

# The Making of Body Politics: Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Mikhail Bakhtin Compared

몸의 정치의 지평을 찾아서:  
모리스 메를로-퐁티와 미하일 바흐친을 중심으로

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## Abstract

This article is concerned with the importance of the body in everything we do and think. It is based on my forthcoming book entitled “Prolegomena to a Carnal Hermeneutics” – the neologism “carnal hermeneutics” I began to use in the early 1990s as the art of interpreting the body which has multiple dimensions. It was the father of modern Western philosophy Descartes who put a metaphysical padlock in the footsteps of Christian asceticism, in which the cogito is seen as disembodied, monologic, and ocularcentric. This paper briefly compares the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin and the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty with a focus on the political. With the support of their ideas, I argue in favor of non- violence, which signifies a perennial question in the history of humankind. Violence is the end(terminus) of dialogue and the intolerance of difference. It is the inhumanity toward both humanity and nature.

□ **Key words** : body politics, transversality, dialogism, hyper-dialectic, aesthetics, sociality, and violence

## 초록

이 글은 우리가 실천하고 사고하는 모든 것에 있어서 몸의 중요성을 밝혀내는 데 목적이 있다. 이 논의는 곧 나올 『몸의 해석학을 위한 서론』(Prolegomena to a Carnal Hermeneutics)에 근거한다. “몸의 해석학”이란 신조어는 내가 1990년 대 초에 다차원을 가진 몸을 해석하는 예술로서 사용하기 시작했다. 서구근대철학의 시조인 데카르트는 기독교 금욕주의의 발자취를 따라서 형이상학적 자물쇠를 채웠다. 그의 철학에서 코기토는 몸과 관련이 없는, 독백적이고, 시각중심적이었다. 이 글은 정치적인 것에

## 2 정치와평론 제14집

초점을 두고서 러시아 문학비평가인 바흐친(Mikhail Bakhtin)과 프랑스 현상학자인 메를로-퐁티(Maurice Merleau-Ponty)를 간략하게 비교한다. 그들의 생각에 도움을 받아서 나는 인류역사의 영원한 숙제인 비폭력을 옹호하는 논의를 한다. 폭력은 대화의 끝이자 차이의 불관용이다. 폭력은 인간성과 자연 모두에게 비인간적인 것을 의미한다.

□ 주제어 : 몸의 정치, 횡단성, 대화주의, 초월변증법, 미학, 사회성, 폭력

### I

In Western modernity it was Descartes who put a metaphysical padlock on the interpretive art of the body which I call carnal hermeneutics. The regime of the Cartesian *cogito* which represents the habitus of modern mind under his harmful influence enacts the canonical institution of the mind's I(eye) which is at once disembodied, monologic, and ocularcentric. The *cogito* is inherently monologic because it is always and necessarily *ego cogito*(the "I think")—the epitome of an "invisible man" in complete isolation from others, both other minds and the other bodies. As a thinking substance(*res*), mind is independent of the body: it needs nothing more than itself to exist. Once the self(ipseity) and the other(alterity) are viewed as disembodied substances, two self-contained entities, monologism—or even solipsism in extremis—is inevitable. The literary hermeneuticist Gerald L. Bruns critically speaks of "Descartes's jealousy of the subject," i.e., "the subject's desire to seal itself off or to keep its thinking pure and uncontaminated by the horizon of the other." As a matter of fact, Descartes himself confessed that any sort of intellectual peregrination(not even to speak of globetrotting), real or imaginary, is anathema to philosophizing. For him, instead, the foundational knowledge of philosophy(i.e., epistemology) is attained nowhere else but in the philosophizing *ego* in its disembodied solitude. Cartesian disembodied thinking or reasoning is refuted *in toto* by Auguste Rodin's sculptural masterpiece *The Thinker(Le Penseur*, 1880). The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke, one-time assistant to Rodin, describes *The Thinker* as follows: He "sits absorbed and silent, heavy with thought: with all the strength of an acting man he thinks. His whole body has become head and all the blood in his veins has become brain." The phenomenologist Erwin

W. Straus is at his best when he argues for the primacy of the body over the mind because “the body of an organism is related to other bodies; it is a part of physical universe. The mind, however, is related to one body only; it is not directly related to the world, nor to other bodies, nor to other minds.” It eminently makes sense to assert that the Cartesian disembodied mind or reason is anathema to the social or “the performative magic of the social”(Pierre Bourdieu’s expression). The mind becomes a *relatum* only because the body is populated in the world with other bodies. It is necessary that we exist as body, as flesh, in order to be social and thus ethical as well.

It should be pointed out that the modern legacy of Descartes’s “epistemocracy” or the epistemological regime of philosophy is marked or, better, marred by the long cherished tradition of the Christian asceticism of disembodiment. For the *cogito*’s pursuit of “clear and distinct ideas,” the mind becomes transcendentalized from rather than immanentized in the body. The alleged dark grotto or continent of corporeality has almost always been castigated and even crucified as an ephemeral and perishable phenomenon in favor of incorporeal immortality in mainstream Western thought. Origen, the stern Christian ascetic and theologian who voluntarily castrated himself—for that matter, castration was not an uncommon practice in his own time—depicted corporeality or, more specifically, sexuality as a passing phenomenon and hinted at the eschatological hope of purifying the soul from the flesh. The following is the elegant description by Peter Brown of the Christian hope in Origen of cleansing and saving the immortal soul from the perishable flesh:

Human life (for Origen), lived in a body endowed with sexual characteristics, was but the last dark hour of a long night that would vanish with the dawn. The body was poised on the edge of a transformation so enormous as to make all present notions of identity tied to sexual differences, and all social roles based upon marriage, procreation, and childbirth, seem as fragile as dusk dancing in a sunbeam.

The body is without doubt the umbilical cord to the social. To be social is first and foremost to be intercorporeal. Only because of the body are we said to be visible and capable of relating ourselves first to other bodies and then to other minds. The body is our *social placement* in the world. With the synergic interplay of its senses, the body *attunes* us to the world. The world, as Merleau-Ponty has it, is made of the same stuff as the body presumably because we relate ourselves

to the world by the medium of the body which is the lived field of perception. Since we are always already social, the body cannot be the “origin” but, more properly, of the ambient medium of the social.

Furthermore, the carnal *landscape* is the presupposed root of all conceptual *geography*. To put it in the language of Merleau-Ponty, perception precedes conception: the perceived world is the always presupposed foundation of all knowledge as well as all action since the body is the lived field of perception. There is indeed the “primacy of perception” in everything we do and think. Insofar as perception is omnipresent and “nascent logos,” there can be no disembodied mind or reason. Gabriel Marcel radically contends that the body belongs to the order of “Being” rather than that of “Having”: the lived body is not an object among other objects, that is, it is never inert but rather is a sentient subject. As an existing subject, the body as flesh is capable of “authoring” the world before “answering” it.

## II

I call the eighteenth-century Neapolitan philosopher Giambattista Vico the primogenitor of Western carnal hermeneutics, who specifically argued against Descartes’ dualism of mind and body based on the philosophical motto of *verum ipsum factum*, assumption of which was emulated in the reputed passage in Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*—woman is not born but made. However, it is the German Tantrist Nietzsche who occupies a special and unique place in the history of body politics in the footsteps of Vico’s carnal hermeneutics, albeit more radically and thoroughly than Vico. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche declares that “Body am I entirely and nothing else; and soul is only a word for something about the body.” Nietzsche initiated and legitimized the “cultivation”(factum, *Bildung*)—not the “naturalization” of the body as a philosophical topic. The famed Japanese Tantric Buddhist Kigen Dōgen, long before Vico and Nietzsche, insisted that only by way of cultivation or training(i.e., *zazen* or seated meditation) do we grasp the primacy of the body over the mind.

When Merleau-Ponty speaks of the body as “a work of art,” he is echoing Nietzsche. Nietzsche challenges and transgresses the speculative and specular conun-

drum of *theoria* and attempts to replace it with the aesthetic(*aisthesis*). By replacing *theoria* with *aisthesis*, Nietzsche inverts Platonism which seeks eternal ideas(*eidōs*) radiated from the “mind’s eye” or, in the words of Hannah Arendt, leaves the dark grotto of human existence to behold the eternal ideas or truth visible in the sky. Nietzsche’s body politics is an upsurge in opposition to the long-established philosophical fortress of all that theoretical speculation has implied and entailed since the time of Plato. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, his first major work, the young Nietzsche valorizes music—perhaps in the ancient Greek sense of *mousike*(performing arts) that includes oral poetry, dance, drama, and music—as the consummate aesthetic: “it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*” and that “only music, placed beside the world, can give us an idea of what is meant by the justification of the world as an aesthetic phenomenon.” For Nietzsche, in short, the world is “measured”(in the musical sense of *metron*) by the aesthetic of music whose primary condition of being is to *attune* ourselves to the world both human and nonhuman.

### III

From the very outset, it should be pointed out that there is no evidence that Bakhtin has read Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology even though Bakhtin has read Martin Heidegger. The best intellectual biographers of Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist use two very suggestive terms in their work *Michael Bakhtin*: Bakhtin’s “phenomenology of the senses” and Bakhtin’s “Slavic Tantrism” as much as Nietzsche’s German Tantrism. I would venture to say that Bakhtin is a Slavic Tantrist or, perhaps better, a Nietzschean “Bodysattva” to alter slightly the Buddhist term *Bodhisattva*, that is, the “Awakened One” who, by way of the body, is capable of performing the harmonics of the world. The body is for Bakhtin connected to everything we do and think without exception. His Slavic Tantrism is deeply rooted in and stems from the kenoticism of Russian Orthodoxy that reveres all matters, including *body matters*, for their spiritual potentials.

The body matters, it matters deeply. But for the body, politics itself would be still born and brain-dead. The visible body is the true soulmate of the invisible

mind. Indeed, *I am my body*. The body of mine is two-dimensional. Its visible dimension is called the flesh, while its invisible dimension the soul. They are, as it were, a double helix. As the mind and the body are reversible phenomena, there is the mind in the body and there is also the body in mind: to use James Joyce's invertible ambigrammatical expression("Greekjew" is "Jewgreek"), the mind/body is the body/mind.

For Bakhtin, society as embodied or intercorporeal is neither a collection of invisible minds nor a seriality of visible objects. The body is not an object among other objects in the world. Rather, it is an event-making agent: as I live my body, I exist as my body, as my flesh. For Bakhtin as for Merleau-Ponty, "the body answers the world by authoring it"—to use the poignant expression of Clark and Holquist. Bakhtin understands well the originally Nietzschean idea of *initium* which signifies the human potential to embark on and inscribe something new in the face of history. The notion of the lived body or the embodied self as *initium* thus rejects the Scylla of egocentricity on the one hand and the Charybdis of anonymity on the other. Both egocentricity and anonymity misunderstand the social or dialogical construction of reality, particularly human reality: they both bring death to the social. Merleau-Ponty, too, speaks of the "instituting subject." To quote him:

If the subject were taken not as a constituting but an instituting subject, it might be understood that the subject does not exist instantaneously and that the other person does not exist simply as a negative of myself. What I have begun at certain decisive moments would exit neither far off in the past as an objective memory nor be present like a memory revived, but really between the two as the field of my becoming during that period. Likewise my relating to another person would not be reducible to a disjunction: an instituting subject could coexist with another because the one instituted is not the immediate reflection of the activity of the former and can be regained by himself or by others without involving anything like a total recreation. Thus the instituted subject exists between others and myself, between me and myself, like a hinge, the consequence and the guarantee of our belonging to a common world.

In this vein, Merleau-Ponty contended that in Jean-Paul Sartre's thought there is no "intersubjectivity" but only "a plurality of subjects" who are held or glued together by "the hopeless heroism of the I" and in which the Other is seen by

the I as pure negativity. Similarly, Bakhtin—for whom hell is *not* other people—opposes Freudian “psychologism” or ego-psychology because in Freudianism there is the irreconcilable antagonism between the demands of the ego’s instinct or desire (pleasure principle) and the restrictions of civilization (reality principle): as Sigmund Freud himself puts it succinctly in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, “The liberty of the individual is no gift of civilization.” In comparing Freud with Bakhtin, Clark and Holquist remark: “In Freud, self is suppressed in the service of the social; in Bakhtin, self is precisely a function of the social. In Freud, the more of the other, the less of the self; in Bakhtin, the more of the other, the more of the self.” Bakhtin’s genealogy of the social opposes the idea of both “I own meaning” (egocentricity) and “no one owns meaning” (anonymity) and opts for the “middle way” or dialogical principle (as a double helix): “we own meaning.” Bakhtin’s dialogism coincides with Merleau-Ponty’s “fulguration of coexistence.” In the “we,” in the fulguration of (embodied) social existence, the self and the other are active co-producers of meaning. Thus the social, according to Bakhtin, is never simply “given” (*dan*) but always “conceived” or “posited” (*zadan*). “Language,” Bakhtin writes, “is not a neutral medium that passes free and easily into the private properly of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others.” This may be called the “performance principle” that Herbert Marcuse adds to Freud’s “pleasure” and “reality” principles.

#### IV

To be (fully) human *is* to be interhuman. Relation, subjectivity, and difference are intimately related and complementary but never oppositional terms. Difference is a distinct mark of the social or interhuman. But for difference, there would be no sociality. There are Heidegger’s (*Differenz* as) *Unterschied*, Jacques Derrida’s *différance*, Jean-François Lyotard’s *différend*, Michel de Certeau’s heterology, Emmanuel Levinas’s heteronomy, Bakhtin’s heteroglossia, and so on. They are indeed a multiplying multiplicity.

What identity is to modernity, difference is to postmodernity. Difference is indeed the cradle of the postmodern deconstruction of modernity. Hegel’s dialectic of syn-

thesis points to the monologism of modernity. The dialectical succession of *Aufhebungen*—to use Bakhtin’s word—“finalizes” itself in the *identity* of identity and difference. Gianni Vattimo judiciously concludes that the Hegelian dialectic consummates the long metaphysical tradition in Western philosophy. Bakhtin insists that there is the difference between “dialectics” and “dialogue”(or dialogics): “Take a dialogue and remove the voices(the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations(emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that’s how you get dialectics.” For him, therefore, the dialectic of identity is abstract and speculative “theoretism”: one is folded into the other. Hegel’s logocentric identity between the “real” and the “rational” is also repudiated by Lyotard: Auschwitz is “real” but not “rational.” On the other hand, Bakhtin’s dialogics of difference—very much like the Sinic logic of yin and yang—finds no final foreclosure or is “unfinalizable.” Hegel’s “theoretism” and Marx’s “ideologism” are equally dogmatic because they foreclose history as a movement, as an open future. The open-ended dialogics of difference fosters the idea that a multiplicity of differences finds no ending. In *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty is in favor of the “hyper-dialectic” that, like Bakhtin’s dialogism with no “finality,” has no final synthesis. Speaking of Dostoevsky, who is his philosophical protagonist, Bakhtin writes in unequivocal and forceful terms:

...at the center of Dostoevsky’s artistic worlds must lie dialogue, and dialogue not as a means but as an end itself. Dialogue here is not the threshold to action, it is the action itself. It is not a means for revealing, for bringing to the surface the already ready-made character of a person; no, in dialogue a person not only shows himself outwardly, but he becomes for the first time that which he is—and, we repeat, not only for others but himself as well. *To be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends* [italics added for emphasis]. Thus dialogue, by its very essence, cannot and must come to an end. At the level of his religious-Utopian world-view Dostoevsky carries dialogue into eternity, conceiving of it as eternal co-rejoicing, co-admiration, concord. At the level of the novel, it is presented as the unfinalizability of dialogue, although originally as dialogue’s vicious circle.



To reiterate, to be human is to be eternally interhuman and communicative: existence is indeed peaceful or dialogical coexistence, which is fundamentally and necessarily intercorporeal and responsive. What is most elemental in Bakhtin's dialogism is the placement of alterity. Clark and Holquist put it with clarity as follows: Bakhtin's "dialogism ... celebrates alterity: it is a merry science, a *froliche Wissenschaft* (Nietzsche's phrase), of the other." This momentous discovery of a "Thou" in the footsteps of Ludwig Feuerbach and more recently Emmanuel Levinas's heteronomy or "altarity" (Mark Taylor's felicitous term) which places the other at the altar of dialogism has the potential of developing "responsibility as first ethics" in expanding Levinas' phenomenological ethics as *prima philosophia*.

## V

Violence as body politics is the utter failure or end of "unfinalizable" dialogue. Let me begin with *jouissance* which is engendered by corporeal feminism, by "gynesis"—to appropriate the neologism of Alice A. Jardine signifying the feminine genesis of things and the legitimation of the feminine. As carnal enjoyment or ecstasy, it is not a feminine mystique but truly a Tantric idea. *Jouissance*, which may be heard as "*j'ouis sens*" is a carnal affair and has a thousand faces. Carnival is one of them. Carnival which is, for its Latin name sake (*carne/vale*), an incarnation of the festive body as a "Freude/an" affair. The body's exteriority as "ecstasy" is manifested in the carnivalesque that is characteristic of humans as *homo ludens* whose body politics is unavoidably ethical as well as aesthetic, cultural, and political. Harvey Cox is unerring when he proposes that the carnivalesque imagination is indispensable to the survival and periodic rejuvenation of human civilization, including its political institutions. He contends, however, that when it becomes a pawn of ideology or a particular political program, it loses its critical edge and creative "*punch*" (also a British magazine of humour) and becomes shriveled into a caged bird, toothless tiger, or—to use Bakhtin's metaphor—"a fish in an aquarium."

The carnivalesque is the most radical aspect of the dialogics of difference because it serves as a *nonviolent technique of social transformation* by the maximal display of

the body. It is body politics that is a communal celebration of festive bodies whose space is filled always with the extravagant display of colorful vestemes and lavish gustemes. As Michel Jeanneret puts it, “it is as if stylistic invention and the subversive power of comedy defy censure and liberate repressed desire. Through the magic of language, the rights of the body and its impulses are restored, abundance replaces austerity, and pleasures which are normally covert or repressed can be indulged.” In depicting the Renaissance which is the most carnivalesque period of European history, Pieter Bruegel often painted the festive scenes of the carnivalesque as a ludic parley of people, as a gluttonous feast, and a specular pageantry. The power of Bakhtin’s dialogics lies in the interpretive and transformative power of the carnivalesque.

The most distinguishing marker of carnival is that it means to be subversive or metamorphic from the ground up and intends to preserve and perpetuate inter-subjective dialogue at the same time. As it is heresiarcical, carnivalization breaks up and “reverses” colorless and prosaic monopoly of the established order of power. It dismantles the hierarchical by freely and irreverently blending—in the language of Bakhtin—“the profane and the sacred, the lower and the higher, the spiritual and the material.” According to the philosophic playwright Luigi Pirandello, the Latin *humor* designates “a physical substance in the form of fluid, liquid, humidity, or moisture,” and humans are said to have four “humors”—blood, bile, phlegm, and melancholy. And the humorist sees the world not exactly in the nude but in “shirt sleeves.” For Pirandello, the principium of humor lies in edifying “the feeling of the opposite”(negativa) in what we do and think. By splitting every affirmation into a negation, humor triggers and engenders the “spontaneous birth”(ingegno) of things. To put it more politically, humor as *negativa* uncloaks, un.masks, or exposes the “dirty bottom” of officialdom and the established regime.

Bakhtin’s work or dissertation establishes a set of protocols for the carnivalesque, including gastronomy or gustemes. He discovers the interlocking link between the two basic human activities: eating and speaking. Indeed, symposium is a feast of words: language goes on holiday at table talk. To quote Jeanneret again, “It is after all the same organ the tongue, which savours words and delights in foods.” It took the personal experience of “lean times” for Bakhtin to discover the phenomenology of dietetics as a celebration: “man’s encounter with world in the act of eating is

joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself.’

The exiled Polish Marxist Leszek Kolakowski observes that throughout the ages there is an incurable and perpetuating antagonism between “a philosophy that perpetuates the absolute” and “a philosophy that questions accepted absolutes.” In other words, the antagonism between the “priestly” and the “jesterly” is the most general form of intellectual culture at any given period of time in history. The priestly attempts to guard the absolute at any cost, while the jesterly is motivated by its distrust of the absolute or a stabilized system and wishes to deconstruct it. Carnival is the “jesterly” play of difference aiming for the creation of an alternative or reversible world order. As a ludic form of subversion, it is playfully, that is, nonviolently, subversive as it intends both to destroy a “real” world and to construct a “possible” world at the same time.

Clowning dethrones the stable and established hierarchy of all kinds. In the Brughelian and Rabelaisian themes of Bakhtin’s body politics, to carnivalize the world is to dialogize it; in it carnivalization and dialogization go hand in hand. As a protest against the monological “misrule” of officialdom, carnivalesque life transgresses and transforms the canonical order of truth and the official order of reality. As Bakhtin writes,

it is past millennia’s way of sensing the world as one great communal performance. This sense of the world, liberating one from fear, bringing one person maximally close to another (everything is drawn into the zone of free familiar contact), with its joy at change and its joyful relativity, is opposed to that one-sided and gloomy official seriousness which is dogmatic and hostile to evolution and change, which seeks to absolutize a given condition of existence or a given social order. From precisely that order of seriousness did the carnival sense of the world liberate man. But there is not a grain of nihilism in it, nor a grain of empty frivolity or vulgar bohemian individualism.

It is quite obvious, I think, that Bakhtin’s carnivalesque is the indirect language used against the oppressive Stalin regime of his time in Russia.

Unlike revolution, which is both a violent form of subversion and “the price to be paid for the abolition of differences,” carnival in and for the preservation

of dialogue is the playful body in rebellion. As Bakhtin insists, the distinguishing mark of violence is that “*it knows no laughter*”—a “Gogolian laugh” that is joyful and festive but not satirical and negative. In both intention and result, subversion by violence brings death to dialogue whose epiphany is the Other. For it there is no alternative because it intends to exterminate the opposition. As all prejudices and violence ensuing from them are the inevitable consequence of the intolerance of difference, there exists a radical distinction between the violence of intolerance and the laughter of tolerance.

Violence runs from boxing to revolution and war. Without doubt, it too has festive and exciting moments. The business of speaking out against the violence of even boxing “is not to break the silence but to interrupt violence”(n'est pas de rompre le silence mais d'interrompre la violence)—to borrow the expression of the French dialogical philosopher Francis Jacques. Boxing is a pure theory of power; it is an abject lesson of “power politics,” *Realpolitik*. For as the boxer is his body, in boxing physical superiority prevails as moral rectitude, i.e., might is right. Sartre helps us to define boxing as the prototype of power politics when he remarks that “the upright man [i.e., the boxer] must be strong; strength is the proof of his right.”

In his argument or polemic against Arthur Koestler in *Humanism and Terror*, Merleau-Ponty once defended violence uncompromisingly by saying that inasmuch as we are carnal beings, we are condemned to violence. Our lot is only the choice among different forms of violence. As violence is the common origin of all political regimes, insisted Merleau-Ponty, not only do “life, discussion, and political choice occur only against a background of violence,” but also abstention from violence toward those who are violent is to become their accomplice.” However, Merleau-Ponty became disenchanted with Marxism in the 1950s which coincide with the Korean War. In his later work *Adventures of the Dialectic*, Merleau-Ponty reversed himself and renounced revolutionary dialectics. He uncovers an insidious dilemma or contradiction inherent in the historical and political logic of revolution when he writes:

Revolution become institution is already decadent if it believes itself to be accomplished. ... There is no dialectic without opposition or freedom, and in a revolution opposition and freedom do not last for long. It is no accident that

all known revolutions have degenerated: it is because as established regimes they can never be what they were as movements; precisely because it succeeded and ended up as an institution, the historical movement is no longer itself: it “betrays” and “disfigures” itself in accomplishing itself. Revolutions are true as movements and false as regimes.

Nonviolence is not merely a reaction to violence, but it asserts itself as the alternative to the making of history with the intent to preserve and perpetuate intersubjective dialogue in humanity. Thus carnivalesque nonviolence decisively takes the side of Albert Camus’ “rebel” or “man in revolt,” who renounces calculated violence and eventually the totalitarian outcome of dialectical violence that ends what Merleau-Ponty, too, calls freedom and Bakhtin dialogue or what I call Bakhtin’s dialogical body politics. Rebellion is for Camus a “protest against death” as well as against tranny, brutality, terror, and servitude. Believing that “words are stronger than bullets,” Camus writes:

Dialogue on the level of mankind is less costly than the gospel preached by totalitarian regimes in the form of monologue dictated from the top of a lonely mountain. On the stage as in reality, the monologue precedes death. Every rebel, solely by the movement that sets him in opposition to the oppressor, therefore pleads for life, undertakes to struggle against servitude, falsehood, and terror, and affirms, in a flash, that these three afflictions are the cause of silence between men, that they obscure them from one another and prevent them from rediscovering themselves in the only value that can save them from nihilism—the long complicity of men at grips with their destiny.

The true rebel is the one who senses and cultivates his allegiance to dialogue and human solidarity with no intention of obliterating the Other. His rebellion or non-violent subversion stands tall “midway” between silence and murder in refusing to accept being what he/she is. The rebel willingly acknowledges the dialogical interplay between the ethical principle of culpability and epistemological principle of fallibility, whereas the revolutionary thrives on the monological absoluteness of inculpability and infallibility, however noble or ignoble his/her cause may be. In conclusion, epistemological dogmatism and moral absolutism have no place in car-

nivalesque life and they contradict Bakhtin's dialogical principle that always recognizes the ever-present, porous moment and zone of ambiguity, as does Merleau-Ponty, that resides and persists between complete doubt and absolute certainty.

- ▶ Submitted : 2014. Apr. 14.
- ▶ Reviewed : 2014. Apr. 29.
- ▶ Accepted : 2014. May. 12.

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