

Dialogs in Hard Times / Diálogos em tempos difíceis

Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction (p.110).
*Mikhail Bakhtin*¹

In the difficult moment we are living, when violence and misunderstanding dominate the large region that gave us Mikhail Bakhtin, Valentin N. Vološinov and Pavel N. Medvedev, we consider it appropriate to recall the words of Boris Schnaiderman, who was Ukrainian naturalized Brazilian, at the *Colóquio Internacional Cem Anos de Bakhtin* [International Colloquium One Hundred Years of Bakhtin], held at Centro Universitário Maria Antonia/USP [Maria Antonia University Center– University of São Paulo] on November 16, 17 and 18, 1995. In the opening lecture, entitled *Bakhtin 40 graus (Uma experiência brasileira)* [Bakhtin 40 degrees (A Brazilian Experience)], Schnaiderman told us about his first contacts with the works by Bakhtin and the Circle and highlighted aspects that placed them in clear opposition to the context of “brutality and violence” experienced by the members of the Circle:

(...) we were predisposed to receive Bakhtin’s lesson on the importance of the multiplicity of voices in our world - a lesson essentially in democratic and anti-authoritarian affirmation, from someone who was a direct victim of Stalinist violence (Schnaiderman, 2013, p.17).²

The passage evokes essential concepts of Bakhtinian thought on the “multiplicity of voices in our world”: that dialogue of voices born out of the “social dialogue among languages” (Bakhtin, p.263),³ and constitutes the “universal symposium” (Bakhtin, p.293).⁴ Four years later, Ken Hirschkop publishes *Mikhail Bakhtin. An Aesthetic for*

¹ BAKHTIN, M.M. *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*. Edited and translated by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984a.

² In Portuguese: “(...) estávamos predispostos a receber a lição de Bakhtin sobre a importância da multiplicidade de vozes em nosso mundo – uma lição essencialmente de afirmação democrática e antiautoritária, partida de alguém que era vítima direta da violência stalinista.”

³ BAKHTIN, M. M. Discourse in the Novel. In: *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp.259-422

⁴ For reference, see footnote 1.

Democracy (1999), in which he also reflects on this Bakhtinian lesson in democratic and anti-authoritarian affirmation. In his words:

Bakhtin does not write about language and culture *sub specie aeternitatis* but language and culture which have decisively broken with traditional forms: a vernacular language, in which all have a right to speak, in which no speaker holds absolute authority, and where subjects should adhere to a moral code they elaborate together (p.VIII).

The memory of these words seems extremely important to us at this moment, in which we observe authoritarianism, violence, oppression, racism, war...; i.e.: everything that suffocates diversity and creative possibilities in human communication. We are also reminded of the important conception of the Circle that “verbal interaction is the basic reality of language” (Vološinov, 1973, p.94),⁵ that is, *dialogue*, which “responds to something, objects to something, affirms something, anticipates possible responses and objections, seeks support, and so on” (p.95).⁶ Dialogue in the broad Bakhtinian sense, but also as an antidote to oppression and violence. These questions undoubtedly motivate the studies of discourse in the different spheres of human activity.

In the same lecture, Boris Schnaiderman recalled a recent past (1964) he had experienced in Brazil: “We saw, in practice, without even knowing it, the most palpable demonstration of the reason that the theorist [Bakhtin] had in stating that authoritarian language reduces everything with a single voice, suffocating the variety and richness that exists in human communication” (2013, p.14).⁷ And this excerpt will introduce the presentation of the excellent articles of this issue, because against the background of these hard times evoked by Schnaiderman, Santiago Bretanha (UFPel) produces the article “Between the Witness and the Word, the Duty to Speak: Testimony as the Object of an Anthropology of Enunciation.” In this article, the author analyzes the book *Retrato calado* [Silenced Portrait] by Luís Roberto Salinas Fortes. The book, object of analysis, is among those motivated by the military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1985):

⁵ VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trad. Ladislav Matejka and R. Titunik. Translator’s Preface. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.

⁶ For reference, see footnote 5.

⁷ In Portuguese: “Víamos, na prática, sem saber ainda, a demonstração mais palpável da razão que tinha o teórico [Bakhtin], ao afirmar que a língua autoritária reduz tudo a uma única voz, sufocando a variedade e riqueza que existe na comunicação humana.”

(...) a great amount of works committed to instituting, enlivening, embodying the shadows and leftovers woven by torn memories, clung to letters and traces that are present as voices/signs/living speeches, witnesses of a moment that, on re-presenting itself, it produces physical, moral, existential pain. And, therefore, it summons new active interlocutors, new readings, new interpretations (Brait, 2016, p.2).⁸

New readings, new interpretations: if in Brait's text on *Retrato Calado* the theoretical foundation of the analysis is the thought of the Circle, in Bretanha's striking article, the author presents us with an analysis based on (innovative) theoretical foundations by Valdir N. Flores' Anthropology of Enunciation. It establishes an interconnection with the studies of the philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who is also based on Benveniste and, with that, innovates the discussion about enunciation and about subjectivity in language. In Bretanha's words, "the analytical gesture carried out assumes linguistics as knowledge about man in his *loquens* property, specifically at the moment in which one singularizes in/through discourse." As can be seen, there are different theoretical voices that allow us to understand essential aspects of the subject who "speaks" in and with society. The originality of the reflection constitutes a great contribution to the field of knowledge, linking linguistics, philosophy, and testimonial literature.

The second text of the issue "Recognizing the Dialogical Nature of the Landscape: For a Marxist Semiotics" by Ítalo César de Moura Soeiro, Ana Rita Sá Carneiro, and Siane Gois Cavalcanti, all from UFPE, also presents an innovative proposal. This time it relates to the reading of the landscape out of the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and the Circle. Combining authors from Architecture and Literature, the text works on the border between Bakhtinian philosophy and cultural studies of the landscape, seeking to defend the "dialogical nature of the landscape." For this, it makes competent use of Bakhtinian concepts such as chronotope and speech genres in order to reach the depth of the meaning of landscape without discarding its materiality, history, geography and dialogicity.

The next four articles attest to the maturity of the reception of Bakhtin and the Circle's works in Brazil, as they all seek to deepen the concepts and understand their

⁸ In Portuguese: "uma grande quantidade de obras empenhadas em instaurar, avivar, corporificar as sombras e sobras tecidas por memórias dilaceradas, agarradas a letras e traços que se fazem presentes enquanto vozes/ signos/discursos vivos, testemunhas de um momento que, ao se re-apresentar, instaura dor física, moral, existencial. E, por isso, convoca novos interlocutores ativos, novas leituras, novas interpretações."

specificity in parallel with other philosophical and literary currents. The first of them “Context as a Space of Creation and Cocreation: a Glimpse at Works of Bakhtin and the Circle” by Paulo Rogério Stella (UFAL) and Beth Brait (PUC-SP/USP) makes a rigorous survey of the meanings of “context” in works by Bakhtin, Vološinov and Medvedev, systematizing them. Considering context as a space for creation and cocreation in the production of meanings, identified as discursive, semiotic, cultural or artistic communication, the authors compare the different works by the Circle in various translations, and arrive at a typification of four types of contexts in the works of the Circle. An innovative study: an extremely important type of essay for those who seek to deepen their understanding of Bakhtinian thought.

In the same methodical and rigorous way, Maria Elizabeth Queijo (PUC-SP), in the text “*Corpus and object from a dialogical perspective: An analysis in Bakhtin’s Works,*” carries out broad research on Bakhtinian works: *Rabelais and His World* (1984a)⁹ and *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1984b).¹⁰ The objective is to understand and discuss the boundaries between *corpus* and object in these works by the Russian philosopher. The comparison of the different translations and the research in a set of texts involving the Russian original, frame texts and other related statements, many of them Russian documents little publicized in the national academic environment, gives depth to the article. Thus, if, at first, *corpus* and object seem to us to be amalgamated in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, as we read the article, they are gradually distinguished.

Miriam Puzzo (UNITAU) signs “Spitzerian and Bakhtinian Stylistics in the Interpretation of Rabelais’s Works.” The article is, as a matter of fact, the continuation of a work that the author has been developing for a long time, aiming at understanding Bakhtin’s stylistics. In this article, the author seeks to specify Bakhtin’s stylistics in relation to Spitzer’s stylistics, based on both authors’ analysis of François Rabelais’ work. The text focuses on contrasting aspects of the interpretation of the Rabelaisian work, providing the reader with the possibility of perceiving particularities in the approach of both authors.

⁹ BAKHTIN, M. M. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolski. Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984b.

¹⁰ For reference, see footnote 1.

The next article, also with a comparative bias, is from the field of philosophy of language. It is “The Intersubjective Nature of Meaning in Bakhtin and Wittgenstein,” by Mateus Toledo Gonçalves (UFPR). The text questions the two philosophers about the way they see the intersubjective nature of linguistic meaning, based on the Wittgensteinian argument against private language and the Bakhtinian thesis of the dialogic orientation of discourse. In a simple but profound way, the text establishes a dialogue between the authors, highlighting the differences in the way they face the issue, and showing that, while Bakhtin emphasizes the relations of tension between the utterances, the inevitable imbrication of my discourse in other discourses, Wittgenstein investigates another instance of interconnection between social and language.

In the last of the articles, “Between Invisibility, Discursive Whitening and Hypersexualization: Controlling Images over the Term *Black* and its Place in Enunciation,” Narjara Oliveira Reis (UFSC) investigates processes of attribution of meanings to the term *black*, showing how their meanings are in full dispute in the current socio-historical context. Based on an excerpt from her doctoral thesis, the author analyzes statements made by two Venezuelan Portuguese-speaking learners of a course for immigrant mothers held in Southern Brazil; and interprets the data of the process of cultural translation of the term black from the concept of “controlling images.”

The issue also contains an obituary and a review. The obituary “Linguist, Literary Theorist, Poet and Chess Player. Professor Nikolai Vasiliev’s Memory” comes to us from Russia and is a tribute to Nikolai Vasiliev (1955-2021), a Russian researcher known to Brazilians who attended the *XI International Bakhtin Conference*, the first to take place in the Southern hemisphere, in Curitiba/PR, in 2003, and at *Colóquio Internacional 90 anos de problemas da obra de Dostoiévski* [International Colloquium 90 years of Problems of Dostoevsky’s Creation] at University of São Paulo in 2019. It is written by Svetlana A. Dubrovskaya from the National Research Mordovia State University, and Oleg E. Osovsky and Vladimir I. Laptun from the M. E. Evseyev Mordovian State Pedagogical University, all researchers from Saransk, the city where Mikhail Bakhtin had taught for several years. The authors had a long relationship with Vassiliev and this gives them the opportunity to draw the profile of this important Russian intellectual, with fruitful production of texts related to the problematic of Bakhtinian studies, especially in relation to the disputed texts. The review, written by Carlos Gontijo Rosa (PUC-SP),

presents the work *Bakhtin and the Body Arts*, a collection of articles organized by Beth Brait and Jean Carlos Gonçalves, published in 2021 by Editora HUCITEC, São Paulo. The author makes a pertinent reading of the articles, critically and competently questioning the viability of the approximation between Bakhtin and the body arts and allowing the reader to have a comprehensive view of the book.

Finally, if man “invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium (p.293),”¹¹ these texts constitute yet another way of inserting the university and the language sciences into dialogic communication. Through them, *Bakhtiniana* is part of the universal symposium of human communication, respectfully and peacefully aiming at understanding the other and fulfilling the important mission of disseminating discourse studies from a Bakhtinian perspective or not. Therefore, we invite everyone – readers, authors and collaborators – to actively respond to these texts, savoring and including them in their research. As readers can see, this is a number that brings together fourteen Brazilian researchers from seven different national universities (UFPEl, UFPE, UFAL, PUC-SP, UNITAU, UFPR, UFSC) and three researchers from two Russian universities (National Research Mordovia State University, and M.E. Evseyev Mordovian State Pedagogical University).

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¹¹ For reference, see footnote 1.

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