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# "Things Pregnant with Words": What Todorov Learned from Bakhtin

In his Introduction to *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, at the end of a passage which relates to the "disputed texts" (books published under the names of Valentin Voloshinov and Pavel Medvedev and later attributed to Bakhtin), Tzvetan Todorov writes — with alarming boldness — "I believe that my name could be added to the pseudonyms — but are they pure pseudonyms? — used by Bakhtin" (xiii). If one is concerned with questions of authenticity and authorial origins, this comment is ambiguous, to say the least. But it is also an early testimony to the depth of the intellectual relationship which is the topic of this paper.

From the mid 1980s onwards, there is a shift in Todorov's work from an almost exclusive focus on narratology and literary theory to historical, ideological, and ethical questions. This "historical turn," as I would call it, coincides with Todorov's engagement with Bakhtin not only chronologically. Rather than another figure in a pantheon of literary theorists, Bakhtin will become a model and a midwife for much of Todorov's subsequent work in the two decades which follow. "For Bakhtin," Todorov writes, "the metatext is actually an intertext; the utterance that describes another utterance enters into a dialogical relation with it" (*Dialogical Principle* 23). By the same token, Todorov's metatext on Bakhtin — *The Dialogical Principle* — will also become an intertext for the essays which follow. But it is not just a question of influence. The intertextual relationship works both ways, and there is much in Todorov's work which may, in turn, help us through some of the underlying ambivalence of the Bakhtinian project.

The Dialogical Principle begins with the question of knowledge in Bakhtin's work on the human sciences, under Bakhtin's own rather fuzzy label of "Philosophical Anthropology." For Bakhtin, this seems to be a default option: "Our analysis," he writes, "must be called philosophical mainly because of

what it is not: it is not a linguistic, philological, literary, or any other special kind of analysis. The advantages are these: our study will move in the liminal spheres, that is, on the borders of all the aforementioned disciplines, at their junctures and points of intersections. The text (written and oral) is the primary given of all these disciplines and of all thought in the human sciences and philosophy in general..." ("Problem of Text" 102).'

Twenty years later, Todorov will use a similar term for his own essay, *Life in Common: An Essay in General Anthropology.* This distinct echo of the Bakhtinian term also denotes a refusal of disciplinary boundary-lines: the essay, Todorov writes, engages with the "concept of humanity that would underlie various investigations of the human sciences as well as moral or political discussions or even philosophy," and seeks to "highlight the implicit definition of humankind itself (ix). If this sounds like an impossibly ambitious task, it is also disarmingly humble as it returns once again to some foundational questions which may have been left behind in our specialized, compartmentalized world, but have never been truly resolved.

Todorov's own interdisciplinary outlook is enabled by the same insights which emerge from Bakhtin's work. Like Bakhtin, he is a "theoretician of texts," whose literary grounding has allowed him to articulate the dynamics not only of literary production, but of the human sciences in general, "based on the identity of their materials: texts, and of their method: interpretation, or as [Bakhtin] would rather put it, responsive understanding" (Introduction ix). But Bakhtin's work calls for a departure from the mode of textual inquiry which had guided Todorov's previous work. In his last fragments of the 1970s, Bakhtin notes his reservations about Structuralism, with its logical abstractions, its "mechanical categories," "opposition," "change of codes," "sequential formalization" and "depersonalization." Unimpressed by the apparent scientific rigor of Structuralist analysis, Bakhtin counters it with the simple assertion: "But I hear *voices* in everything and dialogic relations among them" ("Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences" 169).

Bakhtin's object of textual study is not the Saussurean *langue* — that is, the abstracted, formalized signifying system — but precisely that which has been dismissed by Saussurean linguistics: *the parole*, the concrete, living word, the unique and unrepeatable "utterance." In Todorov's reading, this move is amply justified by the social and historical contextualization of the utterance:

If utterances are unique, can they still constitute the objects of science? It will be recalled that this argument led Saussure to exclude speech (parole) from the object of linguistics. Bakhtin will explicitly oppose this manner of approaching the issue by asserting, as we shall see, that the domain of speech belongs to the social order, and not merely to the individual.... If utterances are considered in their specificity and uniqueness, they become the objects of history. (Dialogical Principle 27-28)

Bearing in mind Bakhtin's "sublation of theory by history" (Dialogical Principle 13), and his insistence "upon the singular, non-repeatable nature of the facts that form the object of the human sciences," Todorov comments: "one may be surprised by the absence of the word 'historical': the term does not appear to have been thematized by Bakhtin, whereas the notion it covers is actually basic for him" (Dialogical Principle 9). The reasons for this omission, if that's what it is, may have had something to do with the actual historical circumstances in which Bakhtin was caught up, but Todorov — ever true to his pseudonymic allegiance with Bakhtin — will set out to correct this omission in his own subsequent work. He will move away from Structuralist abstractions — from langue as the privileged object of study — to a mode of historical inquiry which cannot be systematized, to the paro/e: Todorov, too, will begin to hear voices.

Todorov's "historical turn" begins with *The Conquest of America*. But the choice of this particular historical narrative is, according to the author, "less a historian's than a moralist's; the present [he says] is more important to me that the past. The only way I can answer the question, How to deal with the other? is by telling an exemplary story" (4). The "exemplary" nature of the narrative, in Todorov's sense, lies not in its claim to universality, but precisely in its specificity and singularity. Todorov is not concerned with History in the upper case, but precisely with the lower case mode: with particular and diverse histories of the relation to the other. And so he chooses to focus on the conquest of America during the 16<sup>th</sup> century — probably the most intense and bloody encounter with the other in human history — and lets the stories of Columbus, Cortes, Montezuma, Las Casas, Cabeza de Vaca, Duran, Sahagun unfold and tell themselves in what Bakhtin would have called "character zones"

These zones [which] are formed from the characters' semi-discourses, from various forms of hidden transmission for the discourse of the other, by the words and expressions scattered in this discourse, and from the irruption of alien

<sup>1</sup> Another brief reference to this term appears in the fragment "From Notes Made in 1970-71," which appeared in the same volume (146-47).

expressive elements into authorial discourse (ellipsis, questions, exclamation). Such a zone is the range of action of the character's voice, intermingling in one way or another with the author's voice. ("Discourse in the Novel" 316)

Todorov listens to these 15<sup>th</sup>- and 16<sup>th</sup>-century authors as they "engage in monologues, like Columbus; in the dialogue of actions, like Cortes and Montezuma, or in that of learned discourse, like Las Casas and Sepulveda; or less obviously, like Duran and Sahagun, in the dialogue with their Indian interlocutors" (5). The spectrum of possible relations to the other which emerges from these texts is surprisingly broad and quite unlike the monolithic picture that we often have of remote historical periods (such as the "worldview of the Victorians" or the "Elizabethan world picture"): Todorov's characters assert their difference from or identity with the other; claim superiority or inferiority; idealize or dehumanize the Indians; make instrumental use of their knowledge, unconsciously or strategically; translate the cultural categories of the other into those of their own culture, or relativize their own culture. The significance of the work as a whole may be perceived in the various permutations and intermediate nuances of all these options, in the interstices of these relations with the other. To understand this authorial strategy we should go back for a moment to Todorov's account of Dostoevsky's work as read by Bakhtin:

The best exotopy is precisely the one Dostoevsky practices, insofar as it does not confine the character in the consciousness of the author and puts into question the very notion of the privileging of one consciousness above another. A character in Dostoevsky is an unaccomplished, incomplete, heterogeneous being, but that is the reason of its superiority, because we are all, as we have seen, subjects only in unaccomplishment. [...] Dostoevsky's characters are like us; that is, incomplete, they are like so many authors, rather than the [finalized] characters of ancient authors. (Dialogical Principle 103)

The Conquest of America reads like a novel, as the characters' voices are heard throughout and Todorov positions himself as an interlocutor: "I question, I transpose, I interpret these texts; but also I let them speak (whence so many quotations) and defend themselves" (Conquest 250). It is not just a question of style or aesthetics: it is a conscious choice on the author's part to let the characters speak for themselves, to be a Dostoevsky to his heroes. But this is only the initial point of departure. At the core of this project there is a yet implicit but powerful connection between the way we get to know or

understand the other and the ethical choices we make. What leads to this realization is a direct reference to Bakhtin's "exotopy": "an affirmation of the other's exteriority which goes hand in hand with the recognition of the other as subject" (*Conquest*250).

Todorov's mode of writing — so different both from the rigorous systematicity of Structuralist analysis and from the causal linearity of conventional historical accounts — is inspired by the same heterological principles. "In European civilization," he argues, "logos has conquered mythos; or rather, instead of polymorphous discourse, two homogeneous genres have prevailed: science and everything related to it derive from systematic discourse, while literature and its avatars practice narrative discourse. But this second terrain is shrinking day by day: even myths are reduced to double-entry ledgers, history itself is replaced by systematic analysis.... I could not separate myself from the vision of the 'conquerors' without at the same time renouncing the discursive form they had appropriated as their own. I feel the need ... to adhere to that narrative which proposes rather than imposes; to rediscover, within a single text, the complementarity of narrative discourse and systematic discourse" (Conquest 253). How one tells the story is not only an aesthetic or methodological choice, then. Different modes of knowledge and different modes of telling shade into different ethical choices in relation to the other. The writing -of history, as done by Todorov, is a Mobius strip of Epistemology and Ethics.

Todorov's next step is an inquiry into *The Morals of History*. This ambiguous title (whose French denotation can be either "the moral of the story" or "the morality of history") is not accidental. The common denominator of the essays in this collection — some still dealing with the conquest of America from different perspectives, others with inter-cultural contacts through colonization, immigration, or travel — is the relationship between facts and values through the prism of self and other. Here, too, Todorov follows in the footsteps of Bakhtin:

In the realm of culture, outsideness is a most powerful factor in understanding. It is only through the eyes of another culture that a foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly.... A meaning only reveals its depth once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue. (*Morals* 7)

But inter-cultural relations are invariably fraught with axiological questions, and Todorov takes a stand which may well be controversial in the current

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intellectual climate. Avoiding the pitfalls of much contemporary well-intentioned, politically correct, but misguided third-worldist discourse, Todorov argues that xenophilia and xenophobia or racism are paralogically if paradoxically related. The former is, of course, a more generous impulse, but its underlying premises are equally problematic — third-worldist discourse offers a variant of the "noble savage" approach to "foreign cultures ... [which are] admired precisely because of their primitivism, backwardness, and technological inferiority" (*Morals* 73).

The prohibition of all universalizing value-judgments — though some would consider it the height of political correctness —. must fail, Todorov argues, when we are confronted with the big questions: "If I condemn gas chambers or human sacrifices, it is in the name of absolute principles that proclaim, for example, the de jure equality of all human beings and the inviolable nature of their person" (Morals 74). That boundless assertion of toleration which goes hand in hand with certain varieties of multi-culturalism, is actually a subtle but powerful form of determinism, the hyper-determinist discourse of the enlightened, "which sees human beings as determined by their personal history, material conditions, and ethnicity, and denies them consciousness and freedom" (Morals 15). "Behind this fear of hierarchization and judgment," Todorov writes, "lies the specter of racism. One thinks that if one condemns human sacrifice, one runs the risk of appearing to be a champion of the white race ... By taking historical or cultural context too much into consideration, one excuses everything; but torture, to take one example... can't be justified simply because [it occurs] within a certain culture" (Morals 76-77).

This seems to lead directly to the broader question of universalism *vs*. relativism, and back to what I believe is a fundamental ambiguity in Bakhtin's work. I have suggested elsewhere that the popular view of Bakhtin as a precursor of Postmodernism entails a certain reduction and domestication of his project ("Bakhtin's Homesickness" and "Borderlines and Contraband"). It is all too easy to identify the universalistic outlook — that which would claim a single universal value system by which all cultures and ethical codes should be measured—with a monologic or centripetal position. The converse equation of relativism with a dialogic outlook is just as seductive: the drive for a multiplicity of equally valid voices and ideological positions is often couched in Bakhtinian terms like heteroglossia, polyphony, or simply dialogism. But this is far too neat and tidy, and very problematic indeed. What does one do about those voices which advocate the unthinkable? Do we allow them equal

weight? Do we shrug off any call for moral adjudication as being monologic? Where does dialogism — if we take that to be the structuring concept of the Bakhtinian project — position itself along the spectrum between relativism and universalism?

The full weight of this question becomes apparent when we look to Dostoevsky, Bakhtin's prophet of polyphony, the emancipator of discourse. In Dostoevsky's novels the characters retain their separateness, their voices are not assimilated into or sublated by the authorial voice, and all forms of "consummation" — significantly translated as "finalization" at this phase — are perceived as acts of violence. But even at its most "polyphonic," Dostoevsky's work is never free of a deep metaphysical nostalgia. It is invariably energized by a poignant tug-of-war, call it "dialogue" if you will, between a radically secular, centrifugal mode of being and a persistent desire for ethical grounding. Dostoevsky's characters are all-too-aware of the axiological void which has opened up with the removal of the metaphysical anchor: "there is no virtue if there is no immortality"; "If God is dead, everything is allowed" (77-78, 156).<sup>2</sup>

Bakhtin, too, recognizes this tension: in his "Notes toward a reworking of the Dostoevksy book" there is an oblique note on Dostoevky's conception of atheism as "a lack of faith in this sense, as indifference toward an ultimate value which makes demands on the whole man, as a rejection of the ultimate position." This is followed by an equally oblique comment on "Dostoevsky's vacillations as regards the content of that ultimate value" (294). This has been, of course, the unresolved question of Western ethics throughout the process of secularization: how is one to choose that "ultimate value" without recourse to the ultimate authoritative Other? It is the very same question which lies at the core of Dostoevsky's work, for even the most radically polyphonic of his novels still conclude on a note of, sometimes forced, but extreme piety.

The question of Dostoevsky's polyphonic revolution becomes even more problematic, when we are told that Bakhtin saw his book on Dostoevsky as "morally flawed," because it could not openly deal with "the main questions ... what Dostoevsky agonized about all his life — the existence of God" (Bocharov 1013). It is precisely this problem of grounding, this metaphysical vacuum which, I suggest, has enabled the introduction of the Superaddressee, the ultimate other, into Bakhtin's last essays. In "The Problem of the Text,"

See also ibid. 273-75, 294-309, and Bakhtin's "Notes towards a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book," 89.

written towards the end of his career, Bakhtin introduces a third participant into the concept of dialogue:

An utterance always has an addressee (of various sorts, with varying degrees of proximity, concreteness, awareness, and so forth) whose responsive understanding the author of the speech work seeks and surpasses. This is the second party.... But in addition to this addressee (the second party), the author of the utterance, with a greater or lesser awareness, presupposes a higher *superaddressee* (third), whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in a distant historical time (the loophole addressee). In various ages and with various understandings of the world, this superaddressee and his ideally true responsive understanding assume various ideological expressions (God, absolute truth, the course of dispassionate human conscience, the people, the court of history, science, and so forth). ("Problem of Text" 126)

Each dialogue takes place as if against the background of the responsive understanding of an invisibly present third party who stands above all the participants in the dialogue. ("Problem of Text" 126)

Apparently aware of the problematic implications of this new presence, Bakhtin immediately adds that the Superaddressee, who is "a constitutive aspect of the whole utterance," is not "any mystical or metaphysical being (although, given a certain understanding of the world, he can be expressed as such)" ("Problem of Text" 126).<sup>3</sup> This disclaimer notwithstanding, this new participant, positioned above the interlocutors, seems to hollow out the very concept of the dialogue: it is hard to conceive of this ultimate listener as anything but the "supreme-author" or "ultimate Other" who stages his comeback through the back door. Todorov does not deal with the problematic entry of this new player, and relates the addition of the Superaddressee to Bakhtin's own biographical and historical circumstances, to the solitude imposed on him by exile and the terror of censorship, and to the desert of

unresponsiveness in which he had to make his own voice heard. <sup>4</sup>1 believe, however, there is more to this than a mere compensatory virtual presence; that the Superaddressee with his "ideally true responsive understanding," who is a participant *above* the others in *every* dialogue, offers Bakhtin — and perhaps Dostoevsky, too — a way out of the slippery slope of ethical relativism. <sup>5</sup> The resolution of this aporetic moment in Bakhtin's work does suggest itself, albeit implicitly, in Todorov's work. Todorov, too, is troubled by current trends of contemporary thought, by the dangers of "perspectivism," and the draining of meaning "in a generalized relativism where anything goes, so long as one chooses the right point of view; perspectivism leads to indifference and to the renunciation of all values" (*Conquest* 251). Todorov does not refer to Bakhtin at this point, but he does go back — significantly, I believe — to the same Dostoevskean formulation:

We know we no longer want the morality (or the amorality) of "everything is permitted," for we have experienced its consequences; but we must find new prohibitions, or a new motivation for the old ones if we are to perceive their meaning (*Conquest* 252).

So how does Todorov resolve this problem? What is his way out? Where — we may now ask — is *his* Superaddressee?

In his discussion of the general hermeneutic problem of self and other, of which the understanding of a foreign culture is only a specific instance.

"A last complement: even if there is no ideal reader, who could totalize the meaning of a text, the author can still dream of it; in fact, to understand the strategy of writing it is necessary to identify this 'super-recipient' imagined by the author. Bakhtin has devoted to this question a few pages not exempt of emotion .... Does it suffice to imagine super-receivers to compensate the absence of recipients, of responsive understanding? It is in order to remedy this lack that I have tried, in these pages, to have Bakhtin's voice be heard again: so that the dialogue can finally begin" (*Dialogic Principle* 112).

In the introduction to *Speech Genres*, Michael Holquist writes: "If there is something like a God concept in Bakhtin, it is surely the superaddresee" (xviii). Morson and Emerson who view the superaddressee as a "principle of hope" argue (rather cloudily, to my mind), that the superaddressee itself is "not an ideological but a metalinguistic fact constitutive of all utterances" but then conclude that "God may be dead, but in some form the superaddress is always with us." They, too, note that for Bakhtin there seems to be a correlation between the need to be heard and the need for God (*Prosaics* 135-36).

<sup>3</sup> See also: "Understanding is never a tautology or duplication, for it always involves two and a potential third" ("Problem of Text" 115); "The word is a drama in which three characters participate (it is not a duet, but a trio)"; "The relationship to others' utterances ... is a living tripartite unity. But the thkd element is still not usually taken into account" ("Problem of Text" 122).

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Todorov writes of four modes of understanding which may become the successive phases of a single process: the first two modes — the assimilation of the other into one's own identity, or the effacement of the self for the other, are both easily discredited and surpassed. The third phase marks a resumption of one's identity out of an exotopic position (Todorov actually uses this neologism which was his own coinage for Bakhtin's outsideness):

I do not claim to make others speak, but rather, to establish a dialogue between myself and them: I perceive my own categories as being just as relative as theirs. I abandon the prejudice of imagining that one can abandon all prejudice: I prejudge, necessarily and always, but it is precisely in this that the interest of my interpretation lies, my prejudices being different from those of all others. I affirm that all interpretation is historical (or "ethnic"), in the sense that it is determined by my spatio-temporal belonging: this does not contradict the effort to know things are they really are, but rather complements it. Duality (multiplicity) replaces unity; the T remains distinct from the other. (*Morals* 15)

But it is the fourth phase of knowledge which is most illuminating for the apparent deadlock of universalism and relativism:

In the fourth phase of knowledge, I "leave" myself once again, but in an entirely different way. I can no longer desire, nor am I able, to identify with the other; nor can I, however, identify with myself. The process can be described in these terms: knowledge of others depends on my own identity. But this knowledge in turn determines my knowledge of myself. Since knowledge of oneself transforms the identity of this self, the entire process begins again: new knowledge of the other, new knowledge of the self, and so on to infinity. But is this infinity indescribable? Even if the movement can never reach an end, it has a specific direction, it leads toward an idea. Let us imagine the following: for a long time I have lived within a foreign culture and this has made me conscious of my identity; at the same time, it sets this identity in motion. I can no longer subscribe to my "prejudices" as I did before, even if I do not attempt to rid myself of all "prejudice." My identity is maintained, but it is as if it is neutralized; I read myself in quotation marks. [...] By interacting with the other, my categories have become transformed in such a way that they speak for both of us and — why not? for third parties also. Universality, which I thought I had lost, is rediscovered here: not in the object, but in the project. (Morals 15)

Here, then, is Todorov's Superaddressee: neither in the self nor in the other — it is to be found in the relation to the other, in the process which allows the self to read itself in quotation marks. I believe that what Todorov offers is a *relational*, not a *relativistic* approach — the profound orientation towards the other, the recognition of difference and affinity, and the subsequent shifting

of the self s identity — which, more than any set moral system or code of conduct, characterizes the ethical experience or event.

The seeds of this relational conception of ethics may be found in one of Bakhtin's earliest extant texts, the fragment entitled "Toward a Philosophy of the Act" (1919-1921). In this fragment Bakhtin accounts for what he sees as the failure of formal ethics and outlines a project of "a first philosophy" which would not attempt to abstract, generalize, theorize, or codify the ethical, but would, instead, attempt a phenomenological description of the ethical event or relationship:

A first philosophy ... cannot proceed by constructing universal concepts, propositions, and laws about this world of the answerably performed act (the theoretical, abstract purity of the act), but can only be a description, a phenomenology of that world. (*Philosophy* 32)

Man-in-general does not exist; I exist and a particular concrete other exists — my intimate, my contemporary (social mankind), the past and future of actual human beings (of actual historical mankind). (*Philosophy* 47)

The *ought* is ... a certain attitude of consciousness, the structure of which we intend to disclose phenomenologically. There *are* no moral norms that are determinate and valid in themselves as *moral* norms, but there is a moral subjectum with a determinate structure ... and it is upon him that we have to rely. (*Philosophy* 6)

It is not the content of an obligation that obligates me, but my signature below it. (*Philosophy* 38-39)

Forty years later, Bakhtin will rework this relational outlook:

I achieve self-consciousness, I become myself only by revealing myself to the other, through another and with another's help.... It turns out that every internal experience occurs on the border, it comes across another, and this essence resides in this intense encounter.... The very being of man (internal and external) is a profound communication. To be means to communicate. To be means to be for the other, and through him, for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory: he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking within himself, he looks in the eyes of the other or through the eyes of the other. ... I cannot do

without the other; I cannot become myself without the other; I must find myself in the other. ("Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book" 287)<sup>6</sup>

Todorov comments on this passage: "internally we are all boundaries; and in 'being' (etre) we should read: the other (autre)" (Dialogical Principle 97). Living on borderlines, then, sums up the ethical position of the subject, in a world which has lost its faith in meta-narratives and universal or metaphysical imperatives. But — one cannot overemphasize this — this borderline position is not relative in that it does entail a primary and absolute orientation towards the other. It is a mode of existence which does not allow the subject to assimilate the other or to be assimilated by it. It generates a constant modification of one's self-definition — a reading of oneself in quotation marks — in the contact with the other. In Todorov's own work this liminal imperative will develop into a poignant exilic sensibility.

In the Epilogue to The Conquest of America, Todorov writes of Cabeza de Vaca as "a being who has lost his country without thereby acquiring another, who lives in a double exteriority" (Conquest 249). This is followed by a quotation of a 12<sup>th</sup>-century text by Hugh of St. Victor: "The man who finds his country sweet is only a raw beginner; the man for whom each country is as his own is already strong; but only the man for whom the whole world is as a foreign country is perfect' (I myself, [he adds,] a Bulgarian living in France, borrow this quotation from Edward Said, a Palestinian living in the United States, who himself found it in Erich Auerbach, a German living in Turkey)" (Conquest25ty. More than an autobiographical reminder, the personal experience of exile or "double exteriority" is a mode of being and an ethical imperative which can be practiced even at home. The experience of the uprooted, de-territorialized subject — as Todorov will later picture himself in L'Homme dépaysé becomes a paradigmatic ethical experience of navigation between the relative and the absolute. The exilic mode of being, this living on

- The analogy between textual dynamic and the dynamics of subjectivity in Bakhtin's work is beyond the scope of this paper, but one should at this point note Bakhtin's comment on "the relativity of all boundaries" ("Problem of Text" 105), and his view that "the event of the life of the text, that is, its true essence, always develops *on the boundary between two consciousnesses, two subjects"* ("Problem of Text" 106, italics at source).
- 7 The epigraph to this essay is a dictionary definition of the verb "depayser," which means 1. to change of country, environment, framework; and 2. to trouble, to disconcert, disorient while changing habits.

boundary-lines, produces a constant relativization of one's home, one's culture, one's language, and one's self, through the acknowledgement of otherness. It is a homesickness without nostalgia, without the desire to return to the same, to be identical to oneself. The encounter with the other which produces a "transvaluation" of one's own culture (*Morals* 80) is also the ultimately ethical experience of reading oneself in quotation marks.

Both Bakhtin and Todorov seem to have moved away from their initial literary or aesthetic point of departure as they turn to philosophical questions of ethics and alterity. But these realms of experience may be more closely related than they seem. The formalist conception of aesthetics revolves on the concept of "defamiliarization" or making-strange (ostranenie), coined by Shklovsky. Literary language, he argues, does not function as a "practical" automatic and transparent vehicle of communication, but obliquely, in tortuous, attenuated ways, which disrupt our automatic, mechanical, or habitual perceptions of semantic meaning, of sound, texture, and imagery. For Shklovsky, however, the aesthetic experience is profoundly ethical: "habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, the fear of war.... And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony" (12). Defamiliarization in art — the aesthetic practice of displacement, disruption, deconstruction — is an exilic affect: it does not allow for the smooth assimilation and reduction of otherness. It demands that we recognize an otherness in ourselves. It is, in fact, a reading of the self in quotation marks.

At the close of my own intertext, I would like to go back for a moment to the dialogic principle with a short passage from Bakhtin's last fragment:

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) — they will always change (be renewed in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue). At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meaning, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. (*Methodology* 169-70)

A homecoming festival is, perhaps, too much to hope for, but we may find some consolation for our own metaphysical exile in the promise that nothing

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is absolutely dead as long as we allow its voice to be heard and find our own meanings in it; and in the knowledge that ours is neither the first nor the last word.

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