

MAKING LOVE WITH [BAKHTIN]

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There is so little time for lovemaking. And too much time in between. I have set off in search of effective distraction in the hope of clarifying the concepts of productive relations as described in "Art and Answerability" and in "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," here in a small room bordering upon the crowded street, by boarding a flight of fancy through Bakhtin's texts to Dostoevsky's *Bobok*, via unarticulated reference to Joyce's *Ulysses*. These texts are before me now and, as my eyes move from one to the next, it occurs to me that, during periods of heightened sensitivity, they produce similar effects upon my mind and body. I feel my skin burning and can veritably sense my blood coursing through my veins. But do I? As I rub my hands over my own body, I wonder, "How do we experience our own exterior?" (*Art and Answerability* 27, hereafter *A&A*). Why does it feel so different to experience my own caress, on the one hand, and to feel yours, on the other? Why am I but a "soul slave," incapable of producing by my own existence something that is "productive and enriching" (*A&A* 32)?

I long for a state of active erotic fantasy, dream, imagined creation, for it is only through this kind of meditation that I could hope to understand these exigent questions. "How do we experience outward appearance in the other?" (*A&A* 27), I wonder. "On what plane of lived experience does the aesthetic value of outward appearance lie?" (*A&A* 27). I know for sure that there is no hope that I will produce a "productive" (*A&A* 36) representation of "my own outward image" (*A&A* 30) in the midst of such phantasmical activity, nor even that I'll approach an adequate "representation" (*A&A* 28) of myself to myself. My *situatedness* (*A&A* 134) precludes any such eventuality. I am trapped here, situated in this small space, and though "my thought can place my body wholly into the outside world as an object among other objects, my actual seeing cannot do the same thing" (*A&A* 28) because "I experience myself on a plane that is fundamentally different from the one on which I experience all other active participants in my life and in my imagining" (*A&A* 32). I feel that in order to see myself it must be through your eyes; for "my seeing . . . cannot come to the aid of thinking by providing it with an adequate image" (*A&A* 28). Perhaps in order to do so I could invoke the image of my beloved? Oh, if only I had a photograph! Alas, no. It would be of little use; for even a photograph "provides no more than the material for collation" (*A&A* 34). Any photograph is "fortuitous, artificially received," mere "raw material, completely incapable of being incorporated

into the unity of my life experience, because there are no principles for its inclusion" (A&A 34). No, I must invoke your presence through fantasy, my love, erotic fantasy. Yes. Such a fantasy will not, of course, "fill the lacunae of actual perception" (A&A 29); but at least I'll understand the experience of myself through a vision of you, for "the difference in the planes on which persons exist in fantasy is particularly clear-cut when it has an erotic character" (A&A 29). I shall construct you with my thoughts, yes. I know that it is only through this fantasy that I'll be able to provide you, my "longed-for heroine," with "the highest degree of outward distinctness that our representation is capable of achieving" (A&A 29); but I also know that in doing so I will not provide a truly "adequate outward image" of you (A&A 28). So be it.

I have not the capacity to visualize "my own outward memory in imagination" or to feel myself "from outside," nor even the ability in this too-small *chronotope* to translate my own self "from the language of inner self-sensation into that of outward expressedness in being" (A&A 29); but I do have the power to "vivify" (A&A 30) my recollection of you, my love, and in doing so activate a part of the whole. For this I am willing to settle, if only to separate myself long enough from the hustle and bustle that I know exists beyond that door, and if only to delude myself through fantasy that we are together.

But wait! A sound! A voice! Your voice! You have arrived, my love, unexpected and unannounced, you have arrived to complete and consummate through presence, to vivify and render whole through reply, to coincide and diverge through outward expressedness. Come close, my love, come close.

That you appeared, my love, at the very moment when I sought a landmark and an equally evasive pastime consistent with Bakhtin's directions, is a symbol in a world that too often lacks engaging meaning. Allow me to embrace you, my love, as I have this small space, this pile of sweat-drenched texts, this vision of adequate interaction. Let us speak, my love. Come close. Let us speak. Let me "experience distinctly all of [your] boundaries, encompass all of [you] visually and encompass all of [you] tangibly" (A&A 36). It feels good to embrace you, to feel you, now that all of you "is laid out before me in the exhaustive completeness as a thing among other things *in the world external to me*" (A&A 36).

I express myself to and through you as an idea given shape and form, as a voice through which my entire past must speak and in response to your urging voice and moans which utter your past your present your vision your words your song, this room, this time, this day, our warmth. Come even closer, oh, come closer still and embrace me. I can feel you, taste you! Bring us both to life! Oh my love "it is only [you as other] who can be embraced, clasped all around, it is only [your] boundaries that can all be touched and felt lovingly" (A&A 41). Your "fragile finiteness," your "consummatedness," your "here-and-now being—all are inwardly grasped by me and shaped, as it were, by my embrace" (A&A 41). Oh hold me my love, for in doing so your "outward existence begins to live in a new manner, acquires some sort of new meaning, is born on a new plane of being" (A&A 41). Kiss me, my love, for only your "lips can be touched with [my] own, only on [you] can [I] lay [my] hands, rise actively above [you] and 'overshadow' all of [you] totally, 'overshadow' [you] in every constituent feature of [your] existence, 'overshadow' [your] body and within [your] body—[your] soul" (A&A 41–42).

Down with these trousers! Off with this shirt! Out with my bourgeois egoism! I am not making love with you, we are making love together; you, I, and every component of this darkened room!

I will not speak in search of resolution, for our unarticulated thoughts give rise to infinite potential and meaning, and all that is unsaid between us makes it “possible to believe and to hope,” to “look forward to the compelling fullness of meaning” (A&A 133). But neither will I feast in search of satiation, pray in search of restitution, act in search of salvation, die in search of mute oblivion; nor will I make love in the quest for peace and bliss and an end to it all either for this night or for the coming dawn.

I seek *answerability*, to “answer with my own life” (A&A 1), to touch and be touched not like the hands of the clock passing in silent non-recognition, but like hands who in the obscurity of selfless intertwinement know not, and indeed seek not, to differentiate yours from mine; and then, in a glance, know not, and then seek not, to know myself except through reference to all that I sense through your expression.

Your trousers, or are they mine? undone for what appears the first time ever and, yes it is ten past four not three and darker now than it was this morning and yes, your smile is more tentative and I have drunk tea and dunked my hands into its steaming body throughout the early hours of the afternoon to quench this still-parched throat and to bathe these still-trembling fingers by joining them to equal warmth and wetness, yes.

Allow me quest to find sources for each tender cry and simple gesture, not satisfaction in their presence at this moment, different from the next. We’ll recall at some time, now imagined and hence present before us in this endless afternoon, and by recalling invent how this subtle glance or that unexpected caress provoked oceans of tears for which the drowning strangers outside the door gave praise.

Who will answer for the taste that now lingers upon my probing tongue, and who in doing so will participate in the interpenetration of “art and life” (A&A 1) and life as art as one line of saliva drawn from your left heel to the inner crevices of my right elbow, now flexed, now vulnerable, now atop your own and searching for repose? Who will experience the “guilt” (A&A 1)? And who will take the “blame” (A&A 1)? “For it is certainly easier to create without answering for life, and easier to live without any consideration for art” (A&A 2).

It is written, in some space now occupied by the strangers who walk past and stand beyond and pause to listen from behind that closed door, that “the individual must become answerable through and through: all of his constituent moments must not only fit next to each other in the temporal sequence of his life, but must also interpenetrate each other in the unity of guilt and answerability” (A&A 2). I bore those words into this room when I came here, and now soak them through hungered licking of the once-symmetrically lined threads that compose your now-diaphanous shirt. That they were upon the tip of my tongue or scrawled across your heaving chest I know not, but eagerly taste them and let them intertwine with the odor of your breath, now tasted, now consumed, now exhaled, now wafting, like silent perfumed dialogue into the inner recesses of a brain no longer situated as it was at the time of your soft respiration.

He who demands guilt, recompense, the gift of summary description or long demonstration answers to the desire to know and by doing so becomes an accomplice to a setting now far aloft and infinitely woven into and upon this now whole, now captured and fragmented moment.

"But for inspiration" (Pushkin)¹ I ask, beg, offer, and bear all that, "but for inspiration," are this time, this person—you, this self of mine, intertwined and pleading, and shifting, like the "heh heh heh" of that tempting young girl, Katish Berestova, in Dostoevsky's *Bobok* who announces the doom of betrayal through sharing and survival and the bliss of temptation in the answer of the call (176ff). Heh heh heh, you say. Heh heh heh. I feel the ocean upon me and do not know how to drown.

Now you, I, thrust down upon this bare floor, sunshine caressing, now no longer, the wisps of hair that shelter your eyes from my own. We meet, this piece of clothing, neither yours nor mine, between us no longer, and now the unexpected creation of a new more pungent sweat replaces it upon our naked skin. Your air, indeed the very air between us, bears new signals transmissions visions unimaginable, though imagined when I'd seen you outside of this room, and the consumption and tearing that has rendered the last bits of clothing but a cushion for various softly pressured points, allowing for the first time this moment, visions rendering past truths like those that emanate from a world long refracted and condensed though still engraved into the memories of my wetted skin and yours intermingled and inseparable therefrom.

This floor, your hair cascading into my open mouth, the contracting world now bounded by your hands in mine is as the meeting of not yet "boboked" souls in Dostoevsky's vivid graveyard world, and the sounds uttered are new truths, for the absence of covers masks and measures permits us interaction with all others through the force of answering to no other than you. The graveyard king-for-a-moment, Klinevich, speaks to us like a chant that emanates from beyond the door that shelters this world within the womb of the other, like the distant words that, revitalized, come back to speak to our nakedness: "Damn it, the grave means something, you know! We'll all tell the stories of our lives and not be ashamed of anything. I'll be the first to tell about myself. I'm a beast of prey, you know. Everything up there was tied together with rotten ropes. Away with the ropes, and let's spend [these] two months in unashamed truth! Let's strip ourselves naked!" (Dostoevsky 179) Oh! I have cried out, my love, overenthusiastic in my intermingling of memory with present moment, and now the sounds from beyond that door grow to a clamor, and persons seem to have banded together to condone and reply: "'Naked, naked!' The[ir] cry [is] unanimous" (179). So, heh heh heh, I say to you my love, heh heh heh and, again in the words of Avdotya, allow me to look into your sparkling eyes and cry out to you, to them, "I terribly, terribly want to be naked!" (179).

But this place, though below the now-towering furniture of the room, though without the intrigue and the pretense and the masking and the solitude of unashamedly albeit oft-unwitting interacting strangers that pass us by upon that sidewalk who, though intimate through their participation in the moans and shrieks and heh heh heh that permeate this room, remain to us as the ticking clock upon the wall, though far from life as lived above us in that marketplace of exchange of laughter

and anger and eager glance, though so close in measurable distance, this place is no underworld, no grave, no den of peace or solitude, no “boboked” world of voices, giggles, heh heh, and open-endedness and inestimable distance measured in inches of earth and universes of discursive realms between those now speaking, now rotting bodies. This place, this soft nook between the shoulder blades upon your naked back, is a place of wholeness, a place which begs, like the sculpted tombstone upon which *Bobok*'s narrator sits while contemplating “appropriate reflections” (168), to be as the dialogized written text that is the story of *Bobok* and pleads through unimaginable proximity to be the intrigue and the plot, the character and the effect, the style and the content, the subject, the hero and the author in constant interaction through mounting warmth and pounding heart sensed through salty skin now tasted, now caressed, now licked, now wet.

Vacillating between author and hero, voice and text, body and sound, mind and articulation, your lips, now upon mine, produce their own object of desire and construct the value thereof in their own secreted warmth. Wholeness is inestimably intertwined, my arms still around your back as yours around mine, your lips upon and within my own, with the very taste of you for that is all that is in the thundering darkness of pounding heart and closed eyes and hardened body and thrusting mind in search of point of entry for dissolution complete and eternal creation of sculptured hardness therein.

No longer a world of tentative interaction, of awkward motion in search of unimagined wholeness through warmth, of quiet utterances thrust out like scouts in the silence in search of their own author, nor a stage of the trial before the uninitiated and therefore potentially unreceptive upon which is exhibited “a great many grimaces, random masks, wrong gestures, and unexpected actions, depending on all those emotional-volitional reactions and personal whims of the author, through the chaos of which [we have all] been compelled to work . . . in order to reach an authentic valuational attitude” (A&A 6), this world is now one of differentiation through response and articulation, through shared respiration and resounding echoing moans.

Your shirt, I touch it yet again and draw it out from under us in the hope of recreating moments linking the sight of you with the memory of you covered and untouched by wetness yours and mine, is the final layer of material that, as woven cloth of transmission, absorbed your wetness for tongued extraction; but your countenance now, eyes closed and skin alight, is the very depth remaining after the unmasking of the layers, “layers that were sedimented upon [your] face by our own fortuitous reactions and attitudes and by fortuitous life situations” (A&A 6). Your countenance is our own thoughts and dreams and comments and replies in forms of gestures, regards, and utterances played out in our many interactions, now reflected back after so many grappling nights and uncertain days when the gaze, untrained, wafted and waffled between solitude and eager glance, between the touch of silence and the scream of penetration through discourse.

But oh my sweet the day is too short and night brings new kinds of light and different sounds to fill the moments between the now unstified cries and now unharnessed laugh, heh heh! I hear the pitch of the sidewalk din growing louder once again, and fear our forced descent to the surface from this space so deeply subter-

restrial as to be as a cloud in Hell. I wish to remain in life my love, to plead as did the new voice that comes to life, though dead, in the world of *Bobok* before eternity: "No, I wish I could live a bit longer! No . . . you know, I . . . I wish I could live a bit longer" and "I wish I could live a bit longer; no, I wish I could live a bit longer!" Reply to me as did Avdotya Ignatyevna in that realm when she giggled: "And with such an appetite, you know, he-he!" (170).

Oh moan and thrust yourself against me, my love, completing with the excess of your glance your stare your caress the space behind above and within me! Heh heh! Fill my senses with but the sound of your voice and the taste of your skin to make this whole world my own and that of art and life divided a subject for intellectual contemplation! Heh heh!

I feel unbounding and unmediated tenderness as I hold on to the warmth and wetness of your words, your expression, your tongue, and your body, and feel as never before since the last time and never again until the next embrace that to love in absence of the other is "cold and cruel," "devoid of any loving and cherishing elements," indeed "any aesthetic elements whatsoever" (A&A 48), for the "gift" (A&A 12) of your sculpting touch, like the gift of your presence, is unexpected in its arrival, mutual in its completion, life-giving in its answerability, defining in its motion, and self-constituting in its permeation into the memory of who and what we are, singularly and together, at this moment and into the beyond.

Fill "the dark chaos of my inner sensation of myself" (A&A 50) as I kneel before the taste and presence of your own; I feel my very self as though awakened from sleep without definition, dream without recollection, interaction without pleasure, separation without pain, touch without response, taste without sensation, and sound without reply; you are beautiful, my love, warm and sweet as I see you now and beg you, heh heh, plead with you and answer your own pleas with replies, heh heh, and live with you to live for you as you live for me vividly "embodied" (A&A 51) and "whole" (A&A 19) "on an axiological plane inaccessible to my inner self-sensation and my fragmentary outer-seeing," and on an "axiological plane" (A&A 51) so unimagined prior to our mutual touch, an aesthetic realm so intensely "productive" (A&A 36), as to redefine through birth-like invention the very substance of your gift which is your presence, our now pounding hearts and intertwined bodies, my vision of you transposed into vision of us upon this wet and seemingly pulsating floor that through touch and taste and sound becomes too vision of the very boundaries of my self and lack thereof for you with me as your "outer body disintegrates and becomes merely a constituent in my own inner body," valuable beyond our passionate will for "carnal desire, pleasure, gratification" (A&A 51) and "unitary flesh" now "inner flesh" and into, heh heh, the realm of, heh heh, I love you, heh heh, I love you, heh heh, I am dissolving into the construction of your self and mine and, heh heh, don't leave, heh heh, don't stop, heh heh, "I wish I could live a bit longer" (*Dostoevsky* 170) heh heh, heh heh, heh heh, heh heh.

NOTES

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1. Not for the fretful cares of everyday life,
Not for the pursuit of profit, not for warfare
Are we born—but for inspiration.
For sweet sounds and for prayers.

A.S. Pushkin, "The Poet and the Crowd," cited in note 2 of *Art and Answerability*, 2–3.

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