Alina Wyman’s recent book undoubtedly embodies a lot of hopes that the project of intertextual literary criticism, in its broad sense, was endowed with. Her analysis of Dostoevsky’s writings becomes enriched by her expertise in theories of dialogism by Bakhtin and Sheller. Wyman, however, does not leave this enrichment unilateral: it appears plurivocal because of the influence which Dostoevsky’s writings themselves have on these theories in the whole complex of Wyman’s analysis. This attitude, of course, ruins the linear logic of her expounding: Wyman starts her analysis with a peculiar concept, “active empathy,” which turns out to be the third notion uniting Sheller’s idea of Christian love and Dostoevsky’s idea of textual “vzhivanie” (Einfühlung — a German synonym used by Bakhtin). This concept reveals its utmost meaning only at the end of the book, after different characters and plot fragments by Dostoevsky have been considered through the prism of “active empathy” (yet still left incomplete). Consequently, Wyman’s


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book impressively realizes a dialogism which is rhymed and looped on the structure of research dedicated to it.

The risks of this approach are connected with the limits of intertextual senses which it is possible to seize within the framework of a single analysis. This is the reason why such an approach becomes both impressive and vulnerable to criticism. In particular, it is unobvious for what reasons Bakhtin’s “vzhivanie” or active empathy should be returned to the contemporary dialogue with Dostoevsky via mediation by Sheller’s philosophy. The author explains it through the prism of Bakhtin’s early works, such as “vzhivanie” (empathy in Wyman’s translation) and “stanovlenie” (becoming):

Dostoevsky’s fictional world provides many intriguing case studies that could be productively illuminated through the lens of the Schelerian-Bakhtinian theory of intersubjectivity. The relevance of these phenomenological reflections to Dostoevsky’s ethical concerns, only partly explained by the authors’ common philosophical heritage, is due to the personalist agenda shared by all three thinkers and to the crucial importance of the Christological ideal in their respective models of the world. [...] A Dostoevskian character is deeply and often painfully aware of the profound divide between himself and others, lamenting that unavoidable asymmetry between individual experiences that makes complete self-revelation to the other impossible (Wyman, 2016).

Although this attitude is internally coherent, it also includes a kind of conceptual dead-end for intertextuality realized by the book. In other words, it encloses Bakhtin’s allusions to Dostoevsky within a certain philosophical metaphor. This author’s choice becomes a kind of contextual violation, because Bakhtin’s work on Dostoevsky was written essentially later, at the end of the 1920s. However, it is not a historical and contextual approach which is at stake here, but the role of history and contextualism for Bakhtin’s dialogical principle. This approach means additional risks for the domain of interpretation because it leads to the thesis on anti-objectivation as the crux of Bakhtin’s theory. For instance, if Wyman points out Bakhtin’s skepticism towards Marxist and Freudian explanatory models and consequently develops the thesis of Bakhtin inheriting phenomenological personalism, the same contradictions between Bakhtin’s and Freud’s treating the question of the Other are considered by Tsvetan Todorov. He, in turn, explained Bakhtin’s disinterest in Freud with the former’s concentration on history-based interpretational shifts, which were rhymed by him with the everlasting process of misunderstanding and dealing with the difference between sense in the statement and perceived sense (Todorov, 1984: 72). Bereaving Bakhtin
from structuralist “technicism” for the sake of his putative reconsidering of idealism is also a controversial point because of Bakhtin’s well-known engagements (including those mediated by his collaborators, such as M. Kagan) with a broad circle of theoretical approaches connected with positivism, including those in sociology, psychology and even natural sciences.

What seems to be of utmost importance here is that Bakhtin’s dialogue with Dostoevsky, while being interpreted through the prism of the empathy question, lacks its connection with the history of ideas — in other words, with the optics crucially changing the terms Bakhtin’s theory of literature is interpreted through. Interpreting Bakhtin through the lenses of personalist phenomenology and its own intertextual tradition (including Dostoevsky’s texts as a common referent for different philosophers) is reasonable and stems from the common logic of considering Bakhtin’s complicated intellectual trajectory in comparison with other directions and schools he reflected or was influenced by. This comparison appears as devoid of dynamics — whereas this dynamic dimension of apparition or event is one of the crucial elements for the post-Bergsonian philosophies and theories Bakhtin himself shares.

However, it is seemingly impossible to convincingly distinguish any specific part of these broad intellectual contacts in order to label them as key points for explaining the whole corpus of Bakhtin’s work. For instance, in an interview given to Duvakin in the mid-1970s, Bakhtin emphasized the importance of a wide array of diverse authors for his theoretical worldview, with research by scholars such as Kierkegaard, Cohen and Cassirer becoming an addition to Bakhtin’s own work with literary analysis, which is, on its own, far from philosophical discourse.

Trying to find coherence within these logics, some authors posit that Bakhtin replaced personalist phenomenology with a kind of historical phenomenology (Brandist) (Poole, 2004). This approach allows to unite Bakhtin’s different topics as a philosophy of time. Temporality becomes in this case united on the historical level and on the level of personal development and interaction. Consequently, the dialogical principle by Bakhtin turns out to be a kind of post-Bergsonian reflection on dynamics, posed at the ontological crux of any object and apparition. In this case the concept of intertextuality (related to history and historical sociology, expressed last but not least in peculiarities of literary style and in its connections with the worldview) coexists with the context of dialogism (related to social and psychological aspects of the connection between self-awareness and relations with the Other, where all these aspects are transformations, embodied as reflections of time). This could be illustrated, for instance, by Bakhtin’s

Despite being understood by Bakhtin in terms similar to personalism (for instance, in constatation that any mediating social institutes and authoritative hierarchies lose their importance), this phenomenon is linked, in the scholar’s opinion, not with spiritual experience, but with possibilities of social transformations based on a “micro-sociological” level of dialogical unity — where social transformations develop from changes in personal interaction in this way when the subject of said interaction reduces the distance between themselves and another person (Bakhtin, 2000: 173–174). Or, as in the case of Bakhtin’s work on Rabelais, the temporal dimension turns out to be re-enacted in a single element of dynamics — namely, a temporal moment when birth and death are united in a single principle of rhetorical decline to the obscene. “Prohibited” themes appear here as the themes of life’s renewal, where some lives come to their ends, whereas others — to their births. As a result, the carnival deduced by Bakhtin from Rabelais turns out to be a specific philosophy of history where the Renaissance cosmogonical sense of the “low” themes (compare Bakhtin with Cassirer’s theories of the Renaissance worldview) rhymes with Bakhtin’s contemporaneity, which includes wars, revolutions and violent extinction of modernist culture — these tragic events contributed to the worldview by being truthful and avoiding hypocritical evasion of “prohibited themes.”

The above corresponds with another approach to Bakhtin — namely to the consideration of his works through the question of temporality. In this vein, Bakhtin’s approach to Dostoevsky as a crucial author is sometimes compared with authors (such as Viktor Shklovsky and Lydia Gynzbourg) whose interpretations of history were concentrated around Tolstoy, whose realism turned history into a peculiar and, in fact, central character in the novel. Consequently, Tolstoy’s monologism is appreciated as a kind of theoretical choice where the artfulness of fiction is deduced not by the multiplicity of voices, but by a phenomenological view on the entity, observable in the presented time and space (Morson, 1991). However, Bakhtin’s approach is remarkable in this context because he emphasizes another dimension of temporality via considering Dostoevsky’s dialogism. In Wyman’s optics this temporality acquires spiritual or sublime traits where dialogical disappearance of personal borders overpass principles of linear temporality. It is considered by Wyman as being realized through a different implication
of “Christian love,” directly mentioned by Dostoevsky’s characters, and migrating into theoretical principles by Sheller and Bakhtin, who deduced their questions of empathy from it. However, it is important that Wyman does not concentrate on “The Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics” by Bakhtin, only on his “Toward a Philosophy of the Act” and “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity.” Dedicated to relationships between author and character in the novel, these texts do not concentrate on Dostoevsky, although they pay some attention to a comparison between spiritual experience resisting to the subject’s condition of aloofness and loneliness, and the situation of aesthetic unity realized in the novel.

It is a remarkable trait of Wyman’s attitude that she uses a “polyphony” as her own research tool and applies it to Bakhtin’s works first and the text influenced by Bakhtin’s interpretation in modern perception (such as Dostoevsky). This strategy is undoubtedly risky, because starting a deconstruction of the intertextual “chain,” it is worth remembering its proportions and all the multiplicity of references united by it. Instead, this chain may be torn and reduced to some certain point — inescapably outer for the work of Bakhtin’s own logic of intertextuality.

Wyman’s approach to Bakhtin then paradoxically becomes perceived as a complicated form of intellectual history concentrated on contextualizing Bakhtin — in particular, on studying his early understanding of dialogism through the prism of German phenomenological personalism, his contemporary. But this point omits a peculiar conceptual language by Bakhtin — namely, his concentration on literary analysis instead of using conventional philosophical implements. Early works by Bakhtin expressed it in the most impressive way because all the arguments were taken from the writing and reading experience. This aspect breaks a bridge between Bakhtin-Sheller dialogism instead of the unity of the subject — and Bakhtin’s references from Dostoevsky, which should, in turn, provide a connection with Sheller’s emphasizing of “the Christian love” concepts in his novels. Consequently, Bakhtin in fact disappears from this scheme. But it is he who justifies the very idea of “dialogization” and “intertextualization,” realized by Wyman’s research.

Wyman considers this by describing the following difference between Bakhtin’s and Sheller’s concepts of empathy in its comparison to love:

The divergence between Bakhtin’s and Sheller’s views on value-realization stems from the differences in the philosophers’ concepts of the ontological gulf. If Sheller posits the discrepancy in value between all individual persons, independently
of the I/other division, Bakhtin proclaims the radical difference between my self-value and my valuation of others. [...] For that reason the bestowal of value is precisely that, a bestowal, an unsolicited yet precious gift from the privileged other in Bakhtin’s architectonic (Wyman, 2016: 30).

It seems to be important to concentrate on this comparison, aiming to accentuate this difference. In fact, Bakhtin’s concentration on the self diminishes the very possibility of considering his conceptions through the “love to the Other” as a central category. Such a centralization would omit the question of where these dialogical relationships place themselves. Bakhtin’s work with both the author and hero allows to ask the question regarding to what extent the subject’s self-reflection is possible only through thinking of themselves as the Other (for instance, in creating the hero from the position of the author).

This way of analyzing seems to be prominent after an apparent crisis in interpretations of Bakhtin in humanities. In particular, the principle described above becomes frequently reflected in gender studies and queer studies. For instance, Jeffrey Nealon posits that Bakhtin’s “voice” is so remarkable as a concept because it is not linked essentially to a specific point of view. Rather, a person should find their own voice and accept the other’s voice into their common social context. Because of this, dialogism seems especially ethical, because it marks this social context as not based on struggle and domination (Nealon, 1997: 130). However, it is important to continue these observations to pose Bakhtin’s Other into a single character, practice, position, or identity. In this case, Bakhtin’s terms would be working as “indication” of the techniques and rhetorical grades between subjects finding some traits of “Otherness” within their position or identity, and the loss of this Otherness in a strict categorization of “the Other.” In this way, Nealon compares Bakhtin’s dialogue as a way to problematize identity with Adorno’s criticism towards the unproblematized identity in “the dialectics of Enlightenment”—and, remarkably, correlates Bakhtin’s “I” with Odyssey passing through different adventures, who “completed” himself while at the same time preserving himself from being “completed,” so that only this “completing” reveals to Odyssey his own incompleteness (ibid.: 138). As such, it is important that Bakhtin’s “I” revelation towards the “Other” concentrates on a certain kind of experience: measuring the borders of outer expression.

But does this mean that Bakhtin’s conception could hardly be interpreted in the social vein? It seems important to reflect Bakhtin’s understanding of sociality as linked with a certain and paradoxical way of communication:
literary fiction, and especially the novel, where it is difficult to find aesthetic completion (in comparison with a poem, for instance). And herein lies the problem with Wyman’s statement about

an implicit connection between the author’s intuition of the hero’s essential unity and any act of real life ‘authoring’ or consummation, which allows a loving person to perceive the individualizing unity of the beloved (Wyman, 2016: 44).

The accents in Bakhtin’s project of the novel as a peculiar form to express the “I” with the “Other” as the limits of the sayable and understandable. In fact, Bakhtin’s work with novel turns the latter into a peculiar kind of space where the process of reflecting or guessing becomes placed and visualized—underscored by the very composition of the novel, as its main intellectual surplus is gained through words. To transform this question into the question of love or empathy means to shift the accents which are crucial for Bakhtin’s phenomenalization of novel speech. One could compare these optics with a recent work by Jean Rancière (Philosophy, Culture, and Politics, 2002) on landscape, which is also understood as an artificially created space. It concentrates the time-consuming, dedicated to it, at imagining the situation of vision without the technical restrictions of optics and space-orientation. In the case of Bakhtin’s novel, the same sense acquires the union of inner and outer between persons speaking and acting together.

Bakhtin’s intention may have been to affirm this peculiar space into the novel format consisting from. The role of love and empathy for Bakhtin develops from the experience seized by the novel text — the experience conditioned by the novel being a peculiar spatial and temporal locus. This locus concentrates all attention on the rhythm in which wishes, thinking and positions can only be expressed and felt. Consequently, the novel as an aesthetic experience means, first, an appearance of character — as something (“nechto”) identical to itself, as a certain reality which is affirmed lovely in the novel (Bakhtin, 2000: 58), and second — the emphatical feeling caused by juxtaposing this affirmation with the rhythmic factor in our lives, that which terminates our lives and consequently our ability to experience and express empathy and love (ibid.: 60). As a result, the novel becomes a form for repositioning the roles and relationships which appear as usual in real life interactions and interlocutions. Speaking about the contemporary context of Bakhtin studies, it seems prominent to concentrate on such interdisciplinary value of Bakhtin’s theories which could compare the experience given by the author and hero relationships in the novel with the experience of interaction. Bakhtin shows the novel as a form overriding the rift between inner and
outer, which is applicable most accurately not to the difference between “the I” and “the Other,” but rather to the inner and outer by the subject, such as appearance and self-awareness, realized conducts and the unpredictability of new actions and reactions of the present day.

First, the perspective of considering Bakhtin in the context of semiotics, which recapped his ideas in the late Soviet humanities is important. While there are works designated to comparing Bakhtin’s understanding of the sign with the that of Lotman and Pierce (Reid, 2016), it is possible to pose a wider question on the impossibility to separate Bakhtin’s dialogism and polyphony from the common Saussurean roots they have with the philosophy of language. Second, if Julia Kristeva’s influential interpretation of Bakhtin prepared the ground for developing his ideas in the broad domain of Cultural studies, these ideas have had to lose important parts which contribute to the work’s acuity and inner tension. Bakhtin’s way of posing the question could unite this early structuralist attitude of the surplus between sign and its interpretations with, for instance, Lotman’s occupation with the problem of uncertainty which becomes a genuine locus for seeking answers and expressing inner contradictions. Referring back to Wyman’s book, it is remarkable that some places of her discourse on Dostoevsky considered thought the prism of active empathy touch this optics and elaborate on the theses that also apply to the philosophy of language. Although it is written in terms, unconventional for this philosophy, this kind of formulation suggests some development and renewal of the philosophical view on communicative situations, where it is senseless and impossible for its participants to lead their conversation in accordance with logical principles or to persuade their interlocutors in accordance with their goals and convictions. Using an example from “The Brothers Karamazov” Wyman demonstrates this idea of the sense’s dependence on the conversation—since it is in the very conversation that sense is required, because of the whole situation’s ethical and logical deadlock (and Dostoevsky’s novels outlined this phenomenon extremely poignantly and in detail):

Having thus usurped her judgment, he has disarmed his naive interlocutor by using her potential weapon against himself. A similar reactive strategy of using “words with a sideward glance” followed by “loopholes” is employed throughout the whole narrative against the reader, whose arguments against the major tenets of the underground philosophy are cleverly anticipated by the narrator (Wyman, 2016: 97).
Consequently, the attitude to the character of the novel which appears because of the principles of the latter is possible as a coherent and aesthetic unity, or the “artistic vision” (“khudozhestvennoe videnie”) becomes for Bakhtin the model of how and why one is able to concentrate on some certain event or phenomenon: both have empathy at their center (Wyman, 2016: 81). However, it is not empathy as some kind of sublime or spiritual experience which is crucial here. On the contrary, it means that empathy could hardly be experienced and expressed without digitalization and mediation realized in the artistic form (for instance, by the novel) in discovering certain traits and peculiarities which compose and distinguish a character — a novel embodiment of the single form of experience, position and individuality could bear the pressure of temporality and changeability.

In this context, Wyman’s choice of interpretational paradigm (comparing Bakhtin’s interpretation of Dostoevsky with Sheller’s concepts of “Christian love”) creates an effect where theoretical contexts, contemporary and topical, for Bakhtin become omitted and replaced by an intertextual idea of Dostoevsky’s writing as a peculiar kind of religious philosophy. Consequently, it evokes some contradictions from the view of contextualism — at both the “micro” level of intellectual history (paying attention to Bakhtin’s Circle, and its Marxist and sociological optics) and the “macro” level of Bakhtin’s own references during the whole period of his work.

In particular, if one refers directly to Bakhtin’s main work on Dostoevsky (Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo, 1929), scant evidence of this personalist phenomenology, expressed in connection with religious terms, may be found. Bakhtin’s research into the questions of author and hero took place much earlier, so the inner logic of his work does not demonstrate a coexistence between interpreting the authorship as a dialogic experience (or a kind of philosophy seizing this experience) and analyzing Dostoevsky’s style as a “polyphonic novel.”

For instance, Bakhtin notes that not one of Dostoevsky’s novels includes the dialectical becoming of the spirit; they fail to include becoming or growth at all. The same is applicable, according to Bakhtin, to Dostoevsky’s position as an author, because the author’s spirit does not develop within the novels’ frameworks — this spirit only contemplates or becomes one of the participants, or characters of the novel (Bakhtin, 2000: 34). Then Bakhtin directly states that it is not becoming which is the main part of Dostoevsky’s aesthetics, but coexistence and interaction, which is why the scholar eliminates any explanatory motives which appear from the temporal dimension of the novel: its imagination was not temporal, but first and
foremost spatial. This is the outcome of the character’s lack of recollections and absence of biography: they are immanent with the present movement, which is immanent in its own right for them, as a certain dialog with other characters (or, with the Other) happening in this moment (Bakhtin, 2000: 36).

It seems like Wyman’s book could aid future quests for strategies of dealing with this intertextuality. Perhaps the most convincing way to treat the intertextual tradition is to pose a research question from a position within it, continuing this intertextuality not by using it as a “device” (in Viktor Shklovsky’s terms), but by enhancing some of the succeeding lines that were included in the intertextual “complex” and become more obvious with time.

Wyman’s analysis, however, is not restricted to the earlier period in Bakhtin’s work. This paper finds a new type of intertextuality in Wyman’s research—in her hermeneutical work with Dostoevsky. As a result, a new branch of intertextual genealogy appears, which is actually placed not before Bakhtin’s semiotic turn from synthesis between dialogism and the question of “creativity” (“tvorchestvo”), but, in fact, after the new turn in the perception of Bakhtin, which has changed Kristeva and Todorov’s reinterpretations of his works. Wyman does not position Bakhtin’s legacy as conceptually framing the whole 20th-century tradition of finding the dialogical and heteroglossic dimensions behind a putative unity of text—the tradition which was initiated last but not least by Dostoevsky’s writing, but rather as an anachronistic kind of harbinger of Dostoevsky’s philosophy of active empathy.

Bakhtin’s position is beyond any single tradition or school—including cultural and language contexts. Consequently, while Kristeva and Todorov’s interpretations include Bakhtin into cultural studies and literary criticism, some authors who inherited their interpretation of dialogism, heteroglossia and poliphony extend their interpretation of these concepts over applied humanities, cultural anthropology and psychology, others turn their efforts to incorporating Bakhtin’s work into a complicated context of Marxist tradition, where his theoretical innovations share such domains as sociological thought and Marxist philosophy of history (in particular, for those parts of Bakhtin’s heritage which are related to questions of temporality). In the same vein, Bakhtin’s work, in particular his earliest essays on authorship, may also be interpreted through the prism of Russian phenomenological tradition and, last but not least, through such a peculiar trait of said philosophy as coexistence with spiritual and religious questions.
It is difficult to find which texts are the core of such intertextuality. In this streak of thought, the idea of intertextuality means the possibility to seize more complex and subtle concepts and statements than those which are possible in communication via implements of institutional disciplines, such as philosophy and philology. In the case of Dostoevsky—it is curious to what extent his texts suffice this trait and do not turn a discourse dedicated to it into a hermeneutical exercise which is not intertextual—because it does not try to operate within conceptual and referential common places, frequently borrowed from literature and other areas, of course without restriction by the legacy of a single author and an intentional, self-sufficient exegesis of it. As a result, there is a contamination of languages: on the one hand, those of philology and philosophy, on the other hand, of theory and ideology, and, last but not least, of the rhetorical or literary topos-based intertextual intention and the intention of hermitization on the basis of a restricted circle of texts and paradigms endowed with some symbolic or sacral senses.

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ВАХТИН МЕЖДУ ПЕРСОНАЛИСТСКОЙ ФЕНОМЕНОЛОГИЕЙ И ФИLOSОФИЕЙ РОМАНА
РЕЦЕНЗИЯ НА КНИГУ АЛИНЫ ВАЙМАН О ФИLOSОФИИ ШЕЛЛЕРА, БАХТИНА И ДОСТОЕВСКОГО