on itself. It is as though each part contains the whole, the open totality of which it is a part. For this reason,

entre son premier et son dernier ecrit, entre 1922 et 1974, sa pensée reste fondamentalement la même; on trouve aussi des phrases presque identiques, écrites à cinquante ans de distance. (*ibid*)

This lack of development is not dogmatic reiteration of the same thesis. On the contrary, it should be understood as intended by Bakhtin when on discussing Dostoevsky's novels he maintains that the spirit of the author does not evolve, it does not "become". The dialectic development of a single spirit according to the paradigm of thesis, antithesis and synthesis is absent, there is no tension toward a single and definitive conclusion for which all the various parts of the work must be functional. The very object of Bakhtin's research makes the application of dialectic of the Hegelian type inappropriate: this object remains constant throughout his analyzes even though the materials and problems change: the sign in its wholeness and not as a single element, an isolated term endowed with meaning. This conception of sign with its polysemic, dialogic and polylogic character makes Hegelian dialectic figure as a unilateral, rigid, and fossilized conception, in the last analysis as pseudo-dialectic. Bakhtin alludes frequently and polemically to Hegel and the monologic dialectic of his system. As far back as Marx's critique of 1843 of Hegelian philosophy, Hegelian dialectic has been shown to be full of contradictions only fictitiously overcome with the word arrogating an absolute viewpoint. In "From the Notebooks of 1970-71" Bakhtin describes the development of monologic dialectic as it originates from the dialogic character of the word:

In dialogue we take out the voices (the division of the voices), we take out the intonations (personal and emotional), concepts and abstract judgements are drawn from the living words and responses, all is mixed inside a single abstract consciousness and this is how we obtain dialectic. (Bakhtin 1970-1971: 363)

Unidirectional logic which looks to a single end is put into crisis by the sign's polysemy, polylogy and ideological pluridirectionality. It is difficult to say where a sign begins and where it ends once it is no longer reduced to the single element or broken up into its various component parts. This is so because it is not a thing, but a process, an interweaving of relations. The overall, unitary sense of the sign is inseparable from the concrete communicative context, social interaction, and relation to specific ideologic values and orientations. The interpretation of a sign cannot be limited to its identification. It requires "active comprehension". The sense of a sign consists in something more with respect to the elements that allow its recognition: it is made of those semantico-ideological

aspects which are in a certain sense unique, special and indissolubly connected to the situational context of semiosis. Sign comprehension is active comprehension because it requires a reply, a standpoint, it arises from a dialogic relation and in turn provokes a dialogic relation: the sign flourishes as a rejoinder in a dialogue (see "From the Notebooks 1970-71"). These aspects of the sign are analyzed in the perspective of general semiotics in Voloshinov 1929, but are still more amply studied in two essays, one of 1926 and the other of 1929, also signed by Voloshinov though substantially Bakhtin's.

Referred to the verbal, the sign is a complete utterance, it is not isolated from the social context, ideology or the discourse genre to which it belongs ("the unending variety of discourse genres", says Bakhtin in the "Notebooks": among the titles of his unfinished books, *Discourse Genres*). The utterance is a constitutive part of a socially and historically specified relation, a living text and not an inanimate thing; not an isolated monologic expression to be interpreted on the basis of the relation between linguistic units and language understood as an abstract unit.Writes Bachtin (1974) in one of his most recent papers included in his 1979 collection of writings:

The text lives only through contact with another text (context). We underline that this contact is a dialogic contact between texts (utterances) and not a mechanic contact of opposition between abstract elements [...] behind this contact there is contact between people and not between things. (Bakhtin 1979: 378)

Conceived in this way, the text is the main hero of his two important monographs on Dostoevsky and Rabelais and of his theoretical and methodological studies in general. For this reason we could say that not only is Bachtin's theory a theory of the text, but more specifically the literary text: a theory of dialogue as dialogue flourishes in literary writing.

The text is the specific object of all human sciences concerned with man as a producer of texts (written or oral, verbal or nonverbal). It is in relation to this particular object–the text–that Bachtin's method achieves its specificity. Active comprehension, that is, responsive and dialogic comprehension is the main component in this method. The specific logic of the text is a *dia-logic*, a dialectic between texts. The text's sense is decided in the logic of question and answer, not the abstract, absolute and impersonal categories of *logos*, but concrete and dialogic. Dialogue presupposes a reciprocal asymmetrical distance between two interlocutors: it presupposes that question and answer come from time and space differently experienced, different chronotopes for he who speaks and he who answers.

The word's alterity is an essential element in Bakhtin, and this is true not only of the object of his analysis but also of his own word: Bakhtin's word has its own *alterity* relatively to the historical period he belongs to. A word that remains other in the 1920s relatively to the two poles of current literary debate–formalism and sociologism–; opposition between individualistic subjectivism (Humboldt, Vossler, Croce, Potebnja) and abstract objectivism (De Saussure 1916) in studies on language; and opposition between Marrism and Antimarrism; furthermore, with reference to the study of ideology relatively to individualism and mechanistic materialism. Bakhtin's word is also other relatively to contemporary schools of semiotics, including the trend he explicitly refers to, the school of Tartu (Lotman, Ivanov, etc.). The result is that Bakhtin's theory of the social sign, the ideological sign and in particular the verbal sign represents a term of confrontation rather than of mere confirmation and anticipation regarding official semiotics and its Saussurean, Peircean, Morrisian and Husserlian, etc., matrixes.

On the relation between philosophy of language and semiotics

While it is possible to distinguish between philosophy of language and specific areas of semiotic research (including linguistics) viewed as grammars of particular sign systems, the distinction

between general semiotics and philosophy of language is more problematic given that general semiotics is necessarily philosophical. Nor can the problem be solved by simply stating that general semiotics is concerned with all types of signs, while philosophy of language only turns its attention to verbal language (natural and specialized) and to the disciplines that study them. Apart from a few exceptions, owing to the need of a contingent and temporary restriction of the field of research more than to the attempt of defining it, philosophy of language has concentrated on verbal and nonverbal signs in the perspective of semantics, logico-syntactics or pragmatics.

The problem of the relationship between philosophy of language and semiotics is related to the more general problem of the relation between philosophy and science. As the general science of signs and, therefore, as one among the many sciences of language, semiotics may be distinguished from the philosophy of language, even if general semiotics, as opposed to the various specific semiotics, cannot prescind from a philosophical study of its own categories.

Philosophy of language explores the external boundaries, protrusions, and excesses with respect to the "semiotic field", or science–or "theory" (Morris) or "doctrine" (Sebeok)–of signs. To recall an expression introduced by Bachtin who described his own approach to language analysis as "metalinguistic" (having overcome the limits of linguistics), philosophy of language could be characterized as "metasemiotic". And indeed in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Bachtin(-Voloshinov) used the expression "philosophy of language" for his own research as it unfolded in adjacent fields and along the boundaries of disciplines relating to language and signs, concentrating on their points of contact and intersections. And even in more recent times (during the first half of the 1970s), when the term semiotics was generally accepted as indicating the general science of signs, Bachtin never used this term for his own research, thereby distinguishing it, for example, from Ju.M. Lotman's. The dialogic character of the relationship between these two levels of investigation, and, consequently, the scientific commitment of philosophy of language and the philosophical foundation of semiotics, clearly emerges from the connotation of philosophy of language as metasemiotics.

As Peirce demonstrates, a *sign* or *representamen* is such because it stands to somebody for something, its object, in some respect, insofar as it creates in the mind of that person "an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign", i.e. an interpretant (*CP* 2.228). The sign's meaning then is an (open) class which includes that sign and all its possible interpretants. The mediating function between the meaning and object of the sign is in turn obtained through the mediation of other signs. A sign, says Peirce, exists as "thirdness", that is, it presupposes a triadic relationship between itself, its object and the interpreting thought, it too a sign. A sign always plays the role of third party, for it mediates between the interpretant sign and its object.

We mentioned the sign's enrichment as a consequence of its outings to the exterior in search of itself, and of the disguises usesd to affirm its identity: but a semiotical debasement and devaluation may also be verified. And such enrichment or debasement is always connected to relations with other signs. In any case they are never equal exchange relations typical of the signal (on this aspect Bakhtin-Voloshinov's analyses are elucidating) where, by contrast to the sign, there is a one to one correspondence between the signifier and the signified. More exactly, the meaning of a signal is the class which contains that signal and its interpretants in relations of mere substitution (the red of a traffic light has a single meaning, is a signal, i.e., its meaning is the class of meanings that limit themselves to substituting the color red: "Stop" in the graphic or phonic form, a policeman with outstretched arms, etc.).

Signs too contain the factor of signality and its correlate, self-identity, but they are not accounted for as signs in terms of such factors alone. To comprehend a sign is not to merely recognize the

stable elements constantly repeating themselves. Signs are characterized by their semantic and ideological flexibility which makes them continually available to new and different contexts. Signality and self-identity are overcome by the characteristic features of signs: changeability, ambivalence and multi-voicedness:

In the speaker's native language, i.e., for the linguistic consciousness of a member of a particular language community, signal recognition is certainly dialectically effaced. In the process of mastering a foreign language, signality and recognition still make themselves felt, so to speak, and still remain to be surmounted, the language not yet fully having become language. *The ideal of mastering a language is absorption of signality by pure semioticity and of recognition by pure understanding*. (Voloshinov 1929; Eng. trans. 69)

It is in this sense that the sign is a dialectic unit of self-identity and otherness. The actual sense of a sign consists in something more which is added to those elements that permit its identification. It is made of those semantico-ideological aspects that in a certain sense are unique, are peculiar to it and indissolubly connected to the situational context of the semiosis in course. Bakhtin (Voloshinov 1929) insists on the dialectic relation between these two aspects of the sign indicated with the terms "meaning" (all that which is reproducible and stable in the sign and is subject to a process of identification) and "theme" (the new aspects of the sign requiring active comprehension, a response, a viewpoint and are connected to the specific situation in which semiosis occurs). With reference to the verbal sign in particular and considering the dialectic relation between "theme" and "meaning", observes Bakhtin:

[...] it is even impossible to convey the meaning of a particular word (say, in the course of teaching another person a foreign language) without having made it an element of theme, i.e., without having constructed an 'example' utterance. On the other hand, a theme must base itself on some kind of fixity of meaning; otherwise it loses its connection with what came before and what comes after - i.e., it altogether loses its significance. (*ibid.:* 100)

The distinction between "meaning" and "theme" finds correspondence in Peirce's subdivision of the interpretant into immediate and dynamical interpretant. The immediate interpretant is fixed by use and tradition, it is given by the correct deciphering of the sign, by its recognition, "and is ordinarily called the meaning of the sign" (*CP* 4. 536). The dynamical interpretant "is the *actual effect* which the Sign, as a Sign, *really determines*" (*ibid*., italics my own). Considering the relation to both the dynamical interpretant and dynamical object, that is, to "the Reality which by some means contrives to determine the Sign in its Representation" *(ibid.)*, the sign is never something repetitive in Peirce's conception either. Each time it appears it takes its place in a new semiosical act. The sign is consequently continually renewed, so that its interpretant is never established once and for all: this is the Peircean principle of unlimited semiosis, of the unending succession of interpretants (connected to Peirce's conception of the hypothetical and approximative nature of knowledge subtending his "cognitive semiotics").

In the light of the Bakhtinian and Peircean conception of sign, we may now construct a far more complex and powerful semiotic model which is consequently far more capable of explaining the complexity of signs, or better of semiosis, than any other model which limits itself to the breakdown of the sign into two perfectly correlated parts, that is, the *signifiant* and the *signifié*. The reference is obviously to the semiologies of Saussurean matrix which not only, as we were saying above, conceive the sign in terms of equal exchange between the *signifant* and the *signifié*, but which, as says Bakhtin, are only aware of two poles in linguistic life between which all linguistic and (taking linguistics as the model) all semiological phenomena are expected to be placed: these two poles are the unitary system (*langue*) and the individual realization of that system by the single user (*parole*).

Signs are no longer reduced to a single element, or broken down into their component parts, it is difficult to say where they begin and where they end. Signs are not things, but processes, the

interlacing of relations which are social relations, even in the case of natural signs, for it is only in a social context that signs exist as signs. A comprehensive and unitary view of signs must keep account of concrete communicative contexts, social interaction, and of the relation to specific values, ideological orientations, etc. In short, signs are inseparable from what, together with Bakhtin, we have called "theme" as distinct from "meaning". Theme is unitary and as such cannot be broken down into its component parts. This is possible, if at all, in the case of "meaning", viewed as the "technical apparatus" for the accomplishment of "theme" .

Often in the study of signs the focus is not on the sign as a whole, but on its constitutive parts as in linguistics which provides categories for the definition of the elements and internal units of an utterance. Even the category of "sentence" refers to an element-unit and not to a whole. As Bakhtin continually reminds us, from 1929 onward, all categories of linguistics fail to account for single words when they coincide with the whole utterance, given that they are only able to define words as sign elements, as potential discourse elements, and not as whole signs. This criticism is not only relevant to taxonomical linguistics, but is extensible to Chomskyan linguistics: the latter works on sentences considered independently of their socio-ideological orientation as well of the heterogeneity of the speaker's linguistic community.

There is a point, however, where Bakhtin's position is different from Peirce's: Pierce's semiotics is closely connected to the theory of knowledge, it is a "cognitive semiotics", while Bakhtin's semiotics–or better, his "philosophy of language" (he prefers the latter expression for his reflexions on the problem of sign, text and intertextuality using it both in his 1929 book as well as in his writings of 1959-1960 on the problem of the text)–is closely connected to literary criticism and could be described as literary semiotics. This description is appropriate not because Bakhtin's semiotics is applied to literature, but because *it uses literature as its viewpoint*. In fact, according to Bakhtin, the kaleidoscopic nature of literary lanaguage enables us to perceive in language that which escapes the linguistics of communication which concentrates on the sphere of the Same. Through the language of literature we are finally able to perceive the alien word–not only the word of the other person but also the word of others as it resounds within the word of the "same" subject.

The Centrality of Dialogue in Bachtin's philosophy of language

The original 1929 version of Bakhtin's book on Dostoevsky (which only earned international fame with the 1963 edition after years of isolation from official culture) has now (1997) been made available in Italian translation in a volume entitled *Problemi dell'opera di Dostoevskij*, being the first translation of Bakhtin's 1929 monograph ever. The appendix includes two brief unpublished writings by Bakhtin relative to the reelaboration of *Dostoevsky* , of particular interest to studies on the transition to the 1963 edition.

This is Bakhtin's first important study where literature emerges as a privileged observatory in his philosophical design, a sort of epicentre from which irradiated all the other directions in which his research was to develop. Bakhtin sees in Dostoevsky's artistic creation the literary embodiment of his philosophico-moral ideal: responsibility as a *participative-responsive attitude* to the truth of others and also as dialogue with self. To return to this edition which is centred on the notion of "dialogue", means to reconstruct Bakhtin's theoretical development even better, which also means, in the first place, to re-examine the notion of dialogue, which has often been misunderstood even by Bakhtin's most important interpreters (see Ponzio's presentation to the volume).

The aim of questa presentation (entitled "Dialogue and Polyphony in Dostoevsky: How Bakhtin Has Been Misunderstood") is to show that in Bakhtin's view dialogue consists of the fact that one's own word alludes always, despite itself, whether it knows it or not, to the word of the other.

Dialogue is not an initiative taken by self. As clearly emerges from the novels of Dostoevsky the human person does not enter dialogue out of respect for the other, but also and above all out of spite for the other.

The word is dialogic because of its *passive involvement* with the word of the other. Dialogue is not a synthesis of multiple viewpoints to which, on the contrary, it is refractory. The self is enmeshed dialogically in otherness as the "grotesque body" is enmeshed in the body of the other. Dialogue and body are closely interconnected. There cannot be dialogicality among disembodied minds. Unlike platonic dialogue and similarly to Dostoevsky for Bakhtin dialogue is not cognitive or functional to truth but ethical insofar as it is grounded in responsibility without alibis for the other.

Furthermore, Bakhtinian dialogue excludes all forms of equality, reciprocity between self and you; the dialogic relationship is assymetrical, unreversible. If we agree on this, then the main interpreters of Bakhtin–Todorov, Holquist, Wellek, etc.–have all fundamentally misunderstood the Bakhtinian concept of dialogue. This also emerges from the fact that they compare his work to dialogue in Plato, Buber, Mukarovsky. Above all, they understand dialogue in the abused sense of encounter, agreement, convergence, compromise, synthesis.

It is symptomatic that Todorov should have replaced the Bakhtinian term "dialogue" with "intertextuality"; and "metalinguistics" with "translinguistics". *Intertextuality* reduces dialogue to a relationship between utterances, while translinguistics reduces the critical instance of metalinguistics to a sectorial specialization which, contrary to linguistics, focuses on discourse rather than on language (*lingua, langue*). This minimizes–indeed annuls–the revolutionary reach of Bakhtin's thought: Bakhtin's "Copernican revolution" on a philosophical level and Dostoevsky's on an artistic level involve the human person in its wholeness, his/her life, thought, behavior.

By contrast with Kant's "critique of pure reason" and Sartre's "critique of dialectical reason", Bakhtin inaugurates a "critique of dialogical reason". Contrary to what Holquist maintains when he compares Bakhtin's conception of dialogue with Mukarovsky's, dialogue is not a convenient means of evidencing one's own viewpoint.

For Bakhtin dialogue is not the result of an initiative we decide to take, but rather it is imposed, something to which one is subjected. Dialogue is not the result of opening toward the other, but of the impossibility of closing as emerges from tragico-comical attempts at closing, at indifference. Similarly to Dostoevsky, dialogue in Bakhtin is the *impossibility of indifference* toward the other, it is one's unindifference–in ostentatious indifference, hostility, hatred–toward self. Even when unindifference degenerates into hatred, the other continues to count more than anything else. This is exactly what, says Bakhtin, the novel, as conceived by Dostoevsky, intends to demonstrate and make accessible on an artistic level: *the dialogic sphere of thinking human consciousness* .

In each act of "answering comprehension" not only do the surrounding environments of he who expresses himself and he who interprets interact but also their axiological horizons. However, the dialectic between "self" and "other" does not intervene solely at the level of interpretation: it is active at the level of formulation, thereby conditioning expression form and content.

The more a sign is complex, endowed with tradition and values linking it to the past and opening it to future translations (intended not only in the literal senss but also as interpretation, as dialogic interaction between signs and interpretant), the more difficult it is to establish the boundaries of a sign taken in its wholeness. An example is offered by literary texts whose signifying potential is enhanced by the extra-textual context. The context does not arbitrarily add new senses from the outside, but senses already present in the text are made to emerge with each new temporal and

axiological interval thanks to the relation of alterity and extralocality between extra-literary context and literary text. A great literary text does not flourish within the confines of its contemporaneity. In addition to being dialogically enriched in subsequent epochs, it is rooted in the past, in the history of its own genre, in the values and ideologies that it transmits and reorganizes artistically, etc .

Texts, whether written or oral, verbal or nonverbal do not have precise boundaries, they are not defined once and for all. A text's specificity and singularity is not determined by the elements of a system that can be repeated, but by the sequence of texts (those preceding it insofar as they belong to the same discourse genre and those which it encounters once it has been produced). The text is connected to other (unrepeatable) texts by dialogic and dialectic relations. All this is described by Bakhtin (1959-1961) in his writings on the text as the problem of the semantic (dialectic) and dialogic interconnection between texts inside the boundaries of a given sphere, and as the historical interconnection of texts. The text is not given, it is a dialogic relation, a relation between texts which in their turn are many dialogic relations again; its boundaries are evanescent, in each new intertextual relation it is always more or less "other" as regards a previously given "identity". The text is identical to itself only in the case of mechanical reproduction where it is not considered from the viewpoint of its specific sense or signification (the serial reproduction of a text, a reprint, etc.). On the other hand, the reproduction of a text as *text*, that is, a new reading, a performance, a mere quotation, a new form of fruition of the text, transforms it into something individual, unique, non repetitive and unrepeatable.

Literary writing surpasses the monologism of language, its limited dialogism in the direction of polylogism. Literary writing is this tendency toward polylogism. Literary activity can only properly begin once the author distances himself from the event he is describing and takes up his place outside his own utterance, thereby achieving a situation of "extralocality" where the relation of otherness is maintained between self and other impeding recomposition of the totality. Complementary to the otherness of writing is the dispossession of self, its decomposition and escape from return to self. The condition of being on the outside is constitutive of the creative activity of literature: irony, indirect communication, extralocality are different aspects of the same phenomenon: the otherness of writing.

Dialogue in literary writing–especially in the polyphonic novel–has different characteristics compared with dialogue outside literature. In literature the dialogic potential of language is experimented and pushed to the extreme limit where exchange, relative and oppositive otherness, subordination of *signifiant* to *signifié*, where the Subject, the Truth, the economic, instrumental and productive character of language are set aside by a word that is not functional and that presupposes relations of extralocality and absolute otherness. The otherness of writing expresses the otherness of that which is not writing, but which, similarly to writing, aims at finding expression in an autonomous, self-signifying and non-functional word. A word that holds good for itself, that is constitutively free, *kath'autò*. Bakhtin (1970-1971) speaks of the "peculiarity of polyphony", of the "unfinalizability of polyphonic dialogue", specifying that it is developed by unfinished personalities and not by psychological subjects: personalities characterized by their lack of incarnation (by movement in the direction of excess).

The concept of carnival in Bakhtin's work and in contemporary thought

We have just descibed the importance of dialogue in Bakhtin's thought, but the concept of *carnival* is no less important. *Dialogue* and *carnival* are two categories that characterzie Bakhtin's work. Even if "carnival" and its complementary concept "carnivalization" were only to be introduced in the 1963 edition of *Dostoevsky*, they were already present in *Rabelais* (which may at least be traced

back to the forties) as well as in Bakhtin's studies on the origin of the novel. On the concept of carnival let us now make the following considerations remembering also current interpretations:

1. The text on Rabelais is an organic part of Bakhtin's work which counts books signed by Voloshinov and Medvedev. The distinction made in *Freudianism* (Voloshinov 1927) between official ideology and non official ideology is developed in*Rabelais* in relation to Humanism and Renaissance literature considered in its vital link with the low genres of Medieval comico-popular culture. The focus in *Marxism and Philosophy of Language* (Voloshinov 1929) on the sign in general and not only the verbal sign is developed in *Rabelais* which analyzes the transformation of– verbal and nonverbal–carnival signs in high European literature. Furthermore, it is significant that on returning to his book on Dostoevsky for the 1963 edition, Bakhtin added a chapter on the genesis of Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel whose roots are traced back to t he serio-comical genres of popular culture. The polyphonic novel is considered as the greatest expression of "carnivalized literature". Relatedly to *Rabelais* Bakhtin works on the prehistory of the novelistic word which he identifies in the comicality and parodization of popular genres. Furthermore, his conception of the sign, particularly verbal signs, as being plurivocal, the expression of centrifugal forces in linguistic life, is confirmed and developed in *Rabelais* where he analyzes the language of the public place and the double character–at one and the same time both praising and offensive–of vulgar expression. There is, for example, a close connection between Bakhtin's reference (cf. Voloshinov 1929) to Dostoevsky's notes on an animated conversation formed of a single vulgar word used with different meanings and his analysis in *Rabelais* of the ductility and ambiguity of sense in the language of the grotesque body and its residues, in the complex phenomenon called carnival. Finally, *Rabelais* is of central importance in the whole of Bakhtin's theorizations. By contrast with oversimplifying and suffocating interpretations of Marxism, Bakhtin develops Marx when he maintains that the human can only be fully realized where the reign of necessity comes to an end. Consequently, an effectively alternative social system to capitalism is one which measures social richness in terms of "free time" for one's otherness and for the otherness of others and not of "work time": the "time of festivity" as discussed by Bakhtin which is closely connected to the "great time" of literature.

2. What carnival is for Bakhtin he tells us himself in *Rabelais*. He uses this term to refer to that complex phenomenon, present in all cultures, formed by the system of attitudes, conceptions and verbal and nonverbal signs oriented in the sense of comicality and joyous living. Carnival does not only concern Western culture, nor the Russian spirit, but any world culture insofar as it is human. Today we are witnessing the spread through world communication of the ideology of production and efficiency which contrasts completely with the carnevalesque vision. This difference also concerns the exasperated individualism of production connected with competetive logic.This is contrasted by the conception of the grotesque body founded on intercorporeity, on the involvement of one's own body with the world and with the body of others. But even though it is dominant, the logic of production, individualism and efficiency has not eliminating man's constitutive inclination for nonfunctionality. The human is the nonfunctional and thanks to such a vocation the carnivalesque endures. That this is the case is testified by literary writing. The literary work like all literary works expresses the man's unwritten right to nonfunctionality. In Orwell's *1984,* ultimate resistance to a productive and efficient social system is represented by literature. In this sense we may say that literature is and always will be carnivalized.

3) The human sciences may be described as such for a reason that goes beyond the fact that they deal with man. And hopefully "human" may still be considered as an evaluative and not descriptive adjective. The "human" sciences are the sciences that recognize man's right to nonfunctionality which should be at the basis of humanity's understanding of the signs, texts and works it produces. Human products without traces of nonfunctionality, useless details, do not exist. In this assertion of the nonfunctional man manifests his being an end in itself and not a means. A work's creativity

expresses the condition of being an end in itself. In today's culture this can only be an individual expression, the expression of the single artist. On the contrary, in past cultural systems the lack of functionality, excess, the assertion of man and his products as an end in themselves found collective expression in carnival. Continuators of the Bakhtinian perspective should not be searched for among the authors of essays and scientific works, but among writers, especially novelists. Nor among the writers of this or this other country, but of world literature. Narrative, for example, is best developed in the direction of polyphony not only in Western authors (Pessoa, Bulgakov, Calvino, Kundera, ecc.), but especially in the Latin-American novel. To paraphrase Bakhin, he did not invite scientists, critics or semioticians to celebrate his resurrection, but writers.

4. For all these reasons, Bakhtin's work on Rabelais is of central importance in contemporary culture. Even Bakhtin was aware of the development achieved by his thought system with his work on Rabelais. In fact, the second 1963 edition of *Dostoevsky* includes modifications and additions regarding the relationship between dialogue, novel and carnivalization. This book by Bakhtin has influenced and continues to influence developments in the human sciences, especially culturological studies, theory of literature and literary criticism. But works in literary writing have also been directly and indirectly inspired by Bakhtin's *Rabelais* It is difficult to say where a writer gets his inspiration from, unless the author-man makes explicit statements which nevertheless need verification by confronting such statements with the work author-writer's work. But to stay within Italian borders, *Il nome della rosa* Umberto Eco, *Mistero Buffo* by Dario Fo and perhaps some of Italo Calvino's work's have at least breathed the atmosphere created by Bakhtin's exceptional work.