

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1590/2176-457324390>

BRAIT, Beth; MAGALHÃES, Anderson Salvaterra (Orgs.).
Dialogismo: teoria e(m) prática [Dialogism: theory and/in practice].
São Paulo: Terracota, 2014. 322 p.

*Anthony Wall**



* University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, Canada; awall@ucalgary.ca

A Very Young Bakhtin

Co-edited by Beth Brait and Anderson Salvaterra Magalhães, the recent book *Dialogismo: Teoria e(m) prática* [*Dialogism: Theory and/in practice*] constitutes a thoroughly vibrant and most welcome addition to the field of international Bakhtin Studies. The sixteen contributions published in this well-edited volume of three hundred and twenty pages (accompanied by a short preface by Carlos Alberto Faraco and a three-page introduction by the co-editors) exemplify the present-day youthfulness of Bakhtin Studies in Brazil, replete with much interdisciplinary panache and refreshing intellectual energy.

In many ways, this volume can be read as an excellent introduction to the every-growing field of Bakhtin Studies as currently practiced in Brazil (in particular in São Paulo). The disciplinary reach of the essays is wide, comprising Discourse Analysis, Text and Image studies, Translation Studies, Communication and Media Studies, Performance Studies, Education, Literary Studies, Art History. These studies are for the most part grounded on an interesting theoretical premise, i.e. that in order to revitalise the Bakhtinian notion of dialogism, it would be useful to lay bare the implicit dialogues between, on the one hand, authors of academic essays working in various fields of the Humanities and the Social Sciences disciplines and, on the other, their discursively constituted objects of study. Dialogism, as is cogently argued in the book's introduction, is thereby best seen as that which creates links and inter-human relations. "We become involved in relationships thanks to language, by means of language,"¹ as the editors write in one of the opening pages of their volume (p.14). A dialogic methodology is thus proposed for use in the arts disciplines whereby it is no longer possible to consider lifeless "objects" of study from the outside, but rather from the point of view of the multiple questions and answers emanating from both sides of the researcher-research dyad; that is to say, not only from point of view of the scholar who investigates and writes but also from that of the living material with which she/he proposes to become engaged. In this way, the researcher is *obliged* to take part in inter-vocal and interpersonal interaction, in other words in *dialogue* (p.14).

¹ Text in original: "nos engajamos em relações graças à linguagem, por meio da linguagem".

From the very first pages of this book, the play on words proposed in the subtitle appearing on the dust jacket – roughly translatable as ‘Theory an’/in Practice’ – lets its semantic influence be felt both in the ways in which most of the volume’s chapters are conceived and in the “objects of study” they purport to interrogate. Significantly, the theorist Bakhtin as well as the Bakhtin Circle are much more than window dressing in these essays; that is, they are much more than peripherally quoted sources. Strikingly, they enter virtually every one of the contributions published in this volume and, within them, work at the very heart of the problems developed. All the authors show an acute awareness of recent studies on Bakhtin and his Circle published not only in the Portuguese-speaking world, but also – and most impressively – in the Anglo-American academy, in Russia and in France. Virtually every important Bakhtinian concept is brought into play in at least one, if not more, of the essays published here. In addition to ‘dialogism’, as announced in the book’s title, there is also much productive talk of responsibility, genre, discourse, ideology, great time, chronotopes, written and oral language. Surprisingly, if the theme of carnival is perhaps the least discussed Bakhtinian notion in the essays published here, the book itself is laid out like a sumptuous Rabelaisian feast of ideas where Bakhtin and his thinking are constantly prodded, questioned, re-vitalised, retooled, oftentimes turned on their heads and thereby productively put into motion.

In over half of the essays, the special approach to Bakhtin Studies painstakingly elaborated over the last decade by the prolific Bakhtinian theorist Beth Brait appears in the guise of what she calls “verbo-visual” discourses. Brait’s innovative thinking in the field of cultural studies plays out in the study of multiply-constituted and hybridised objects of study wherein it is impossible to separate their inherent iconic and linguistic dimensions. Regrettably, her work is not yet well-known in the English-speaking world.² In no small manner, the present volume, *Dialogismo: Teoria e(m) prática* is a

² This blind spot for researchers who do not read Portuguese is unfortunate. Some of Brait’s energetic work on (and with) Bakhtin can be seen in the following publications (far from an exhaustive list): (1) *Ironia em perspectiva polifônica* [Campinas, SP: Editora da Unicamp, 1996/2008]; (2) *Bakhtin, dialogismo e construção do sentido* [Campinas, SP: Editora da Unicamp, 1997/2013]; (3) *Estudos enunciativos no Brasil: histórias e perspectivas* [Campinas, SP: Pontes/FAPESP, 2001]; (4) *Bakhtin: conceitos-chave* [São Paulo: Editora Contexto, 2005]; (5) *Bakhtin: outros conceitos-chave* [São Paulo, Editora Contexto, 2006]; (6) *Bakhtin: dialogismo e polifonia* [São Paulo: Editora Contexto, 2009]; (7) *Bakhtin e o Círculo* [São Paulo: Editora Contexto, 2009]; (8) *Literatura e outras linguagens* [São Paulo: Editora Contexto, 2010]. She is of course founder and editor in chief of the electronic journal *Bakhtiniana*.

potent tribute to the productive nature of Brait's work, since over one half of the contributors are either current collaborators and/or former PhD students or post-doctoral researchers who have worked, sometimes for long periods of time, under her obviously successful leadership. To be frank, Beth Brait represents one of (if not *the*) most important thinkers to have emerged during the past fifteen years in Brazil where there are currently a good dozen or more intellectual hot beds in the field of Bakhtin Studies.

The book should not, however, merely be considered as a traditional festschrift in recognition of a master's prominent place in the academy. Indeed, this volume contains several theoretical proposals hailing from outside her intellectual sphere base which, over the years, she has built up at the publically funded Universidade de São Paulo and the private Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo; in addition, this collection of essays is not in the least limited to simple variants of the tenets she has developed on "verbo-visual" discourses. Within the book, many an intellectual adventure is proposed in other realms as well. The book is divided into three parts: the most substantive section of these (140 pages in length), entitled *Dialogism in Life*, contains seven essays, including those signed by the co-editors. A dense theoretical discussion of the history of the press is followed, in Anderson Salvaterra Magalhães' opening essay, by a provocative study of a series of newspaper articles on the Brazilian Neo-Nazi movement, replete with imaginative use of Bakhtin's distinction between small and great time. With Bruna Lopes-Dugnani, Beth Brait co-signs an article devoted to the inextricable links between bodies, verbal discourse and imagery as displayed on many hand-written and printed signs carried by protestors during the huge June 2013 marches, sometimes known as the "V for vinegar movement." Here, polymorphic constellations of "we" in the protestors' utterances are analysed with a view to uncovering the heterogeneous forces of interlocution as they unfold simultaneously across many expressive media, all the while bringing to the fore the space or spaces in which such utterances are produced and received. Other contributions study the complicated interpenetration of juridical and journalistic discourses surrounding a well-publicised murder trial (Maria Helena Cruz Pistori) or the intricate relationships between colour, layout, and font in the publication of a series of magazine covers featuring the former president Lula (Miriam Bauab Puzzo).

This central part of the book is flanked by two much shorter sections (approximately 70 pages each) – one placed before it, the other thereafter – entitled respectively Dialogism and the ‘Brazilian’ production of knowledge and Dialogism in Art. Whereas, in the first part, we find contributions on discursive genres, journalism and, especially, an enlightening article on the problems of translating Bakhtin into Portuguese (Sheila Vieira de Camargo Grillo and Ekaterina Vólkova Américo), in the last section of the book one enjoys several thoroughly Bakhtinian analyses geared toward fields of study such as museography where intertwined words and images play a most prominent role in a recent exhibition on the writer Jorge Amado (Adriana Pucci Penteadó de Faria e Silva), the illustrations of Aesop’s *Grasshopper and the Ant* (Elaine Hernandez de Souza), free indirect discourse in Graciliano Ramos’ novel *Barren Lives* (Maria Celina Novaes Marinho), or finally the subversively hidden presence of the mother’s voice along with an informative discussion of the use of proper names in João Guimarães Rosa’s widely acclaimed novel *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands* (Sandra Mara Moraes Lima).

The multifarious objects of study first proposed, and then unpacked, in the essays contained in this collection guarantee a rewarding journey for the reader wishing to gain a detailed glimpse of where the Russian thinker is heading these days in the undisputed cultural centre of Bakhtin Studies world-wide, i.e. Brazil. The youthfulness of the contributors is not amongst the least attractive features of this book (although one may have wished for less self-quotation on the contributors’ part and the use of the same editions when quoting from Bakhtin’s and his Circle’s works). Given the book’s somewhat surprising groupings of essays, similar objects of study such as “journalistic discourse” can be found in several contributions placed in different parts of the book. The positive upshot of such editorial choices is that dynamic objects of study are not ghettoized into a single section of the book, while at the same time various methodologies and theoretical points of view are fruitfully juxtaposed with one another, that is to say, almost dialogically in their paratactic array, as the reader moves from one essay to the next, thereby seeing the folly of restricting his or her curiosity to a single part of the book or even to a single “object” of study. In the end, *Dialogismo. Teoria e(m) prática* is not only a most fitting tribute to the work of Beth Brait, which must be placed at the very centre of Brazilian Bakhtin Studies, it also provides most convincing

testimony to the high quality of research currently being undertaken by many a young scholar in São Paulo and elsewhere.

Received August 27,2015

Accepted October 28,2015