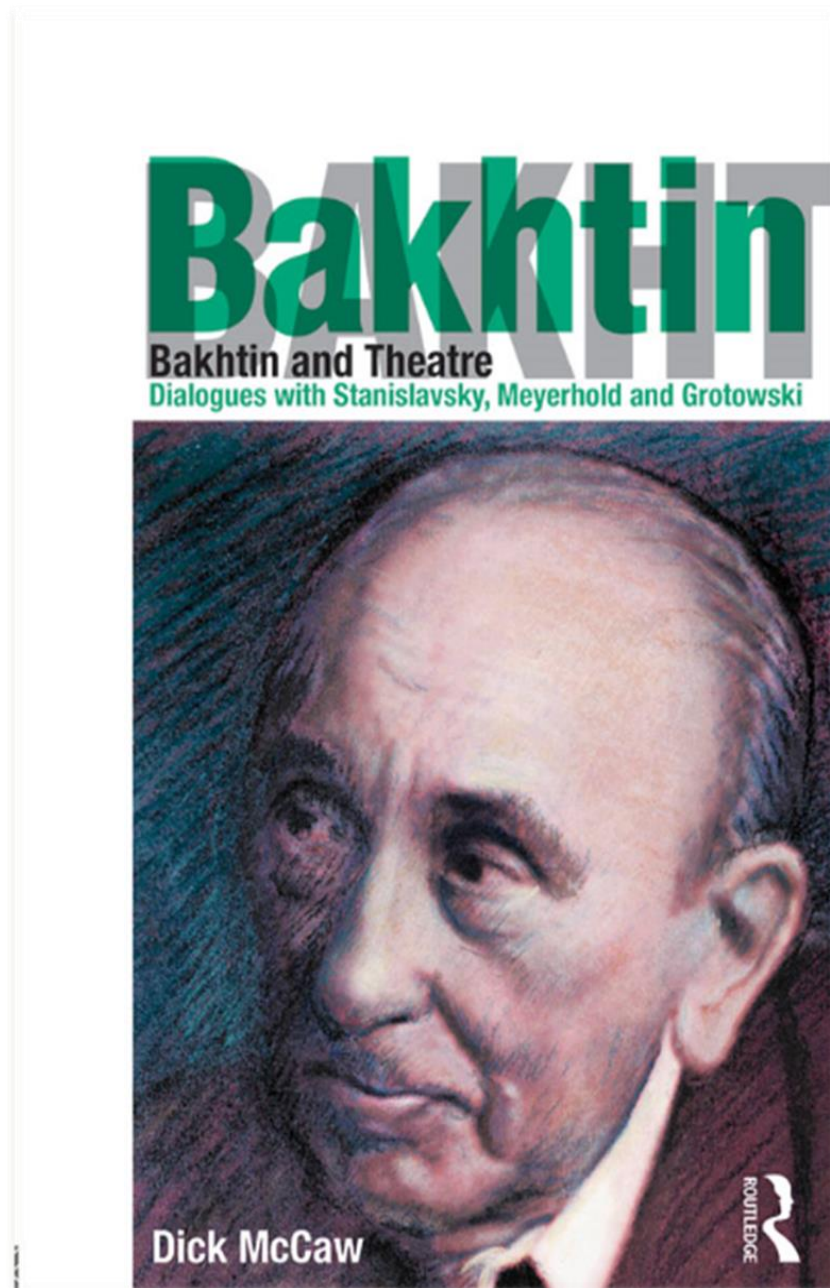


MCCAW, Dick. *Bakhtin and Theatre: Dialogues with Stanislavsky, Meyerhold and Grotowski*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2015. 264p.

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Bakhtin and Theatre: Dialogues with Stanislavsky, Meyerhold and Grotowski was written by Dick McCaw, a senior lecturer in Drama and Theatre in the Department of Drama and Theatre of Royal Holloway, University of London, and published in 2015 originally in English. There is no Portuguese translation to it yet.

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In an unprecedented initiative, the book examines the connections between the thinking of the Russian author Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) and the theatre production of directors and contemporary theatre researchers of Bakhtin's work: Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938), Vsevolod Meyerhold (1879-1940), and Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999).

This study, which is extremely pertinent and relevant to those who not only research on and/or are interested in theatre studies but also want to know and to deepen their knowledge about Bakhtin's work, offers a lot more than just a handful of references on the approximations of the Russian philosopher with the theatre production of his time. It presents a detailed outline of the relationships between theatre techniques, content and (aesthetic) form in the light of the philosophy and language studies developed by Bakhtin and the Circle.

From a somewhat accidental encounter, during his research for a play with the *Medieval Players* (1981-1992), the theatrical company of which McCaw was part, a fruitful and long-lasting relationship that gave birth to his doctoral dissertation and, later on, to the present book was established.

Bakhtin and Theatre discusses the work of three directors/pedagogues that were always questioning the nature of theatre and the work of the actor. Although Bakhtin mentions Stanislavsky and even tries to make some notes on theatre performance in his work, his books do not refer to Meyerhold or Jerzy Grotowsky. In turn, the work of the three theatre professionals analyzed in this study does not mention Bakhtin's theory.

Most of the argument for *Bakhtin and Theatre* stems from concerns expressed in Bakhtin's initial intellectual production, especially in the works *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (Translation and notes by Vadim Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993) and *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity* (In: BAKHTIN, M. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Edited by Michael

Holquist and Vadim Liapunov and translated by Vadim Liapunov. Supplement translated by Kenneth Brostrom. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990, pp.4-256), written between 1920 and 1924. McCaw defends that these works, when understood as a “philosophy by other means,” can subsidize and expand issues related to characters and empathy, which reverberate in actors’ learning process and development.

McCaw questions, for instance, if Bakhtin’s notion of *event* could have any connection with Stanislavsky’s concept of *given circumstances*. This concept is concerned, among other aspects, with the creation of theatre characters in an expanded dimension while considering the character’s exteriority as part of the scenic composition (including aspects, such as the discursive-enunciative marks of identity, e.g., age, social status and gender as well as the more technical specifications, e.g., costume, make-up, and scenario).

Regarding McCaw’s initiative to research possible approximations with a field of studies that was not widely discussed in Bakhtin’s intellectual production, it is important to highlight that Caryl Emerson (Princeton University/USA) describes the book *Bakhtin and Theatre* as a reference that, undoubtedly, inserts him into the performing arts when it demonstrates how Bakhtin’s thinking can be alive and creative when the chosen place of reflection is the theatre.¹

The book is divided into six chapters. While the first chapter presents an overview of Bakhtin’s thinking, the three following chapters look into theatre questions that stem from a dialogue between Bakhtin’s and Stanislavsky’s early works; the last two chapters analyze the way how those questions are discussed, reformulated and answered by Meyerhold and Grotowski.

After considering how undeniable the approximation between Bakhtin and theatre studies is, each essay traces the chronological development of his thinking, highlighting the most important concepts associated with each period of his writings. The first part is clearly dedicated to the discussion of his early manuscripts, which give us the bulk of his conceptual work that theoretically endorses all the reflections presented throughout the book.

¹ Cf. EMERSON, C. Bakhtin and the Actor (with constant reference to Shakespeare) https://www.academia.edu/21884973/Bakhtin_and_the_actor_with_constant_reference_to_Shakespeare

The first chapter – Bakhtin and Theatre – presents the works that made Bakhtin renowned, highlighting his studies on Dostoyevsky. It also reflects upon some notions that follow Bakhtin’s career by briefly but punctually presenting Discourse in the Novel (Discourse in the Novel. In: BAKHTIN, M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp.259-422, written in 1934-35, Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel (In: BAKHTIN, M. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981, pp.84-258), from 1937-38 and reviewed in 1973 by the author, and *Rabelais and his World* (Translated from Russian by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), his doctoral dissertation, written in 1940 and published in 1965.

In the second chapter – Time and Space in the Novel and in Theatre – McCaw pores over the issue of action in its relation to space. More specifically, he asks how an action can be experienced by the person that performs it. It is in the core of the philosophy of the act, as discussed by Bakhtin, that the text leads to discussions about time, space and meaning in Bakhtin’s and Stanislavsky’s work.

Chapter 3 – Psychophysical Acting – analyzes how Stanislavsky’s approach to the development of the actor can be expanded based on Bakhtin’s ideas about the acting body, or, in other words, how the relationship between mind and body in the experience of the self in the world (everyday life) is of interest, apart from the literary aspect of analysis, to the field of study of the body arts and performance.

The fourth chapter – Authoring a Character – discusses the theme of authorship in Bakhtin and his contribution to the research on the performance of the actor. By means of an approach that is based on Bakhtin’s reflections upon the *I* and the *other*, the text establishes points of relation with the notion of unrepeatability. Besides, it addresses issues regarding the theatre spectacle as a unique and singular event, which grants it the status of ephemeral art and is, at the same time, performed every night to a different audience and in a different place. Thus, it creates a variety of possibilities of production, circulation and reception of contextualized meanings not only in the scenic work itself and its always in-progress finish, but also in the countless subjective aspects that interfere in the performance and the scenic viewing experience.

In the fifth chapter – Meyerhold, a Revolution in the Stage – the author discusses how the action of the *other* can be experienced by the *I* and how *we* (the *other* and *I*) can deal with the aesthetic value of the action, stating that a possible connection between Bakhtin and Meyerhold comes from both directors' references to the *Commedia dell'Arte*. It was the *Commedia dell'Arte* that drove Meyerhold past his early period of Symbolist productions, which were of a more static nature. And it was the same referential of popular images that led Bakhtin to a deep philosophical discourse about Rabelais's work.

In chapter 6 – Grotowski: Beyond Theater – McCaw points to the strong influence of Stanislavsky's and Meyerhold's work, suggesting that if Grotowski was initially excited about the idea of Meyerhold's *Total Theatre*, he ended up with a *Theatre of Total Act* – His Poor Theatre. He used this expression to emphasize the importance of a conception of theatre detached from stage resources, understood by Grotowski as accessories that are not necessary to theatre acts. By reading this chapter, the reader gets in contact with Grotowski's demand for an event of meaning, which occurs in a real time and place (even if it is protected by fiction's aura) and for which there is no alibi. In other words, here he comes close to Bakhtin's perspective, to which the acting subject is immerse in a responsive act that he/she cannot bypass.

In the book's conclusion, the author advocates for his objective to show that the questions regarding acting, and, more broadly, the theatre, address themes and processes that are indispensable for us to understand ourselves and other people. Bakhtin offers two explanations about time and space: the first is a phenomenological description of the experience of being as embodiment; that is, it is only possible to *be* at a time and in a space. Further on, he elaborated on a theory of genres or forms of time and space in different materialities. McCaw argues that the first explanation is particularly useful and applicable to the art of the actor, while the second has an undeniable contribution and a direct relation to theatre theories and specificities.

To sum up, Dick McCaw affirms that Bakhtin's ideas about time and space are of interest to the performing arts because they demand that a theatre researcher perceive the different forms of living, creating and understanding the meaning of theatre making, which is not the same as being dedicated to writing or critiquing novels. The author also warns that even though little is found in Bakhtin's work regarding acting, theatre styles

and theatre architecture, Bakhtin's theories must be carefully applied when we are talking about the fields of theatre practice, especially regarding the ethics and aesthetics of the character. In other words, not all the meanings of *character* in Bakhtin can be perfectly directed to the creative sphere of the theatre, with its minutiae and characteristics.

The relevance of *Bakhtin and Theatre: Dialogues with Stanislávsky, Meyerhold and Grotowski* in theatre and language research is, above all, a result of the didactic and in-depth style that the author chooses in order to produce punctual and accurate insights regarding the topics discussed throughout the book. In the difficult task of communicating with the readers and researchers of Bakhtin and the Theatre, the book is of a unique and enticing nature, for it gives a refined and sophisticated look into the life and work of three icons of the 20th-century theatre. Thus, Stanislávsky's, Meyerhold's and Grotowski's innovative ways to make, practice, think, theorize, train, and experience contemporary theatre, based on their research and experiments, are given, by Dick McCaw, a new approach as he brings them into contact with Bakhtin's theories. It thus enriches the bibliographic references of every researcher that intends to glance at and uncover theatre from a dialogical perspective.

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Received May 26,2016

Accepted August 07,2016