

THE KERNEL OF THE NOVELISTIC GENE: INCONCLUSIVENESS

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Vous estes en la mort pendant que vous estes en vie. Car vous estes apres la mort quand vous n'estes plus en vie. Ou si vous ayez mieux ainsi, vous estes mort apres la vie; mais pendant la vie vous estes mourant, et la mort touche bien plus rudement le mourant que le mort, et plus vivement et essentiellement. Si vous avez fait vostre prouffit de la vie, vous en estes repeu, allez vous en satisfait, (Cur non ut plenus vitae conviva recedis?) Si vous n'en avez sçeu user, si elle vous estoit inutile, que vous chault-il de l'avoir perdue, à quoy faire la voulez-vous encores? Montaigne, "Que philosopher, c'est apprendre a mourir", *Essais, Livre I, Chapitre 20*.
Le but de nostre carriere, c'est la mort, c'est l'object necessaire de nostre visée: si elle nous effraye, comme est il possible d'aller un pas en avant, sans fiebvre? Le remede du vulgaire c'est de n'y penser pas. Montaigne, "Que philosopher, c'est apprendre a mourir", *Essais, Livre I, Chapitre 20*.

Face to face with the experience of the genre shifts in the modernist novel, Lukács in *Die Theorie des Romans* (1916) and Ortega y Gasset in *La deshumanización del arte* (1925) - though the latter advocated the ideas of perspectivism - proclaimed their thoughts about the end of the novel. Contrary to their position, in *Epos i roman: O metodologii romana* (1941) Bakhtin claims, "The process of the novel's development has not yet come to an end" (1981: 40). What is the kernel of the novelistic gene to polarize the opinion on the genre so openly? Scrutinizing the roots of the novelistic discourse, Bakhtin introduced his unique ideas about an ever again renewed genre, a non-canonical one, the literary form in essence never completed. He found it as a genre which cannot be framed by pre-existing categories, namely, not identified on the ground of the epic form. Bakhtin's theoretical and historical discussion of the novel and its word, explicitly disclaiming any role of the epic in its formation as a genus, was certainly ground-breaking. "Only that which is itself developing can comprehend development as a process", Bakhtin argues, and continues, "The novel has become the leading hero in the drama of literary development in our time precisely because it best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making" (1981: 7). The novel, claimed as a form of a substantial irony of existence, is a genre on being as *becoming* (German *Werden*). Or, as stated by Kundera, the novel is about man's being and it is concerned what it means to *be* in the world. As an art form, it manifests the interests into

inconclusive reality of life. "The novel is the only developing genre and therefore it reflects more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and rapidly, reality itself in the process of its unfolding." (Bakhtin 1981: 7) The novelistic discourse was instituted to intervene in the issues of human self, actually, of self and identity, and is in its modernist outcome a novel *par excellence*, realizing that self-identity is an ongoing state of affairs, ever changed and reinterpreted. Rejecting the authority of any abstract ideological delineation of the novel, Bakhtin intervened in the acute debate on the genre with an in-depth study of great significance. Though available in fragments, his theoretical views turn out to be manifestly consistent. In his philosophical, basically historical observations of the novel, he recognized the essential nature of the genre defined by fluidity, and the open sense of the historical. Thus, in fact, while outlining the complex condition of the genre, he intervened into the very logic (into the sophisticated, multifaceted sense) behind the modernist turn as well.

The novel is genuinely a European art form founded in disclosing the truth as identity structure. Playing the inherent role of re-examining human being in the world, the art of the novel is closely intertwined with the elementary traces of men's self-awareness and his earliest consciousness of (historical) time. At its core, the event of the novel actually implies a new way of conceptualizing time, hence a claim about the genre as "the vanguard of change" (Bakhtin 1981: 33). The novel as a form is shaped on the ground of the human reorientation to the present, to the "contemporary reality in all its inconclusiveness" (Bakhtin 1981: 31). In fact, it was introduced when the first sense of modernity (and hence also of historicity) came forth. As a form it coexists with the most basic traces of the rationality and the initial idea of an individual will to action. It is a genre stemming in the early human self-understanding as *animal rationale*, in man's new attitude to the world, his rudimentary familiarity with the world given in the zone of direct contact with immediate present. The very moment of man's rudimentary familiarity with the world, his emerging "direct contact with inconclusive present-day reality" (Bakhtin 1981: 39) signifies, in fact, the very origin of art as *mimesis* as well as the advent of nascent scientific view. Actually both, the novel and art as praxis of imitation can emerge by the birth of democracy and plurilinguism, that is, by the first traces of consciousness of heteroglot reality, "when the present becomes the centre of human orientation in time and in the world, [when] time and world lose their completedness as a whole as well as in each of their parts" (Bakhtin, 1981: 30). Or in familiar Lukács's dictum, the novelistic form is an expression of transcendental homelessness.

Being shaped when "the temporal model of the world changes radically: [that is, when] it becomes a world where there is no first word (no ideal word), and the final word has not yet been spoken" (Bakhtin, 1981: 30), or, to employ Lukács's view paraphrasing Hegel, in the world that has been abandoned by Gods, the novel can be brought into being at the dawn of the metaphysics of subjectivity.

The traditional novel coexisted with the history of metaphysics or the ground of onto-teleological thinking. It is a genre of emerging self-awareness as well as of skeptical attitude. That is why throughout its rather long history the traditional novel can be found as a story of a quest for a meaningful existence. However, what is meaningful or substantial in one's life, is entirely subjective, an ambiguous resolution, essential only for the inherent nature of an individual. At the closing of the traditional prose narrative, the novelistic hero is in his individual quest for a meaningful existence principally confronted with the naked truth that the human existence is finite (cf. Montaigne, "To philosophize is to learn how to die"). Throughout the history of the traditional European novel, the novelist writing involves us in the ongoing conflict behind the heroes' individual projects (and their unsuccessful outcomes), actually into the clash of an apparent rational action to fulfill the life task (or, in Don Quixote's words, to endow world with an order) and of the chance factor of the bare existence. At the time the first novels (Greek *pseudes historia*) were brought into existence, the word chaos (*χάος*) implying in the ancient Greek "the primal emptiness, space" was already grasped only as "disorder". At the rudiment stage of the novel, the encounter of the human self with "the primal emptiness, space" was apparently found quite unbearable.

In my understanding of the novel as a genre of complex existential encountering with bare reality of our own being, I am much indebted to my late professor Dusan Pirjevec who discussed the form of the novel in depth and approached to the sense of its structure utterly historically. In the 1960s and 1970s, being impressively intrigued into the existential meaning of literature and art, he launched his strong theoretical insights into the novel and its configuration, considering mainly the fundamental frame of the character's action disclosing the nihilist ground of metaphysical thinking behind the life project grasped by the European novel. His original reading of Hegel's, Lukács's and Goldman's views on the novel extended over Heidegger's *Seinsgeschichte* philosophy and his carefully thought-out ideas on art brought fruitful assessments of the genre as an authentic European art form. Elaborating his own theoretical and

historical understanding of the novel as art (and investing into his ingenious discussion also his own philosophical and existential experiences of his revolutionary, in fact, world-shattering years during the WW2), he found *Don Quixote* a prototype of European novel, as a book touching upon the laughter and the grave moments of revelation, a book about human condition which brings about openness for paradoxical, incongruous identity of being. Kundera's comment on the novel as "an echo of God's laughter" (cf. Kundera 1988: 168) could be well read bearing in mind this openness for paradoxical, incongruous identity of being. In his analytical scrutiny of *Don Quixote*, Pirjevec identifies the European novel as a unique form portraying mainly an individual as an active subject, a sovereign being (Latin *subjectus*), subjected to his own *self* (that in the sense of metaphysical Being, i.e., hypostatizing something as a transcendental value or scheme); the hero of the traditional European novel is constituted in metaphysical Being and is living up to his (metaphysically grounded) subjectivity when carrying out his innermost interests and aspirations. The hero's self in the novel is striving to be self-realized in view of an idea, according to his own subjectivity (or partisanship), in view of his most intimate initiative. According to Pirjevec, the novel reveals the problematical nature of human being figured out as a sovereign self (when the self is aspiring to perform his postulated, transcendental aim, his own *telos* or in words of Montaigne "le but de nostre carriere"). Insight into the novel, as discussed by Pirjevec, essentially discloses the challenging, upsetting views on the self in the European thought. At the outcome of the best European novels, when the novelist character on his journey to accomplish his metaphysically grounded self (in fact, his interests and aspirations defining his selfhood, his distinct identity) realizes that himself, his own *being there*, being-in-the-world, can not be identified with something assumed, the reader is wrapped up in a catharsis; he finds it the moment when *disclosure of being* as Being comes about. Pirjevec interpreted the cathartic moment in the wrap-up of the novel as art form bearing in mind the Heidegger's idea of ontological difference. The novel is an emblematic European art form, its "genuinely poetic projection is the opening up or disclosure of that in which human being as historical is already cast" (Heidegger, quoted in Taylor 1986: 276.) "After *Don Quixote* the European novel could not continue to exist by way of imagination, i.e. as fantasy and fiction in its literal sense. When becoming the mirror of life, the laughter withered away in the novel." The novel launched as *pseudes historia* was "programmed" to become serious. Establishing itself as a privileged form of ignorance, or, to quote Bakhtin in Holquist's translation, as a genre that "speculates in what is

unknown" (1981: 32), the novel can easily approach the most perplexing and subtle problems of self and identity, of freedom and necessity, of deceiving (false) subjectivity of man as *subject*, etc. The history of the novel truly considers the issues concerning our most basic human existence. Dealing with the tricky and impenetrable issues of self and identity, the novelistic genre involves its plot interests. In traditional novel, narrative theme is essential to discuss the self and the reality of the metaphysically grounded interests or goals - *identity as sameness* in Ricoeur's sense - of the hero.

In modernist shift, the novel through its narrative logic intervenes in the very dilemma of human self leaving behind the metaphysical burden. The change the modern novel accomplished in the twentieth century was actually the realization of a different line of novelistic writing, the one exemplified in Rabelais, Sterne, Swift, romantic novel, Flaubert's *Les Tentation de Saint Antoine*, the novelistic mode being coexistent throughout the long history of the metaphysics of subjectivity. The narrative approach of these novels was able to grasp the quandaries of human existence through much more elusive settlement, through an inconclusive, serio-comical attitude (Greek *spoudegeioin*), and was running parallel with the so-called traditional European novel. In its own comprehension of reality and events, the modernist novel (an heir of this genre line) has perceived how terribly unreliable is our human gaze. In fact, modernism reveals how the point of view or focalization (i.e., the very act of linking or the state of being linked with reality) is insubstantial, fragile, flimsy; modernist skill through its formal inventions actually thematizes the very insubstantiality or groundlessness of ground. Because the advance of modern art found it unavoidable to address the "continuing temporal transitions" (Bakhtin 1981: 30) of reality, the ever-changing representation of it, its praxes were driven by the necessity of inventing fresh techniques of "scopic vision" (Spivak 2003: 108) or stereoscopy. Auerbach describes the modernist method a "multivoiced treatment of image" ["die vielstimmige Behandlung"] (Auerbach 1946: 481). In fact, in modernist schemes one can identify an advance of dialogism and its basic logic of inconclusiveness. Aware that existence, truth, as well as facts of history cannot be founded on a single source and defined in accordance with a single (universalistic) meaning any longer, modernism - advocating the modernist unrestrained "contact with the spontaneity of the inconclusive present" (Bakhtin 1981: 27) - grasps the open reality with its inherent logic of conflicts and contradictions. It approaches the given world in its inexhaustiveness of truth, that is, as an immense, boundless wealth of being. Bakhtin discussed

double-voiced, internally dialogized discourse of the novel (grasping ambiguities, individual dissonances, misunderstandings, the fundamental heteroglossia ("*another's speech in another's language*", 1981: 324) already in mid 1930s. Most important is the view that such "dialogic oppositions [... remain] unresolved", "determined by a collision" (Bakhtin 1981: 405). The novelistic gene characterized by its basic inconclusiveness, involves not only lack of any pattern, but can well communicate the contradictory nature of our very existence, its elusiveness, indecisiveness, vagueness, indefiniteness.

The above mentioned parallel line of novels, essentially thematizing the very insubstantiality or groundlessness of ground of being through its serio-comical mind-set, undermines the human arrogant and frantic search of a meaningful existence. Aware that such an attitude to being-in-the-world (in fact, any quest of a meaningful existence) is doomed to failure, and responsive to the elusive (in fact, serio-comical) reality of life, it advocates the standpoint that the world without signification is the world itself, the bare fact of existing. The attitude read in serio-comical representations of this novelistic lineage does not necessarily mean that the world has no meaning, it only reminds us that the world is not about meaning, that it is our human condition, the given which is available to us, sensitive, unique, beyond words, delicate, subtle. The novelistic gene only lets us know that man's being-in-the-world is an established fact given to his discretion to take hold of it. "It is the evidence of the world that matters. Being-there (German *Dasein*) comes ahead of beings and meanings," claims Jean-Luc Nancy (2001: 4). "Only *Dasein* is *mine*, and more generally self." (Ricoeur 1991: 191- 2) The novel reveals that the true sense of the world as well as of our human existence is rather plain: *être la pour rien*. Here we can recall again Nancy's philosophical twist that the "loss of a meaningful world is actually a gain, because a world without signification is the world itself. Not that the world is nonsense, but the 'sense of the world' is only conceivable once we have acknowledged that the *world is not about meaning*, but is a more *locus* for the meanings." (Kretzschmar 2002) The observation brings us back to the initial (but in times of metaphysical, onto-teleological thoughts forgotten) meaning of the word chaos as the "primal emptiness, space". In portraying the ambiguous life journeys of its heroes, the traditional novel grasps the very response of the world, that the "world can give back its own real." (Jean Luc Nancy 2001: 44) Or, in words of Kundera, "the novel is a fictitious paradise of the individual. The novel is a terrain, where no one possesses the truth [...], but everyone has his own right to comprehend it." (1988: 169) The comment reminds us of our own available contacts

or communications with reality and truth; actually, it implies that there are only different ways of our "relatedness to the real" (Ricoeur 1988: 5, quoted in Makaryk 1993: 455). In his book *Being Singular Plural* Nancy asserts: "The 'meaning of Being' is not some property that will come to qualify, fill in, or finalize the brute givenness of 'Being' pure and simple. [...] Being itself is given to us as meaning. [...] meaning is itself the sharing of Being." (2000: 2)

The novel brings about its own unequivocal interpretation of the world. As a genre, it was advanced through realizing that one's own conceptual system or horizon [Rus. *krugozor*] is not identical or agreeing exactly with someone else's, that there is a gap between one's own intentions and the words and someone else's words. The gap was evident through emergent consciousness of self, through rudimentary self-understanding of man as *animal rationale*. The initial process of sensing the split in the identity of interests enabled the birth of dialogue. "Being *čuzoj* makes dialogue possible." (Holquist 1981: 423) This sense of otherness (Rus. *čuzdost'*) and the fact of outsidership represent the threshold of the novelistic discourse. The novel which is constituted in "the spontaneity of the inconclusive present" (Bakhtin 1981: 27), in the primordial sense of the modern (Latin *modernus*, Latin *mod(o)*, mod(o) lately, just now), lays open to view the co-existence of differences. In Nancy's words, the novelistic genre puts forward that "meaning is itself the sharing of Being" (2000: 2).

It brings us back to the logic of modernist strategies of dialogism and the historical sense in the modernist novel. At least double, dislocated topological insight into certainty and truth set forth by the modernist aesthetics of transitoriness is generally discussed bearing in mind modern pluralism and perspectivism. Grasping the very multiform actuality, immediacy of true existence, novelistic genre in modernism was verifying the very re-orientation to the never-ending present and testing its openness to the concreteness of the world. Through the Baudelarian formula 'représentation du présent' the continued existence of the novel in its modernist configuration involves us into the world of paradox, inconsistency, absurdity, contradiction, unease, incongruity, discrepancy, irregularity, unpredictability, changeability, challenge, meaninglessness, ludicrousness, nonsensicality. Baudelairean sense of 'représentation du présent' giving insights into the immediacy in its "all-embracing and unconcluded process" (Bakhtin 1981: 30), introduces us into unsettling process (Kristeva) of events and of protagonists' situations, erasing the 0-1 logic and reinstating a more all-encompassing view of transfinite logic, to borrow a concept used by the mathematician Georg Cantor. In "Word, Dialogue, and Novel",

when introducing Bakhtinian views on the novel, Kristeva "emphasizes the specificity of dialogue as a *transgression giving itself a law*" and figures out its principle as "*law anticipating its own transgression*" (1980: 71).

The modernist breakthrough with its innovative and far-reaching interventions into narrative form of the novel appeared to be radical but actually only re-accentuated the qualities inherent to the principles of this genre. Modernist novel with its structural impediments in the representations and apparent deformities in narrative construction, of course, could not be perceived only as an experiment in form, but as a representative form of dialogism (a form manifestly addressing otherness) which inscribed in itself the instances of the response - the instances of the reader. The radical narrative invention introducing the inscription of the reader into the text had considerable consequences for further modes of transforming the genre. However, in the 20th century, one can find an endless chain of traditional narratives as well, but such cases of the conventional novel merely demonstrate the compulsion to repeat the genre patterns. Implications in the postmodernist narrative practices prove the tacit evolution of the novel and its interests.

Novel in modernism takes advantage of the artistic exploit of narrative procedures to the maximum. As a genre that dwells upon identity problem novel is getting even more intrigued in the very issues of narrative identity, addressing ideas of *selfness* and ideas of *sameness*, to evoke Ricoeur's elaborated distinction of the problem. Modernist art promotes a de-centered logic or, to put it differently, truth, the self, and the factual, as modernist methods testify, are not apprehended as something identical to themselves, but as non-finalized or inconclusive entities open to otherness, always in a dialogic relation. Narrative inventions introduced into poetics of the radinovel touch upon the very terrain(s) of continuously reinterpreted identities. The modernist self is manifestly conscious of being defined through dialogism. The Cartesian ego, as well as Western logocentric ways of thinking, is openly challenged in modernist art of novel. In modernist's view (well in agreement with the views stated already by Nietzschean philosophy) the privileged Cartesian oneness of "*I*" is clearly subverted. Novel in modernism – as the multitude of its poetics testifies – is able to open up the "impossible task" to bring forth "the unthought" (to use Heidegger's vocabulary) and to grasp the very floating and transitory state of being. Novelistic genre in the beginning of 20th century overtly initiates views of constructivism in its aesthetics. The idea is well corroborated by position found in Apollinaire that the contemporary art is not an art of imitation representing "the reality of sight", but an "art of

conception" or an art representing "conceptualized reality or creative reality", "reality of insight" (Apollinaire 1912, in Harrison and Wood 1997: 182). Focusing multicultural and multilingual reality as a narrative theme the genre points out how the Self and the given truth are ongoing events, ever reinterpreting facts, continuously intertextualized through the passage of time. The factual and reality are recognized as something contingent, not something stated forever within the fixed boundaries. The novel with its very gene reminds us that *being* is in a state of flux, transmuting its character, ever transgressing the given edges. Reality (as well as Self) is the given in its literal sense: given to us to grasp it and to respond to it in the ongoing chain of responses.

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