

Enthymema XXXI 2022

From Dialogic Imagination to Polyphonic
Thinking: Bakhtin in Saransk 2021



Oleg Osovsky

Mordovia State Pedagogical Institute

Vera Kirzhaeva

Mordovia State University

Svetlana Dubrovskaya

Mordovia State University

Ekaterina Chernetsova

National Research University, Higher School of
Economics, Russia

Abstract – The article presents the results of the XVII International Bakhtin Conference held in Saransk (Russia) on July 5-10, 2021. The forum brought together over 100 participants from 22 countries and was held online. The 18 plenary lectures and more than 100 panels and online-discussions focused on the most important questions of the reception of Bakhtin’s heritage, and the influence of the thinker’s ideas on contemporary humanities. Presentations included works in the following areas: biography of Bakhtin, determining the place of his ideas in modern philology, philosophy and other social sciences, the theory and practice of education, and interdisciplinary research. This article analyses and contextualises the work of the conference against the background of the Bakhtin Forums of the 1980s and 2010s, which became an important part of the global Bakhtin Studies, as well as of the recent development of Bakhtin’s heritage in Russia and worldwide. The authors highlight the most important results of the last conference as supplementing and reconstructing Bakhtin’s biography, clarifying the details of the process of dialogical interaction of Bakhtin’s work with his contemporary ideas and the preceding traditions, defining the boundaries of Bakhtin’s influence on the humanities and the natural science, as well as the possibilities of integration of these disciplines under the “sign of Bakhtin”.

Keywords – Mikhail Bakhtin; Bakhtin Studies; XVII International Bakhtin Conference; Reception of academic heritage; Dialogism; Polyphony of Humanities.

Osovsky, Oleg, Vera Kirzhaeva, Svetlana Dubrovskaya and Ekaterina Chernetsova. "From Dialogic Imagination to Polyphonic Thinking: Bakhtin in Saransk 2021". *Enthymema*, n. XXXI, 2022, pp. 338-352.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.54103/2037-2426/19793>

<https://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/enthymema>



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ISSN 2037-2426

From Dialogic Imagination to Polyphonic Thinking: Bakhtin in Saransk 2021

Oleg Osovsky, Vera Kirzhaeva, Svetlana Dubrovskaya
Mordovia State Pedagogical Institute

Ekaterina Chernetsova
National Research University, Higher School of Economics, Russia

1. Introduction

When it was announced at the final session of the XVI International Bakhtin Conference in Shanghai in September 2017 that Saransk had been chosen as the venue for the next forum of Bakhtinologists, the audience was sympathetic and enthusiastic. Indeed, the choice of Saransk was logical. Here Bakhtin lived and worked for over 25 years, teaching at the Mordovian Pedagogical Institute and then University, while preparing his manuscript on Rabelais for defence, a new edition of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, the monograph *The Work of François Rabelais and the Folk Culture of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, and a number of other important texts, including the “Problem of Speech Genres”. The decision of holding the conference in Russia in the year of Bakhtin’s 125th anniversary can be perceived as a kind of tradition. Let us recall that the 7th conference was held in Russia in the year of Bakhtin’s 100th anniversary, and then, in 1995, in Moscow the leading representatives of international Bakhtin Studies had the opportunity to meet for the first time in the homeland of the thinker. This is what Irina Popova (Moscow, Russia) meant when she said in Shanghai that the conference returned to Russia after almost a round-the-world trip having visited various places of the world.

Preparations for the Saransk Forum began at the end of 2017 and went on against the notable backdrop of significant events in Russian and the international Bakhtin Studies. Although no “breakthrough” works appeared during this period, one cannot but notice that the interest in Bakhtin’s legacy increased not only among literary scholars, linguists, philosophers and cultural scholars, but also among representatives of other fields of the humanities, which is clearly demonstrated by the collections that were published in these years *Inspired by Bakhtin: Dialogic Methods in the Humanities*, *Mikhail Bakhtin's Heritage in Literature, Arts, and Psychology: Art and Answerability*, monographs *Dialogic Pedagogy and Polyphonic Research Art: Bakhtin by and for Educators* by Yu. Matusov, M. Gradovsky and A. Marjanovich-Shain; *The Birth and Death of Literary Theory: Regimes of Relevance in Russia and Beyond* by G. Tikhanov; *Bakhtin in the Fullness of Time: Bakhtinian Theory and the Process of Social Education*, etc. It is also worth mentioning two Saransk monographs about Bakhtin, written within the framework of the project “Bakhtin Encyclopedia” (*Mikhail Bakhtin: Personality and Heritage*; *Mikhail Bakhtin: Problems of Studying the Biography and Academic Heritage*). We should also mention the International Seminar at the University of Sao Paulo devoted to the 90th anniversary of the *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (*Bakhtiniana. Revista de Estudos do Discurso* vol. 16, no. 2, 2021).

All this was generally consonant with the basic trends of Bakhtin Studies in Russia and the world, outlined in a number of reviews (Yurchenko; Osovsky and Dubrovskaya; Hirschkop 159-160).

For all the achievements of Bakhtin Studies, there is still a need for a serious conversation about Bakhtin’s scholarly legacy, its origins and stages of evolution in the context of Russian

and world intellectual history. The reality of contemporary history adds new subjects: whether the principles of Bakhtin's novel polyphony will become an integral part of "seterature" or polyphonic thinking in artificial intelligence; whether Bakhtin's dialogism has a role in the dialogue between the "self" and the "other", where the "other" can also become neural networks, while the image of "other" is created on gadget screens, appears in messengers and circulates in social networks, generating more and more duplicates; whether reposting becomes another speech genre or only an example of alien words and others.

It was these questions, among others, that participants in 17th International Bakhtin Conference had to answer in order to outline the paths of development of Bakhtin Studies for the upcoming years.

2. Background

The tradition of the International Bakhtin Conferences goes back nearly four decades, and the history of these academic forums has become an integral part of the history of the global Bakhtin Studies. The Bakhtin conferences have never intended to be a place for summing up the preceding period of the development of Bakhtin Studies, but the papers presented there inevitably reflected key moments and breaking points in the intellectual world's reception of Bakhtin's ideas. In fact, the first attempt to make sense of Bakhtin's contribution to contemporary philology took place in the USSR, in the year of the thinker's 75th anniversary, when one of the few leading centers of Soviet structuralism – the Linguistic Association of the Laboratory of Computational Linguistics at Moscow University – held a special meeting. In the speeches of V. V. Ivanov, Boris Uspenskij, a former participant of the Prague Linguistic Circle and an old friend of Roman Jakobson, Peter Bogatyrev, and others, the significance of Bakhtin's personality and ideas for contemporary research, in particular semiotics, the milestones of his biography, and key texts, including those not yet published, were defined. The first International Forum of Bakhtinists was held 13 years later, in 1983, in Canada, in Ontario. Since then, international Bakhtin conferences have been held regularly at universities in Europe, South America and North America. Among the cities that have hosted them are Ontario (Canada), Jerusalem (Israel), Cocoyoke (Mexico), Calgary (Canada), Gdansk (Poland), Curitiba (Brazil), Jyväskylä (Finland), and others. A special place in the list belongs to a conference in Manchester, where researchers from Russia and international colleagues met for the first time in the summer of 1991, on the common platform of the International Bakhtin Forum. The Soviet delegation included, in particular, Vyach. Vsev. Ivanov and Sergei Averintsev, and a new generation of Bakhtinists, including Vitaly Makhlin. It is worth noting that the conversation between Russian and Western scholars was not an easy one, due, to a large extent, to different approaches to the reception of Bakhtin's ideas in the context of academic and cultural tradition, and to the willingness/unwillingness to integrate the thinker into a wide range of scholarly paradigms. David Sheppard, the organizer of the Manchester Conference, and one of the most subtle interpreters of Bakhtin in the 1990s and 2000s, wrote expressively a few years later about the difficulties of this dialogue, noting:

a dominant, then it was a profound and mutual lack of understanding (*nedoponimanié*) or outright misunderstanding (*neponimanie*) between the Western scholars who were in the overwhelming majority and the small number of colleagues representing the Soviet Union for the first (and, as it was shortly afterwards to prove, last) time in the history of the international conferences. In part, of course, this was a product of linguistic barriers (most Western Bakhtinians are not Slavists), which there were not sufficient facilities to overcome satisfactorily. In part, too, it was nothing more serious than a clash of academic cultures, occasionally embarrassing but ultimately fruitful. But much more important than both these factors was an incompatibility between two sets of founding assumptions about the nature and purpose of theoretical endeavour in general

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and Bakhtin studies in particular. What seemed to trouble non-Russian (and non-Slavist) participants most of all was the idea that for professional, and even ethnic, reasons they were apparently doomed to misapprehend and misrepresent both Bakhtin and his thought. Their Russian counterparts, on the other hand (with some support from the Slavist contingent), were at a loss to understand how connections could be made between their compatriot and the discreditable discourses of such outlandish, beyond-the-pale movements as Marxism or feminism. (*Bakhtin* XVI–XVII)

The dialogue between Russian and non-Russian Bakhtin Studies continued much more successfully, which was confirmed, on the one hand, by the participation of Russian authors in international collections devoted to Bakhtin, and on the other hand, by the presence of leading Western Bakhtinologists on the pages of the *Dialogue. Carnival. Chronotope, Bakhtin's Collected Works, Problems of Bakhtinology*, and other publications. In recent decades international Bakhtin conferences have been raising and striving to solve the most important questions for understanding the contemporary meaning of Bakhtin's ideas. For example, the conference in Bertinoro was held under the motto 'Bakhtin: the test of great time', while the XV conference in Stockholm in 2014 was devoted to the reflection of various 'Bakhtinian practices': from the academic to the visual and political ones.

In 2017, the International Bakhtin Conference was held for the first time in Asia. The venue was Fudan University in Shanghai. There is no doubt that the choice of China was a recognition of the contribution that Chinese Bakhtin Studies have made in recent decades to the development of Bakhtin Studies at home and in the East in general (Dubrovskaya). Even against the background of the abundance of translations from Bakhtin and publications devoted to Bakhtin throughout the world, two editions of Bakhtin's seven-volume collected works in Chinese and a five-volume Chinese anthology comprising the best works of scholars from Russia, Europe, America and China itself look impressive.

In comprehending the results of the conference in Shanghai, one of the authors of this article noted that the main thing that united everyone in Shanghai was the understanding of the need for joint scientific work, the coordination of efforts of Bakhtinologists from different countries to create a full-scale image of the thinker and a comprehensive description of his legacy (Osovsky 227).

It was assumed that the next conference in Saransk would move in the same direction. Its motto - *Mikhail Bakhtin's Ideas and the Challenges of the 21st Century: From Dialogical Imagination to Polyphonic Thinking* - testified to this.

3. Impressions and Revelations of the Saransk Forum

The XVII International Bakhtin Conference was held in Saransk on July 5-10, 2021, a year behind schedule. While mentioning the challenges of the XXI century in its title, the organizers did not anticipate what real challenges humanity would face in 2020. And the great credit for the fact that the conference took place is due to its organizers from Mordovia University, their assistants and advisors all over the world, and, of course, to the participants themselves. The Covid-19 pandemic, which has changed the life of all mankind, certainly also affected the organization of this scientific forum. The only mode available for communication was, of course, online. We should note here that the cancellation of the most important part of the event – live communication between participants outside of plenary sessions and various panels, and conversations during coffee breaks and breaks – was partly compensated by no less lively and active conversations in chat rooms and e-mail correspondences after the most discussed papers and discussions. Galin Tikhanov's (London, UK) humorous phrase at the closing session, «Zoomed - not doomed», best reflected the new reality of scientific communication. There has

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been a radical transformation in the chronotope of the forum, which in the new conditions has actually acquired its own 'big time'. Whereas earlier conferences in the traditional format were held 'here and now', the venue for the Bakhtin Conference was now the whole world. And when the organizers of the conference in Saransk began the work of the panels and sessions at 10.00 Moscow time, for their participants from the USA, Japan and China the day was already over, while for the speakers from Europe it was just beginning. But at the same time, all of them were virtually in one important and understandable chronotope.

More than 100 speakers from 22 countries took part in the conference. For obvious reasons, most of the participants were from Russia. In 18 plenary speeches the most important questions of modern Bakhtin Studies were touched upon, what can be called the key vectors of comprehension of Bakhtin's heritage and understanding of what exactly the development and use of his ideas give to the world today. The overwhelming majority of conference participants spoke of the need to read Bakhtin anew, and it must be said that many of the reports proposed new forms and formats of this reading. At the same time, there were the most unexpected exchanges between participants' presentations, and the scope of the resulting dialogue was beyond all expectations.

Vitaly Makhlin's (Moscow, Russia) talk "'Creating Consciousness': M.M. Bakhtin's Authorship as a Problem", is a serious attempt not only at a new reading of Bakhtin, but at a radically different interpretation of the notion of *authorship* in the Bakhtinian key. In taking up one of the most important terms in Bakhtin's early writings, the speaker offered his vision of Bakhtin's specific nature as a thinker whose ideas have no parallel even with those of his Russian and Western counterparts whom we usually list when we think of Bakhtin in the context of twentieth-century intellectual history. At the same time, the multifaceted nature and obvious complexity of Bakhtin's thought require a special approach to understanding what he said:

Bakhtin is too 'philosopher' for philologists, and too 'literary scholar and philologist' for philosophers; he is too 'Russian' for Western scholars, and too 'European' for Soviet and post-Soviet scholars. This can be called a *black square* in the history of the reception of Bakhtin's authorship, a deep alienation between the era of 'experience' in the early twentieth century and the era of 'survival' one hundred years later, which was there from the very beginning, but in the new century, as they say, came out and 'en-trenched' (*oplotnilya*).

On this background, «creative consciousness» becomes the particular type of thinking within which Bakhtin's cultural-philosophical thought develops, from his treatise *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* and *Author and Hero* to his books on Dostoevsky and Rabelais and his works and fragments of the 1950s and early 1970s.

The cultural historian and literary scholar Nikolai Nikolaev (St. Petersburg, Russia) also spoke about the unity of Bakhtin's philosophical path, focusing his paper on Bakhtin's texts from the late 1910s to the 1920s and the works of Bakhtin's Circle. Emphasizing the initial originality of Bakhtin as a philosopher, which can be explained neither by the influence of German neo-Kantianism, nor by the traditions of Russian religious philosophy, the speaker discussed the inner integrity of the philosophical picture of the world and man, which was formed by the young thinker in Nevel and Vitebsk, and which was refined in Leningrad in the late 1920s. Despite the disappointing fragmentariness and even incompleteness of the surviving texts from the Nevel-Vitebsk period, Nikolaev has offered an internally convincing interpretation of how and why Bakhtin's thought evolved from his own «moral philosophy» towards the *Problems of Dostoevsky's Work*, *Formal Method*, and *Marxism and Philosophy of Language*, based primarily on his 1924 article and materials from L.V. Pumpyanskij's archives. Although the latter differ from what Bakhtin wrote at the turn of the preceding decade, Nikolaev

identifies in them an immanent range of problems common to Bakhtin's philosophy as a whole and once again confirming the idea of its wholeness.

The papers "The Experience of Combining Bakhtin's Aesthetics and the Theoretical and Literary Ideas of OPOYAZ" by Vladimir Novikov (Moscow, Russia) and "Bakhtin and Narratology" by Valery Tiupa (Moscow, Russia) transformed into a sort of dialogue about the significance of Bakhtin for the past and present of European philology. On the one hand, V. Novikov, who is at the same time a literary scholar, a writer and a literary critic, thinks it is fundamental to take into consideration the points of interaction between the Russian formal school represented by OPOYAZ and Bakhtin opposing it. On the other hand, for one of the leading theorists of contemporary narratology, V. Tiupa, it is crucial to show how the terms and categories of Bakhtin's historical poetics become key concepts in the poetics of narrative in general. According to the speaker, contemporary narratology is not a sequel or a direct consequence of Bakhtin's findings, but without the latter contemporary narratology simply could not take place and would not receive confirmation of its interdisciplinary status.

It was not only the early period and the 1920s-30s that drew the speakers' attention. Noteworthy was the reference to the notion of *change* as a special category in later Bakhtin's texts in the talk "On Death and Turn-taking in Conversation" by linguist and translator Sergei Sandler (Beer-Sheva, Israel). The researcher stressed that «Bakhtin's radically new approach to wholeness created the conditions for a truly innovative application of his ideas in different spheres».

The interest in different aspects of Bakhtin's philosophy was characteristic of many of the speakers. Thus, Andrey Sychev (Saransk, Russia) gave a coherent analysis of Bakhtin's ethical postulates through the prism of the concept of *chronotope*.

Ukhtomsky and Bakhtin's ideas about chronotope, act, dominant, polyphony, etc. can serve as a starting point for studies of temporal and spatial characteristics of morality. Their peculiarity is that they do not give us ready-made schemes and do not anticipate final conclusions. They invite dialogue: they pose questions and encourage us to search for our own answers. In this sense, the chronotope is a tool not only for understanding the existing, but also for constructing a new moral reality.

We will not claim that the chronotopes of ethical consciousness suggested by the speaker radically change today's understanding of moral codes, but there is no doubt that they add a lot to the understanding of how the system of moral priorities is formed.

A convincing attempt to integrate Bakhtin into the depths of philosophical thinking was made by Grigori Tulchinskii (St. Petersburg, Russia). His paper, "Act, Responsibility, and Self-awareness: Self as a Narration about Non-Alibi in Being", was among the few presentations which highlighted the connection between Bakhtin's discoveries and the contemporary humanities, as well as natural sciences. Particularly interesting seems the correlation, shown by Tulchinskii, between Bakhtin's ideas of act and responsibility and the contemporary discoveries of neurophysiology.

The argumentations of Sergey Smirnov (Novosibirsk, Russia) on the peculiarities of Bakhtin's philosophical reflection, manifested in his famous *Conversations with V.D. Duvakin*, became almost a dialogue-like extension of Bakhtin's observations. Bakhtin's stories about his past, formally defined by the interviewer's questions, are transformed, in the speaker's conviction, into his philosophical autobiography, which continues the historical-philosophical tradition, whose starting point can be considered the "confessions" of Marcus Aurelius and Pierre Abelard.

No less interesting in this context was the report "Features of Cultural Meanings in the Writings of M.M. Bakhtin" by philosopher, translator and commentator of the Chinese collection of Bakhtin's works Lu Xiao-he (Shijiazhuang, Hebei Province, China). A detailed

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analysis of Bakhtin's texts allowed the scholar to propose a typology and hierarchy of meanings and values, a large-scale study and description of which should be the subject of a special study:

The role of cultural meaning in reality lies, first, in changing the ideology and morality of the recipient, in his self-improvement and moral self-education, and, second, in influencing the economic foundations through the individual. Otherwise, when we elevate our meanings, it is easy to fall into the abyss of idealism or dogmatism.

Bakhtin's dialogue in the paradigm of modern education was the focus of the presentation by Eugene Matusow (Newark, USA), one of the ideologists and theorists of modern dialogic pedagogy, which deliberately explores the educational potential of Bakhtin's ideas and the possibility of their realization. The speaker identified five main features of Bakhtin's dialogue and examined what educational modes derive from these features.

Another confirmation of the relevance of Bakhtin's ideas and his circle to contemporary research and educational practices was the report "The Bakhtin Circle and the East (or What Bakhtin's Ideas Tell us about 'Decolonizing the Curriculum')" by Craig Brandist (Sheffield, UK). The speaker's unexpected, it might seem, turn to the colonial and postcolonial problems in the contemporary humanities receives a substantial justification – an appeal to that Orientalist stratum which is present in the research of Bakhtin's contemporaries, friends and opponents (from M. Tubiansky to N. Marr and his associates). Bakhtin's own ideas, including the idea of dialogue, and those new views on the cultural and historical heritage of the East, which were formed by Soviet Indologists in the 1920s and 1930s, when Russian Oriental Studies experienced its stage of 'decolonization', prove valid here too. As C. Brandist rightly points out,

Bakhtinian dialogism can play an important role in establishing the dynamics between social groups, along with their ideological affiliations, and thus provide a more solid theoretical basis for such analysis.

This provides an opportunity to overcome the oversimplification of the colonial discourse and the notion of natural pre-colonial societies in postcolonial studies. In turn, Brandist also draws a purely practical conclusion about the need to «decolonize» university curricula, in which the established postcolonial «big canon» of Eastern cultures is to be replaced by Eastern cultures as embraced in 'big time'.

A characteristic feature of this conference, as of the previous one, was the increased attention paid to Bakhtin's biography: it begins to be perceived in the broad context of the thinker's relations with his contemporaries and with the preceding intellectual tradition through the lens of the same Bakhtinian «big time». A remarkable metamorphosis, which could be defined as «the big in the small and the small in the big», has been taking place before the eyes of the conference participants. Bakhtin's biography, which, according to the rules of the biographical genre, was in 'little time', gradually acquired its own 'big time'. This was graphically demonstrated in the paper "The Fad for Bringing Bakhtin Down (and Where It Goes Wrong)?" by Caryl Emerson (Princeton, USA), who attempted to identify the reasons for the «anti-Bakhtinian» invectives of part of the academic community, and to outline the potential for a constructive dialogical critique of the thinker's ideas. Consistently assessing the position of A. Korovashko, the author of the book *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Emerson pointed out:

Korovashko did not understand Bakhtin because he did not like him. His view is as distant from his subject as possible. Having neither philosophical training nor an understanding of the debates to which Bakhtin responded, Korovashko interprets Bakhtin's philosophical texts as if they were literary.

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At the same time, Emerson does not aim to unrestrainedly praise Bakhtin. She is close to and understands the work of the English theatre historian and teacher of acting and scenic plastics, D. McCaux, on Bakhtin's corporeality, and the Russian-American literary scholar and culture expert M. Epstein on the «diamond rule» of moral imperative, which seem not so much to correct as to supplement Bakhtin's individual thoughts. We should note that the experience of C. Emerson herself, who co-authored with G. S. Morson the famous monograph *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (1990), allows us to assert that it is on the path of constructive argument with Bakhtin that fruitful results can be obtained.

The broadness of research approaches and the diversity of tools is evidenced by Ken Hirschkop's (Waterloo, Canada) paper "Mythmaking: Why Bakhtin Went Back to the Future in the 1930s", which incisively attempted to understand Bakhtin's complex relationship with history and the future in his works from the second half of the 1930s through the construction of «the little myth». Hirschkop proposed a reconfiguration of the traditional points of reference for contemporary Bakhtin Studies for the formation of Bakhtin's concept of the novel and novel time, designating as key the experimental texts of 1937-1938 related to his study of *Bildungsroman*. It is here that Bakhtin's chronotope unfolds with a particular vision not so much of the past as of the future, which, in fact, marks the contours of the large-scale philosophy of history that Bakhtin was gradually forming in these years. The image of the growing man in a growing world is the ultimate research objective of the thinker's corpus of works of the second half of the 1930s, which will continue with his study of Rabelais and the fragments connected to it.

A number of new biographical subjects were presented in papers "M. M. Bakhtin and the Soviet Literary Establishment: The End of One Myth" by Oleg Osovsky (Saransk, Russia) and "Bakhtin Opens the Dictionary of Philosophy and Stumbles upon Cosmopolitanism" by Galin Tikhanov (London, UK). Thus, O. Osovsky proposes to reconsider the traditional view of Bakhtin in Saransk as a scholar who in the 1940s and early 1960s was stagnating in a provincial backwater and was completely forgotten by the scholarly community, on the basis of some recently discovered archival materials and drawing on transcripts on books from Bakhtin's library. The uncovered documents show that Bakhtin had his own history of relations with the Soviet literary establishment. In this connection, the image of the 'Soviet Bakhtin', i.e., the notion of the scholar's real place and role in Soviet academic and cultural life, must be adjusted in some respects.

G. Tikhanov's speech demonstrated the importance of the work with books from Bakhtin's library, access to which was opened to researchers in Saransk in the second half of the 2010s. Analyzing Bakhtin's pencil notes in the article "Cosmopolitanism" in the philosophical dictionary that belonged to him, the speaker presents Bakhtin's reaction to the new ideological threats that appear at one of the most tragic periods of Stalin's Soviet history, and the possibilities of his work with new ideological and political meanings:

From the adoption of a non-European version of cultural and literary history (while preparing his dissertation research on Rabelais, but also later in the early 1950s in Saransk) to the introduction of the term *big time*, Bakhtin's work was an integral part of the ideological debates of his time.

The new possibilities of Bakhtin Studies were demonstrated in the reports "The Project 'Bakhtin Encyclopedia' in the context of current problems of modern Bakhtin Studies" by Svetlana Dubrovskaya (Saransk, Russia) and "The Starting Point: A Chronotopical Meeting with Bakhtin on the Threshold" by Mikhail Gradovsky (Stavanger, Norway) and Jane White (Canterbury, New Zealand). As S. Dubrovskaya suggests, the current state of Bakhtin research

allows us to raise the question of creating a new format of scholarly and reference publication, simultaneously fulfilling the task of an Internet site for the Bakhtinian community:

We consider this project to be the first step in the creation of a Bakhtin reference resource, believing that the proposed path is only one of many. The key to the overall success of a project of such a format should be a true polyphony - the involvement of a much larger number of researchers, whose combined work will describe the life and legacy of M.M. Bakhtin in a comprehensive way.

M. Gradovsky and J. White described their experience of «traveling to Bakhtin» as a kind of «journey with Bakhtin». The visit to Bakhtin's places (Vitebsk and St. Petersburg) described in the talk was a form of getting closer to the authentic meanings of Bakhtin's texts.

The reception of Bakhtin's dialogical character by different academic schools and cultures is a topic that has been at the center of Ramon Alvarado's (Mexico City, Mexico) research for many years. Creating a kind of audiovisual encyclopedia of global Bakhtin Studies in conversations with its leading representatives, the scholar seeks to show how important Bakhtin is for contemporary humanities knowledge, where Bakhtin's ideas become the key to new theoretical and practical developments. At the same time, the speaker's methodology is extremely broad: using all the possibilities of today's technology, he presented to the participants of the Bakhtin conference an actual video film about the reception of Bakhtin's ideas in South America.

A logical continuation of the ideas and subjects of the plenary reports was the work of the section sessions and online forums, which lasted for four days.

4. Themes and Subjects of panel

Whereas a characteristic feature of the plenary papers was an aspiration to raise large-scale questions, the panel discussions allowed for a more substantial examination of 'the specifics' and for going into the nuances and details of Bakhtin's heritage in the broadest and at times unexpected contexts.

The work of the panel sessions proceeded along four main lines and focused on the biography of the thinker and the reception of Bakhtin's ideas in contemporary philology, philosophy, and other social sciences. A separate subject for discussion was «Bakhtin's interdisciplinarity» i.e., the possibilities of implementing his ideas and approaches in the widest possible range of cultural and historical material.

One more direction can be conventionally called *Bakhtin's component of the theory and practice of education*, which perhaps was on this occasion presented for the first time on such a large scale. Several dozens of participants not only made presentations on how Bakhtin's ideas were understood by the educational community and used in school and university practice, but also held two online seminars in which specific problems were discussed. For example, Kiyotaka Miyazaki (Tokyo, Japan) organized an online platform to discuss the problems of using Bakhtin's dialogism in the practice of teachers, kindergarten teachers, and occupational therapists. No less intense was the discussion of dialogic methodology organized by J. White and Mahtab Janfada (Melbourne, Australia).

Dialogical pedagogy was at the forefront of the Brazilian participants' talks. They analysed Bakhtin's dialogical concept largely in the context of Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, as discussed by Ana Guedes-Pinto (São Paulo, Brazil), Carla Figueredo (Goias, Brazil), and Mello Layssa Gabriela Almeida e Silva (Goias, Brazil).

The speakers did not limit their discussion to the dialogical interactions between the teacher and the student through the prism of the Bakhtinian approach, but addressed the widest range of Bakhtinian notions (from the theory of speech genres and the other's word to polyphony and discourse) and touched upon different aspects of the educational process, including the specifics of rhetorical methods used by teachers, the organization of work with foreign students, and the principles of selecting textbooks and teaching materials. The most noteworthy presentations here included those by Ana Marjanovic-Shain (Philadelphia, USA), Tatiana Ob- lasova (Tyumen, Russia), Olga Marchukova (Moscow, Russia), and Yulia Bokatina (Saransk, Russia).

There was understandable interest in the discussion of Bakhtin's biography. Although the biographical panel was relatively small and was presented mostly by participants from Saransk, it was not limited to Bakhtin's 'Saransk circle'. For example, Natalia Voronina (Saransk, Russia) focused her presentation on the friendship ties between Bakhtin and Maria Yudina. Referring to the pianist's published letters and memoirs, the researcher stressed the importance of this relationship not only for the outstanding musician, but also for Bakhtin himself, confirming the assumption, emerged many times before, that it was her meeting with Yudina which determined to a considerable degree the 'musical elements' of his own philosophical-aesthetic constructions. Unfortunately, the presentation did not cover what the audience considered to be probably the most important and interesting aspect – the speaker's personal involvement in Bakhtin's and Yudina's biographies. N. Voronina, the daughter of Bakhtin's colleague in the department, went to Moscow in 1961, where M. Yudina, at the request of the Bakhtins, helped her, a young music school graduate, to prepare for the Conservatory.

Another of Bakhtin's friends, Pavel Medvedev, was the subject of a presentation by Darya Medvedeva (St. Petersburg, Russia), who told the audience about the publication of the collected works of the scholar, which presented the legacy of the literary scholar and literary critic in such a scale for the first time. Two impressive volumes included P. Medvedev's works on poetry and drama of A. Blok, on the issues of history and theory of literature, the psychology of writers' work, as well as literary and critical articles and notes, fragments of memories, and archival materials. The speaker talked emotionally about the magnitude of P. Medvedev's personality and the frustrating underestimation of his role in Soviet literary criticism and literary life in the 1920s and 1930s. Unfortunately, she devoted most of her presentation to the debate around *The Formal Method in literary criticism*, without citing any new data in favour of the book's 'titular author'. During the discussion of the presentation, it was repeatedly suggested that we should follow Averintsev's advice and refrain from fruitless arguments about Bakhtin's authorship/non-authorship of a certain part of the Medvedev-Voloshinov corpus of texts, at least until new data or more or less convincing results of textual analysis become available.

Evidence of how lively and inwardly dialogical the conference was is the presentation of Olga Ariskina (Saransk, Russia) on "The concept of *Way (Put')* in the academic discourse of the 20th century (based on M.M. Bakhtin's dissertation)". Referring to the transcript of Bakhtin's defense and focusing on the concept of *the scholar's way* in Bakhtin's concept-sphere, Ariskina showed on seemingly purely linguistic material the wholeness and scale of Bakhtin's understanding of his purpose and its conscious verbalization during the defense.

One can assume that one of the tasks of biographical Bakhtinology should be to clarify and expand the names of Bakhtin's milieu. Thus, Irina Klyueva's (Saransk, Russia) report on the wife of Bakhtin's friend B. Zalesky, the pianist M. Yushkova-Zalesskaya, was notably interesting. Referring to the comments in Bakhtin's *Conversations with V. D. Duvakin*, Klyueva offered her version of who was behind Bakhtin's phrase about Kerensky's «last love». References to documents in archives and other materials gave the proposed version sufficient credibility. The subject of perception of Bakhtin by the students of Saransk from 1940 to 1950 was at the center of the presentation by Lyudmila Lisunova (Saransk, Russia) and I. Klyueva in which

the audience were shown an unexpected document survived in the archives of Bakhtin – a letter from a part-time student who tried to express her admiration of Bakhtin as a teacher and person.

The discussion also touched on the problems faced by Bakhtin's biographers: the thinker's archive, which has been transferred to the Russian State Library, remains inaccessible, and the possibility of working with Bakhtin's materials in other archives, such as the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art and the archive of the St Petersburg Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, is limited.

At the same time, it was noted that it would be promising to study in detail other sources, in particular books and journals from Bakhtin's personal library, which are now stored in Saransk. In this context, the publication presented to the participants of the conference, a catalogue of inscriptions on the books presented to the philosopher (Voronina, *Sobranie*), is of particular value.

Obviously, an overview, even of the largest volume, cannot contain a description of all the presentations at the conference, and we will allow ourselves to dwell on those reflecting the most obvious trends of modern Bakhtin Studies. Thus, for philologists it was still important and essential to analyse the possibilities for applying Bakhtin's approaches and ideas to the phenomena of language and literature, folklore, and to identify new aspects of Bakhtin's «aesthetics of verbal creativity». The material used was as diverse as the Russian language and Russian literature, Finno-Ugric epos, and Chinese, Brazilian and Filipino literature. Through the efforts of the speakers in one row were the French G. Flaubert, the Norwegian P. Lagerquist, the American E. Tyler, the Russian philosopher and poet V. Solovyev, playwright A. Sukhovo-Kobylin, writer and journalist S. Kondurushkin and contemporary poet M. Stepanova.

It is perhaps surprising that this time the names of F. Dostoevsky and L. Tolstoy were hardly mentioned at the conference, and that very limited attention was paid to Bakhtin's book on Dostoevsky. It is encouraging that many of the participants consciously moved toward supplementing Bakhtin's theoretical constructions with new material, confirming in particular the validity of his concepts of popular laughter culture. Alexander Ivanitskiy (Moscow, Russia) showed how the categories of *author and hero* work in Scandinavian poetic folklore, and Natalia Dolgorukova (Moscow, Russia) presented her analysis of «medieval Bakhtin» through the prism of French texts connected to the chronotope of the tavern. Elena Rimon (Ariel, Israel) emphasized the presence of carnival images in the first Menippean in Hebrew (Yosef Perl, 1819) and Alexander Filey (Riga, Latvia) - in Russian Book (1568), a Russian-German commercial phrasebook of the late Middle Ages. Adelina Angusheva (Manchester, United Kingdom) offered a significant addition to today's understanding of folk laughter culture by expanding the range of sources from the early 1900s that Bakhtin might have known. The scholarly dialogue between Bakhtin and Pumpyanskiy as an essential part of the Russian reception of the history of Russian literature of the XVIII-XIX centuries was presented by Tatiana Akimova (Saransk, Russia) and Giuseppina Larocca (Macerata, Italy).

There were several ways of making sense of Bakhtin's contribution to contemporary philosophical research at the conference: on the one hand, there were largely traditional papers on the dialogue between Bakhtin and philosophy of the past and the present, the Bakhtinian context of social and cultural philosophical reading of the world and the mankind; on the other hand, there was an evident desire to search for new interpretations of Bakhtin's philosophy as a whole and its individual categories. The quite expected presentations included the consideration of Bakhtin's early philosophy, such as discussions of the phenomenology and architectonics of action by Tatyana Erokhina (Yaroslavl, Russia) and Irina Emelkina (Saransk, Russia), the analysis of the Bakhtin aesthetic of the sublime by Oksana Kravchenko (Teheran, Iran), and reflections on the hermeneutics of subjectivity by Elena Pesotskaya and Vera Inchina

(Saransk, Russia). A fresh perspective on the problems of dialogic imagination through the prism of pedagogical thinking emerged in Linda Siebell's (Perth, Australia) talk, which in some ways echoed the observations of Sergio Mas Dias (Barcelona, Spain) on the deep meanings of the category *love* in Bakhtin's thinking. A combination of a deep interest in the philosophical works of the Russian thinker with an attempt at its critical analysis was characteristic of the papers "Mikhail Bakhtin's Ontological Project: Exceptional Originality or Veiled Eclecticism?" by Nikolay Chervyakov (Moscow, Russia) and "Reflections on the Responsible Approach to Bakhtin's Heterogeneous Thought by Alina Vaiman" (Sarasota, Florida, USA).

A number of notable presentations focused on the work of Bakhtin's concepts and categories in the 'living body' of contemporary urban culture. Thus, Elena Semenova (Moscow, Russia) spoke about different youth subcultures, Julia Kuzovenkova (Samara, Russia) - about visual art practices. An interesting experience of verbal and visual reception of Bakhtin's ideas in Brazil was presented by Antonio José Luciano Rodrigues (São Paulo, Brazil).

In general, the format of the online conference, which has proved its worth, unfortunately had a downside: not all the speakers were able to speak at the agreed time for technical reasons. And this is the reality of new technologies, which also had to be reckoned by the organizers and participants of the conference.

6. Conclusions

To conclude our review of the 17th International Bakhtin Conference, we would like to offer our ideas on what path contemporary Bakhtinology might take and how. The papers of the participants confirmed that the formula «Bakhtin yesterday, today, tomorrow», which has already been used more than once, remains crucial, describing in the best possible way the view of the thinker and his legacy in modern humanities. It presents three images of Bakhtin simultaneously. This is *Bakhtin yesterday*, that is, the historical, real Mikhail Bakhtin as a direct participant in the intellectual life of Russia and the world, who entered the latter half of the 1910s and was actively present in this life up to the mid-1970s. The 'second' Bakhtin is *Bakhtin today*, that is, the Bakhtin of our contemporary views of him, the Bakhtin whose texts we work with here and now. And, of course, *Bakhtin tomorrow*, i.e., Bakhtin for the twenty-first century, whose ideas not only do not lose their modernity, but acquire new dimensions in connection with the challenges that are being formed in the conditions of social, intellectual, ideological, political, and economic life. Working with all these images of Bakhtin, working with his ideas and concepts, supplementing and continuing these concepts, new interpretations of his well-known works, and the possible discovery of new texts and materials - these are the tasks for Bakhtin researchers and, as far as possible, are and will be addressed by them in the coming years.

It is still important for Bakhtin Studies to supplement and reconstruct Bakhtin's biography, to clarify the process of dialogical interaction between Bakhtin and his contemporary ideas and previous traditions, to define the contours of the Bakhtin layer in the humanities and natural sciences and the possible integration of certain components of these fields under the sign of Bakhtin.

The conference demonstrated the effectiveness of international cooperation in various online formats, in specially prepared sessions, and in other forms of scholarly communication. It is no coincidence that the Bakhtin Center of Mordovia University suggested that this is the mode of holding a special international online seminar dedicated to Bakhtin's biography in September 2022.

Among the positive results of the conference is the publication of its materials (Dubrovskaya, Voronina, Klyueva, and Sychev). Some of the papers and speeches have already appeared in "Izvestia of Samara Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences", the

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“Journal of Literature”, “Bakhtin Bulletin”, “Center and Periphery”, and an electronic collection of abstracts has been prepared.

In conclusion, we should add that the next international Bakhtin forum will be held in the summer of 2023 in St. Petersburg.

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