

From Bakhtin to Kovačič: From the Ethics to the Aesthetics of Life in Autobiographical Writing

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In his article “Avtor i geroi v estetičeskoj deiatel’nosti” (Author and hero in aesthetic activity), written in the years 1920 to 1924 and published in 1979,¹ Mikhail M. Bakhtin elaborated in great detail on the topic of autobiography, to a greater extent than he was to do in his later works. Although he does not discuss specific aspects of the genre of autobiography and its types, his reflections show that his concept of autobiography is based on philosophical background similar to that of Wilhelm Dilthey and Georg Misch, who share the same presumption regarding a self-confident and self-conscious subject, and assuming that an autobiography is a consummated and value-related representation of life.² In line with this, Bakhtin considers the linguistic creation of art from a humanistic standpoint at the core of which he sees science, art, and life, which the individual can unify in an entity only if he also assumes complete answerability in art as well as in life. Life and art are not one but have to become unified in the individual, in the unity of his answerability.³

If we apply these reflections to Bakhtin’s text on the author-hero relationship, the author appears as an authority fully responsible for the hero as a whole, as the author must echo the hero’s actions by a unitary reaction to the *whole* of the hero as a human being. The latter emerges from the author’s axiological relation to the hero, whom the author has to develop in order for him to be aesthetically productive (Bakhtin 1990: 4–5). In other

¹ It was published in the posthumously edited proceedings *Estetika slovesnogo tvorčestva* (The aesthetics of verbal art [Bakhtin 1979]). Already in 1979, in its sixth and seventh issues, the journal *Kunst und Literatur* published an extract of this text in German translation; a Serbian version was in extensu published in 1991; and a Slovenian one in 1999. A full German version was edited in 2008, whereas the American version dates from 1990.

² Dilthey characterized the autobiography as the highest and most instructive form of understanding of life or as a form of self-reflection of human beings about the course of life, respectively, which is merely given literary expression (Dilthey 1993: 246–47). In a similar way, his disciple Georg Misch underlines the autobiographer’s ability to understand his life through the significance he attaches to his experiences and to conceive his life as a single whole; in addition, he interpreted the history of autobiography of the Western world as a history of human self-awareness (Misch 1949: 10, 11). The baseline of these reflections is that a person’s identity is represented in texts and that life precedes the linguistic expression that the self-conscious subject employs.

³ Bakhtin developed these ideas in the article “Iskusstvo i otvetstvennost” (Art and answerability), published in 1919 (Bakhtin 1999: 7–8).

words, “The author is the bearer and sustainer of the intently active unity of a consummated whole (the whole of a hero and the whole of a work) which is transgredient to each and every one of its particular moments or constituent features” (Bakhtin 1990: 12).

According to Bakhtin, the hero himself cannot live by this whole and consummatedness as a human being either. In order to live and act, unconsummated, open for himself in all essential moments constituting life, he must be someone who is “axiologically yet-to-be,” his true value has to lie in front of him, in the future (Bakhtin 1990: 13).

The fundamental preliminary condition for an aesthetically productive relationship between author and hero is therefore the former’s position of *being outside* (*vnenakhodimost’*) with regard to all components of the hero—space, time, value, and meaning—because this position enables the author “to collect and concentrate *all* the hero, who, from within himself, is diffused and dispersed in the projected world of cognition and in the open event of ethical action” (Bakhtin 1990: 14).

Bakhtin requires the position of being outside when the hero is autobiographical as well. The author “must become another in relation to himself, must look at himself through the eyes of another” (Bakhtin 1990: 15) in order to complete himself to a whole with values which are the values of the *other(s)*. These values delimit and consummate the life within him and are transgredient to the hero’s consciousness.

...for the author-other, the whole of the hero must remain the ultimate whole; the author must be separated from the hero—from himself—totally, and one must define oneself purely in terms of values for the other, or, rather, in oneself one must come to see another.... even if the hero’s consciousness were the consciousness of the entire world and rendered the entire world immanent to itself, the *aesthetic* standpoint would still have to provide his consciousness with a background that is transgredient to it. Or, in other words, the author would have to find a point of support outside that consciousness, in order that it should become an aesthetically consumed phenomenon—a hero. (17)

If the author loses this valuational fulcrum outside the hero, then there are possible three typical author-hero relationships: the hero takes possession of the author, the author takes possession of the hero, or the hero himself is his own author (Bakhtin 1990: 17–21). All these cases deviate from the position of being outside, the preliminary condition for an *aesthetic event* that is possible only if there are (at least) two participants and two non-coinciding consciousnesses. When the author and the hero coincide or when they find themselves standing next to each another in the face of a value

they share, or as antagonists, the aesthetic event ends and an *ethical event* begins (like in tracts, manifestos, speeches of accusation or of praise and gratitude, invectives, and confessions); when there is no hero at all (in treatises, articles, lectures), it is a *cognitive event*, when there is a consciousness like the encompassing consciousness of God, then a *religious event* takes place such as in prayers, worships, and rituals (Bakhtin 1990: 22).

Whereas in traditional autobiographies the coincidence of the author's and the hero's consciousness, as well as the identity of author and hero are often considered as a constitutive element of this genre, in Bakhtin's concept the author's self has to project itself into the life of another or of the others, so that a life, described from birth and even to anticipated death, acquires the values which are in fact the values of the other (Bakhtin 1990: 104–105). According to Bakhtin, life, within its own context, “lacks any aesthetic weight with respect to plot or storyline” and the author's self (*I-for-myself*) cannot become his own “valuable hero.” The pre-defined time and space of an *I* is in reality the time and space of the author and not of the hero (Bakhtin 1990: 106).

Life, which for Bakhtin need not necessarily be available in its entirety, is the given material which is aesthetically to be formed only by the other or by the author, respectively, who projects himself into another. Furthermore, for him the memory of someone else's completed life provides the “golden key to the aesthetic consummation of a person” because memory “is an approach to the other from the standpoint of his axiological consummatedness,” where the “consolidation and formal modification of a life” starts (Bakhtin 1990: 107). Within these limits, life can be arranged and shaped in a completely different way because it is “freed from the claws of what-is-yet-to-be, of the future, of purpose and meaning—such a life becomes emotionally measurable, musically expressive, and self-sufficient” in its total disponibility (Bakhtin 1990: 108).

As a matter of evidence, Bakhtin links the aesthetic to art and the ethical to life. Life is defined with meaning while to be artistically interested means “to be interested, independently of meaning, in a life that is in principle consummated” (Bakhtin 1990: 112). Only this interest allows an aesthetic vision of the world which has to be understood as the world of the others and in which one must come to feel at home in order to be able to go on from *confession* to objective aesthetic contemplation, from search of meaning to the world as a “beautiful given” (Bakhtin 1990: 111).

The role of the other, the limitations and consummation of life from the position of the other is the reason why Bakhtin, on the level of consciousness, does not see any sharp delimitation in principle between autobiography and biography. He states that neither in biography nor in autobiography is the *I-for-myself* an organizing and constructive moment of

form (Bakhtin 1990: 151).⁴ The coincidence of hero and author for him is a *contradictio in adiecto* because the author is a constitutive moment of the artistic whole which as such cannot coincide with the hero, who is another constitutive moment of this whole.⁵ The personal coincidence “in life” of the person *spoken of* and the person *speaking* does not abolish the difference between these two constituents within the artistic whole (Bakhtin 1990: 151).⁶

In his article Bakhtin is not interested in forms of autobiography that follow any kind of objective, scholarly or historical aims, but only in such forms to create artistic-biographical values. Hence, it is interesting to see which kind of biographical values are relevant and how Bakhtin defines them with respect to the artistic whole. His findings can be summarized as follows:

1. *Biographical values* are values that are the least transgredient with regard to the self-consciousness (Bakhtin 1990: 151–52).
2. The *biographical form* is the most *realistic* form because it contains the least amount of constituents that isolate and consummate the hero (Bakhtin 1990: 152).
3. *Biographical values are common to life and to art*, they can define practical acts and their aim; they are the form and the values of the *aesthetics of lived life* (Bakhtin 1990: 152).
4. Any *value-related biographical unity* is possible only in those cases if there are also other narrators; without the stories of the others, life would remain dispersed (Bakhtin 1990: 154).
5. The *fragments of life* (fragments from the standpoint of the biographical whole) that the I experiences from within himself, only get the inner unity in the relation to the *I-for-myself*—i.e., the unity of confessional self-accounting, and not the unity of biography (Bakhtin 1990: 154).

In these findings we can detect the main reasons for Bakhtin’s relativism with regard to the aesthetic and hence artistic value of both biographies and

⁴ In his article on biography and autobiography in Antiquity (1937/38), Bakhtin states that there are no fundamental differences between the autobiographical and the biographical point of view because of the complete externalization of the person’s inside with respect to the public whole (Bakhtin 1982: 260).

⁵ For Bakhtin, the author and the hero are basically *two* others, two “consciousnesses,” only that there is no fundamental antagonism because they are in the same world of authority of the others (Bakhtin 1999: 164).

⁶ In his late reflections on the shape of time and chronotope in the novel, Bakhtin underlines even more distinctly that the author-creator—although he creates an autobiography or genuine confession—remains outside the world he describes because he is beyond time and space in which the event he narrates or describes happened (Bakhtin 1982: 368).

autobiographies. It is a logical consequence of Bakhtin's claim for a hero's life that is consummated from the other's standpoint and his comprehension of (auto)biography as in principle externalized, objectified life.⁷ Therefore he also considers that only an "intimate, organic axiological participation in the world of the others... renders the biographical self-objectification of life authoritative and productive" (Bakhtin 1990: 155).

All previously mentioned aspects force autobiography and its artistic-biographic values on the edge between art and life, between literature and non-literature. Moreover, Bakhtin concludes concerning the author-hero relationship in biography that the author is naive, connected with the hero by kinship, that he is not a pure artist because his values are not fully aesthetic, and at the same time the hero is not a purely ethical subject either because his leading values are aesthetic (Bakhtin 1990: 163). Hence, a world of (auto)biography which is defined in such a way is not a definitely consumed world, is not "isolated out of the unitary and unique event of being by any firm and essentially necessary boundaries." Therefore, Bakhtin does not consider a biography as a *produced work* but rather as an "aesthetized, organic, and naive *act* performed in a proximate, axiologically authoritative world" (Bakhtin 1990: 165).

Yet, (auto)biography appears in another light if we read Bakhtin's thoughts also as a form of criticism of a specific practice in autobiographical writing. This point of view seems to be reasonable with respect to his notion that biography is intended for a "kindred reader, a reader who participates in the same world of otherness," while a "critical reader" considers biography to a certain extent as "raw material for artistic forming and consummating" (Bakhtin 1990: 165–66). Nevertheless, at the end of the chapter related to the autobiography, Bakhtin mentions the possibility of the author becoming a "pure artist"—namely, in those cases where he "ceases to be naive and totally rooted in the world of otherness; where the *kinship* between author and hero *is not severed*; where the author is sceptical about the hero's life":

As such, he will constantly oppose the transgradient *values of consummation* in the *values of the hero's lived life*; he will seek to consummate the hero's life from a point of view which is in principle different from the way that life was lived and experienced by the hero himself from within himself. Every line written, every step taken by the narrator, will strive, in that case, to utilize the narrator's *fundamental and essential excess of seeing*, for

⁷ The principle of the externalization of the human being's inside also constitutes the basis for Bakhtin's reflections on the antique autobiography because a citizen's whole life was shown and seen on the agora (Bakhtin 1982: 260).

the hero is *in need* of a transgredient justification, the author's gaze and the self-activity will *encompass* and shape essentially what constitutes *in principle* the hero's *limits with respect to meaning* at the point where the hero's life is turned outside itself; and thus, a demarcation in principle will be set between the hero and the author. (Bakhtin 1990: 166)

In this way, autobiography can accomplish the conditions of aesthetic activity and can be the work of an aesthetically productive author. Bakhtin also discusses some examples where the hero is not consummated, where the author lacks any unitary countenance and where the axiological position of the other weakens (Bakhtin 1990: 19); in another part he highlights the crisis of authorship, as it is no longer possible to be an artist when art itself is delimited, when actions and creations happen directly in the *unitary event of being* with the human being as its sole participant or when the author's right to be outside lived life and to consummate is contested so that lived life becomes intelligible and important as an event only from within itself, in the value-categories of *I-for-myself* (Bakhtin 1990: 203).⁸ However, concerning the value-categories Bakhtin persists in the aesthetics of *being outside*, in consummation and in this also constitutes the major difference to the reflections of Lojze Kovačič on life and literature.

Lojze Kovačič (1928–2005), one of the most distinctive authors of Slovene autobiographical prose dealt, for his part, intensely with life, literature, and his writing in his essay *Delavnica. Šola pisanja* (Workshop. The school of writing) from 1974. In the introduction of the book edition of this essay⁹ he explains that it was initially a “hunt” for his existence but that he remained empty-handed because cognition and everything else a human being considers evidently belonging to him, like his body, “already flows ahead of him three years before his birth” (Kovačič 1997: 9). In a more modest variant, he then tried to link the morally-artisan aspect of writing with life into an attractive artistic challenge with the aim to reveal how the shattered life of a specific person has influence on the way he expresses himself.

Kovačič departs, to put it as Bakhtin would, from the *ethical event of life* and stays bound to the *aesthetics of lived life*. His hero is inside himself, “diffused and dispersed in the projected world of cognition and in the open event of ethical action” as Bakhtin assumes for a hero, who is not

⁸ Aleksander Skaza states the beginning of the weakening of the aesthetic value of consummation precisely in relation with Bakhtin's reflection on the crisis of authorship, especially in the works of F. M. Dostoevsky and A. Bely (Bakhtin 1999: 365).

⁹ It was first published in his book *Preseljevanja* (Migrations). The following quotations refer to the reprint from 1997.

consummated. In this way, Kovačič's autobiographical hero broadly corresponds to Bakhtin's definition of the human being who has to have its true value in front of him and has to be open for himself and to the future in order to live. He remains open and infinite, the author does not seek a solution in a transgredient consciousness, nor a consummated axiological position outside himself but attempts to catch as much as possible of what is real or at least potentially in and next to the hero, what is present, but unrevealed.

For Bakhtin the *aesthetics of lived life* is a part of the biographical values that are common to life and art and have to be surpassed by *aesthetic activity* to achieve the unity and consummation of the artistic whole.¹⁰ For Kovačič, on the other hand, the *aesthetics of lived life* is a model and a criterion for his artistic creation. According to him, literature has never to be "ashamed of life" and should turn back to where it has already been: to the letter, the diary and to confessions (Kovačič 1999: 31, 133). He also speaks of the "life style of literature" in the sense of writing from an inner freedom (Kovačič 1999: 121). A text for him is an *organism* (Kovačič 1993: 149) and he states, as he wrote in an interview, that "not everything" is in literature, as there is only a literature of fragments, in the same way as life is composed of fragments (Komelj-Snoj 1997: 220).

Fragmentation is the fundamental principle of his writing and maybe one of the most important constitutive moments of form in his work.¹¹ Fragmentation means for him the expression of doubt that the human being ever in his history has been a complete personality, able to identify with himself and the cosmos (Komelj-Snoj 1997: 220–21), so that, in his opinion, the only "face" a modern creator can honestly wear, is the fragment as the "expression of a world which does not close itself or which cannot close itself anymore" (Kovačič 1997: 27). Yet, on the other hand, regarding the matter which he describes in a fragment, Kovačič expects from himself that *everything* has to be said (Komelj-Snoj 1997: 220).

¹⁰ Later, in his books about the poetics of Dostoevsky (1929, 1963), Bakhtin substantially added, respectively revised his views on consummation: the unconsummation of the hero becomes the precondition for the hero's dialogical position in the polyphonic novel while the consummated hero is linked with the monological type of narration (Bakhtin 1985: 67, 58). This concept evidently corresponds even more to the author-hero relationship as seen by Kovačič (Kovačič 1997: 187).

¹¹ An exception is his last novel *Otroške stvari* (2003). Kovačič compared this book with a unique compositions of a train because the chapters concerning time and space are rigorously aligned one with another (Kovačič 2003: 328).

Equally, for Kovačič life is the material which an author has yet to deal with,¹² but, differently from Bakhtin's aesthetics, according to the principles of fragmentation and unconsummation which enable him to write repeatedly about the same occurrences in his life, including dreams, in order to reach the bottom of them or to clarify them from different angles. This also allows him to compose a new book from fragments of already published texts¹³ or to create from different, yet unused notes a new textual unity,¹⁴ as well as to write on the basis of unpublished material a *counter-book* to the previous one, as he is inspired by the will to exhaustively present on paper all his life "to the last possibility, until silence" (Komelj-Snoj 1997: 202). But, on the other hand, he resumes, that writing about himself was in fact a Sysyphean task:

Občutek, da sem neki del življenja izrazil, je trajal večasih kar dolgo, recimo tudi dvajset let. Ampak potem mi je življenje, ki je dinamično in ne ljubi trajnosti, pokazalo, da sem odpravil, oziroma čas mi je dokazal, da je to epizodo odpravilo življenje ad acta na povsem drugacen, nasproten način, kot sem jo jaz. Le omrtvičil sem s pisanjem zapleteni dogodek, ga omamil, pa je spet oživel [...]. (Kovačič 2009: 134-135)

(The feeling that I expressed some part of my life sometimes lasted quite long, let's say even for twenty years. But then life, as it is dynamic and does not love continuance, showed me that I disposed—that is, time showed me that life disposed of this episode ad acta in a totally different way than I had. I just devitalized the complex event with writing, dazed it, but it began to live again.... [Kovačič 2009: 134–35])

Kovačič, in his considerations on writing, aesthetics, and being, consequently departs from lived life, from the *unitary event of being* which, in a way, is also true for Bakhtin. Whereas Bakhtin sees the aesthetic activity of the author and the hero in the surpassing of projected life, for Kovačič life and literature can become equal in value and inseparable categories, especially from the standpoint of the memory, the memory of life and literature, because in both cases

¹² Kovačič compares the work of a writer with the work of his father, who was a furrier and who produced clothing out of furs of different game animals, and hence out of *living substance*. Likewise, the writer is, according to him, transforming in the underground, symbols and personalities out of living substance through the contents of his works (Kovačič 1997: 15).

¹³ See the books *Preseljevanja* (Migrations 1974), *Sporočila iz sna in budnosti* (Messages in dreams and wakeness 1987) and *Tri ljubezni* (Three loves 2004).

¹⁴ See the collection *Prah* (Dust 1988).

...there is only a kind of visual image left, a voice, light, a metaphor, the spirit of a room, a wall, a tree etc. Here, art and life, the effect of showing and the practice, which cannot as a whole stay and last with the human being, are together, eye to eye, and are equal in regards to their intensity and almost merge. This is much for the art; we cannot expect more from it, because simply it cannot give more. (Kovačič 1997: 36)

In an interview from the year 2000, four years before his death, Kovačič even said, “I do sit in the story of my life, in its plot—now evidently more on the folding chair near the exit. Now that everything is behind me, I do know somehow that I was right because life brings such tense stories, shakes, dreams, awakes a thousand I’s that are in oneself” (Zor-Simoniti 2000: 52).

With regard to these reflections and to the majority of his prose we can state that the narrator equals the real writer, that he suppresses the narrative illusion, that he “becomes human” and is situated completely in everyday life (Dolgan 2004: 164), but at the same time, there is no identity between the real person, the writer, the narrator, and the hero. Kovačič differentiates in principle between the inner process of creation, which happens inside himself, and the process of writing down, which happens outside himself (Kovačič 1988: 111). He distinguishes when he “duplicates” into the hero and talks about someone else (Kovačič 1985: 391), when he changes from a narration in the first person to a narration in the third person,¹⁵ when he projects himself into the past and observes himself:

Od blizu pogledam vojaka, o katerem pišem, kako se leta 1950 vrača domov iz JLA; vidim ga na hodniku železniškega vagona z lesnim kovčkom ob nogi, ko se vlak ravno bliža Ljubljani. Tako blizu mi je, skoraj na vogalu moje mize, da bi ga lahko zgrabil. Kaže mi hrbet, skrivljen, negiben, da ne razločim, kaj gleda in pod katerim kotom, katere reči pritegujejo njegovo radovednost, kako ozko in izdvojeno je njegovo vidno polje... Iz tega bi lahko spoznal merilo njegove osebnosti, lastne perspektive, sklepal o njegovih manijah, nagnjenjih, nasprotjih, ki se spodbijajo v njem; tako se začne življenje nekega lika. A vidim ga še zmeraj samo v hrbet, negibnega, čeprav je to (med nami rečeno) ena od oseb, ki se je pred več kot štirimi desetletji v mojem imenu zapletla v življenje oziroma se je ono vmešalo vanj, mi je zdajle – kot je bil najbrž on sam takrat sam sebi – do kraja nedostopen:

¹⁵ Especially in the books *Pet fragmentov* (Five fragments, 1981) respectively *Tri ljubezni* (Three loves 2004) and *Vzemljohod* (Descention 1993).

skrivnost, v katero nama ni, ne prvemu ne drugemu, mogoče ali celo dovoljeno vstopiti. (Kovačič 1993: 9–10)

(From near I look at the soldier I write about, how in 1950 he returns home from the Yugoslav army, I see him on the corridor of a railway wagon with a wooden case next to his feet, as the train is just approaching Ljubljana. He is so near to me, almost at the edge of my table, that I could grab him. He shows me his back, buckled, not moving, that I cannot recognize what he is looking at and from which angle, what things allure his curiosity, how narrow and doubled is his field of view.... Hence, I could realize the measure of his character, his own perspectives, imply his obsessions, affinities, contradictions, which contend inside him; this is the way the life of a character begins. But I still see him only from behind, not moving, although it is (between ourselves) one of the persons who more than forty years ago, in my name, got involved in life—that is, life inserted itself into him, and he is hence, as he was probably at the time for himself, completely unapproachable: a secret, in which we both, neither him or me, are able or even allowed to enter. (Kovačič 1993: 9–10)

Kovačič's relation to the hero is not uniform, and considered from the typological aspect, we even have to deal with a hero who in his main features already can be found in Bakhtin's typology of the (auto)biographical hero—namely, in the *social-quotidian type* (Bakhtin 1990: 155) who is focused on social and family values and based on dominating descriptive elements. This also constitutes the type of hero in whom Bakhtin notices an indication of the incipient disintegration of the (auto)biographical world, the moment when the author becomes critical, where his situatedness outside any other becomes essential, when his axiological involvement in the world of the others diminishes and the authoritativeness of the other's axiological position decreases (Bakhtin 1990: 162).

Of course, Kovačič's hero is not situated in a biographical world in Bakhtin's sense, as there is no consummating absolute consciousness of the author and no axiological position of the other. The *other* who appears in Kovačič's texts does not have the role of an authoritative or organizing aesthetic principle; he is on the same level as the I, equal to him or even overlapping with him as for Kovačič “/n/obody, who is the other, is completely another but is I, the same way that I /.../ have never been completely different from of the others” (Kovačič 1988: 212). Therefore Kovačič does not see the human being primarily in eternal disagreement with the world but rather with himself, as it:

...stalno “ustvarja” in “uničuje” v slučajnih zvezah z drugimi, da se vsa njegova spoznanja o pomenu in dejanjih oblikujejo “med ljudmi”, ker vsa čustva, vse vere, sveta in nečista prepričanja ne prihajajo od srca, ampak so mu naložena od zunaj, na pot sprotnega oblikovanja, skozi njegovo stalno preoblikujočo se formo. (Kovačič 1990: 197)

(...constantly “creates” and “destroys” himself in coincidental relations with others, as all its recognitions about meaning and actions are created “amongst people,” as all feelings, all faiths, holy and impure convictions does not come from the heard but are loaded from outside, on the way of continuously modeling, by its constantly refashioned form [Kovačič 1990: 197]).

But the *other* can also represent the possibility to tell an “objective story” about oneself before birth—that is, in the way he tells the “story or the legends of life” as it has echoed in himself when he was told it by the other(s) (Kovačič 1997: 58), an approach he also used in the novel *Otroške stvari* (2003): “Vse to sem videl v maminih očeh, v žalostnih, lepih ali hladnih pogledih, ali razbral iz njenega glasu, tako da sem o življenju, v katerem me ni bilo, lahko izbral okoliščine in kraje in jih premikal po vrsti ali kot se mi je pač prikazalo” (All this I saw in my mothers eyes, in the sad, beautiful or chilly views, or I read it in her voice, so that I could choose about the life, in that I did not exist, the circumstances and locations, rank them in line or as it appeared to me [Kovačič 2003: 23]).

Since Kovačič is completely focused on his own person, it is not surprising that he considers himself also as the first addressee of his texts; moreover, he assumes that in telling *oneself and not to the others* as the “main achievement one can realize” because there is nothing more fruitful for the reader than “attending as third witness the consistent dialogue of the author with himself.” Hence, Kovačič expects from such a literature that

...it has to be “entire” and it shall not be written under any control of a certain meaning.... It should re-compose a human being inside himself like he re-composes himself in reality every day alone, the same way he is always the same and always different to himself; what he has accepted as belonging to him in this precise moment will be left aside the very next moment; nothing shall be bound anywhere, neither spiritually, nor finally: as unconvincing as life, open, an antithesis to everything, the chaos through which the human being walks in his cerebral, rather than in his sexual or inherited sphere. (1997: 187)

As we can see, Kovačič in his view on the fragmentation of life and literature also reflects the crisis of the modern subject which—already in the

early twentieth century—inevitably led to new forms of autobiographical writing. Bakhtin, for his part, recognized this crisis as a crisis of the authorship and tried to overcome it with the author's position of being outside the hero, which he revised in his theory on dialogue and polyphony; nevertheless, his early reflections already display a critical position towards conventional forms of autobiography and provided the path towards an "aesthetic of life" in autobiographical writing.

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POVZETEK

BAHTIN IN KOVAČIČ: OD ETIKE DO ESTETIKE ŽIVLJENJA V AVTOBIOGRAFSKEM PISANJU

Prispevek obravnava Bahtinovo pojmovanje umetniškega dela in primerja njegovo opredelitev razmerja med avtorjem in junakom v razpravi Avtor in junak v estetski dejavnosti, napisane v letih 1920 do 1924 in objavljene leta 1979, z refleksijami Lojzeta Kovačiča (1928-2004) o lastnem življenju in pisanju. Tako Bahtin kot Kovačič, ki oba izhajata iz humanistično-etičnih pogledov na svet, človeka in umetnost, v bistvu zanikata možnost istovetnosti avtorja, pripovedovalca in junaka tudi v primeru avtobiografskega pisanja. Bahtin predvideva glede razmerja med avtorjem in junakom vrednostno in zaključujočo pozicijo drugega: avtor mora postati drugi v razmerju do samega sebe, preseči mora zavest junaka-avtorja, da postane estetsko zaključen pojav – junak. S trdnim položajem zunajbivanja avtorja v razmerju do vseh junakovih sestavin – prostorskih, časovnih, vrednostnih in pomenskih, je Bahtin skušal preseči krizo modernega subjekta, ki jo je dojemal kot krizo avtorstva, medtem ko je kriza subjekta in jezika integralni del Kovačičevega subjektivizma in njegovega modernističnega ustvarjanja, ki ga zaznamuje spoznanje o razbitosti in fragmentarnosti življenja, človeka in literature. Njegov avtor-junak ostaja znotraj samega sebe »vraztresen in razmetan v zadanem svetu spoznavanja in odprtem dogodku etične dejavnosti«, kot to Bahtin predvideva za junaka (in človeka), ki ni zaključen. Po Bahtinu mora avtor, če naj bo »popoln umetnik«, biografske vrednote, ki so skupne življenju in umetnosti ter oblika in vrednota estetike živetega življenja, nadgraditi z zaključujočo zavestjo in pretrgati sorodnost med junakom in avtorjem, medtem ko Kovačič izhaja iz etičnega dogodka življenja in ostaja zavezan estetiki življenja, ki mu je tudi vzorec in merilo za svoje umetniško ustvarjanje. Bahtin, ki je vsekakor kritičen do konvencionalnih oblik (avto)biografije, je svoje poglede na estetsko dejavnost avtorja in junaka v poznejših razpravah o dialogu in polifoniji še bistveno dopolnil oziroma revidiral, saj odprtost junaka postane pogoj za junakov dialoški položaj v polifonem romanu, kar se v še večji meri ujema tudi s Kovačičevo koncepcijo avtobiografskega pisanja.