

Who's Afraid of Lotman and Bakhtin? Two Semiotic Readings of Fear
/ ¿Quién les teme a Lotman y Bakhtin? Dos lecturas semióticas del miedo
/ Quem teme Lotman e Bakhtin? Duas leituras semióticas do medo

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ABSTRACT

I seek to draw a theoretical articulation around two posthumous works by Mikhail Bakhtin and Yuri Lotman, key exponents to think about culture from a semiotic perspective. In these late productions, both thinkers expose a shared interest in reflecting how fear materializes, being able to be read in concrete texts that seek to account for the phenomena that are occurring on the cultural horizon. In this sense, Lotman and Bakhtin focus on investigating the regular appearance of a set of principles and motives that would be systematically updated in the relationship between social ties and fear. My purpose is not only to describe, but also to outline a critical apparatus about fear from a semiotic perspective, in light of the interpretation of these articles that keep heuristic power and provide an instrument to initiate a reflection on this cultural mode of feeling.

KEYWORDS: Fear; Yuri Lotman; Mikhail Bakhtin; Cultural Semiotics

RESUMEN

Busco trazar una articulación teórica en torno a dos trabajos póstumos de Mikhail Bakhtin y Yuri Lotman, exponentes clave para pensar la cultura desde una perspectiva semiótica. En estas producciones tardías, ambos pensadores exponen un interés compartido por reflexionar de qué manera el miedo se materializa, pudiendo leerse en textos concretos que buscan dar cuenta de los fenómenos que van produciéndose en el horizonte cultural. En tal sentido, Lotman y Bakhtin se abocan a indagar sobre la aparición regular de un conjunto de principios y motivos que se actualizarían, sistemáticamente, en la relación entre lazo social y miedo. Mi propósito irá más allá de lo descriptivo para esbozar aparato crítico sobre el miedo en perspectiva semiótica, a la luz de la interpretación de estos artículos que guardan potencia heurística y proveen de un instrumental para iniciar una reflexión sobre este modo cultural del sentir.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Miedo; Yuri Lotman; Mikhail Bakhtin; Semiótica de la cultura

RESUMO

Busco traçar uma articulação teórica em torno de duas obras póstumas de Mikhail Bakhtin e Yuri Lotman, expoentes chave para pensar a cultura sob uma perspectiva semiótica. Nessas produções tardias, os dois pensadores expõem um interesse compartilhado em refletir como o medo se materializa, podendo-se ler em textos

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concretos que buscam explicar os fenômenos que estão ocorrendo no horizonte cultural. Nesse sentido, Lotman e Bakhtin estão focados em investigar a aparência regular de um conjunto de princípios e motivos que seriam sistematicamente atualizados na relação entre laços sociais e medo. Meu objetivo vai além do descritivo para delinear aparatos críticos sobre o medo na perspectiva semiótica, à luz da interpretação desses artigos que mantêm o poder heurístico e fornecem um instrumento para iniciar uma reflexão sobre esse modo cultural de sentimento.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Medo; Yuri Lotman; Mikhail Bakhtin; Semiótica da cultura

The aim of this work is to make the perspectives of Yuri Lotman and Mikhail Bakhtin dialogue with each other, linking some of the most relevant contributions that these role models of the Soviet semiotics left for the study of fear: affects¹ that in our Western culture seems to have always gained complexity at moments of great historical dynamics (cf. Augé, 2014; Boucheron y Robin, 2016; Mondzain, 2016). Because of the materialist affiliation and the shared dialectic of Lotman and Bakhtin, and considering their interest in funding transdisciplinary projects oriented to link culture and their texts as structures that refract each other (ARÁN y BAREI, 2005; AMÍCOLA, 2001), I understand that it is possible to think certain points of articulation that contribute to develop an efficient theory to make visible the flow of fear as an affective orientation towards a cultural form.

This is related to my current research lines, which question the way in which a Culture of Fear takes artistic form in stories that coincide in displaying a political dimension of fear (GÓMEZ PONCE, 2019; 2020). Nonetheless, the preliminary findings suggest that the concept of “Culture of Fear” lacks accurate definitions and methodological applications for the study of its multiple representations in diverse cultural artifacts. For this reason, my work seeks to overcome those gaps through the development of a theoretical enclave that allows fear to be understood both as a thematic configuration and a cultural phenomenon that materializes itself artistically in narratives surrounded by aesthetic, ethical and political tensions. In this sense, I understand that the

¹ I follow the cultural Marxism approach proposed by Fredric Jameson (2019, pp.70-76), who, in a conception close to the one developed by Lotman and Bakhtin, defines “affects” as cultural forms of feeling and collective background upon which emotions are cut, inasmuch affectivities named and appropriated by the subject. Besides, an ample exam on the so-called “affective turn” can be consulted in Arfuch (2018, pp.17-30).

proposals made by Lotman and Bakhtin keep heuristic potential and provide a tool to initiate a reflection upon this cultural form of feeling, allowing me to outline a critical device about fear from a semiotic perspective.

In this article, in a special way, I set out such an approach in light of two little-known texts by those authors, whose points of view display more than one coincidence as regards the question of fear. It is the case, however, that these two reflections cannot be thought of without their biographic exiles and the changes that their works have gone through in the West. Thus, as the Bakhtinian production abounds in disputes about authorship, and it claims the quasi archeological work of its exegetes (conscientious in deciphering the chronological order of those vast notes that the philosopher handed down during his confined years) (BUBNOVA, 1996), Lotman's theory, perhaps overshadowed by the great impact of his first literary studies of a more structural nature, has faced difficulties in its circulation, and his late writings have had scarce visibility, at least in the Western international context (BAREI, 2012).

On the one hand, I will refer to Mikhail Bakhtin's notebooks, apparently written in 1944, which were discovered late and are currently known as "Additions and changes to *Rabelais*" ["Adiciones y cambios a *Rabelais*"] (2000 [1944?]). They are notes destined to an eventual re-edition of his foundational work on carnivalesque culture and the transition from the Middle Ages to Renaissance times (BAKHTIN, 1984 [1965]),² written during his stay in Savelovo, a period in which the philosopher partially resumes his academic activities after years in exile. Merged with bibliographic pieces on Ukrainian literature and some notebooks with short reflections, those fragmented notes would share their synchrony with the brief article titled "Rabelais and Gogol: The Art of Discourse and the Popular Culture of Laughter" (BAKHTIN, 1989 [1940?]), posthumously recovered in the compilation translated into Spanish as *Teoría y estética de la novela*.³

On the other hand, I will revisit Yuri Lotman's "Witch Hunts. Semiotics of Fear" ["Caza de brujas. La semiótica del miedo"] (2008 [1989?]), an article that, according to

² BAKHTIN, M. *Rabelais and his World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984 [1965].

³ Big part of the articles gathered here in this compilation were published in English in BAKHTIN, M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. However, the text we discuss here was published separately in BAKHTIN, M. *Rabelais and Gogol: The Art of Discourse and the Popular Culture of Laughter*. Translated by Patricia Sollner. In: *Mississippi Review*. Vol. 11, No. 3, Essays Literary Criticism, 1983, pp.34-50.

his son (LOTMAN M, 2008), has two similar versions on the issue dealt with, though the destiny of one of them has not yet been clarified. Although the text that was found (incomplete and lacking some footnotes) has an uncertain date, it is possible to date it between 1988 and 1989 because of the strong introduction of Ilya Prigogine's thought, and the noticeable interest in analyzing the semiotic of the great social cataclysms in history. In this period, he also elaborated another key text about the same topic: "Technological Progress as a Problem in the Study of Culture", written around 1989 and recovered, then, in the Spanish-written compilation *Semiosfera I*,⁴ carried out by Desiderio Navarro. Apart from this, it is worth mentioning that both texts are preludes to what, later on, is replaced by one of Lotman's most important legacies: his book *Cultura y explosión. Lo previsible y lo imprevisible en los procesos de cambio social* (1999 [1992]).⁵

Beyond the anecdotal, what these pieces of information allow us to see is the way in which the reflection upon fear will articulate within Lotman's and Bakhtin's thoughts, while they are introduced as a question that gradually develops into two key benchmark categories: Bakhtin's carnival and Lotman's explosion. In this sense, I consider, then, that the problem of fear, as these authors understand it, must be linked to periods of cultural transformations, where this affect seems to be oriented to account for a permanent state of alienation of subjects, but also of resistances that encourage the transitory liberation, and the provisional abolition of an established order. Consequently, it is not possible to read those articles without recovering their hypotheses in light of other productions with which, in different levels, they share their temporality and concerns.⁶ Under the shelter of these premises, I begin, first, by retrieving Bakhtin's contributions.

I have already mentioned that "Additions and changes to *Rabelais*" must be considered in the frame of his vast project dedicated to elaborate stylistics of the genres in prose, a task that will encourage him to study the work of François Rabelais and the festive-popular forms. In his compositional logics, Bakhtin will reveal not just one of the origins of the European novel, but also a complex way of subverting social order, and

⁴ LOTMAN, Y. Technological Progress as a Problem in the Study of Culture. Translated by Ilana Gomel. In: *Poetics Today*. Vol. 12, No. 4, 1991 [1989], pp.781-800.

⁵ LOTMAN, Y. *Culture and Explosion*. Translated by Wilma Clark. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2004 [1992].

⁶ Neither Mikhail Bakhtin's text nor Yuri Lotman's have been translated into English or Portuguese.

arguing against dominant ideologies. It is common knowledge that Bakhtin faced carnival and its main features, revealing in the compositional logic of this popular celebration one of the origins of the European novel, but also an “unofficial culture” that subverts and argues against the dominant social order.

Concerned with identifying how the image of a new man develops in the transition towards modern consciousness, the Russian philosopher elaborated a fruitful theory of carnival, interpreting this phenomenon as the remnant of an agrarian culture that resists the advancement of the emerging bourgeoisie, as well as a novel expression of the popular. As Pampa Arán ponders (2005, p.77), this is the most “intense semiotic” zone of the Bakhtinian thought, in the sense that his notion of carnival becomes a productive theoretical framework to relate the social and its discourses as spaces that refract one other through a complex system of artistic and symbolic mediations.

However, this is a task that Bakhtin carries out in light of the tragedy and some paradigmatic works by William Shakespeare, the writer that he, together with Rabelais and Cervantes, acknowledges as one of the most important figures of the Renaissance times. Bakhtin will then get into a very detailed analysis of some of the Shakespearean texts (*King Lear*, *Richard III*, *Macbeth*), looking at them through the notion of chronotopy (an aspect that will allow him to include other cultural languages, such as theatre), but also at some motifs of Western literature that are taken as “universal images.” This question is noteworthy if we remember the Bakhtinian prudence as regards the universal interpretation of those artistic forms that only acquire a voice in the intersubjective encounter between consciousness and situated historical contexts.

Nonetheless, an effort is perceived here to delimit a certain cultural memory of fear, resuming a conception that strongly permeates his study on Rabelais: that is, a “cosmic terror” that, inscribed in the depths of the unconscious, is present from the beginning of times (BAKHTIN, 1984 [1965], p.335).⁷ This reading of fear of calamities and natural disasters that are similar to “an obscure memory of cosmic perturbations in the distant past” (1984 [1965], p.335)⁸ will find, in the “Additions and changes to *Rabelais*”, its best example of what Bakhtin recognizes as a quasi-atavistic concern for the “temporal nature of the body”⁹ (2000 [1944?], p.169). This means, a concern for its

⁷ For reference, see footnote 3.

⁸ For reference, see footnote 3.

⁹ In the Spanish translation: “carácter temporal del cuerpo.”

degradation, its finitude, and the mysteries that it hides from that new modern man that is still overwhelmed by the memory of diseases and pestilence, that “condensed image of death”¹⁰ as Bakhtin would call it (2000 [1944?], p.169).

It is a privileged place, then, that is given to fear of death, which the philosopher has focused on in different texts. For example, when he reflects upon the impossibility of a subject’s taking part in his/her own death (“death-for-oneself”)¹¹ and upon the failures of literature regarding “spying on death from within”, something that writers such as Dostoievsky and Tolstoy will thoroughly achieve (2008 [1961], p.303).¹² In this sense, the carnivalesque genres operate upon fear of death, neutralizing it through the disappearance of the borders between youth–old age, and life–death–resurrection, and also through laughter, that “powerful medium of fight”¹³ that by nature is profoundly revolutionary (BAKHTIN, 2006 [1946], p.84). Because of this, the body gains relevance in carnival and in its system of images (that is, grotesque realism) that exaggerate and hypertrophy its parts, openly exposing its functions, such as eating, drinking or defecating. Furthermore, the corporeal becomes a problematic zone in the pre-romantic and romantic arts, varieties that, according to Bakhtin, render the lugubrious its signature and where the grotesque “acquired a private ‘chamber’ character. It became, as it were, an individual carnival, marked by a vivid sense of isolation” (1984 [1965], p.37).¹⁴

It is enough to observe how some motifs are operated in both expressions: the mask, the puppets, and the figures of the devil, so recurrent in that spring and morning carnival, which will also appear during Romanticism, but as favourite elements of the night that, stripped from their restoring function, are loaded with a sombre character. In addition, that festive-popular laughter that frees the thought becomes malign in the romantic grotesque, being replaced by the infernal laughter. In this sense, in Bakhtin, fear is another form of the popular, and a constant topic with which Realism works in all its expressions, sometimes confronting and parodying it, and sometimes stylizing it. This is why, in “Additions and changes to *Rabelais*”, he starts his journey affirming that “when

¹⁰ In the Spanish translation: “imagen condensada de la muerte.”

¹¹ In the Spanish translation: “la muerte-para-sí-mismo.”

¹² In the Spanish translation: “espiar la muerte desde adentro.”

¹³ In the Spanish translation “poderoso medio de lucha.”

¹⁴ For reference, see footnote 3.

analyzing the images of the popular fest it becomes necessary to take constantly into account the *generic fear* incarnated in them” (2000 [1944?], p.191; my italics).¹⁵

Now, I momentarily put aside the Bakhtinian reading to get into the semiotics of Yuri Lotman, who will begin with an argument similar to that of Bakhtin’s, but giving a step forward. His interest in questioning the transition towards the Renaissance also becomes visible in an exploration through literature (Dante, Lope de Vega, Bacon) that contributed to model this period as utopic and as myth in progress, relegating Inquisition, the religious wars and, mainly, the witch hunt, to the darkness of the Middle Ages. However, it is a reading that Lotman understands as mistaken, and for this he reconstructs that intense story in which “thousands of fires blackened the skies of Europe” during the eve of the century of Reason (1991 [1989], p.791),¹⁶ dismantling the idea that the collective paranoia during this period translated other evident dangers such as epidemics and foreign invasions. It happens that these factors have been a constant throughout European history and, in this sense, his “Semiotics of fear” (2008 [1989?]) (one of the texts in which, furthermore, his methodology regarding cultural study is discussed in more detail) intends to demystify this affect that emerges in very different historical moments, generating extremely similar texts that reveal the logics of the system.

It is important to remember that we are addressing Lotman’s late production, where the concept of explosion takes a central place because it enables tracing several reflections upon mechanisms of the unpredictable, a persistent concern geared toward problematizing the different “speeds” that generate “a sharp increase in the informativity of the entire system” (2004[1992], p.14).¹⁷ Even so, here there is a programmatic task that Lotman seems to hand down to future inquiries of the cultural semiotic that, because of his early death, he was not able to carry out (cf. Segre, 2004): that is, to the detriment of the cultural studies geared toward researching prolonged and plurisecular processes, this theoretical perspective chooses to analyze the unforeseen changes that are not governed by probability laws, but by chance.

In this context, social cataclysms will appear as privileged objects of study and, because of this, in Lotman’s last texts he will dedicate himself to the reconstruction of

¹⁵ In the Spanish translation: “al analizar las imágenes de la fiesta popular es necesario tomar permanentemente en cuenta el *miedo genérico* encarnado en ellas.”

¹⁶ For reference, see footnote 5.

¹⁷ For reference, see footnote 6.

mass consciousness in the context of great cultural crises. His “Semiotics of fear” is an attempt to show how semiotics can question a vast repertoire of massive behavior phenomena, in view of rendering intelligibility to information that seems lost in the course of cultural diachronic, and that historic science, that which Lotman distrusted, has overlooked because of its tendency to reduce cultural heterogeneity to a stable and permanent regularity (ARÁN, 2012). Given that textualities, as well exemplified throughout the Lotmanian theoretical edifice, work as condensed programs of cultures (cf. LOTMAN, 1999[1981]), the semiologist takes the challenge of getting into the “analysis of texts produced at moments of sharp intellectual conflicts (and therefore, semiotics), which reflect the tensions at critical moments of the social development of humanity” (2008 [1989?], p.11).¹⁸

The study of fear appears as an effective method to reveal that which is deemed “normal” in habitual conditions, and consequently, Lotman resorts to the deciphering of documents that circulate in societies victim of panic, dealing with the regular appearance of these principles that are systematically updated in the massive consciousness. What the semiologist will observe during generalized panic is the profusion of an “unmotivated fear”, whose unknown causes generate mystified and semiotically constructed recipients. Lotman then warns:

It is not threat that creates fear; it is rather fear that creates threat. The object of fear turns out to be a social construct, the creation of semiotic codes, with whose help said society codifies itself (2008 [1989?], p.12).¹⁹

What is interesting is that such an orientation will lead him to question the witch trials, detecting in the absence of parameters of choice and the torture of victims, as well as in argument inconsistency, more complex operations that respond to the staging of a generalized suspicion. Since, for the scholar, the witch-hunt deals with the conscious elaboration of stereotyped forms and fictions that seek to give common features

¹⁸ In the Spanish translation: “análisis de textos creados en momentos de agudos conflictos intelectuales (y por ende, semióticos), que son los que reflejan las tensiones en los momentos críticos del desarrollo social de la humanidad.”

¹⁹ In the Spanish translation: “no es la amenaza la crea el miedo, sino el miedo el que crea la amenaza. El objeto del miedo resulta ser una construcción social, la creación de códigos semióticos, con cuya ayuda la sociedad en cuestión se codifica a sí misma.”

(difference, cohesion, conspiracy) to a threatened minority, but which becomes necessary as it is turned into a scapegoat of deeper historical crises.

Now I would like to highlight that the files that Lotman analyzes recover everyday verbal exchanges (such as rumors and gossip), which lead him to resume historian Jean Delumeau's hypothesis and his "spectral analysis: identifying specific fears that then are added up to create an atmosphere of fear" (2012 [1978], p.31).²⁰ It deals with a question about the effects of fear in social experience, whose answer is sought in the voices of that anonymous mass that the science of history has muted, but where the collective image of a given state of culture can be captured. For this reason, Lotman will here openly recognize his debt to Bakhtin, as he will also insistently do in these late productions, in which the concern about time and history strongly emerge. Even today, there are Bakhtinian features in his reading of heretic and satanic rites, in the way in which they promote anti-cults that distort Christian liturgy codes, through parody and a "reading in reverse". Nonetheless, unlike Bakhtin, Lotman is not interested in "the popular sources of these beliefs [...] but in their synchronic structure and in the place they have in the 'culture of fear'" (2008 [1989?], p.17).²¹

In order to explain this, it is necessary to resume the first explorations Lotman made about fear during the first summer schools in Tartu, and in the ambitious attempt to establish a typology of cultures (Cf. Lotman, 1970a and 1970b). Back then, he had a hypothesis on that evolving moment when culture emerges as a "system of complementary prohibitions" (1970b, p.205)²²: first, the form of norms of shame that made it possible to internally organize a primitive collective human in a hierarchy, and then, through fear and coercion, which had defined our relation with communities-other. In this sense, the physiognomy of a Culture of Fear must be considered as a set of imposed limitations on the human subject that the semiologist will see reinforced with the birth of the State, but above all, he understands it as a fundamental psychological mechanism that allows cultures, through their texts, to organize themselves and their prevailing reality.

²⁰ In the Spanish translation: "análisis espectral: individualizar los miedos particulares que entonces se suman para crear un clima de miedo."

²¹ In the Spanish translation: "las fuentes populares de estas creencias [...] sino en su estructura sincrónica y en el lugar que ocupan en la 'cultura del miedo'."

²² In the Spanish translation: "sistema de prohibiciones complementarias."

At this point, it is paramount to resume Bakhtin's perspective, which is close to the former's in the sense that it understands that fear also restricts. It does so through suffering and submission of the body to shame, and it is because of this that the corporal dimension becomes a fighting arena during carnival, and capital dimension of its disquisitions on the work of Rabelais. Bakhtin recognizes that the imposition of shame and fear respond to two sides of a coin "used by all religious systems to oppress man and his consciousness", which intervene limiting the body, that space of contact and knowledge of the world and others (1984 [1965], p.335).²³ In a particular way, this is about a reading that, in the "Additions and changes to *Rabelais*", he will thoroughly explore under the shelter of Shakespearean literature, and the way in which the writer resignified the folkloric roots of fear in his tragedies.

Two Shakespearean motifs, substitution-change and the enthronement-disenthronement, re-elaborate the signification of the body through blood shedding and dismembering. In Shakespeare's persistent recurrence to parricide and filicide, Bakhtin finds the persistence of a monotonic sense, without any possibility of resurrection or renewal, since the English writer seems to be prone to show that the apparition of fear is, actually, a reaction to "the law of change" (2000 [1944?], p.175).²⁴ His interest in the problem of the crown and, therefore, in "all power (hostile to change), whose constitutive moment is the subaltern's violence, oppression, lie, tremor and fear, just like the reversed fear of the ruler towards the subjugated to the power" (2000 [1944?], p.175).²⁵ As I understand it, what Bakhtin is observing is the power that fears insurrection, and the rupture of the established order, something that Shakespeare re-introduces from that deeper tragedy that is the end of the individual. This reading seems to gain validity when introducing the almost-telegraphic affirmations of the philosopher that

to a certain extent, *Macbeth* can also be called tragedy of fear (the very own fear of the living). There is nothing guaranteed in life, there is no quiet and eternal possession. All kind of criminal activity (on its limits, it always means murder). The ideal state is the intrauterine (2000 [1944?], p.184).

²³ For reference, see footnote 3.

²⁴ In the Spanish translation: "la ley del cambio."

²⁵ In the Spanish translation: "de todo poder (hostil al cambio), cuyo momento constitutivo es violencia, opresión, mentira, temblor y miedo del subalterno, así como el miedo reversivo del potentado hacia el sometido al poder."

All in all, I think that his Bakhtinian idea of “fear of change” seems to dialogue with the Lotmanian case that all epidemic of this affect is the corollary of a state of social uncertainty about the great sci-tech revolutions. It suffices to remember his insistence on examining those abrupt changes “in the field of information storage and exchange” (1991 [1989], p.782),²⁶ such as the invention of writing, printing or mass media in the twentieth century. According to Lotman, fear is the result of strong innovations that threaten the codes with which culture interprets itself, organizes its memories, and models its reality. He believes that the increase in the witch processes is a consequence of the appearance of technologies that not only collaborated with the exacerbated increase in the demonological literature (for example, *Malleus Maleficarum*), but also with the innovations of perception of time and space (perfection of navigation, discovery of gunpowder, construction of roads, diffusion of string clocks, etc.), and with those great figures that symbolize intense political reforms in Russian history (as it happens with Ivan the Terrible, a character to which, casually, Bakhtin will also repeatedly come back in his “Additions and changes to *Rabelais*” and his contributions to carnival).

However, in parallel, Lotman is also capable of identifying that, during the trials, behind the faces of the accusers was not only the male population, but mainly an incipient bourgeoisie “dominated by fear, hate and envy” (2008 [1989?], p.23).²⁷ It is a hypothesis repeatedly suggested by Lotman, who observes that the changes of scientific and technological order cannot be thought of without that economic process that led, in Western Europe, “to the formation of early capitalist relations in Western Europe” (1991 [1989], p.784).²⁸ Nevertheless, there are no major precisions about this link between witch-hunt and capitalism in Lotman (something that, in recent times, a great number of studies have explored),²⁹ though in some way this could be read between the lines in the

²⁶ For reference, see footnote 5.

²⁷ In the Spanish translation: “dominada por el miedo, el odio y la envidia.”

²⁸ For reference, see footnote 5.

²⁹ Take as example the investigation by Silvia Federici (2014), who deals with the processes of witches as fuel for the primitive accumulation of the capitalist system, which would have taken advantage of the social convulsion to strengthen the model of family as nuclear, reproductive and monogamist. There is a version in English: FEDERICI, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch. Women, The Body and The Primitive Accumulation*. Brookly: Autonomedia, 2004.

statement that such a paranoia synthesizes “the fear experienced by the male majority of losing their condition of dominion over society” (LOTMAN, 2008 [1989?], p.30).³⁰

I wonder if Bakhtin is not getting to the same premise through Shakespeare and his works that project fear towards the son and his return as murderer, and towards descendants that await the death of one of their parents, two images that *Macbeth* problematizes in different instances. Since it seems that what these motifs are exposing, according to Bakhtin, are fears of that in-formation bourgeoisie, concerned with keeping that “world created by money power (capitalism)” (2000 [1944?], p.215).³¹ This hypothesis is barely suggested and, in the transition from the Middle Ages to the modern consciousness, Lotman and Bakhtin seemed to coincide in placing fear as a problematic zone, identifying that, through this affect, the emergent bourgeois conception places a social order under question, sometimes through great inscribed fears of a human memory, sometimes staging new paranoias at the core of the social body.

As for the rest, I consider it convenient to clarify that there is no intention here to force the interpretation of these articles that, still full of potential, were produced as incomplete and fragmented research notebooks. Neither does one intend to take to an extreme the similarities between Lotman and Bakhtin, not knowing the epistemological distances that are particular to each of them, even in their scientific imaginaries (temporal for the latter – take his idea of Great Time – and spatial in the cognitive semantics for the former). It is about a foundational tension that surfaces in the way that both scholars have conceptualized the Culture of Fear, because where Lotman observes that this affect is the result of auto-regulation of the system itself that seeks to face social disputes (he will say that a society victim of fear is not so interesting in itself but as “a medium of representation of the semiotic mechanism of a culture as such” (2008 [1989?], p.12),³² Bakhtin sees it as the product of a human action that seeks to mask the historical tensions: that is, of “making the world and its monotony official. [Of] all forms of discourse that appear poisoned by fear and intimidation” (2000 [1944?], p.211).³³

³⁰ In the Spanish translation: “el miedo de la mayoría masculina a perder su situación de dominio en la sociedad.”

³¹ In the Spanish translation: “mundo creado por el poder del dinero (capitalismo).”

³² In the Spanish translation: “medio de representación del mecanismo semiótico de la cultura como tal.”

³³ In the Spanish translation: “la oficialización del mundo y su monotonía. [De] todas las formas del discurso que aparecen envenenadas por el miedo e intimidación.”

If we compare the Lotmanian premise of culture as a self-sufficient mechanism to the responsible participation of the humanist anthropology of Bakhtin, I cannot help but marvelling at the coincidences that also show these late productions, whose heuristic value is manifested in these keys for the identification of affectivities, and the way that they colonize cultural forms, discovering senses that have been navigating since ancient times. Two perspectives that, despite their marked differences, promote a critical reflection on fear that, in their diachronicity, show the historical contradictions, and the multiple changes introduced by the socio-political avatars of capitalism. Besides, through this fragmented and incomplete outlook on fear, Lotman and Bakhtin propose again a fertile paradigm to think about the dynamics of cultures, facing them as dynamic spaces, refractive and full of intersections, and where senses are not only links in an infinite chain of texts, but also active places where the atavistic memory, history, subjects and their ways of feeling are confronted.

I would like to finish this article resuming what I signaled at the beginning of my presentation, the fact that the problem of fear in Lotman and Bakhtin cannot be thought out of their biographical exiles. I wonder, then, if their life stories, and the historical condition of their productions would not be taking form in these late writings, even in a way a little more explicit than in other paths of their theoretical edifices.

This premise acquires validity if we remember that, according to a confession by the very Bakhtin during the interviews carried out in 1973 by Duvakin (BAKHTIN y DUVAKIN, 2019 [1973]), his work on carnival was originally going to be published in 1933, though the personal odyssey of the philosopher dilated such project. It is also worth mentioning that around this year, when the Stalinist fear starts to be organized, was a time in which the first massive purge takes place, together with the generalized hunger in the country, data used by Mikhail Ryklin (2000) to suggest that *Rabelais and His World* and the fragments taken from it cannot be less than self-therapeutic texts. Supported by this argument (and even if I resume Tatiana Bubnova's hypothesis about the fact that the ideas associated with carnival are appreciated, in different ways, in all the works that followed 1925 (cf. Bubnova, 1996),³⁴ the question about fear would early emerge as a constant

³⁴ In relation to this, during the dissertation of his doctoral thesis in 1946, Bakhtin recognizes having dedicated more than ten years of investigation to the work of François Rabelais (2006 [1946], p.72). A series of date would support this premise as it happens, for instance, with other texts written during the period in question and that come to complement his reading on Rabelais, such as "Forms of Time and the

concern that the Bakhtinian work displays to account for its own historical avatars, and that of its culture.

Lotman's text accounts for what his interpreters call a "scientific testament": intense intellectual legacy where the semiologist seemed to find himself in a rush because of health deterioration, since "he abandons himself to the invention, even more than in his previous work, almost as if the fear of not being able to communicate all his ideas had taken over him" (SEGRE, 2004, p.52).³⁵ Also, he concludes here his *No-memorias* (2014), a biographical text started in 1988, when he suffered from the first stroke (and which, after prolonged stays in hospitals, would cause his death in 1993). The memories of his participation against the German occupation invade these late texts, where Lotman evokes the epochal conditions of WWII, the fear in the battle front, and his great care to make the younger understand that fear "does not surface in objective conditions (size of danger), but in our attitude towards them" (LOTMAN, 2014, p.54).³⁶ It is no coincidence, then, that his "Semiotics of Fear" is inscribed in this testament where he recovers a culture of affects, in an attempt to close an interest that was far from an episodic concern.

I believe that the final lesson that these thinkers have passed down to us is in questioning affects from the footprints that they leave in our memory, an argument that gains relevance in our current historical experience, overwhelmed by the fears that introduce the crises of globalization, and of that predatory capitalism that surrounds us with hunger and poverty, new kinds of violence, and new forms of war, where the displaced and refugees emerge, and with an environment that gives signs of exhaustion. In this convulsive scenario, the life stories of Yuri Lotman and Mikhail Bakhtin provide a certain hopeful panorama, encouraging us to explore up to the last consequences the way in which subjects are colonized by the collective affects, and the way in which our cultural stories respond to imaginary solutions in face of the irresolute contradictions and

Chronotope Novel" (1937-1938) and "Epic and Novel" (1941) (see footnote 4) and, perhaps that which can be seen as a kind of prelude, chapter V of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* (1929) (re-published then under the title of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Translated by Caryl Emerson. London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986[1963]). This reading supposes not only an anecdote as it acquires relevance to understand certain vacancies in the history of Bakhtinian concepts and allows to think, for instance, that his concept of chronotopes was getting ripe in together with the concept of carnival (cf. BUBNOVA, 1996, p.48).

³⁵ In the Spanish translation: "se abandona a la invención, más aún que en sus trabajos anteriores, casi como si le instara el temor a no poder comunicarnos todas sus ideas."

³⁶ In the Spanish translation: "no surge por las condiciones objetivas (el tamaño del peligro), sino por nuestra actitud hacia ellas."

the historical cataclysms because, perhaps, as Lotman thought in his last days, “the best way to free oneself from fear is getting into its cause” (2014, p.53).³⁷

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³⁷ In the Spanish translation: “el mejor modo de liberarse del miedo es meterse dentro de lo que causa”.

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