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BAKHTIN IN BITS AND PIECES: POETIC SCHOLARSHIP, EXILIC THEORY, AND A CLOSE READING OF THE DISASTER

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What Remains

“When all is said, what remains to be said is the disaster. Ruin of words, demise of writing, faintness faintly murmuring; what remains without remains” (Blanchot 33). In this essay, I read four of Mikhail Bakhtin’s wartime fragments, three of which are included in this cluster in English translations. These preparatory notes, unfinished drafts, and unpublished materials are included in the “archival volume” of Bakhtin’s *Collected Works* (*Sobranie sochinenii*, henceforth *CW*), volume five, whose publication in 1996 inaugurated the colossal project of revising Bakhtin’s legacy wholesale, both previously published and not. Because the editors based their textological work on archival manuscripts, they claimed that “the reader should *in all instances* obtain *new texts* by Bakhtin, including those that are already known [... which will cohere into] an integral picture of Bakhtin’s ideas” (“Kommentarii” [“Commentaries”], *CW* 5: 6; emphasis in the original).

There have been several attempts among Bakhtin scholars to address this archival part of Bakhtin’s legacy (Hirschkop; Erdinast-Vulkan; Shepherd; Lipovetsky and Sandomirskaia; Sandomirskaia). According to the editors of Volume Five, the pieces represented in it are of special interest “for the reconstruction of the total context of Bakhtin’s thinking processes” (*vossozdanie tselostnogo konteksta, tselostnaia kartina bakhtinskoi mysli*) (“Commentaries,” *CW* 5: 5). Note the emphasis on the reconstruction, or re-creation, and totality. Note also the intention to reboot Bakhtin, to start over and supply the reader with “new texts [...] in all instances” (“Commentaries,” *CW* 5: 6). It is the editorial desire to return to origins and thus to purify. The idea of deleting

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all previous interpretations as inadequate and starting over from zero is not simply of special interest but of predominant significance for my reading of Bakhtin's fragments and notes. A re-reading of Bakhtin's legacy in ever returning cycles continues much as it was during Bakhtin's "first hundred years" (Emerson). Each new authoritative revision seeks to become a definitive edition, an exhaustive commentary and a "total context." But instead, every time, the "thinking process" starts its thinking anew and thus invariably fails to achieve anything definitive, total, reconstructible, reproducible—in the form of ideology, philosophy, a scholarly discipline, or a collection of works with an abundance (or overabundance) of learned commentary.

The subject of my reflection here is Bakhtin and writing. Bakhtin is acknowledged as a philosopher of dialogue, and the practice of writing as such is not something he is supposed to have contributed to theoretically. Moreover, for him, his own writing does not appear to have ever constituted a theoretical issue or a problem for reflection. For this reason my attempt to read his fragments in the context of Maurice Blanchot's *The Writing of the Disaster* might strike some as illegitimate. In the unending discussions about the meaning of Bakhtin's ambivalent terms (another challenge to the translators of his texts), meaning is discussed as a factor of dialogue in performance, as a reality of language and thought, but not as a problem inherent in writing, nor in relation to writing as an independent force in the creation of meaning (or in the creation of obstacles, contradictions, and supplements to meaning, as has been argued in various continental philosophies of language). In the meantime, in the unfinished fragments of the archival volume, issues of writing become quite prominent precisely because of their unfinishedness. Taking the act of writing into consideration adds a critical dimension to Bakhtinian scholarship that up to now has focused on matters of intertextuality and context.

Recently, another way of interpreting Bakhtin's ambivalences has evolved: that of reading Bakhtin in a comparative context, against the background of contemporary European thought, a mode of interpreting by means of "reading-with."¹ My purpose in this essay is to resolve Bakhtin's obscurities and ambiguities by interpreting them through categories elaborated by Blanchot, such as 'writing,' 'the disaster,' *désœuvrement*, 'the fragmented,' 'the night,' and 'the Messiah.' In the late 1970s, Blanchot was inventing his category of the disaster in an attempt to find a new formula for describing the relation between the practice of literature and the catastrophic experiences of 20th-century European modernity. He wanted to know how to think the disaster; he was imagining the disaster of Auschwitz and the Gulag *post factum*. In the mid-1940s, Bakhtin was living the life of an administrative exile, a life

1. Examples of "reading-with" include multi-dimensional comparative juxtapositions in Adlam *Face to Face* and, especially relevant for my purposes, Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan's reading of Bakhtin alongside Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, and Levinas (Erdinast-Vulcan).

full of very real, not imagined, disaster on an everyday basis; he was observing the colossal disaster of the Soviet people under conditions of terror and war. His notes emerged out of an immediate empirical experience of the disaster, not out of theoretical interest or poetic imagination. In the “archival volume,” over the almost forty years that separate Bakhtin and Blanchot, as if at the intersection of their quite disparate destinies, histories, and biographies, the reader discovers a Bakhtin who seems to be in dialogue with Blanchot. At times it even seems that the Bakhtin of the 1940s were responding—in part confirming, in part questioning—the insights of Blanchot, whose book appeared only in 1980.

In terms of their writing, Bakhtin’s wartime notes, as fragmented as they are, are not much different from his preliminary notes from other periods. However, as Ken Hirschkop suggests, they also bear evidence of a crisis (Hirschkop 169–85). I agree with Hirschkop’s warning that the fragmentary textuality of the notes should not be seen as a direct result of the trauma of repression and exile; it is too easy to “grab at the easy historical explanation” of Stalinism to “excuse this exceptional decade as an understandable, if theoretically regrettable, loss of philosophical composure” (*ibid.*, 171). My attempt to read Bakhtin with Blanchot is dictated by a similar intention to think through these fragments as a critical theory of modernity, the outcome of “a peculiarly modern crisis.” (*ibid.* 172, emphasis mine—I.S.)

A similar peculiarly modern crisis—a crisis of history and politics that expresses itself and is duplicated in the crisis of individual authorship—is also analyzed by Blanchot in his reflections on the disaster. “Disaster” is, literally, “breaking away from the star,” the loss of totality. Blanchot hereby expands and revises the early Romantic theory of the fragment, transforming an aesthetic theory into a reflection on memory and representation in the context of the 20th century. Writing that is fragmented (that is, devoid of the totality of an *oeuvre*, writing in its condition of *désœuvrement*) is itself a disaster and determined by the structure of the disaster afflicting history and politics, the meaninglessness and horror of Auschwitz and the Gulag (Blanchot 81–84).

The disaster: break with the star, break with every form of totality, never denying, however, the dialectical necessity of a fulfillment; the disaster: prophecy which announces nothing but the refusal of the prophetic as simply an event to come, but which nonetheless opens, nonetheless discovers the patience of vigilant language. The disaster, touch of the powerless infinite: it does not come to pass under a sidereal sky, but here—a here in excess of all presence. (Blanchot 75)

Thinking and writing the disaster creates a specific messianism that Blanchot proclaims directly in the passage above, and that Bakhtin elaborates upon in a wartime fragment about “greater” and “lesser” memories and experiences (to be addressed further in this essay). A specific “weak messianic power” (Walter Benjamin) is especially manifest in the Bakhtin of the archival volume, the author of writerly bits and pieces written from the very heart of the

disaster. Here, the reader encounters an unusual Bakhtin: not so much the grand theorist of dialogue but rather a humble victim, a sufferer of writing; not someone implementing doublevoicedness and heteroglossia as principles of dialogicity while in the practice of writing, but rather someone struggling hard, and repeatedly failing, to get through, to reach and touch, to get hold of and retain, at least for a short time, his own thinking while scribbling down something in pencil in a cheap school notebook. “Whoever writes is exiled from writing, which is the country—his own—where he is not a prophet” (Blanchot 63).²

In the wartime notes, writing is, indeed, performance—not of dialogue, however, but more of the conflict between dialogue and writing; a conflict that represents the true disaster of the writer but at the same time is known to anybody who writes. The frequent result is dissociation disorders and severe writer’s block. And it cannot be excluded that what one reads in the fragments collected in the “archival volume” is merely the ruins of a project: not at all evidence of a “total thinking process” but evidence of the failure that most likely haunts any project involving any sort of writing, as well as the impossibility of any totality in thinking. Evidence of the disaster, in other words. Some results of my co-reading of Bakhtin with Blanchot, during which I also had ample opportunity to experience the disaster, I dare to present below.

An Otherwise of Writing, an Otherwise of History

Among 20th-century messianic thinkers, Mikhail Bakhtin is original in his ambivalent approach to redemption as a problem of language. *Vse moglo by byt' drugim* (“Rhetoric” 214). This is a maxim that he repeats in various contexts, an ambiguous formula in which the choice of tense and mood becomes a key to the “otherwise” of history: *Everything could be different* (and it was); *Everything could be different* (in the future, even though it is not yet different at the moment of speaking); *Everything could have been different* (but never was, and therefore can never be different in the future). That sentence can be translated from the Russian in at least these three ways, indicating the power of the particle *by*, a marker of the subjunctive, to produce mutually opposed and contradictory meanings within one and the same form. The subjunctive mood here becomes a promise of something that evades being captured by a verb in the indicative; a vague promise of the possibility of an otherwise of history, something that can be/could be/could have been different. A promise

2. Compare still another example of the alienating power of writing: “When Kafka allows a friend to understand that he writes because otherwise he would go mad, he knows that writing is madness already [...] Madness against madness, then. But he believes that he masters the one by abandoning himself to it; the other frightens him, and is his fear; it tears through him, wounds and exalts him. It is as if he had to undergo all the force of an uninterrupted continuity, a tension at the edge of the insupportable which he speaks of with fear and not without a feeling of glory.” (Blanchot 43)

of hope and by the same token a statement of hope's failure, a figure of speech called *enantiosis*: internal antonymy, Logos torn apart into opposites from the inside; two or more meanings within the same form that are mirror images of each other and cannot be reconciled.³ I will presently return to the important role of the mirror in one of Bakhtin's fragments, and to the asymmetry of opposites in the primal scene: someone gazing at his/her reflection in the looking glass.

This connection between salvation (from history in the indicative mood) and the loopholes of meaning inherent in an enantiosemanic term made itself known eloquently after 1929, when Bakhtin was first legally persecuted. During the writing of the 1943–1946 fragments, his hardships in exile were multiplied by the privations of wartime. Was there a chance for history to be/have been otherwise, and if yes, how? An unexpected answer is found in a text written while Bakhtin was teaching Russian to secondary school students in Kimry in 1944–1945. It is his only complete text in this volume, unpublished until the early 1990s, but prepared for publication in 1945. This article deals with the methodology of teaching Russian grammar in school.⁴ Here Bakhtin explains his method of teaching asyndetic syntactical constructions through examples from Pushkin and Gogol'. He shows that when conjunctions of condition and time are omitted, an alternative syntactic pattern emerges that allows for an immeasurable enrichment of meaning when compared with the standard forms entailing "when" and "if." Under those new conditions, chains of cause and effect are broken, causality remains only implied, the order of things becomes questionable and unnecessary, and there rises up from a line or a verse something like the promise of an otherwise of causality, and an otherwise of the historical law.

Indeed, from the point of view of logical meaning, the two causal constructions—with and without a conjunction—are identical. A line from Pushkin *Pechalen ia: so mnoiu druga net* (literally, *So sad am I: with me, there is no friend*) is in its deep structure equivalent to the standard form of the phrase, *I am sad because there is no friend with me*. Yet these two patterns exert quite different effects in reading. The latter has standard syntax and zero expressive power. The former has maximum expressivity but strange, ambivalent syntax; the marker of causality has been dropped and replaced by a mere punctuation mark, a colon. The verse fills up with emotion and drama, and this is not only a matter of improved style. Something new is implied: an indication coming

3. Enantiosis, from Gr. *enantios*, opposite, contrary; the expression of an idea by a negation of its contrary. In linguistics, enantiosemy is a semantic property, internal antonymy, i.e., antonymy between different meanings of the same word, e.g., *terrific* in the senses of *terrifying* and *very pleasant*.

4. "Voprosy stilistiki na urokakh russkogo iazyka v srednei shkole" ("Questions of Stylistics Debated in Russian Language Classes in High School," henceforth "Questions of Stylistics") (*CW* 5: 151–56).

from language itself that “everything could be different.” In an asyndetic structure, the iron logic of “if—then” is merely optional. Asyndeton becomes a token not of omission but of some unknown presence, the possibility of something else, of some other truth and order.

An alternative historical experience becomes a possibility as long as language preserves an otherwise in itself. Asyndeton—another way of connecting clauses, without a connective conjunction—creates loopholes in a system and dovetails in the linearity of chronology and cause-and-effect chains. Against the monotony of the regular subject-predicate sequences of main and subordinate clauses, asyndeton—the un-connected connection—ruffles up the texture and supplies a micro-carnival for the enjoyment and emancipation of the reader.

This last conclusion is certainly not what Bakhtin would spell out in class or in an official publication for secondary school teachers. Still, it is significant that he takes up the themes of alterity and non-finalizability, fundamental ideas of his, while explicating a minor stylistic device. What is more, asyndeton—etymologically, un-connection—is a rhetorical figure that adequately represents Bakhtin’s personal experience of the 1940s: a complex state of exclusion combining exile, illness, poverty, and civic death. One is therefore also tempted to read Bakhtin’s asyndeton as a self-portrait, himself an embodiment of omission, dissociation, and non-connectedness; his own being having become a human ellipsis in the midst of the disaster of terror and war.

The archival notes from 1943–1946 thus can be read as fragments toward a theory of exile, by a subject in exile, and out of exile: an exilic theory. To reiterate, “Whoever writes is exiled from writing [...]” (Blanchot 63). In a fragmented way, full of omissions, contractions, encryptions, and other modes of meaningful emptiness, these bits and pieces contain outlines of an original theory of subject-object relations. In these fragments, theory is not explicitly present but needs to be elicited from “what remains”: the asyndetic, disconnected remainders of the work of thinking that failed to implement itself in full in an *oeuvre* of scholarly writing. I am thus seeking here an otherwise of theory in an otherwise of scholarship.

Asyndeton: the Constitutive Principle and Automethodology

Bakhtin’s generation of the “apotheosis of groundlessness” (Lev Shestov)⁵ invented the novel as an object of theoretical reflection, as if it could substitute for the ground they had lost, as if literature could compensate the modern subject for social fragmentation and historilessness. The novel would supply a surrogate totality and provide modernity with a utopia of a different,

5. *Apofez bespochvennosti: opyt adogmaticheskogo myshleniia* was the title of Lev Shestov’s seminal book from 1905, a phrase that I believe sums up the destinies of Russian intellectuals of Bakhtin’s generation. Interestingly, in English translation, the title is sometimes rendered *All Things Are Possible*. I would like to thank Caryl Emerson for this comment.

improved and ever further improvable integrated coherence. The younger Bakhtin in “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” (henceforth “AH”) approached the theory of the novel in a messianic way, as if the novel were judgment and salvation in a surrogate heaven, in the consummate whole of “aesthetic totality.”⁶ In the name of this totality, the transcendental (*vne-nakhodimyi*) Author actively created and “finalized” the passive, formless, and incomplete bare life represented in the Hero. That poor, passive, inarticulate existence was supposed to sacrifice itself to the aggressive intervention of the Author in order for the novel, on a higher level, to achieve an aesthetic whole, a kind of transfiguration or a Hegelian *Aufhebung*, in an accomplished work of art. In a specific messianic way, Bakhtin’s theory of the novel—with its strong theological undertones and hidden biblical allusions—proceeded from the assumption that a literary *oeuvre* could redeem life’s deficiency and finitude by the making-whole, in an artistic representation, of life that had been broken by history. However, in the closing section of the treatise (which for unknown reasons, was left unfinished), instead of judgment and reconciliation, the novel turned out to be an apocalypse without redemption. In the final analysis, literature and life—two opposing principles, thesis and antithesis—both imploded and self-destructed in a double crisis. Instead of reconciling and cancelling opposites in a synthesis, in a higher instance of integrity and coherence, the novel testified to a different truth. This truth was the fact of an end without justice and sublation; *désœuvrement*, the un-*œuvring* of the *oeuvre* instead of “aesthetic totality,” an apotheosis of the inoperative and the fragmented.⁷

Writing is the disaster, but also the Other of the disaster, Blanchot says. Just as in disaster, the writing subject is “anonymous and bereft of self,” lost in writing as if in “oppressive night (the empty, the ever dispersed and fragmented, the foreign night)” (Blanchot 14). Blanchot’s *désœuvrement* literally applies to Bakhtin’s case, and especially to the writing of notes, the project of

6. Bakhtin’s “AH” presents considerable difficulties for interpreters of his legacy who seek coherence between this long unfinished piece and his ethics, both in the earlier six-paragraph “Art and Answerability” and in the later work on Dostoevskii. Neither its genesis nor its message is clear. I agree with Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan that after “Author and Hero,” there is a fault-line, a watershed, a transition from metaphysics to dialogue (Erdinast-Vulcan vii–viii). However, in my reading below, I emphasize how Bakhtin, in his wartime writing, did not simply abandon, but made repeated returns and critically revised his earlier conceptions. See also Sandomirskaiia 111–72.

7. Blanchot’s *désœuvrement*, translated by Ann Smock as *uneventfulness*, or in other versions, *un-working*, *de-working*; *the inoperative*, means a condition in which writing surrenders all claims to aesthetic totality, to achieving the perfection and finitude of an *oeuvre*; from the point of view of subjectivity, this means “[...] the effacement, the extenuation of the subject [...] a change in time, and that between being and not-being, something which never yet takes place happens nonetheless, as having long since already happened [...] the silent rupture of the fragmentary” (Blanchot 14).

achieving a whole (a new book, maybe) that is continually collapsing. A whole that is *de-oeuvred*, un-worked, in-operative; in effect, already lost before it has begun. For Bakhtin at the time of his writing of these notes, life had already become an “oppressive [...] foreign night.” The writing in the 1940s notes does not describe or complain; in their very texture and uneven rhythm, these pieces of prose are not fragments in the sense of a literary or philosophic genre. They represent, perform, and thereby testify to Being itself—not simply to a manner of writing—as to something that is fragmented and unconnected: the double night of history and language.

Writing (out of) the disaster, Blanchot’s writer writes (out of) his anxiety, and this sums up the thought of the writer into a conversation that has no end, an infinite conversation. This is a grotesque Kafkaesque figure whose language expands in proportion to his anxiety, generating an ever multiplying discourse without limit. For Blanchot, this expansion *is* anxiety, but this is not the case for Bakhtin. During his time as teacher at the Kimry school, Bakhtin appears to have been instructing his students in something that could be described in terms similar to Blanchot’s *désœuvrement*, but with an opposite sign: as sensual enjoyment, (stylistic) variability, and the diversification and enrichment of meaning. His object lesson of asyndeton in Pushkin was designed to teach children how to enjoy the aesthetics of fragmented, alternative grammars and how to elicit more meanings out of silences and omissions, as opposed to the explicitness of standard grammar in the unitary language that flourishes in bureaucracy and science. The evolution of a speaking subject, Bakhtin declares in this (auto-)methodological article, for example the subjectivity of a child acquiring his native tongue, goes through a series of crises of language (*perelomy*), and the teacher’s task is to achieve a complete turning point:

... to lead the student out of the dead end of bookish literacy [*knizhnost'*] onto the path of the language of life, a life that is literate and cultured but at the same time living, fearless, and creative. A depersonalized, abstract, bookish language [...] is indication of an only partial education [*poluobrazovaniia*]. Fully accomplished cultural maturity in a person speaks a different kind of language. [...] In the forms of an anonymous, clichéd, imageless, abstract and bookish language, thought that is creative, original, and explorative cannot develop, thought that refuses to isolate itself from the richness and complexity of life. (“Questions of Stylistics,” *CW* 5: 155–56; translation mine)

As one can see, Bakhtin returns here to his thinking in “AH”: again, he is seeking a completeness reminiscent of the phantom of the “aesthetic totality of the novel” in his early treatise; this time, however, it is “a fully accomplished cultural maturity” in the subjectivity of the student. In contrast to his ideas in “AH,” where aesthetic totality was achieved by the domination of literature over life, here Bakhtin seeks completeness in emancipating life from the monopoly of one (syntactic) norm: in the discovery of an individual face, a face beyond writing, and “the living intonation of the writing subject” that results from “the process of destroying depersonalized bookish clichés” (*ibid.*).

Thus for the wartime Bakhtin, it is not totality that redeems non-freedom, but the disaster—the destruction of clichés—that reveals an infinite potential of freedom and justice. The hierarchic relation of domination and dominatedness between the author and the hero here gives way to an alternative order of (dis)connection, in which the mission of emancipation is given to the reader: a passionate reader, a reader who is capable of being affected by the text, to release the object—the text being read—from the order of depersonalized clichés. Asyndeton—un-connection—is here the principle of constitution, seeking its own regularities at the margins of language among those minor variations when grammar itself becomes incoherent, giving way to alternatives, and thus acknowledging the utopian nature of the idea that language represents connectedness in a disconnected world.

The acceptance of asyndeton as a principle also leads to a critical revision of the very idea of understanding by means of conceptual analysis. Or, with Blanchot, “The *Aufhebung* turns inoperable, ceases” (40). In his article explicating his teaching methods, Bakhtin invites the reader to learn together with his pupils how to make sense out of a text by allowing oneself to be affected by language. One must learn how to experience the text one is reading; it must be first acted out in oral recitation before one analyzes. Bakhtin insisted that the whole of the reader’s sensorium be involved in the reading, and even in an exaggerated manner, including facial expression and gesture, for the reader to create an aesthetic relationship and enrich the text by investing it with readerly experience. The reader must respond with self-transformative attention, by rendering *effectively heard* (*uslyshano*, emphasis by Bakhtin) what the text wishes to say. This is a reading that is close in the literal sense: not a distancing conception but intimate proximity, when the sensibility of the reader is fully mobilized. Understanding becomes a sym-pathos, in which the poem receives an after-life, inspired—in-spirited—by an affective similarity between the text and the reading body:

Before analyzing the first sentence, we read it (aloud) with maximum expressivity, even somewhat exaggerate its intonational structure, and reinforce the elements of dramatism encoded into the sentence with the help of mimicry and gesture: it is very important to make the students hear and appreciate [...] moments of expressivity (emotional expressivity, first and foremost) [...] let them feel the predominant role of intonation in sentences of this kind; let them perceive and see, in the articulation of this line from Pushkin, with what inner necessity the intonation combines with facial expression and gesture. Only after the poem has been *effectively heard* (*uslyshano*) by the students [...] is it possible to start analysis. (“Questions of Stylistics,” *CW* 5: 146; emphasis by Bakhtin)⁸

8. Emerson made an important comment that the recitation of Russian poetry, much respected among Russian listeners, sounds to the American ear “like a singsong drone, quite embarrassing and exaggerated” (personal communication). Indeed, the sometimes exaggeratedly affected, sometimes monotonous and almost trance-like vocalization creates an individual touch distinguishing *avtorskoe ispolnenie*, i.e., the performance by the poet of his or her own verse. But this is different from *vyrazitel'noe chtenie* (expressive recitation) that Bakhtin was

This still insufficiently appreciated unpublished text from Bakhtin's archive should be given attention for three reasons. First, in the description of his pedagogical practice, Bakhtin demonstrates that his conceptual metaphors (dialogue, voice, voicedness, heteroglossia, etc.) are not abstractions but direct descriptions of what for him represented language and writing: meaning that is incorporated and communicated affectively. Second, it is a rare piece documenting Bakhtin's priorities in reading (and probably explaining his unusual, rich, maybe even too theatrical manner of reciting poetry that we hear in his audio recordings near the end of his life): reading not solely toward understanding but toward a complete experience of, and emotional involvement with, the work. Third, it is in this description that we might find a key to Bakhtin's other fragments from the 1940s, including the three translated in this forum, as cryptic and ambiguous as they are. This article on pedagogy helps us to reconstruct their message as something inalienable from "mimicry and gesture" in the act of reading, its "maximum expressivity" and the "elements of drama" in it.

Night Visions: the Other of Terror

The remaining texts in Volume Five are drafts and sketches, rough copies, and occasional notes, either previously unpublished or published in an unsatisfactory or doctored way. For the reader of Bakhtin's *oeuvre* these fragments are a double challenge: they evidently lack the richness and fullness of that floral, emotionally involved style that one recognizes in his major writings; and they are very private, written in a sort of shorthand bordering on cryptography. As in any publication of any unedited legacy, the reader expects to capture thought at its origins, at the very beginning of the "real Bakhtin," the Bakhtin of his world-renowned *oeuvre*, and maybe even a Bakhtin without a mask, face-to-face, if you wish.⁹ Instead what one discovers is a kind of night-time writing—feverish, hasty, disconnected, and probably not entirely clear to the writer himself.

We seem to be dealing with bits and pieces that seek to connect into a whole, but the whole never materializes. Shorthand means massive ellipses: quite a bit of text represents mere indices, subjects registered and arranged in

teaching in class. Ever since the mid 19th century, *vyrazitel'noe chtenie*, or *deklamatsiia*, declamation, also called *khudozhestvennoe*—artistic, or actorly—*chtenie*) has been part of the Russian school curriculum, a method of achieving a more profound understanding of literary text (Kairov and Petrov; Schmidt 18–47). Bakhtin's emphasis on bodily expression in teaching poetry is therefore not unusual, and his emphasis on the voice and dramatization seems to contradict his own principle of heteroglossia (in his earlier theory of the novel). However, something genuinely Bakhtinian even in this (rejected) attempt to conform to the didactic norm is his use of *vyrazitel'noe chtenie* as a creative loophole to undermine the "seriousness" of normative grammar.

9. On the bio-bibliographic debate in Russia ("Bakhtin under a mask," or "half-masked"), see Adlam, *Critical Work* 245–57.

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a certain order like knots for memory that never get untied; nomenclatures and calculi of *specificities, types, roots, varieties*, etc., about which he does not say anything. A table of contents without contents, a subject index without subjects (i.e., predicates):

The image of the city and its artistic specificity. The type of Dostoevskii's novels and the history of this type (its historical development, its historical roots). Soliloquia as one of its roots. Moralia and their varieties. The special place of Menippea. The trial of truth (the old new truth) on a human being. The image of Diogenes. The image of Menippus. ("On Questions" 223)

Then, interrupting the flow of substantives, writing explodes with digressions and parallelisms, in an excessive, passionate, even ecstatic predication. A *type* or *variety* transforms into a living being full of pain and suffering, described in cadences of predicates of ever increasing intensity. Here, for instance, is a digression in which Bakhtin describes the organization of space in Dostoevskii:

This is not the usual artistic earthly space, in which the human being is firmly localized and surrounded. This organization of space is connected to the Inferno. This is not a space of life, but of an exit out of life; this is the narrow space of a threshold, a boundary, where it is not possible to settle in, find comfort, obtain a foothold, where one can only step over, transgress. (*ibid.*)

Just as abruptly, the digression then falls silent and exits. Enter nomenclature:

The history of this space. Schwellendialoge. The forms and types of thresholds and boundaries in architecture. (*ibid.*)

And then it explodes, digressing again:

All the action, from the very beginning to the end, takes place at a point of crisis, at a point of fracture. (*ibid.*)

In the broken rhythm of the fragments, one hears a soliloquy all the time interrupting itself, as if somebody else, some other person, were speaking to the author from the inside of his own writing. Bakhtin described this situation quite precisely in his little fragment "Chelovek u zerkala" ("A Person at the Mirror"):

It is not I who looks at the world with my own eyes from within, but I look at myself with the eyes of the world, with the other's [*chuzhoi*] eyes; I am possessed by the other [*drugoi*]. Here, there is no naïve wholeness of the external and internal. [...] The surplus of the other [*drugoi*]. [...] From my eyes peer out the eyes of the other.¹⁰ ("A Person" 217)

There is cruel irony here, given the circumstances: this imaginary other might well be the metaphorical Other of philosophy, but also someone real and literally *chuzhoi* (alien), perhaps a secret informer or a police officer, a

10. The "image in the mirror" is interpreted variously by Irina Denischenko and Alexander Spektor in this cluster. In my reading, which contrasts with theirs, what is important is the moment of symmetry that produces the opposition/contrariness (Gr. *enantios*) and at the same time, the unresolvable tautological sameness in the structure of the scene.

secret eye invisibly present in between the lines of Bakhtin's own text. Yet equally probably, this other could be a highly welcome imaginary stranger: a publisher, a critic, indeed, any reader whatsoever, any audience at all. This is all the reader's guesswork: Bakhtin probably means all of that and even more than that; or maybe this "surplus of the other" is the instance of reading that punctuates the naivety of the author's thought as a whole. No matter what kind of alien instance looks back at me from the mirror of my writing/reading, like a man facing his own reflection, all that is "me" appears here as if overpowered by the ever challenging, ever present otherness of the Other. Hence, the fragmentariness, the un-connectedness, the permanent asyndeton. This is writing that simultaneously asserts and questions, establishes and digresses, in a peculiar kind of rhythm—or better, an arrhythmia—of beginnings and failures to begin, or to continue to an end. With or without a mask, all writing and reading represents, even before it starts, various forms of Blanchot's *désœuvrement*.

Bakhtin "as he is" remains unattainable even in these *de-œuvred* handwritten bits and pieces, those scanty traces of his living presence available to us today. He appears always attended by someone else, even in his presence to himself. A truly nightmarish scene: "Looking at me from the mirror are somebody else's eyes": a me inhabited by a not-me; under the alien gaze of its own mirror image, an "I" completely alienated from me, an "I" that I have "to usurp" from the other in order to be myself. However, not only in the darkness of night but also in the broad daylight of consciousness, the activity of reading and writing is structured exactly like the scene in front of a looking glass. The text I am reading or writing looks at me with a gaze that I do not know nor recognize and that completes the readerly/writerly "me", but also alienates me from me. The other is not outside of the self, but emerges in an act of reflection: it is a self that continues its dialogue with itself as long as it is capable of self-othering. This is a moment of great danger, since in this instance of face-to-face with the mirror of my writing/reading, at the threshold of my completion into something coherent and whole, that word that looks at me from my writing and reading does not know itself and does not coincide with itself, because the word itself "does not know whom it serves; it comes from darkness and does not know its own roots" ("Rhetoric" 209).¹¹

It is this absence of self-consciousness in discourse combined with blind servility (it serves, but does not know whom or what) that makes it impossible to know things by analysis. Thus does Bakhtin teach children in his classroom how to experience a verse before (or maybe instead of) analyzing it. Knowledge by judgment and concept, just like representation in an image, seeks to immobilize. In "Rhetoric," a fragment in which Bakhtin is so unusually and passionately outspoken, he openly accuses analytical appropriation

11. On Bakhtin's Other that is Not-I and Not Not-I, see Nikulin 117–18.

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as a method, which transforms reality into knowable and representable objects at the cost of extreme violence:

The element of violence in cognition and artistic form. The element of the lie, which is directly proportional to violence. The word frightens, promises, gives rise to hope, praises or abuses [...] The self-utterances of those in power. The element of violence in object-cognition. [...] the subjugation of the world [...] is its aim. ("Rhetoric" 205)¹²

The truth of conceptual knowledge, as well as that of the servile artistic image, is primitive in its predatory dialectics: a thesis consumes its antithesis in order to produce the totality of synthesis on a qualitatively new level. Both science and art that act out of such predatory principles are nourished by devouring (*pogloshchenie*) the object through its concepts and representations.

A preliminary deadening of the object is a prerequisite of cognition, the subjugation of the world (its transformation into an object to be devoured) is its aim. [...] The object is all here and nowhere else; and if it is here in its entirety, then it is dead and can be devoured. (*ibid.*)

In an act of cognition or in a "reifying" artistic depiction, the carnivorous truth produces knowledge by allowing the concept or representation to incapacitate, entrap, and destroy the object. No considerations of artistic value, no claim of aesthetic perfection or objective truth can change the fact that

The creative process is always a process of violence that truth commits against the soul. Truth has not yet been kindred to the human being, [...] it has always been an obsession. [...] it always held something back, surrounded itself with mystery, and consequently with violence [...] A person encounters the truth about himself as a deadening force. ("Rhetoric" 209)

The Russian language draws no distinction between "it" and "he," the animate and the inanimate. The object as Bakhtin describes him/it in "Rhetoric," might very well be a living human being; it could equally well be a self-portrait against the background of the political disaster of the U.S.S.R. in the 1940s. Bakhtin represents the Passion of the object on a Golgotha of lethal truth, using motifs of detention, interrogation, and execution; fantasies of immolation by truth could also imply *Pravda* editorials and the deadening effect of its "seriousness," the reality of terror: attempts at escape, detention, trial, verdicts in absentia, and a gaze (or a bullet?) in the back of the head:

The object wants to jump out of itself, it lives by a faith in the miracle of its sudden transfiguration. The image forces the object to coincide with itself, plunges it into the hopelessness of the finalized and the finished. The image deploys in full all the privileges of its outsideness. The back of the head, the ears, the back of the object are in the foreground. (*ibid.*)

Such is the terror of being/becoming an object of somebody else's gaze: the other looking at me from the mirror; the stranger gazing at me from my text; the cannibalistic truth demanding my full coincidence with the contents of

12. As if speaking from Bakhtin's mirror, Blanchot positions violence in writing itself: "Writing is per se already (it is still) violence [...] The name wears away, the fragment fragments, erodes" (46).

judgment. There is a great risk in my confrontation with my own reflection—in the mirror, in reading, in writing, in an act of knowledge, representation, and understanding. Who is subject and object in such a confrontation, who gazes and who is being gazed at, who is inside and who is outside? Both positions are fully open to violent arbitrariness.

That is why the subject as it appears in Bakhtin's notes from the 1940s is a figure of the *limen*. He thinks and writes as if hesitating on a threshold, if not the brink, of something. Balancing is a central figure of thought in Bakhtin at that time, and his writing, never finishing and continually returning to the beginning, also seems to linger at a limit. Bakhtin describes this position as the non-coincidence of the self with itself, a tangential position simultaneously inside and outside of selfhood:

The impossibility of sensing myself wholly outside of myself, completely in the external world, rather than on a tangent to this external world. [...] The world is all before me, and, although the world is also behind me, I always move myself to its edge, to its tangent. ("On Questions" 219–21)

This is an oblique "me" still lingering before it transforms into the nominative of the grammatical subject, "I". What is necessary for this transformation is for "me" to be stabilized in (an other's) thought, (an other's) image of myself, to resolve this hesitation and to "localize me," that is, to complete this tangential "me" by including it into the whole of the (other's) worldview. Only then can an "I" become relevant by relating to the "me"; and only then can "I usurp" what is mine—from others:

My body, my face; which feelings and evaluations of myself can be usurped by me only from others. Directedness toward my whole, grief for myself, heroization, to be in my own image for others. ("On Questions" 219)

But that would mean to abandon the threshold, the point of unstable balance, to commit and "[...] to be in one's own image for others, to withdraw from the tangent into the [other's] image" (*ibid.*). This, by the same token, would also mean to abandon a possibility—as weak and improbable as it might be—of achieving an infinity of sorts, of evading "localization" and even death, because there is no death as long as I cannot imagine and believe in it, as long as

I do not know my entirely external body, which is located completely in the external world, the body that will become a corpse; it can be an object of thought, but not an object of living experience. I am at that point on the tangent which can never find itself wholly in the world, which can never become being (reality) in that world, and, consequently, which can never be annihilated in it; I cannot enter the world whole, and, for this reason, also cannot exit [...] it whole. (*ibid.*)

Those who do not exist "whole," do not die "whole"; those who stand on a tangent are open to the infinite openness of the world, that cosmic alchemy in which "[...] each and everyone is an I, each and everyone is an other" (*ibid.*, 221). This is a condition approaching the limit of pure limitlessness, an ulti-

mately *des-oeuvred* condition: a body that dares to open itself to infinity so radically that it shakes off even the miserable remainders of form, that monstrous dysmorphism that is the grotesque body of carnival. A “tangential me” cannot “enter the world.” “Entering the world”—that is, becoming an “I,” which means becoming an other in the eyes of the other—is comparable to what happens to a body “becoming a corpse.” This threshold, when the obliqueness of “me” resolves into the nominative “I,” is also where literature and science start, the realm of a stable cognized Truth with its lying rhetoric and its serious cruel eyes, leaving behind itself that very threshold beyond which Everything can be/could be/could have been different.

Self as the Other of the Other

Vse moglo byt' drugim: a fine specimen of Bakhtinian irony, an example of his “word with a loophole.” This loophole not only provides an emergency exit in a hopeless situation, but also has an unlimited generative power.

Des-oeuvred discourse both dreams about becoming an *oeuvre* and dreads it, just like a “me” longs after, but also is wary of, a complete realization and alienation of the “I” in the eyes of the other. The same dynamic applies to the almost complete whole of a future book that is hinted at in Bakhtin’s notes, a whole that all the time wants to begin, and fails to. Time, Bakhtin says, is not a line but a complex body of rotation: “That which eternally returns and at the same time is irretrievable. Time here is not a line, but a complex form of a solid of revolution. (“On Questions” 229). And so also is his writing: a rotation of thought and its return, each time in a new formulation and with a new set of implications. With each cycle, thought acquires a different configuration, expresses itself in different figures of speech, and seeks for itself a different place among the established discourses—stylistics, poetics, literary history, didactics. Each time, too, it becomes more complex because it receives a new angle and a new “refraction.” But the book—the totality, the *oeuvre*, the “aesthetic whole of the novel” from “Author and Hero”—never arrives.

And this is why the reader’s search for a genuine and unmasked Bakhtin also fails. We interrogate these disparate remainders—or rejects?—from the creative laboratory of the thinker; we chase him away from his tangential neutrality, trying to catch him in the image of our own reading eyes, but we still fail to achieve the ultimate understanding of the ever-elusive: this is what Bakhtin is, this is how we should read him, all of him is here, “[...] all here and nowhere else [...] in his entirety” (“Rhetoric” 205); translation modified.)

Importantly, in this game of pronouns—*I* and *me*, *he* and *it*—there is no third instance of “you”: the subject’s face-to-face encounter with the mirror (of his/her own reading and writing) is purely tautological. The drama is acted out exclusively between the first and third persons singular reciprocating each other’s gazes. That is the reason why stepping over the threshold and leaving the tangential position of being neither inside nor outside always entails a

great risk. The eyes of the other transform me into an object to be “devoured.” As long as someone occupies a tangential position, this someone might, theoretically, be safe—but will never be self. Selfhood can be a gift or a blow, and the difference between these two is insignificant: in Russian, the difference is only a single letter (Bakhtin’s famous pun, *dar* [gift]—*udar* [strike or blow]). As for grace, there is no place for it in this economy: “Grace has always descended from without” (“Rhetoric” 209).

Thus dialectics is inhuman, but so also is the dialogue that comes in place of dialectics, even though dialogue is inhuman in a different manner. In spite of Bakhtin’s insistence on deriving its genealogy from the humanist tradition, dialogue is a post-human arrangement, negating not only the greater whole in the aesthetic of the novel and in any integral *Weltanschauung*, but also negating smaller wholes, like the integrity of an individual being, someone for whom truth means destruction because he/it “[...] encounters a truth about himself as a deadening force.” Another hallucinatory vision: a self defined by a double otherness, not as a singularity but as the other of the other. And this extraordinary inversion, Bakhtin comments, is quite ordinary and even normal for modern persons who “[...] live not by their exceptionality, but by their own otherness [*drugost*]. Exceptionality materializes and becomes parasitic (egoism, ambition, etc.)” (“On Questions” 221),

Thus the three fragments translated here—“On Questions of Self-Consciousness and Self-Evaluation,” “Rhetoric, to the Extent That It Lies,” and “A Person at the Mirror”—are in fact three approaches to one and the same question, three attempts to solve the same problem from three different directions. In the first, “On Questions,” Bakhtin is dealing with conditions of subjectivity, the stepping over the threshold from the insidedness-outsidedness of a tangential relationship—into the double othering of the subjective position; from the indeterminance of the “me” into the “I” fully determined by the other. In “Rhetoric,” he explores the conditions of objectification; the cruelty of the “deadenning power” of truth and the unbounded symbolic violence that is implied in an act of signification or representation. In the third, “A Person,” Bakhtin declares the impossibility of differentiating between subject and object, between subjectification and objectification, a duel between me and not-me. If we consider these three approaches as different angles of the same inquiry, all of them seeking an unachievable common whole, they can be summed up as an anthropology in which man (that indistinguishable he/it, or I/other, or subject/object) becomes a dynamic entity without identity. It is a proteic, infinitely divisible, and fragmentable being; a self-consciousness that depends on the other for consciousness. This is a selfhood that is only partially present to itself; a being that knows so little about its own being that it cannot even believe in the reality of its own death: in short, a veritable apotheosis of groundlessness, of non-coincidence with the self. Bakhtin is writing about “that which eternally returns and at the same time is irretrievable”; a

dis-order of eternal return (Nietzsche, Bakhtin drops *en passant*, understood this truth too mechanistically) (“On Questions” 229). Becoming the object is an outcome of the “deadening power” of truth; subjectivation, an outcome of “the self-immolation and universalization of my I” (*ibid.*, 231). Subject and object are locked into a tautological circle of mutual determination. That is why writing becomes a search for the transgression of all forms, of both self and history, an activity directed toward the breaking up of the vicious circle of the subject-object tautology, “to bypass my own self and my epoch in time” (*ibid.*, 231).

The Unpower of Love (Eleousa)

To achieve such a breakthrough, one must acknowledge that not only is God dead, but atheism too is “flat and banal,” and traditional religion merely “naïveté” (“Rhetoric” 213–15; translation modified). Grace does not belong to this vicious economy of circular subject-object reciprocations. What is needed to resolve the circularity is a “genuinely kind, selfless, and loving person,” but such a person “has not yet spoken [and] has not become a writer.” In the meantime, “only love can see and represent the inner freedom of the object” (*ibid.*, 207). Love calls the object by its name, never by its nickname (and probably also never by the pronoun, we might add.) Only in love can an object appear as singular and therefore “can never be absolutely consumed,” because “Love leaves the object wholly outside of itself, next to itself (or behind)” (*ibid.*), and leaving-alone is precisely what a concept or an image cannot do. Love is that third instance that is missing in Bakhtin’s dialogue between the “I” and the “it”: a “you” that does not confront a person face to face and thus does not directly challenge a person after the manner of that cruel truth that looks seriously, never smiles, and sentences one to annihilation by judgment passed in absentia. Love gives the object freedom by not intervening, not foisting itself upon, by merely being present nearby. Can such inactive love actively save, can it effectively break the cycles of self-alienation and “devouring”? Most probably not. Love is not capable of redemption, it does not judge and stages no doomsdays, it can only provide an alternative in “irony, uncertainty, bashfulness (the shame of [truth’s] seriousness)” (*ibid.*, 209). It is love that declares: “everything can be/could be/could have been different,” thus promising us a miracle, something to wonder at:

A new philosophical wonder before everything is necessary. Everything could have been different. One needs to remember the world as one remembers one’s childhood, to love it as one can love only something naïve (a child, a woman, the past). (*ibid.*, 215)

Love has no power, it is un-power. It cannot intervene, it can only be near. Like a *panagia eleousa* (the selfless love of the Mother of God), it only protects by touching slightly, as if a mother’s cheek brushes up against the child’s cheek. Two pairs of eyes look away from each other, across and beyond each other’s

gazes, in the direction of unknown futures. There, “everything could be different,” but at the same time, nothing can be changed. All that is possible with love is a momentary tangential togetherness, an almost imperceptible caress that at the same time is a farewell; a desire that relinquishes all power and possession; a longing that lets go; a memory without recollection: *milovanie* (caressing), *umilenie* (tender affection), a share of grace that always comes from the tangential outside. Instead of a face-to-face, a mere cheek-to-cheek.¹³

Not the Last Judgment at the end, then, but wonder and love at the beginning. At the beginning there is remembering, not truth, but love tells us what is to be done: to return to the very beginning of philosophy and start all thinking anew. This affective attitude, an amazement before everything—Gr. *thau-mazo*—is the true origin of all philosophy (according to Plato and Aristotle), of all faith (according to the New Testament), and of all close readings of the world. *Eleousa*, love without conditions, causes, and tenses, wholly tangential and subjunctive, in which, at any given moment of time, everything and anything can be, could be, and could have been different. And then,

From the kingdom of objecthood, thinghood, the kingdom of clear-cut doneness, of necessity, where thingifying cognition operates, from there we [would] enter into the kingdom of freedom, of non-predetermination, of unexpectedness, and absolute newness, of infinite possibilities and of one’s non-coincidence with oneself. (“On Questions” 221)

Conclusion

In this essay I have attempted a reading of Bakhtin’s archival materials as specimens of the writing of the disaster, using Maurice Blanchot’s formula. Like Bakhtin, Blanchot speaks in internally antonymous terms: the writing of the disaster means its documentation, but it also signifies the disaster writing itself, manifesting itself in writing. Or perhaps writing constitutes the disaster for the writer, an eternal writer’s block, a besiegement in language; the entrapment of the writer within his own thought, which makes him incapable either of producing a coherent whole, or of moving on in order to do something else (as exemplified by the truly tragic situation of Kafka above, using the madness of writing as a defense against madness as such).

In those remainders that survived the disaster, by necessity unconnected and full of inner contradictions, Bakhtin implemented his exilic theory toward emancipation. The significance of his efforts becomes obvious if one reads those bits and pieces through the lens of Blanchot’s categories. Indeed, Bakh-

13. *Eleousa*, or *Panagia Eleousa*, *Bogomater’ Umilenie*, is a canon in Orthodox icon painting, representing the Virgin Mary holding the infant Jesus in her arms, touching him on the cheek with her cheek, the eyes of the mother and the child looking beyond each other. The most venerated Russian icons, the Vladimir and the Don icons of the Mother of God, belong to this type. The reference to *eleousa* is a suitable explanation of Bakhtin’s systematic use of words related to *umilenie* in the context of the ethics of I and the other: *milovat’* (to caress), *milovanie* (*granits*, *obolochki*, *drugogo*) (the caressing of the boundaries, the outer envelope, the Other).

tin suggested an anachronic history determined by temporality in the subjunctive, with the polysemantic subjunctive *by* (*moglo by*) erasing the difference between past, present, and future. In addition, he suggested that it is possible for things to be connected with one another by an asyndetic—unconnected—connection, with the ellipsis of “if” and “when” allowing us to undermine a monotony of causes, conditions, sequences, and consequences. As if to implement an exilic logic of enantiosemanticism and unconnection, he sometimes writes without any syntax at all, resulting in reflection that rotates around the same beginning without ever ending in anything conclusive. In this essay I have tried to use Bakhtin’s techniques as critical categories, not as deficiencies but as aids, to facilitate my reading of the disaster, with a special attention to parallelism between these and Blanchot’s analytics of writing.

To conclude, I would like to unpack the suggestion I made at the beginning about Bakhtin being an unusual messianic thinker. Blanchot poses a very Bakhtinian question at the end of his book, when he compares the Christian idea of the Last Judgment with the idea of the Messiah in Judaism. Concerning the former, Blanchot asks: “Why the necessity of a just finish? Why can we not bear, why do we not desire that which is without end?” (142–43). It is only in “Hegelian language,” Blanchot declares, that the Messiah “signifies the end of history, the suppression of time.” For Bakhtin, “suppression” and “end” mean “coincidence with oneself.” But there is nevertheless a future, an after, an endlessness, an “unexpectedness and absolute newness.” That is exactly what Bakhtin taught his pupils during the war, in the god-forgotten hole of Kimry, when he initiated them into the wonders of asyndetic syntax in Pushkin. He showed them how to never cease expecting miracles from writing, even from just one and singular poetic sentence, and never stop being amazed by the effect. For those who are faithful just keep waiting: the coming of the Messiah “is now and only now. There is no need to wait, although to wait is an obligation. And when is it now? [A now is always] dependent upon realizable-unrealizable conditions: ‘Now that you heed me, or if you are willing to listen to my voice’” (Blanchot 142).

Keep waiting, because these two kingdoms, one of non-coincidence with the self, the other of the “doneness” of the self, equally belong to man—or rather, man is simultaneously the subject and object of the two. Bakhtin calls them the domains of “the greater” and “the lesser,” respectively. Each determines man in a manner that completely excludes the other, and each claims man’s memory and experience wholly for itself.¹⁴ The domain of man’s “lesser experience” and “lesser memory” is fully dominated and delimited by historical practice; its memory is “built on deliberate forgetting”; its understanding, on “deliberate non-fullness” (“On Questions” 227). This is man the subject of history, whose consciousness fully coincides with itself, subject to

14. See also David Shepherd on Bakhtin’s notion of “great time.”

finitude and finalizability, an eternal object. In his “greater experience” and “greater memory,” man is a phenomenon commensurate with “the succession of great epochs (with great Becoming) and with the immobility of eternity,” an instance that has a past and a future that far transcends historical memory and prognosis. It is a mega-memory “that descends and extends into the pre-human depths of matter and inorganic life, the experience of life of worlds and atoms” (*ibid.*).

Bakhtin in this mode gives voice to mystic insight and accomplishes a poetic (in)version of historical materialism. He inscribes not man into the evolution of matter, but inscribes matter itself—with its immense eons, horizons, and varieties, expanding from worlds to atoms—into the historical experience and memory of the human being, finite, finalizable, and unpowerful.

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Тезисы

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Бахтин в осколках: Фрагменты и записи военного времени (в сопоставлении с "Катастрофическим письмом" Мориса Бланшо)

В этой статье делается попытка интерпретации черновых фрагментов и рабочих записок М. М. Бахтина, датированных 1943–46 гг., в сопоставительном чтении с концепцией письма Мориса Бланшо (*L'écriture du désastre, The Writing of the Disaster*). Не имея между собой прямой интертекстуальной или биографической связи, не являясь также современными друг другу, заметки Бахтина и фрагменты Бланшо, тем не менее, посвящены осмыслению общего опыта европейской модерности XX столетия, века тотального истребления жизни и культуры. В статье делается попытка осмысления места и специфики бахтинских фрагментов с точки зрения их принадлежности "письму катастрофы". Категории, которые конструирует Бланшо, позволяют предложить новую интерпретацию бахтинских отрывков. В то же время, тогда как Бланшо пишет катастрофу, опираясь на воображение, Бахтин из своей повседневности административно-ссылного военного и послевоенного времени анализирует катастрофу изнутри ее реального опыта, частично предвосхищая, частично подтверждая, частично оспаривая философские выводы, к которым Бланшо придет в совсем ином контексте почти сорока годами позже.