

Déroulement -

Book launch and discussion of Professor Bogdan Bogdanov's book *Text, Speaking, and Understanding*



HRISTO P TODOROV

Bodan Bogdnov about ordinal speaking

In his preface to his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* Ludwig Wittgenstein writes “This book will perhaps only be understood by those who have themselves already had the thoughts which are expressed in it—or similar thoughts.” In this way Wittgenstein formulates a general tenet for the understanding of theoretical texts, which can be formulated as follows: understanding the books we read not for pleasure, but led by a cognitive interest requires that the reader has at least considered the questions discussed therein. This also is the case with Professor Bogdanov's new book *Text, Speaking, and Understanding*. Understanding the book requires not a mere intellectual curiosity, but a robust interest and some serious preparation concerning a battery of philosophical questions.

The book contains a preface, 16 essays and a postscript. As the author states himself, in terms of content, each essay in itself has more significance than the book as a whole which should be seen as a background to each essay. This background, however, surreptitiously turns into a ‘philosophical *tractatus* in disguise’. Professor Bogdanov did not let this work function as a real treatise, because as an author, he consciously and deliberately tried to avoid the allusion that what the book is about is science. The question then is: what is this, if not science?

An initial definition of the genre that I would venture is Philosophy, and a very specific type of philosophy. By aims and subject, it falls within the domain of philosophical anthropology, because, like in his other recent books *Separate and Together* (2005) and *Past and Modernity* (2010) Professor Bogdanov seeks characteristics of major functions of Man which determine the state of the “hu-

man situation” or Human existence. In method and style of thinking, this is a hermeneutic type of philosophy, inasmuch as the ultimate goal of the thinking and research, but also – the major tool is interpretation. It is also essential to add – this is an original, non-dogmatic philosophical anthropology and a rather unconventional hermeneutic philosophy.

The major philosophical-anthropological claim that underpins and defines the specific claims in the book can be formulated as follows: Man is a – said in one breath – speaking-acting-thinking-understanding creature. This unity of speaking, acting, thinking and understanding is reflected, discussed, deconstructed and reconstructed again in each separate essay of the book as the author, in a reflex of the multiplicity, differentiation and changeability of each of these activities never ceases to create and sustain the conviction that they form a unity.

The leading role in this complex is played by speaking, specifically – the so-called ‘ordinal speaking’. In Professor Bogdanov's words, it is the major topic of this book. Human speech is multifarious. It varies according to its topic, aim, context, form, speaker, audience etc. ‘Ordinal speaking’ is a term which names a specific type of speaking in general – it is speaking that bears the general characteristics of each type of speech.

Ordinal speaking has two characteristic features – one is that it refers to external objects, the second – that it generates specific verbal entities – correlates to those external ones. This creates a particular type of duplicating reality. One of the central critical theses of the author is the requirement for an unflinching discrimination, differ-



entiation between the external objects and the language entities. The central affirmative thesis is the one about 'creating a verbal entity'.

Thinking is a less discrete internal form of speaking, while thinking-speaking is inseparable from doing, inasmuch as naming and defining external objects is at the same time also a project for their change.

Understanding (essays 8 and 14) is realised in speaking. The umbrella term for what is subject to understanding is 'meaning'. It is an ancient philosophical tradition from Plato and Aristotle to equate meaning and essence. That is why understanding is grasping the essence of the object, that is to say the general in it. According to a modern philosophical theory about understanding, however, meaning is construed functionally as a reason, aim and connections with other things, a situated-ness and even - a connection with the world as a whole.

Understanding is realised through the use of multiple ready-made 'schemes-paradigms' (for Heidegger and Gadamer these are pre-structures). The author's original thesis is that when speaking and understanding, people use a number of paradigms simultaneously.

Finally, I would like to formulate two open-ended questions:

1) The idea of understanding always contains a degree of normativity, inasmuch as we can distinguish right from wrong, adequate from inadequate understanding and we are in a position to say when we have understood and when we have not – we do need a criterion for that. The question is what is the place of this normativity in this theory of understanding?

2) Professor Bogdanov's hermeneutic theory is unambiguously a philosophy of speaking. However, speaking logically presupposes listening. When I speak, I tell somebody (a listener) about something. In its classical variant (Gadamer, Habermas) philosophical hermeneutics engages with the thesis that speaking itself has a dialogic structure and then listening and replying are construed as part of the speaking itself. With Professor Bogdanov, however, I am left with the impression that the conversation (the dialogue) is a variety of speaking, which raises the question where is the place of listening? Is it possible or necessary for the philosophy of speaking to be complemented and developed with a philosophy of listening?

MARIA POPOVA

The text – pre-reality and meaning

In his book, Professor Bogdanov presents shared thoughts, ruminations, evaluations on different topics, but the main highlights are the meaning of texts and of speaking, understanding, the relationship between thinking and reality, language, culture and the world, mediated through 'reasoning internal dialogic speech (diatribe speaking)'.

This book presents profound theoretical writing which, under the guise of a sympathetic dialogue with oneself and with the reader, discusses questions which belong to a meta-scientific paradigm, which can be no other than semiotics.

The leitmotif that runs through all the essays is thinking, sense and understanding, as well as the related concepts faith, truth, reality and Man.

A long-term follower of Saussure's structuralist idea, Professor Bogdanov broadens the horizons of its field and intrepidly treats its concepts of the sign – 'signifier' and 'signified' as a relationship between the two and as functions of meaning and sense in the text and outside of it. Professor Bogdanov lifts the curtain of the major semiological and semiotic theoretical question, which will henceforth be the canvass where the specific questions of culture, faith, reality, truth, knowledge build on, and namely, this is the relationship between signifier and signified. This relationship starts to collapse when the deconstruction in Derrida's concept turns into a revision of structuralism. In this context, Professor Bogdanov asks his question: is it possible to have only signified or only significance without signifier?



The signified is not single, it is an unordered collection of semantic fragments (a semantic class of connotants and denotants), a result of associative links, memory traces, a psychological projection (expectation). Some of the fragments with priority, depending on the context and circumstances, connect with the signifier to fulfil the signification (meaning) of the sign. Outside the text meaning functions as this sign, which, in turn, in the basis of the new, the 'other' text appears as a signifier. The signifier and signified from the first text mix together and overlap, like two cells which merge, so as to be called 'a new signifier' for the 'other' text.

If we leave the structuralist communicative Saussurean conception based on the dyad signifier/signified, which forms the sign, then we can search for the answer elsewhere, namely: We turn to the semiosis put forward by Charles Peirce and look for conditions where the interpreter connects directly with the object without dependence on the signifier. Then, the triple unity and the triangle Object – Sign – Interpreter is transformed in a linear relation sign – interpreter. Is this possible? Why not? It should be theoretically possible. However, this 'theoretical' does a good job because, for instance, the theoretical level in science works with hypotheses which have some murky signs, supposedly developed not necessarily for the object they seek and if it is finally explicated, it needs additional explanations so that the necessary semiosis should take place. The over-complexity created when combining Peirce's and Saussure's hypotheses leads to additional unnecessary complications because it is hardly possible to uncover a non-language sub-reality which is invisible (unidentifiable) for our tools and senses through concepts referring to structured languages. The scientist, for instance, might have in his head a myriad of data and surmises, but he can only formulate one hypothesis and to look for the signified through the supposed signifier (factoral realisations and projections of the object), so that he could uncover them. The worst part is that even scientists are not perfect interpreters, because in their hypotheses they can only work with their own language, cultural, social, existential and cognitive experience. What is needed here is a touch of intuition. Professor Bogdanov explains:

"Words are ambiguous; through them we always enter a reality that is more complex. Apart from pointing to something external, language signs are also made internally as signs where one signifier designates one internal signified. Thus these signs experiment with external reference via a preliminary internal one. And because everything human is implicitly verbal, I am afraid that the claims I make about language signs refer not only to them but to the sign in general... If something exists but in ways which preclude visibility, through the verbal sign its existence is made visible without specifying what it is. But how can we point to something which does not exist and which brings into human speech a verbal object with no correspondence to an external object? From the point of view of truth, it should have a name. Such truth should be called modal... It is clear we should call it this. Because the denoted object does not exist, whereas it should exist.

" – because it is in human actions, thoughts and speech.

What is reality? A model of the world? The one and only universally accepted truth of the world in which we live?

Complete reality, Professor Bogdanov writes, is something momentary which is swiftly substituted for another reality. Even speech, no matter how many enhancements are applied, cannot express reality truthfully. It is on variations of reality and truth that Professor Bogdanov places a special emphasis in connection with semiotics as an interpretative doctrine, although he never calls it that. Truthfulness has numerous manifestations. "No question is more difficult than that of truth", Professor Bogdanov writes. "Because we live in an external world in which we think and speak but this world generates in us thoughts and feelings and notions which the moment they become verbal expressions ... immediately turn into something external when we speak of them" "because in the unconscious implicit point of view of this speaking, the world is multi-topic and multi-object. What exists are things in the world and the world itself but not the words or phrases..."

The external world and truth are not equivalent, even when consensus about the truth exists.

"For the time being, what we talk about as truth ... is far from the correspondence we are drawn to by the verbal object of this word."

And so it is, each of us has their model of the world and mutual understanding depends on the coincidence of these models. But is it possible for the world to be understood and to find out the truth about it? Is the world complete or is it a function of variables? As well as reality, like in Professor Bogdanov's shared concept, it is flexible in time. It has temporal variations. But what about reality, where is it? It is obvious that in his thinking, man operates with two realities – that of the world of signs that surrounds man and the second reality – that of his thinking and awareness shaped in a different timing. These two realities can be distinguished only methodologically. In fact, they interfere with each other and interact depending on circumstances and can change, like in a kaleidoscope, the views of reality and truth.

Reality is due to changes here and now and presupposes an evaluative attitude which is modelled not by us, but by the circumstances – external and internal. Or – we can say that reality is over-interpreted. This brings us to understanding and sense. If there is misunderstanding for the speakers – even of the same language, it is due to mismatches about the meaning of the conversation, narrative or dialogue. For things to be that way, Professor Bogdanov emphasises that this is due to a mismatch between the 'unfolding reality' of the text and 'external reality'. Speech, no matter how many improvements are made to it, can never reflect reality. Understanding can never reach the complete unambiguousness of the world-model in dialogue and speaking. Is it possible that the future belongs to texts which say only what they mean to say? This leads to expressing states, in haiku, for instance, or in iconographic or emoticonic correspondence in electronic social networks. Text is a signifying procedure, but meaning does

not relate to it because the denoted and the meaning do not belong to it.

Achieving sense where pointing is impossible is a matter of language creativity which generates reality as a designate and leads to the denoted that does not exist. To achieve understanding, the interpreter needs faith that the thing is what it is. Faith is needed to accept the truth. This is the topic of one of Professor Bogdanov's most interesting essays. Social balance can be sustained on collective faith. And this leads to collectively accepted general truths – experimentally or mentally expressed.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to this issue – where is Man amid this mosaic of senses, meanings and truths? I have complete confidence in what Professor Bogdanov has proposed, i.e. I have faith in it, I accept it as true, I understand it. And it is:

Man enters complex relationships with his environment, endowed with the capacity to inherit and to have a mind and memory. That is why understanding presupposes a certain pre-cognition we are unaware of. The Human is not only in the body but also – in what lies above the biological; however, about it there do not exist sufficient predications and the speaking about it stops at a truth which we have grown to realise collectively.

The mind, however, never stops at a certain finite truth. It is whimsical and wants to draw Man into the above-biological. Roving in dreams, fantasies, hopes, memories,

pleasant associations, expectations, enhancing the physiological capabilities promote Man to the above-biological and place him in unity with the spiritual. In the belief that going over the biological can continue even without the body.

Professor Bogdanov's book poses many questions which have received unambiguous answers in semiotics. For the qualified semiotician, the book is a phenomenon and a valuable enrichment of our academic book market. This book expands the rich field of semiotics and saturates it with the intellectual burden of ruminations over the major and eternal questions. These questions date back to Plato and Aristotle and stretch up to the present day. Philosophy keeps a vigilant eye over the issues. The greatest emphasis falls on the questions about reality and cognition, truth, understanding, faith and religion, culture, the spiritual.

The text is not easy to read, but it is not difficult to understand. However, the reader needs a certain preparation. The language and respectively – the verbal labyrinth of thought in the book and the monologic sharing achieve a complete revelation of the author's theses. Without any attempt to conceal sincerity or an attempt to underestimate the reader. Simply, this is a book for all those who understand it. It is a friendly, collegial and intellectual gift of experience and a trip in uncharted waters which still hold hidden secrets.

KRISTIAN BANKOV

A Dialogue at a higher level

My point of view, quite contrarily to the one expressed by Professor Popova, and rather unexpectedly, but after all this time for once in tune with what Professor Bogdanov said here, is to show that finally, having been acquainted with Professor Bogdanov's entire ontology, I am now fully aware that fundamental differences exist in the ethics, the cognitive ethos to modelling the processes in culture. They make the dialogue really difficult between this system of thought and semiotics as a science, which purports to be useful, after all, paradigmatic, didactic, suited for doing research, with prognostic capacity and generally – presenting a stage in a positive tradition. Both Saussure and Pearce sought for something new which would provide a sound foundation for knowledge, be that logics or linguistics.

Thanks to these new theoretical essays offered with Professor Bogdanov's book *Text, Speaking, and Understanding*, we now for the first time can have a view of his system in its entirety, which is asystemic, but, in fact, is outlined in a formally exquisite way. In it the essays are connected in a spiral motion, with a top-notch mastery of meaning and with a micro-surgical precision of language use of Bulgarian, which I consider a major merit of the

book. Thus Professor Bogdanov achieves a quite authentic and original thinking, where the influence of other authors or schools of thought is reduced to minimum. In this sense, the book is worth reading as a whole, because what it leads up to, in the end, is achieved through a sequence of essays which are not connected via a logical link, but are mutually evocative; they do not add up into a specific model, quite the contrary.

Progressing through this spiral, tracing the trajectory of meaning, having grasped in its entirety this approach to knowledge and to the role of language and its link with reality, and here we are - at the realisation of a hardly achievable compatibility with the theoretical semiotic models and paradigms in which we believe. That is why when I read the whole book, I realised that in our not very intensive, but fairly long-term exchanges with Professor Bogdanov at various fora, specifically in his own online forum, but also at other all-university discussions, we have sometimes expounded on specific issues in isolation from the whole, whereby somehow we have failed to reach agreement. It is now, having studied the whole book and its doctrine, that I realise why it was like that. The dialogue should simply continue on a global level, the level of our



comprehensive notion of sense and the role of knowledge in the academic community and society as a whole.

A perspective on one such global level for dialogue is opened, for instance, by Professor Bogdanov's thesis connected with the biological, natural, living matter of the human being. This plane of understanding what is culture, what is speaking, that these are processes and practice but in the end, the model of these processes and practice by no means belongs to the recently formed and culturally codified innate habitus of Man. In reality, the model for this transition, of this outgrowing is ingrained in the biological shape even before man – in reality culture, according to Professor Bogdanov, in this upgrade which is innate to the biological shape and which evolves in some direction although we cannot determine what exactly, is just one step. That is why each paradigmatic, dogmatic use of language suppresses its living essence. In the course of our relationships, we are forced to use language and thereby construct models with it which carry us through and help us achieve whatever goals, inasmuch as speaking is always doing. However, each feat accomplished through language use, each value added through our speech needs to be compensated with a compromise, with a deformation of the initial relationship between speaking and reality, which is always an open one: each halt in the paradigm, each imposition of opinion, each value achieved in this way through speaking, be that theoretical comfort, if you like, or scholastics, or even manipulation, all of this is a sacrifice of the initial characteristic of the upgrade predetermined with our biological nature, coded in the live process of speaking.

Proceeding from the above theory about the biological, in the course of the essays a host of other concepts is spawned. These are commonly accepted tenets, terms, even some fundamental landmarks in theoretical and philosophical thinking, which Professor Bogdanov problematizes, demonstrating in a way that – I repeat – is not logically sequenced, but in a spiralling narrative, they are all deformations of the ontological link that the process of speaking precedes the sediments deposited by speech, or secreted in culture. Such deconstructed concepts are truth, text, understanding, dialogue, rational/irrational, open system, context, discourse etc.

Professor Bogdanov quite rightly states that he employs semiotics for his own purposes. This is also what happened at the biggest forum of semioticians for the past year. In his inaugural address welcoming the delegates to the 12th World Congress in Semiotics he did not hesitate to state that he treasures semiotics because it can do precisely what is desirable to be done under his doctrine. Such a position, of course, is more than praiseworthy in my view. At the same time, the aim of my short talk here was to show that entering the heartland of this unique doctrine, this complex mental construction, which is Professor Bogdanov's ontology, we can see numerous contrasts with conventional and positive theoretical models that we subscribe to and which help us earn our living, inasmuch as we work in higher education.

With these words, I would like to wish happy reading to anyone willing to measure themselves against the high intellectual standard set by *Text, Speaking, and Understanding*.

MORIS FADEL

In Search of Context



When in the 90s, as a student I started attending Bogdan Bogdanov's seminar, I noticed peculiarities which linked him to the approach that was dominant at the time and which proclaimed itself 'post-modern', but there were also features which distanced him from it. The connection was his flair for the multiplicity of the events under discussion, the attention he gave to the role of language and to the presence of the body in culture. However, the point of divergence from the paradigm was his wish to formulate truth conditions despite the visible multiplicity and changeability of things, as well as the struggle for precision of the expression. Truthfulness stood outside the interest of post-modernists, *in vogue* was the metaphorical, ironic, the pun and the *calembour* verbal gesture.

After 2000 the intellectual atmosphere started to change. Unfortunately, this change is not felt as palpably here, as it is elsewhere. Philosophers such as Quentin Meillassoux and Graham Harman put forward novel global pictures of the world, also known as 'speculative realism', 'object-oriented philosophy' or 'new realism'. These titles do not refer to the same theory, but we can see common goals and agendas. The overall idea is to take the step

forward after 'postmodernism' while preserving some of its basic tenets. The new ideas receive increasing support not only in the field of philosophy, but also in other arts and humanities.

A 'common *topos*' for the authors who develop these ideas is their rejection of the claim "there are no facts, only interpretations", attributed to the thinker whom postmodernists consider their father – Nietzsche; the critique of the postmodernist concept that external reality does not exist independently of the subject, it only becomes visible through our attitudes and in this sense it is always 'tainted' by them, it is always a product of their imagination, illusion or, as it was fashionable to say 'a *simulacrum*'. With Bogdan Bogdanov the external is problematised on several occasions. In his book *Text, Speaking, and Understanding*, he asks the question: "Which is mine specifically?" The question delivers a blow to the authority of the subject, so persistently reified by modernity to set off the presence of a reality, which is totally divorced from us. The paradox that engages the author on several occasions is that this very reality is something we mistakenly perceive as ours. In effect, 'ours' does not belong to us, specifically

not in the traditional Jungian or Foucauldian sense of subjugating the Ego under the influence of the 'collective unconscious' or the dominant constellation, but to a plane outside the social, and outside the work of the myriads of cells which make me up.

The conversation about the cell in the book is connected with a different dimension which gets it closer to attitudes which are trying to overcome 'post-modernity'. Post-modernists break the bond between the so-called sciences and arts. They despise 'scientific knowledge', considering its pretence for precision utopic, because it places boundaries to the endless self-evolving subjectivity – the foundation of their convictions. Bogdan Bogdanov's book collates the 'scientific' with the 'humanitarian' knowledge in one perspective, which appears to me intriguing: the possibility that something which does not belong to the domain of the 'arts' – the cell, living matter – to produce with its own resources what makes the essence of the humanities – meaning.

The idea that meaning can be created by a cell, by living matter, leads to the conclusion that the human is deprived of one of its traditional priorities. Moreover, this gesture is doubled. On the one hand, this flies in the face of a privilege we have always enjoyed, on the other, it attacks its connectedness with one of the markers of humanity – language. Critique of anthropocentrism, of the idea of us as standing hierarchically higher is characteristic of 'speculative realism' and 'object-oriented philosophy'. Bogdan Bogdanov likes to speak of the human, but this does not mean that he is blinded by love for Man. Neither – that he joins the opposing extreme, typical of some authors of today. The book balances between speaking of Man as different from the other inhabitants of our planet, but not as the crown of creation, either. "I do not believe that the so-called outgrowing of biological life on Earth is crowned by

human existence", he writes.

The new conceptions can be speculative in the sense that they offer large-scale explanatory schemes which go outside experience but stop short of being metaphysical, endowing reality with absolute significance. In Bogdan Bogdanov's book there is a concept which bridges the two functions. This is 'linkage' that the author sees as a characteristic of the spiritual. This linkage determines reality, it makes it what it is, while at the same time it prevents it from freezing in one state and makes sure it keeps changing. Linkage stands outside the metaphysical scheme 'cause – result'; it is neither of these two because it can run between unexpected spheres, at unexpected places – for instance, between the material and the immaterial, as we are shown in one of the most interesting essays in *Text, Speaking, and Understanding*. Those of you who read Bogdan Bogdanov's forum regularly will have noticed that based on this linkage, he develops the idea of modular logic.

A book that creates a model of reality in whose centre we see the unpredictability of combinations, relatedness without familial relationship cannot be imprisoned in the genre of the treatise. It has chosen the essay instead – the genre where conceptualising never reaches the state of becoming a theory, where the expectation is of challenges, amendments, justification, dialogue. As one of the significant philosophers of our time, Graham Harman says: "Undoubtedly one of the traditional weaknesses of modern Western philosophy is the exaggerated value attributed to the theoretical strand. Maybe this is where we can expect changes in the future. Just like the Hellenistic World abounded in cynics, sceptics and stoics, the second half of the 21 century may see vagrant wise men who might get together in Sao Paulo, Bangalore, Hangzhou or Dubai."

GEORGI GOCHEV

A Praise of Difficulty

Difficult - this word seems to be the most frequent and instant definition of the book *Text, Speaking, and Understanding* by Bogdan Bogdanov. The attribute also came up tonight in the talks of the people who spoke before me. I also think that the book requires quite an effort on the part of the reader but, in my opinion, the difficulty is not due to inexperienced or pretentious writing, but to the fact that Professor Bogdanov's philosophy attacks a few habits of scientific thinking and its written expositions.

The first habit that we are accustomed to but Professor Bogdanov challenges is the split between academic thinking, speaking and writing on a topic. For us academic thinking usually takes place in silence and in isolation, in a library, a laboratory or study and by the time we start writing on the problem we research, the thinking has already been done. Thereby, the text we are writing aims first and

foremost to outline what is it that we have sought and respectively - discovered; it means to enlighten the reader rather than engage him in the search.

Professor Bogdanov approaches writing in a different way. The texts included in his new book are thought over, spoken and written simultaneously. They reveal the way that thinking on an issue has, in effect, taken place; the emphasis falls not on issues discovered elsewhere, but on the very road of the discovery. This, certainly, changes the role of the reader. He is not expected to be a passive recipient of the author's wisdom, but an associate in his thinking. Therefore, what happens between author and reader is not a lecture or monologue, but a dialogue.

Removing the boundary between thinking, speaking and writing goes in tandem with another trait of Professor Bogdanov's work – erasing the borderline between the



real and the verbal. The object of philosophy, as described in *Text, Speaking, and Understanding* is neither reality itself, nor words for their part; the object of this philosophy is the complex real-verbal type of a world in which we live. That is why for Bogdan Bogdanov speaking about an object from reality is usually also speaking about the meaning of the word which names this object.

If we need to name this philosophy with a term, that would be 'semantic'. And indeed, the texts in Bogdan Bogdanov's book are studies in philosophical semantics. However, they are more than that – they are live situations. Why? Firstly, because what is being thought about is not seen as a static object outside the text but as something live around which time and change seem to flow. Secondly, because the person who does the thinking does not stand outside the thinking as a static subject of thought, but as

someone who undergoes changes in his viewpoint. And thirdly, because the reader who is steeped in the time of the text, just like the object of the thought and the thinking subject also undergoes change.

That is one of the sources of difficulty – the person reading Professor Bogdanov's book needs to think together with him and to experience change and finally to face the risk of getting as a result of the reading a view of the world that is not stable but a shaky one. This risk is amplified even further by the fact that if in our practical existence, 'world' means to a great extent a set of differences, sequences and juxtapositions, for Bogdan Bogdanov 'world' also implies similarities, connections and unities.

Thus we reach the second source of difficulty in *Text, Speaking, and Understanding* – the book honours the distinctions among the objects under discussion, while also seeking points of convergence. We are quite used to the difference between 'the spiritual' and 'the biological'. In two of his texts in the book, Bogdan Bogdanov discusses this distinction and shows that while he understands why it might be necessary, he also reveals that between the functioning of the mind and the human, animal and vegetable cells there is something in common and therefore, the living creature which can think and speak and another living creature which cannot are more related through their common structure than evolutionary theory likes to acknowledge.

Introduced into academic discourse, such a view of the world necessarily also affects the well-established tenet that specialisation in research is a positive development. Professor Bogdanov's book seems to state the opposite – no, the better theory is not the theory of separation, but the one of unification, of shuttling among a range of themes. Which,

in itself determines the character of *Text, Speaking, and Understanding* as encyclopaedic and – in the positive sense – amateur. Yes, this is a book about everything and it, indeed, contains a collection from everything which we usually look for in isolation in books about metaphysics, psychology, biology, religion and political science.

Being, as I say, a book of everything, *Text, Speaking, and Understanding* by Bogdan Bogdanov belongs to a very indeterminate genre. The reader asks himself what is it that he is reading and how he needs to react to the reading – because this is what genres are about: ready-made streamlining of text perceptions. So what is it that we read on the pages of *Text, Speaking, and Understanding*? Is it a research treatise of the type of Aristotle's texts, or is it a discourse, like those by Epictetus, or a dialogue like Platonov's, disguised as a monologue? Or is it, as was already

mentioned here, a protracted response to Wittgenstein's logic and game theory of language?

Bogdan Bogdanov calls his texts 'research essays'. This qualification, in my opinion, draws attention to the fact that these are efforts to connect traditional academic discourse – as it originated with Aristotle's treatises and evolved through Wittgenstein's lectures – with natural human speech. That is to say, to connect the concern for definitions and distinctions with the urge to re-name, create metaphors, summarise and alternate themes.

VESSELINA VASSILEVA

The long narrative of brief existence

I noticed that one way or another all speakers mentioned the biological and the predetermined, as discussed in the text, also – whether the book should be read as a whole, as one long text, or as several discrete essays, some – longer, others short, as Professor Bogdanov himself wanted. This is precisely my topic – the long narrative of brief existence.

When I interviewed Professor Bogdanov for University Diary, he said that the message of his book is that it is very important how we speak about something. That what we say, should be articulated very carefully and later improved more and more. This succinct message, however, is achieved through a long and complex process of speaking because, it – the speaking – is also doing: we say something, we write a text, but we thereby project, create a model of reality and we build a reality – we pass into something else, just like this happens in our biological existence.

In the "Tree of Life" Professor Bogdanov speaks about the long narrative of our brief existence – because we are discrete beings who are born and die – this is what our brief existence looks like at first glance, but in effect the narrative about us is a great deal longer, because we are made of genes and we pass on genes, which we have inherited from a long time before us and which will remain long after we are gone. We last longer, because we connect.

The book can be said to have been inspired by and sustained by the great names, which it presents, but also succeeds in time – such as Roland Barthes, Charles S. Pierce, Terrence Malick, Constantine P. Kavafy; it rests on Aristotle, whose idea of essence is further developed by Professor Bogdanov, as well as on Plato, because it follows Socrates' words from Phaedo, which he told me once he has made his motto: "... when something is ill-named, this is not only abuse of language. The misuse of language induces evil in the soul." But what this book does is that it really elicits what it seeks to expose – and after a long reading, one can see that it is based on our genuine contexts through a scheme revealed by Professor Bogdanov in "Discourse, Text and Sense" and shows the exchanges which these contexts enter against the backdrop of a larger picture.

So, these have been, in my opinion, the three major sources of difficulty when reading *Text, Speaking, and Understanding* – a synchronised flow of thought, speech and writing within the framework of the text, the worldview – not as a set of differences but of connections and similarities and finally, the compromise in the genre, proceeding from this worldview. Three sources of difficulty, but also three springs of vitality for those about to read Bogdanov's book. That is why these words of mine befit the title "In Praise of Difficulty".

I really wanted, because of the short time, and because life is short – to pick only one text to speak about here, to find the text which is the most important, which could be the short story of the whole book but if one day I thought of one text, on the next day I would think of another – and it did not work out in this way. But the choice was impossible to make not only because of my hesitation and inability to choose, but because this reflects the nature of the book itself – it does not lend itself to a brief narrative – and this is what makes it so formidable – its model is that of a lingering narrative which outgrows the discrete text, it outgrows even the book itself and goes even further – it outgrows textuality, because speaking is also doing.

Let me just add an aside – thanks to the model that Professor Bogdanov uses – to show the long narrative of brief existence – we have the following: the reader cannot help the feeling of a plot – that unfolds in the book, and it does happen, but coming from the outside, from what happens to the person who understands.

Why is it, however, that led by the principle long narrative - brief existence, we are incapable of narrowing down on one specific text in the book?

If I were to choose the first text "Roland Barthes's *The Rustle of Language as philosophy*", we immediately come across outstanding moments like these: the reading of a literary text turns it into a different text altogether; Roland Barthes' ego rebels, while Professor Bogdanov's ego intensifies; to understand effectively the present and the past, we need to understand living itself in general, which presents a transition from a less likely truth to a more-likely one. Now is the time to mention that for Professor Bogdanov truth is a model of reality - unfolding.

This is the text where Professor Bogdanov says that the text is an island which caters for something external, something that is not in the text. The pleasure of the text, the enjoyment lies in relating the text to the pleasures which it leaves together with other texts and their creation.

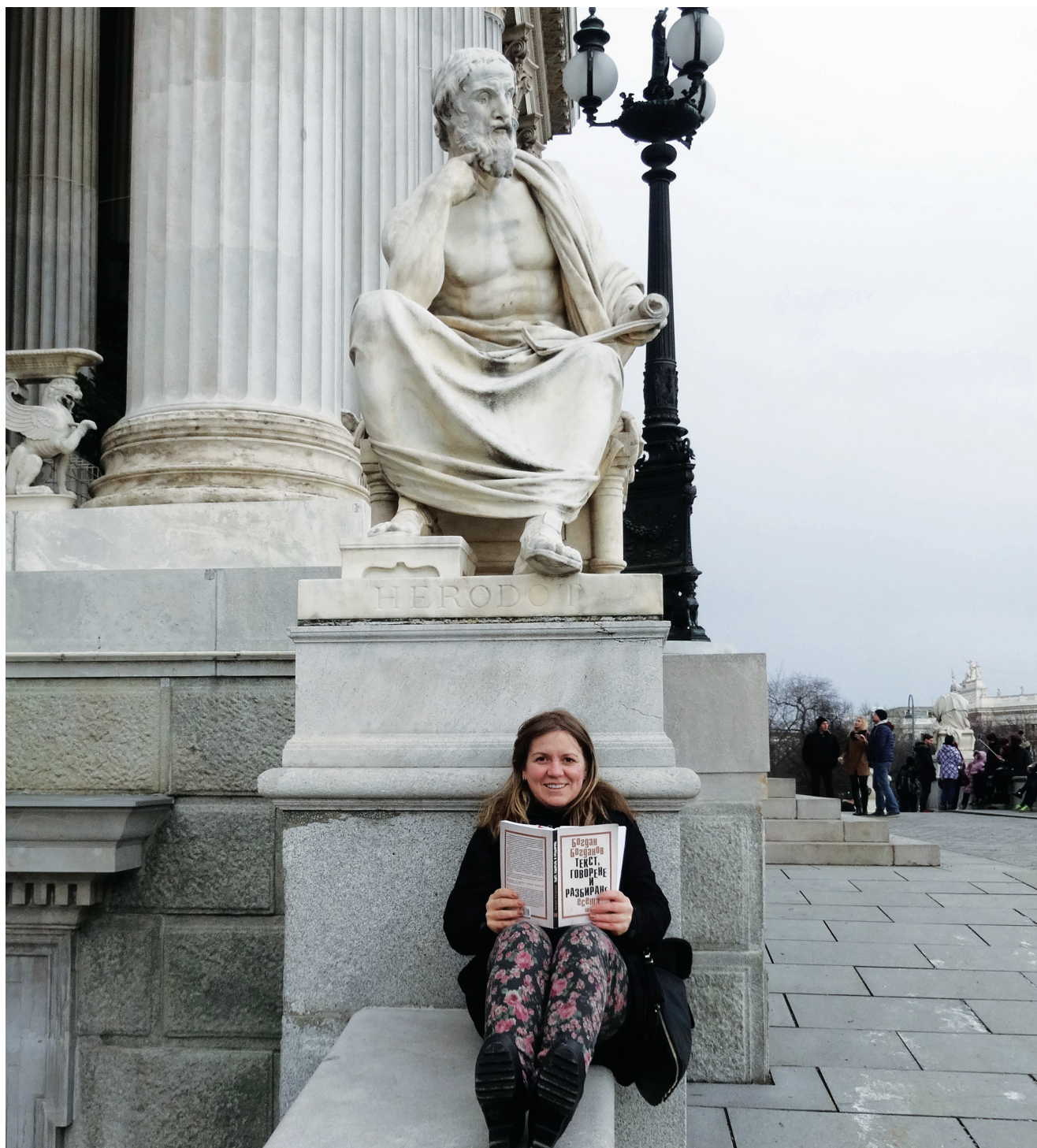
This text is about turning predication into an imaginary object which engulfs everything and gives matter the definition- essence and calls it a 'nice thinking-engulfing-otherisation'.

Although I said that it is impossible to choose one text that is the most significant in Professor Bogdanov's book, I have often thought that my favourite text is the one about the translation of a poem by Kavafy. This is the text that more than any other cannot possibly be just a text but in its own way carries the backbone of the whole book – probably because it was born as a spoken text.

For a long time I also thought of the essay “Discourse, text and meaning” as my favourite, but it cannot be chosen by itself either, because it is based on a different idea – rather than talk of concepts, it relates them and reveals a big picture. Discourse is a spoken intermediary, a form that sets the schematic content of what is being said and written – thanks to it, speakers and writers can speak and write about something that has already been spoken and

written about to a certain extent. Discourses are a ‘standard meaning’ but it is not simply the author's meaning, it is before the author and beyond the author. Discourse is also another thing – it is ‘re-stating again’. And this is where Professor Bogdanov comes up with something very important: “we do need re-statements because contexts change”. That is why we are to genes what our texts are to discourses – “fitting the actual owned into the non-actual non-owned scheme of what has been said in the discourses used”.

In this text Professor Bogdanov presents again two big discourses – of representing and of reflecting which lead to nothing other than – namely, to unfolding-modelling of change, leading to a benefit of exemplary meaning – to the idea of narrative-story-plot – typical of literary discourse



which, with its illustrative nature, in turn, is typical of reality itself and this is where we reach the theory that man can understand through his occurrence in his context by settling down well into the discourses that carry him through as genes.

The text, however, is a wedge with a beginning and an end – says Professor Bogdanov – the text is the brief existence. And this is where we find the grand scheme I mentioned – and which shows that apart from settling down in standard meanings carried by discourses – the text is once evoked by the understanding that happened to its author, and secondly – from the understanding that happened to someone else who has used it – this is the birth of a different text. This duplicity of texts is ingrained in the text, as was ingrained the standard meaning of the discourses and this is the long narrative in the texts which, in turn, have a beginning and an end.

Professor Bogdanov's book is full of such long talks – its genre is not indefinite, its genre is new, which is why it cannot be attributed a hasty label – be it independent essays, or a connected whole – a treatise, a non-academic text or something else – we observe the birth of a new genre which lies hidden because social practices, discourses, activities, reality – they are not ready for it yet, which is why it is easier to employ what is known – the familiar sciences, the usual genres, the names of the well-known – until we move to the reason for the emergence of this novelty.

This reason in the book is engrained in the way the biological has been presented, not only because of the move towards human continuance and immortality, but also because of the move of speaking towards doing. Because speaking always hooks up with the circumstances and perpetually undergoes change – as also does life.

Therefore, for me the greatest merit of this book is that it has in itself this second grand plan of the biological, the natural, of evolution – the thing that is above life and to describe it a new term needs to be invented.

There are three texts where the biological is shown in an uncompromising way: “The tree of Life”, “Of Speaking as Action” and “Opposition, Human Environment-Culture and Open System”.

In the big pictures of “The Tree of Life” we can see the merging of the big discourses of speaking and the biological. Substituting what is spoken with one predicate name for a new spoken with another predicate name is what makes the utterances long. The essence of long statements, however, is construed as their reduction to short texts. In effect, we always want to have a short and clear meaning – this is the aim of academic terms – the brief existence. However, the genuine meaning of long statements is not there, but in the complete process and the thereby evoked model of reality and the transition to another. The same happens to living creatures – which come into existence, stay alive and change into something else – shuttling between death and immortality – not between birth and death. That is what the biological does – our non-biological nature evolves over the biological. The biological has long, composite truths of the biological process. And

here the question arises about the enhanced man. That is why Professor Bogdanov brings forward not the spiritual which is related to a stable system of symbols, but the spiritual which follows a complex biological operationality – chaining more in the name of some outgrowth – the long narrative.

In “Speaking as Action” the biological sneaks in differently – concerning the issue that both we and the animals live in a world which is at least duplicitous – we are at the same time in this space-time but also in the space-time of an all-encompassing world. It is the same with speaking which also presents coping with some external space-time – which is secondary. Thereby “the complexity of the biological existence on Earth is replicated in human speech” – says Professor Bogdanov. And the question is whether the biological which places an organism in one environment-time by allowing this organism to have its own specific life, but also opens it for another, larger life stands lower than verbal expression and understanding, or it replicates the biological, while in the best of cases outgrowing it, and in the worst – simplifying it. In this text Professor Bogdanov introduces the so-called ‘modular search’ – which is available to all forms of living – “a search for something better in exchange for an environment and in exchange between one and another, whereby they merge in a togetherness which upgrades and enhances their discreteness.” That is why there is a difference between life as a fact pressed hard by the slipped in stringent term – and real living which is trying hard not only to enhance itself, but also to upgrade itself, to become different which would also be called something else.

The third big biological thing is in the text of the thirteenth – and fatal – essay: “Opposition, Human Environment-Culture And Open System”. This text is answerable for the reality of immortality, but if someone here has been left with the impression that immortality is only an abstraction: “our understanding should not stop at the institution of culture by valorizing it for its more permanent being in comparison with the more restricted in time one of each man, because the longer existing cultural human has existed for a shorter time than the natural in this man, in which there is an amazingly long complex experience”.

You can see how many ways the biological has – through which we can interpret absolutely everything, but I associate it with this model of understanding through an external plot, because the biological is also an expression of the environment-context – just like a person understanding is environment-context for each specific text. Even the oral medium is transferred in our texts the way that the biological is transferred, ever since the time that the feast was the first genre.

In the course of this discussion I realised what makes Professor Bogdanov's platform different – with his new genre which outgrows not only the known genres, but genres as such, because above the practical social here-and-now there is another level – continuing and keeping up the pretence, also above the discursal preset which will be transferred – but there is a real here-and-now, and they do not stand in opposition, they are bonded. Just like there

is a bond between the biological process and the process of the theoretical plot which can also work at the level of interpretation of the literary text, but also at the level of ordinary speaking and real living. This book is continuing and hence – bigger – which does not stop at specific concepts, objects, opinions, human life – it outgrows them reaching the level of what is known as the bond between

the author and the reader, one – the invisible voice, the other – the real living body, at the same time – the creation and the thing unfolding, but not just the biological – man has a guarantee that he is longer – and through his genes, which he continues and will have continued – like sense and meaning, but also – through the longer narrative, through which we bond with others around us.

BOGDAN BOGDANOV:

First of all, I would like to thank all those present here. Then, I am grateful to those who deserved even more gratitude for having staged such a wonderful debate. One should not be split from the other because a lovely debate, in effect, takes place by virtue of the respective listening, not only by speaking. Listening is an important part of what is being said.

The book can never be discussed and presented exhaustively; moreover, each speaker highlights one aspect while back-grounding another one. But this should be normal. However, I'd like to share that in the book I tried through a host of synonyms to emphasise what I understand by 'text'. A text, broadly speaking, for me – and this is a pet idea of mine apparent throughout the book – is 'unfolding'. I keep calling texts 'unfolding'. This comes to stress the fact that they actually develop at a specified stretch of time. That is why the book abounds in synonyms from this field, but there also appears to be another – probably just as frequent – semantic field: music. For what is music, if not unfolding without words?

And what is the music of classical *chez-d'oeuvres*? For me it is a precious gift whose unfolding moves me deeper and deeper. I know very well why. Because in them, just like in wonderful texts, we find distinctions, connections and changes which accomplish their convincing meaningfulness. That is why reading a text, listening to music, as well as this debate here are attempts to make our living more meaningful for a brief moment. We would like our whole life to be such a moment, but it is a long sequence of moments, only a few of which are meaningful.

It is in those moments of meaningfulness that we take interest in the truths which we unconditionally approve – "So it is". That is why in my book there is no room for the claim that truth is relative. We are always in the current moment. The moment we leave this debate, someone may say: "Well, they debated, but most of all this was a waste of time". It can be put this way because we all have other things to do. Yes, but this is so only in juxtaposition with this fact.

Thence we have a specific consequence that juxtapositions are inherent even when we decide to make an absolute statement. We can make absolute claims about one thing or another. However, they are absolute only in name while in reality they contain implicit comparisons to something better or worse, the thing we are making statements about. Thus, we have two truths, in fact – the more real one is implicitly comparative, the other – an ab-

solute statement which incorporates a comparison. Both are necessary, moreover - not in general and forever, but at this very moment. Thus the spoken is a signifying situation valid for the present moment, in which nothing is relative.

I am truly grateful to everybody, moreover, I thank the organisers who have actually made this event happen – it was my insistence that it should not be a launch but a debate. The worst part of book launches is that the festivities preclude proper understanding of the book. While on this occasion, look at the six speakers – they have read the book and, in effect, they have, in the best sense of the word, internalised and appropriated my thoughts. Most of all, of course, I thank Vesselina, who was actively involved in the whole process of producing this book. Secondly, I owe gratitude to Georgi Gochev.

We cannot expect to capture everything most intimate in one such text. I can make an exception and tell you something about 'unfolding', the central idea in the book. It was triggered in my mind by the etymology of the French word *deroulement*, then it unfolded (this is its etymological meaning) into everything else I discuss in the book. The same holds true of the biological whose strength is in the fact that it is a long process unfolding on our Earth. That is how, while writing this book, I felt like the happy child that I was at five or six, but am not nowadays. But why was I so happy writing this book? Not because of the book itself, but because its long *deroulement* exposed me to more truthful circumstances which are lacking in my daily routine.

In it I am sceptically sad, like all those who believe that they are no more than carriers of the genes which are truly immortal, unlike the carriers. The extended unfolding of the text convinced me that this position is untrue. I realised that in the text of my living amid the immortal genes that I have inherited there is also an attempt to pour into them something of mine which can also be passed on. I realised that there is no room for sorrow, because apart from being this mortal man that I am, I also take part in a longer biological unfolding where an imprint of me is left that reaches farther than I could ever go.

In my role of professor and researcher I have experienced various circumstances. I rebel against one of them. And this is throughout my life to have to comment on what other people have written before me. And I said to myself: "Well, then, why don't you philosophise? Nonetheless, in your previous books you have started doing it." I



philosophise, but I am not a philosopher, nor do I strive to be one. The professional philosopher will always tell me that what I have said has already been written somewhere else. I would be glad that someone else has realised the same thing and discovered it and therefore I am not stating something untrue, but what is more important is that I have not merely discovered it, it has become existentially mine.

None of the speakers so far noted the existential position that I borrowed from Pierce – the antique idea of stoicism called *lekton*, spoken matter. Not only did I borrow, but I also expanded on this idea, turning it into a specific claim that all things in the human environment have emerged in the first place as just those *lektons*, as spoken objects. We are surrounded by things we have made in a complex human environment which, naturally, would have been a great deal less complex, had it not been for human speech. Now this belongs to no one but me and I insist on it.

Man keeps talking of things as they should be. That is why I formulate the position that speaking has this basic function and I take the liberty to tell literary theorists, of course, in my characteristic tone of the moralizing sceptic: “Look, what literature does can also be done via the stupid speech of the man in the street!” They do precisely the same thing – they claim that what they say is true while it may not be true.

And this is what is wonderful both in literature and in the ordinary speech of every individual.

You ask about understanding. That I am under the strong influence of Plato is true. But I will reply in plain speech. Nobody understands initially what he wants to understand. There is a preliminary **MUST**, which sets the norm both for saying something, and for understanding it. A different issue is that these are two different things. What matters for both is that understanding is stopping by both what is understood and what is said. In either case we stop by a necessary truth. Our goal in understanding is reaching such a truth.

On the issue of philosophy, I mentioned that I must philosophise without being a philosopher. I have the same belief about semiotics – that I need to be a semiotician without being a professional one. To become a professional semiotician, endless reading is required and numerous sacrifices, the biggest of which is myself. Bad luck! That is why I would rather stay an amateur. The same holds true also of the professional field of classical philology. Every day I establish that I have no knowledge of this or that. Then I go and seek reference books.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to everyone and I wish that at New Bulgarian University, just like it happened with my book, we have such debates more often, because they are the genuine meaningful achievements that we make and towards which we should strive.