

**Federico Pellizzi**

## **Introduction: The XIV Bakhtin Conference**

Mikhail Bakhtin is certainly not a sacred icon, the solution to all the bugs of theory, a model that can be applied dogmatically to all subjects using some of his key concepts. He is rather a stimulus to make us think more in depth about the subjects that we ourselves deal with. Because Bakhtin is a deep thinker, he is not a great systematizer but rather an acute theoretician, he demolishes models without necessarily creating new ones, his concepts are always a complex viewpoint on the world, never an aspiration to create a standard interpretation, a rule for current thought, for the small time in which we find ourselves.

Therefore I would invite all participants - and I can see that lots of you have already done so - to bear in mind the suggestions on which this conference is based: Bakhtin through the test of great time. Bakhtin is already in great time because he has been called upon to solve the aporias of structuralism, formalism, Marxism, deconstructionism, postmodernism, and contemporary eclecticism. Yet in some way his thought has always eluded these attempts to reduce it or harness it. And the very fact that we are still here trying to come to terms with it, quite apart from how fashions evolve, shows how productive his thought was as indeed was that of those close to him or those in dialogue with him. Moreover, his ideas still embrace many different fields, from architecture to economic thought, from linguistics to the media, from literature to the arts, from interpretation to theory.

And this is the second point, Bakhtinian thought is always a pressing invitation to return to theory. Bakhtin is first and foremost a philosopher, and thus never considers problems as they appear in a contingent and circumscribed way. He poses theoretical questions and also poses the problems of posing theoretical questions.

Great time is not a question of time but of the spatial dimension of thought. History is not narration, historicism, philosophy of history, but rather interpretation. Bakhtin's approach is "philological" in the broadest sense of the term as it takes into account concrete facts, texts and at the same time the big picture and contexts. But what profoundly characterizes it is in our view the theoretical background, a background that is sensitive and in dialogue with the subject while at the same time it always tends to bring us back to the underlying issues, the very criteria of theory. The fact that all this leads to a form of hermeneutics which is never explicative but always dialogic is by no means a secondary fact. It represents the responsibility of theory, as well as the courage of theory which may perhaps often be missing in contemporary studies.

I can see, even from all the messages that I have received and from the books that have been published, that Bakhtin is still alive and is productive in research work. And this is one of the reasons why it is worth continuing to hold these conferences, the idea for which was created some time ago by Clive Thomson and Anthony Wall - to whom I think we should all be grateful. We may have to find new formulae, try to organize conferences that are more streamlined in some way. In the meantime we are going to start with an experiment: some of you - many of you offered, thanks for that - will be acting as respondents to the presentations of others. This seems to me to be an important way of creating a dialogue. Naturally this designation is not an imposition but a proposal that may be changed as we go along, according to the needs and preferences of each of us. However I would not like this duty to be seen as an academic exercise. It

should rather be an opportunity for us all to understand and ask questions of each other.

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