

Bakhtin and the Performing Arts / *Bakhtin e as artes do espetáculo*

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Performing Arts nowadays means an arsenal of investigations, experiments and practices of an already unspeakable spectrum that embraces the fields of body, theater, dance, performance, circus, drama and scenic history, production and technologies (among others) by means of different theoretical-practical branches and research contexts. The artistic-conceptual thought as well as the processes of creation, circulation and reception have been changing the artistic experience so much so that it is no longer possible (nor necessary) to restrict the field to a single epistemological perspective or knowledge area.

The universe of performing arts in outgrowing its own historical place currently leans toward the crossing of the innovative and the aesthetic dimensions; in other words, modifications in the interest in the means of human communication and expression have also caused changes on the ways of living and producing a live scene – a premise yet necessary to the existence of the Performing Arts in contemporaneity.

The constitution of a knowledge field, however, involves voices that resonate through time and, in a way, delimitate the discursive projection of authors and intellectuals interested in a particular subject. This delimits and/or expands the possibilities of understanding that subject in a process that is responsible for, sometimes, making visible and, some other times, for erasing reflections that are found in the “great time” and in distinct “spheres” of communication. Beyond any exemplification, such would be the case of the Performing Arts and the works by Mikhail Bakhtin [1895-1975], Valentin Voloshinov [1895-1936] and Pavel

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Nikolayevich Medvedev [1982-1938], scholars who constitute what is nowadays called the Bakhtin Circle. The investigation of the discursive texture of such relation must be urged from at least two angles.

The first one would relate to the way in which the thematic convergence Performing Arts emerges in the writings of these scholars in different times, spaces and forms, resulting in different possibilities from which theater, dance, body and performance constitute the object of reflection for Russian intellectuals, even when their approaches are not direct and punctual.

A second perspective of investigation, broader in nature, consists in investigating the potentiality of the Bakhtinian work to analyze performances, which includes their contexts and times.

It is noteworthy that in the works of the Circle¹ it is possible to highlight some issues concerning the analysis of the relation between theater, play, acting and contemplation that, albeit quite unfamiliar to both scholars from the dialogical perspective and from the Performing Arts, can contribute to a better understanding of the scope of the Bakhtinian group, which certainly embraces both perspectives.

In Brazil, especially in the Laboratório de Estudos em Educação Performativa, Linguagem e Teatralidades – EliTe/UFPR/CNPq [Laboratory of Performative Education, Language and Theatricality] the relations between Bakhtin and Performing Arts as well as discourses and scene practices have been studied in different dimensions, through Dialogical Discourse Analysis; EliTe also investigates the notes on arts found in Bakhtinian works (GONÇALVES, 2019). Our investigations have been discussed in congresses, groups, research projects and events of important research associations in Brazil (Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Letras e Linguística – ANPOLL, GT Estudos Bakhtinianos [National Association of Post-Graduation and Research in Languages and Linguistics – Bakhtinian Studies Work Group], the Associação Brasileira de Pesquisa e Pós-Graduação em Artes Cênicas - ABRACE, GT Pedagogia das Artes Cênicas [Brazilian Association of Research and Post-Graduation in Scenic Arts –Pedagogy in Scenic Arts Work Group], and the Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Educação-ANPED, GT Educação e Arte [National Association of Post-Graduation and Research in Education,

¹ See *Dialogismo e polifonia em Bakhtin e o Círculo (Dez obras fundamentais)* (BRAIT, 2016)

Education and Art Work Group]. Such connections have resulted in a wide range of scientific publications concerning Bakhtin and Performing Arts, such as articles, book chapters, Students Reports for Scientific Initiation Programs, Dissertations and Thesis and Post-Doctoral Reports.²

Recently, the important title *Bakhtin and Theatre: Dialogues with Stanislavsky, Meyerhold and Grotowski* (McCAW, 2016), by Dick McCaw, Senior Lecturer at Royal Holloway, London University and one of the foreign cooperators in ELiTe/UFPR/CNPq “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)” (GONÇALVES; SANTOS, 2016, p.217).³ This book contributes greatly to the knowledge of the area as there are not many playwrights dedicated to the subject.

Hence, the emphasis on the partnership between two theater researchers from different countries (Brazil and England), who share the same theoretical interest (Bakhtinian studies), in the challenge of making the current issue of *Bakhtiniana* simultaneously remember/recover research possibilities between Bakhtin and Performing Arts that have already been studied and had results presented to the scientific community, and still project other investigation poetics, bring forward the well-deserved visibility of the relations between studies by Bakhtin and the Circle and the area of Arts (scene, body and education).

We also emphasize that Caryl Emerson, professor at Princeton University – Canada, recognized for her trajectory in Bakhtinian studies, wrote in 2015 the paper *Bakhtin and the Actor (with Constant Reference to Shakespeare)* (EMERSON, 2015), which approaches the Bakhtinian understanding of the actor’s play and the art of acting/playing a role/character.

It is also necessary to remember that Marvin Carlson, renowned American playwright and intellectual in the Performing Arts, in his essay *Theater and Dialogism*,

² To better understand the research developed by the group, see the published summary of the *II Jornada Nacional de Estudos em Educação performativa, Linguagem e Teatralidades* [II National Journey of Studies on Performative Education, Language and Theatricality] at: <http://proxy.furb.br/ojs/index.php/oteatrotranscende/issue/view/440>.

³ In the original: “examina as conexões entre o pensamento do autor russo Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) e a produção teatral de diretores e pesquisadores teatrais contemporâneos de Bakhtin: Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863-1938), Vsevolod Meyerhold (1879-1940) e Jerzy Grotowski (1933-1999).”

published in 1992, pointed out the Bakhtinian theory as an important study for scenic arts thus encouraging the use of the concepts of heteroglossia and dialogism, in particular, to understand the voices that constitute the theatrical experience (CARLSON, 1992).

It is currently known that members of the Circle attended the Russian theater. According to Brait (2019), members of the circle albeit living difficult political and social contexts in the Soviet Union, lived the Russian culture, especially during their formative years and early career, thus consuming, enjoying and knowing art “even if the whole of [their] work does not present studies directly related to theater, to theater theories and dance” (BRAIT, 2019, p.13).⁴

We mention, for example, Ivan Ivanovich Sollertinsky (1902-1944), who in spite of being recognized by his contributions to music, was also an expert in scenic arts to the point of teaching History of Theater (BRAIT, 2009). Shatskikh (2007), who investigated the intellectual and cultural life in Vitebsk in the first half of the 20th century, also described the importance of Ivan Sollertinsky for the cultural and theatrical development of the city, pointing out his contributions to several fields including the scenic arts.

In Vitebsk, according to Shatskikh (2007), a Bakhtin who attended and enjoyed the theater was present. The author in reporting the results of her research on the cultural life in Vitebsk, reminds us of the scenic practices denominated stage judgments, popular modes of performance in which historical and fictional characters were brought to judgment with engagement of the audience. It was on during these didactic performances that Mikhail Bakhtin explored, as an attorney, the duality of the acting-spectator.

Pavel Medvedev, one of the most popular intellectuals in the Bakhtinian Circle, in the autumn of 1922, “invited by the director, actor and poet P. P. Gaideburov and by the actress N. F. Skarskaia (Vera Komissarzhevskaja’s sister), joined the ‘Brotherhood’ of the Itinerant Theatre” (MEDVEDEV; MEDVEDEVA, 2014, p.42),⁵ thus becoming

⁴ In the original: “ainda que o conjunto da obra não apresente estudos diretamente ligados ao teatro, às teorias do teatro e da dança.”

⁵ MEDVIÉDEV, I.; MEDVIÉDEVA, D. The M. M. Bakhtin Circle: on the Foundation of a Phenomenon. *Bakhtiniana*. Revista de Estudos do Discurso, São Paulo, v. 9, n. spe, p. 28-48, Jul. 2014. Disponível em: <http://revistas.pucsp.br/bakhtiniana/article/download/11535/14624>. Acesso em: 14 jun. 2019.

director of repertory and the editor of the journal Notes of an itinerant theatre (*Zapiski peredvizhnógo teatra*).

There is also, as McCaw (2016) reveals, based on Bakhtin's biography by Clark and Holquist, a professor Bakhtin who directed a seminar on theatrical aesthetic and history in the *Mordovia Theatre for Music and Drama* while in Nevel and Vitebsk (McCAW, 2016, p.28).

Rule (2015), in mentioning the Circle's passage through Vitebsk, points that in spite of the acknowledgement that the current Bakhtinian intellectuals explored several areas of study, including culture and art as a convergent center of interest, there are historical and circumstantial erasures that have prevented their recognition and direct relation to certain fields of knowledge. It is remarkable, for example, the absence of the Circle's intellectual production in the theatrical studies. In this regard, Medvedev & Medvedeva (2014) note that possible connections between the scientific work by members of the Bakhtinian Circle and theater, thus arguing that some names should be historically mentioned next to those of Konstantin Stanislavski⁶ and Vsevolod Meyerhold.⁷

In addition, Bakhtin's interest in Shakespeare, particularly his tragedies, must be mentioned: "When analyzing Shakespeare's tragedies, we also observe a sequential transformation of all reality that affects the heroes into the semantic context of their actions, thoughts, and experiences" (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.164).⁸ In *Additions and Changes to Rabelais* (BAKHTIN, 2014 [1944/1992]), written in 1944 and published for the first time in 1992, Bakhtin dedicates a good part of his writings to the study of Shakespearean theater. Such interest is also noticeable in several references to Shakespeare that are easily found in Bakhtin's works throughout time.

In *Author and Hero in the Aesthetic Activity* (BAKHTIN, 1990 [1920-22]),⁹ Bakhtin discusses aspects concerning theatrical acting and relates the actor's art to the

⁶ Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938) is one of the most important theater intellectuals in the world, famous for the development of the Method of Physical Action that since the czarist Russia has influenced the actor's pedagogy in formative contexts for theatrical interpretation.

⁷ Vsevolod Meyerhold (1874-1940), director and theater theorist from the first half of the 20th Century is known for his biomechanics studies on the actor's education and by opposing some aesthetic conceptions by Stanislavski.

⁸ BAKHTIN, M. *Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences*. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Austin, TX: Texas University Press, 1986. pp.159-172.

⁹ BAKHTIN, M. *Author and Hero in the Aesthetic Activity*. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Austin, TX: Texas University Press, 1990. pp.4-256.

field of literary analysis. The expressive aesthetics in drama is also subject for Bakhtin's discussions when he establishes a dialogue between the particularities of play, illusion and contemplation that are found in the game of acting (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.64).¹⁰

In *From Notes Made in 1970-1971*, Bakhtin refers explicitly to Konstantin Stanislavski, the most famous theater researcher in the world: "Stanislavsky on the beauty of play – the actor's depiction of a negative image. Mechanical division is unacceptable: ugliness – a negative character, beauty – a performing actor" (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.155).¹¹ Such reference leads us to imagine that in so claiming Bakhtin should know minimally the pillars of the actor's art postulated by the Russian playwright.

Reaffirming the relations between works by the Circle and Performing Arts, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*¹² by Medvedev mentions the plot of Oedipus¹³ (page 17) and the "sincerity" of the actor (page 147) when referring to the reflections of the Russian formalist Boris Eikhenbaum (1886-1959) on the poet Nicolay Nekrasov (1921-1978).

Emerson (2015) regrets the fact, however, that Bakhtin and members of the Circle did not dedicate themselves more deeply to performance studies. In so far, the Bakhtinian legacy shows no vestiges of immersion in discourses and practices by theater masters of their time, such as Meyerhold, Brecht, Nicolai Evreinov, Edward Gordon Craig and Mei Lanfang, nor more detailed notes on the Russian theater of the 20th century.

Nonetheless, it must be taken into account that the Bakhtinian perspective dialogues with aspects of theater/dance/body that even in the field of scenic studies are at times underestimated or considered unnecessary to the artist education, such as authorship and the relation between time and space. This is another possible relation between the Performing Arts and the intellectual production by the Circle: the contributions of the Bakhtinian thought to understand the scenic phenomena and its workings.

¹⁰ For reference, see footnote 9.

¹¹ BAKHTIN, M. *From Notes Made in 1970-1971*. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Austin, TX: Texas University Press, 1986. pp.132-158.

¹² BAKHTIN, M./MEDVEDEV, P. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1991.

¹³ The plot of Oedipus is analyzed in *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity* by Mikhail Bakhtin (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.69-72 [1920-22]), which demonstrates the Circle's interest concerning the study of the theatrical text.

As McCaw (2016, p.238) has discussed, it is relevant that research on the connections between Bakhtin and Performing Arts are constituted as an exercise to explore the inter-illumination between theory and practice since the universe of the scene lives off at least two expectations: one from the practical world (making theater/experimenting processes) and another from the so called academic world (writings/theorizations).

It is between the lines of these horizons of possibilities that texts composing the present issue of *Bakhtiniana* approach a subject yet underexplored by language and theatrical studies: Bakhtin and the Performing Arts.

Prior to summarizing the scope of each article, we thank *Bakhtiniana* and editorial staff, partners, translators and revisors (for Portuguese and English languages because *Bakhtiniana* is a notorious bilingual journal available on-line on the best scientific platforms in the world), without whom it would be impossible to collect in the present issue productions of such quality and excellence. We also highlight the participation of authors of different higher education institutions, both national and international, many of whom are sponsored by agencies who financed most of the research presented here such as: FAPESP [São Paulo Research Foundation], CNPq [Brazilian National Research Council] and CAPES [Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education] to which we are immensely thankful. It must also be said that this issue only became possible due to the active collaboration and support of most members of Laboratório de Estudos em Educação Performativa, Linguagem e Teatralidades (ELiTe/UFPR/CNPq), a research group that gathers researchers and students from Brazil (Paraná, Santa Catarina, São Paulo, Acre, Amazonas) and from abroad (England, Paris, Portugal and Colombia), and that has as one of their purposes the investigation of the relations between Bakhtin and Performing Arts.

Next, we present the texts.

The opening of the issue brings our articles Laboratory, Spectacle, Disassembly: Dialogical-theatrical Experiments of the Carmen Group in *A serpente* [*The Serpent*], by Nelson Rodrigues (Jean Carlos Gonçalves) and Bakhtin's Bodies (Dick McCaw). The first focuses on the processes lived from the construction of a theater play to the many formats for presenting the work to the audience. The second presents some conceptions

of body in the Bakhtinian work by visiting his early and last texts, a philosophy of the body.

Following the relation between work and audience, Robson Rosseto and Patrícia Pluschkat bring *The Spectator's Sensory Perception in Contemporary Theatricality: Dialogues with Bakhtin*, in which we can reflect on otherness and interaction in scenic arts.

Felipe Augusto de Souza Santos in *Dialogism, Polyphony, Chronotope and the Grotesque in Krapp's Last Tape: A Bakhtinian Reading* presents an analysis of the play *Krapp's Last Tape* by Samuel Beckett, by revisiting the Bakhtinian concepts of dialogism, polyphony, chronotope and the grotesque. The concept of carnivalization is discussed by Carlos Gontijo Rosa, in the article *Carnivalization in Iberian Baroque Theatre*, which focuses on class conflicts and discursive strategies in the tragicomic narrative of the Spanish Golden Century.

The relation between education and the Performing Arts is found in the following texts: *Dancing Bodies at School: Dialogues between Performative Education and the Bakhtinian Perspective*, by Michelle Bocchi Gonçalves, Thais Castilho and Jair Mário Gabardo Jr. and *Protagonism in Theater and Education: What Displacements of Sense Make an Author/Actor Emerge?* by Claudia Cavalcante and José Luiz de Souza Santos. These articles are noted due to their dialogical approach to practices, spaces and educational policies.

In José de Alencar's Drama *Mãe* and the African-Brazilian Social Voices, by Angela Rubel Fanini and Maria Domingos Pereira Ventura, access is given to an argument on slavery culture through an analysis of the play *Mãe [Mother]* by José de Alencar. The article *Yuri Lotman and the Semiotics of Theatre* by Rodrigo Alves Nascimento explores contributions by the Russian semiotician Yuri Lotman to Theater semiotics.

Carolina Fernandes Rodrigues Fomin closes the issue with her review of *Teatro e universidade: Cena. Pedagogia. [Dialogismo] [Theater and University: Scene. Pedagogy. [Dialogism]*, a book released in 2019 by Editora Hucitec. The volume contains the excellent preface *Entre a cena e a pedagogia, o dialogismo [Between the Scene and Pedagogy, Dialogism]*, written by Beth Brait, cover presentation signed by

Dick McCaw, and our analysis based on Bakhtinian studies of the processes of doing theater at University.

The articles in the present issue of *Bakhtiniana* present a set of studies currently developed in different fronts of investigation that embraced the dialogue between Bakhtin and Performing Arts, attesting the recent interest in the subject from researchers of several research centers. The issue contributes to the development of knowledge in Linguistics, Languages and Literatures and Arts by fostering reflections that, we hope, can translate into other correlated research expectations since we are living through times in which talking about art (or identifying oneself as an artist) requires awareness and puritanism (which fundamentally disagrees with the essence of the questions and the reflections that the articulation proposed in this issue intends to generate).

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