

Dialogic Clash between Reading and Writing: Manifestation of Discourse Ethics Based on the Bakhtin Circle / *Embate dialógico entre leitura e escrita: manifestação de uma ética da ação discursiva a partir do Círculo bakhtiniano*

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ABSTRACT

Based on concepts of the Bakhtin Circle, this investigation discusses the relationship between reading and writing. Based on the key concepts of dialogism, exotopy, authorship etc., it was perceived that reading and writing are kinds of social action with an ethical dimension. For the Circle, reading and writing are creative and dialogical processes, as the reader and the author enter into a deep dialogue in which positions, often in opposition, enter into confrontation. On reading a text, the reader does so based on his/her cultural repertoire, mediating the act of reading through different slants: context, gender, social group, axiology, and so forth. In this process, the reader re-creates the text based on his/her personal parameters. However, the text resists the reader, having been thought of by another person, whose axiological, temporal and contextual horizons may be different. Which is the possibility of convergence or disagreement between author and reader? The answers to this problematisation showed that the reading-writing process is made up of an ethical perspective with a dialogical base: the presence of the other occurs as alterity and, in the light of this presence, it leads to the necessity of making choices, interventions and of considering options which could destroy, carnivalise, praise, or idealize this other. The centrality of language in the establishment of the social being showed that the dialogical discourse ethics is a key concept for understanding reading and writing.

KEYWORDS: Reading and writing; Dialogic clash; Discourse ethics; Author; Co-authorship

RESUMO

Esta investigação, fundamentada em conceitos de Bahktin e Volochinov, discute a relação entre leitura e escrita. A partir dos conceitos de dialogismo, exotopia, autoria, dentre outros, percebeu-se que leitura e escrita constituem uma ação social de dimensão ética. Para o Círculo, leitura e escrita são processos criativos e dialógicos, visto que leitor e autor entram em profundo diálogo em que posições, muitas vezes díspares, se confrontam. Ao ler um texto, o leitor o faz com seu repertório cultural, mediando a leitura por vieses: contexto, gênero, classe social, axiologia, etc., recriando-o a partir dos seus parâmetros. O texto, entretanto, resiste, visto que foi concebido por outrem, cujo horizonte axiológico, temporal e contextual é outro. Qual a possibilidade de convergência e/ou discordância entre autor e leitor? As respostas a essa problematização demonstraram que o processo leitura/escrita é constituído por uma perspectiva ética de base dialógica: a presença do outro ocorre como alteridade, levando à necessidade de se fazer escolhas, intervenções, opções que podem destruir, carnavalizar, exaltar e idealizar esse outro. A centralidade da linguagem na constituição do ser social mostrou a ética discursiva dialógica como categoria fundamental para a compreensão da leitura e da escrita.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Leitura e escrita; Embate dialógico; Ética discursiva; Coautoria*

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1 Centrality of Language and Dialogism and the Marxist Tradition

We start this discussion from a fundamental principle for the Circle. The first issue to be considered when it comes to the Bakhtinian perspective and the Circle is the concept of Dialogism as understood in its epistemological and ethical aspects. Dialogism is the founding principle of the act of knowledge, communication, verbal interaction and formation of humanity and human conscience as well as of a way of acting and interacting within the social environment. It is the condition through which we are aware of ourselves, the others and the world; the condition for our communication, reading, writing and speaking. The dialogic attitude is central to the constitution of the social being. Dialogism is ethical and social action, and it assumes alterity. Our relationship with the world, either by language or by action (work, technique), must involve the other. In order to become social, humans must interrelate with each other; dialogism is, therefore, ontology. The dialogic orientation assumes a relationship between the self and the other, and such a relationship is unavoidable. Never am I alone in the world, and the presence of the other is inevitable and irresistible, forcing me to dialogue with, to answer, to rebut, to criticise, to follow and to interact with - this “other.” Language is, essentially, a dialogic process given through intersubjective relations.

In reading the work of the Circle, dialogism stands out as a principle from which language, social relations, culture, history, concrete struggles and the constitution of the human being all derive. However, language is also an essential human condition and language study and experience occur from a dialogic perspective. Bakhtin and Vološinov (1986),¹ specifically in this work, viz., *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, despite

¹ VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Transl. Ladislav Matejka and I.R. Titunik. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986.

TN. The authorship of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* is controversial. Some assign it exclusively to Bakhtin; others assign it exclusively to Valentim Voloshinov and there is also the possibility of a co-authorship. Once authorship is understood from a dialogic perspective, this work can be referenced with two authors, i.e., Bakhtin and Voloshinov, as they belonged to the same group of language studies, sharing many premises regarding the object of research. This is the approach that we adopt in this article. Besides that, in Brazil, the edition informs the two authors. The present paper is written in Portuguese, in Brazil, so we used this edition. For the English version of this work, our reference attributes only Vološinov as the author.

their connection with the Marxian tradition, warn about language being relegated to a secondary importance by that very same tradition. It is widely known that the whole Marxist political-theoretical framework stresses the centrality of work, human making, and praxis. Thus, Marxism highlights human action and struggle but not language, which is often understood as a mere communication tool. In the Marxist tradition, human action precedes speaking in qualitative terms.

For the Russian theoreticians mentioned here, the situation is different, that is, language does not derive from praxis. Language is activity, that is, it occurs among concrete historical subjects and urges them to fight. Language is a battlefield, following our social praxis. In the theoreticians' words: "The word as the ideological phenomenon *par excellence* exists in continuous generation and change; it sensitively reflects all social shifts and alterations. [...] The development of language cannot be studied, of course, in complete disregard for the social being and the social and economic conditions as refracted" (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, pp.157-158).² Thus, the Circle opens an absolutely unprecedented discussion within the Marxist tradition, which hegemonically highlights language's derived character, considering it secondary within the process of formation of the social being as it prioritises work as the first instance of mediation between humanity and nature, and between humans. The Russian thinkers, opposing this tradition of work centrality, emphasise that language forms the social being in its early instances of social relationship. Humans do not have a language of their own that would enable them to interrelate. They occur as language, which begins from material conditions of existence and is formed along concrete daily relations, meaning that it has a material basis. However, differently from the Marxist tradition and despite emerging from concrete conditions of the human being and reflecting these circumstances, language also refract them as it is neither reproduction of reality nor mere naming of things.

Language also creates and recreates such reality as it occurs amidst struggles, opinions, and axiological positions. It cannot be a simple code that follows action, work, and the concrete becoming of human praxis. Language is, therefore, human activity, acting, changing, and instituting what is real. The relations between basis and superstructure have double meaning for the Circle, thus moving away from the most orthodox and hegemonic Marxist tradition in which basis determines superstructure,

² See footnote 2.

relating it to a reductionist materialist perspective. It also drifts away from an idealist position that denies the existence of a historical referent for language. Language is connected to reality and originates in reality while simultaneously creating, changing, deforming, and carnivalising it. Bakhtin and Voloshinov (1986)³ introduce a whole session of discussions about the relationship between basis and superstructure. They provide a sound answer to one of the most relevant and challenging issues in the Marxist tradition so far, which consists of the criticism to Marxism in relation to the monological determinability of economics over the field of ideas, languages, and constituted ideologies.

Another point discussed in the Circle that clarifies this issue is the dimension of “life ideology,” which is quite important for theoreticians. It proves the relevance of concrete social relations of human acting and how this setting is a source of language constitution, proving its materialist nature. The immediate praxis context is important, but the Circle also highlights the long term context present in discourses as the enunciation is always an answer to what was already said and a rebuttal in anticipation. It encloses not only what is immediate, such as the present, but also the remote past, and the future. The Circle's contribution to the Marxist debate about language is unprecedented and has faced one of the most critical points of the left-wing tradition so far, which is the issue of economic determinism. The inclusion of the discussion on language in the Marxist field is innovative and establishes an ethic of action in everyday practice.

2 Abstract Objectivism and Individualistic Subjectivism: Overcoming and Introducing an Ethics of Discourse Action according to a Dialogic Perspective

Thus, depending on the way I relate with the other's word, I can establish ethics of discursive action. I live in the words of others and therefore, in their world, and I respond to them. Therefore, both writing and reading, being areas of language, always become concrete on the boundary between author and reader. Both reader and author are responsible for the production, circulation, and meaning of a text. One cannot highlight only the author or only the reader. Reading and writing have always had a dual nature.

³ See footnote 2.

The dialogic perspective that enables reading and writing is completely distant from the monological position in which the focus is on one of them. From the perspective of the aforementioned theoreticians, an author has power over the text, and so does the reader. The text lives and becomes meaningful along the boundary between one and the other:

I live in a world of others' words. And my entire life is an orientation in this world, a reaction to other's words (an infinitely diverse reaction), beginning with my assimilation of them (in the process of initial mastery of speech) and ending with assimilation of the wealth of human culture (expressed in the word or in other semiotic materials). [...] Everything that is expressed in the word collapses into the miniature world of each person's own words (words sensed as his own). This is the immense, boundless world of other's words constitute a primary fact of human consciousness and human life that, like all that is primary and taken for granted, has not yet been adequately studied (consciously perceived) (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.143).⁴

In this excerpt, he is not talking about language from an instrumental standpoint but from a lookout from which the human species, as a social and cultural being, is formed and constituted. Considering this aspect as fundamental in language and dialogism for every social relationship, it is understood that a subject is never alone in an act of communication, interpretation, speech, action in society, writing, and reading. In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*,⁵ the authors question two theoretical and philosophical frameworks that seek to explain the relationship of individuals with language, culture, and life. Based on a dialogic perspective, they show that both Individualistic Subjectivism, which defends that the subject originates from and gives origin to knowledge, speech, reading, communication and action, and Abstract Objectivism, in which subjects are subjected to a linguistic, cultural, philosophical or action code that lies before and above them, are inappropriate to explain how the relationship between subject and language, subject and culture, subject and history takes place. We will especially highlight the field of language, aware that the cultural, historical, economic and existential questions are implicit in the debate as, for the Circle,

⁴ BAKHTIN, M. M. From Notes Made in 1970-71. In: BAKHTIN, M. M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Transl. Vern W. McGee. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986. pp.132-158.

⁵ See footnote 2.

language is constitutive of social being and, in that sense, language cannot be thought of out of the chain of human action in life.

For the authors, the meaning of language lies neither in an isolated individual nor in the system that subjects him or her. The subjects, through dialogical relationships in which one assumes the other, use a given social verbal code and mobilise it in their social relations, imprinting new and eventful meanings to the signs that come from this code. It is through the clash and confrontation of axiological positions that the code is triggered, and it is given its meaning there. Far we stand from an isolated subject that mobilises a given code, means it only from his or her subjective experiences, and speaks a kind of “idiolect.” Far we also stand from subjects who use a stable code just to communicate, thus strengthening the system and effectively reproducing it.

From this perspective, reading is neither an isolated reader’s action nor is it exclusively directed by the author or another given literary code. The author does not subject him/herself to the reader and vice versa. Both resist in their particularities. Both use a shared code, culturally and socially given, but each one mobilises it according to his or her axiological position. There is both stability and instability. However, in order to meet and understand each other, they should share values and positions without ever entirely converging. Otherwise, one annuls the other. If the author’s text prevails, the reader is inexistent. Where the reader prevails, the text is devoid of meaning and historical situationality and can be fulfilled with just about any reading. They are two particular subjects even though they share a given culture, meeting in the text and clashing there. Both are irreducible to each other/before one another as it occurs in the life of concrete human beings in which the attempt to annul the other will never materialise. Even in dictatorial, monological times with extreme violence and censorship, the total annulment of those who can jeopardise system is difficult. Both author and reader are axiological subjects who are particularised and do not annul each other. They maintain their specificities. Thus, we see that the Circle theory is also valid for a reflection on human existence, and it is not only another linguistic or cultural theory that can be used in a technical analysis of a given corpus. From the Circle’s ideas we can extract ethical and political guidance to apply in everyday life, in the classroom, and in the Agora, thus answering social, historical, economic, and existential questions. The Circle understands the human plight in its capacity to resist, in alterity and in the other’s irreducibility.

Nevertheless, in this article we will focus on the relations between reader and author through its dialogic dimension, that is, through an “ethics of the discursive action guided by a dialogic perspective,”⁶ which believes in alterity and in the other’s resistance.

We can perceive that the Circle dialogues with traditional problematisation of ethics. The contrast between the Circle and Individualistic Subjectivism points to a criticism of the ethical dimension aimed at acting and thinking from an “ethical selfishness” through which acting according to private interests and demands is preached, disregarding the other. Along this line of thought, my reading of a text or any other that emerges in this text and the analysis and interpretation developed thereof are the only possible and right ones, as the perspective of the other is strange to me. Especially in the classroom, we have the teacher’s reading based on this universal thought, and it is expected to be repeated and multiplied among students. The genealogy of this ego dimension goes back quite far in human history, dating back centuries. It has been reinforced, especially in the modern era, in which the individualistic perspective is exacerbated.

From this standpoint, the individual emerges strongly detached from the social as a source of speech, rules, freedom, and action. The guardianship of state, religions and traditional rules is questioned by this individual who becomes a subject of his or her own story. During the Enlightenment, with the newly risen bourgeoisie and the liberal ideological apparatus, the egoic ethics is strengthened, and the individual appears as a monad, an atom from which emanates all the power to act, judge, opine, opposing the traditional or dogmatic rules. Bakhtin and the Circle advocate a different stance, questioning this libertarian subject, who is isolated and individually strengthened. They place the subject in direct contact with the other, who resists him/her and brings him/her into a relationship of intersubjectivity. This is another ethical vision that believes in alterity. The centrality of human action is displaced from the subject to the intersubjective. The Circle also strongly opposes Abstract Objectivism as mentioned above, and here we can raise the resulting ethical question.

Along this line of thought, the ethical dimension is guided mainly by universal and equal rules for all, which subject individual actions. The “standard-deontological”

⁶ From our reading of the Circle’s works, we believe that it is possible to use these terms to understand the reading and writing process.

perspective is highlighted since there is a communication, speech, writing, analysis, reading and action code of conduct that can become universal. From this perspective, the particularised subject, the other, social class divisions, clashes and dissents are obliterated, because it is believed that universal principles applicable to all can be achieved. During Enlightenment, this line of thought is also exacerbated, stressing rationality as the driver of universal principles that could be valid for all. For the Circle, in turn, such normativity is questionable. Another solution is sought and given by the existing clash between centripetal forces that reinforce this normativity, this universality, this fixedness, and the centrifugal forces that lead the struggle of positions between the social subjects, whether near or far. Bakhtin and the Circle defend an ethical dimension of the other, and this other is different and resists what is “universally valid.” There is no monological truth of the isolated subject, and neither is there any objective truth of the standards system. However, both the subject and the code are not obliterated but are meaningful from an alterity dimension, that is, it is in social, cultural, historical and verbal interaction that meanings can be envisaged, live, suffer, change, and be constituted.

For the Circle, word centrality is an ethical issue, or even meta-ethical, as words add meaning in the everyday clash of ideological positions. How can an agreement be reached about the meaning of words such as, for example, “justice,” “freedom,” “subject,” “should-be” and “moral”? There is no stability in the meaning of words as people are different from each other. Therefore, it is not possible to advocate any type of ethics, either individual, of the isolated and particularised being, or universal, rationally given by a transhistorical sphere. The Circle perceives movement, process, the struggle of positions that often lead to dissention rather than agreement, which goes against a standardisation of speech, action, reading, and writing for all. This is distant both from the autonomous individual who is free to decide and make decisions as to language, writing, reading and the destinations of the *polis*, and the categorical imperatives valid for all, regardless of class, gender, ethnicity, age, culture, etc. Decisions do not emanate only from the isolated individual, i.e., individualism, nor exclusively from rules, systems and standards that are binding on all. Not everything is subject to a generalisation by means of rationality as defended by the thinking from which the Abstract Objectivism derives. From this critical perspective, especially with regard to these two major Western cultural frameworks, viz., the Individualistic Subjectivism and the Abstract Objectivism,

we begin to understand the ethical process of the discursive action and the dialogic of reading and writing. From this “discursive ethics,” which understands language as a non-abstract system but instead as culturally and historically shared among subjects and which does not obliterate the subject but rather sees the subject in confrontation with the other in the intersubjective field, we can perceive and experience reading and writing. Both lines, the Individualistic Subjectivism and the Abstract Objectivism, are recovered, revisited and overcome in another analytic key, that is, dialogism and discursive and dialogical ethics.

For the Circle, language is dialogic *par excellence*. In other words, to speak, write and debate about something, it is necessary to go through the discursive clash around the object. The subject does not reach the object from a transcendent and rational consciousness that clearly defines, conceptualises and classifies him or her. Here there is a direct counterposition with Western rationalistic metaphysics, which sees the subject-object relationship through a transcendent consciousness that is capable of telling the truth about the object. This Cartesian perspective is far away from the Circle. It takes an opposite direction. Only the mythical Adam headed straight to the object, naming it:

The expression of an utterance can never be fully understood or explained if its thematic content is all that is taken into account. The expression of a statement always *responds* to a greater or lesser degree, that is, it expresses the speaker’s attitude to other’s utterances and not just his attitude toward the object of his utterance (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.92; emphasis in original).⁷

People living grouped together in society gather, talk, write, speak about reality, objects, events, their action in the world. These speeches, these verbal positions are divergent and are clashes of discourse. From this perspective, the right word cannot prevail over the thing [it refers to]. To reach the object, this requires a clash with those discourses that often say it in different ways. We go through the other’s discourse about an object. Thus, both writing and reading of a given text are always interdiscursive and intersubjective. Reading requires entering the discourse net that the text gets built.

⁷ BAKHTIN, M. M. The Problem of Speech Genres. In: BAKHTIN, M. M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Transl. Vern W. McGee. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986. pp.60-102.

Writing also involves the other's discourse about an object. The dual direction of the word, that is, its dialogic character, is confirmed by the authors that we follow.

Orientation of the word toward the addressee has an extremely high significance. In point of fact, *word is a two-sided act*. It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and for *whom* it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between the speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*. Each and every word expresses the "one" in relation to the "other." I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.86; emphasis in original).⁸

For Bakhtin, the issue of space and time situational rhetoric is fundamental. It is not only the immediate context as wanted by Lenin's theory of reflection, that is, every change in infrastructure causes a homologous change in overstructure. Actually, the connections between basis and superstructure in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*⁹ area mechanistically handled as language is also sensitive to the material changes of human existence. There the issue of economics stands out. However, language, constituting humans and occurring in their daily struggle, has the power to refract, carnivalise, criticise, confirm and repair reality, acting decisively upon it as mentioned above. Thus, the Circle's vision is distant from the Marxist vulgate in which mechanistic and economicistic explanations prevail and subdue superstructure and language, limiting them to a mere reflection of reality. Immediate context therefore has influence upon reading and writing, but that does not imply that this chronotope is the only one to institute reading and writing.

Besides, for Russian formalists, with whom the Circle dialogs as their counterpart, the chronotope is not relevant when it comes to the reading of a work as they investigate the compositional forms and structure of a text, aiming to find a model that repeats itself, regardless of space and time. This vision of negative chronotope is not interesting to the Circle as every text or utterance is produced by someone who is answering someone else. For the Circle, the author's time and the reader's time are important. There is also the long term temporality brought about by intertextuality that both the author and the reader are capable to operate in the act of writing and reading. From the Circle's perspective,

⁸ See footnote 2.

⁹ See footnote 2.

dichotomy is rejected, that is, we cannot say, “Give me the author's time and you shall have a work, or give me the reader’s time and you shall have the work.” This is not sustainable as it is a monological attitude. The author also dialogues with long-term speeches. The author’s text has discursive memory, and the reader is supposed to trigger such memory in order to establish a complete dialogic with text. To read a novel such as *Esau and Jacob* [Esau and Jacob] by Machado de Assis (2000),¹⁰ for example, intertextuality must be perceived. Machado mobilises another long-term Western discourse. The reader who does not know certain Biblical narratives will miss a large part of the reading. The author’s time, the reader’s time and the mobilisation of temporalities before the text are an integral part of it, making it quite complex. Besides, reading the novel becomes much richer if we know how to read this plural chronotope. In Bakhtin's words:

Karl Marx said that only thought uttered in word becomes a real thought for another person and only in the same way it is a thought for myself. But this other is not an immediate other (second addressee); the word moves ever forward in search of responsive understanding (1986, p.127).¹¹

Both writing and reading are utterances as they respond to the other’s discourse and aim at the other. The Circle does not regard the sentence from a grammar standpoint; it considers it as a living act of communication between human beings who respond to each other. Reading and writing border on each other, that is, there is no way they will not mingle. The text demands positioning and reading from a reader. Otherwise it will die if it is not read. There should be similarities between author and reader, that is, a common cultural repertoire for both to establish dialogic. If those who write both ask and answer, those who read ask and answer as well. In Bakhtin's words:

Any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive, although the degree of this activity varies extremely. Any

¹⁰ ASSIS, Joaquim Machado de. *Esau and Jacob*. Transl. Elizabeth Lowe. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

¹¹ BAKHTIN, M. M. The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis. In: BAKHTIN, M. M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Transl. Vern W. McGee. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986. pp.103-131.

understanding is embued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: The listener becomes the speaker (1986, p.68).¹²

3 Concrete Examples of the Dialogic and Ethical Relationship between Authors and Readers

In this section we will illustrate with some examples the relationship between author and reader that is established in tense, organic dialogic and ethical ways. For example, the complete works of Marx are an answer to its time, to the Industrial Revolution, to Capitalism, to the bourgeoisie and its discourse. It would be very interesting if, through Dialogic Discourse Analysis – DDA,¹³ we could recover, in Marx’s speech, the voice of his interlocutors and see them within Marx’s narrative context. We can see that many of Marx’s contemporary fellows are disclosed there and are even called by their real names. However, in the German theoretician’s discourse long term speeches emerge, especially when he recalls historical periods that were much earlier than his own work. Marx is a text reader both in the immediate context and in the long term duration, and he dialogues with them both in conflict and in agreement.

Marx’s readers should read his works both from the immediate chronotope and from the perception that he is also the result of previous chronotopes that are now mobilised by the author. Marx is capable to mobilise age-old chronotopes given the German thinker’s erudite personal culture. And it is in such a discursive complex that we can find ourselves and read Marx. In addition, as his work is canonic and widely read, when we approach it we face other readings that have mystified, carnivalised, deepened and distorted his work. Such readings also interfere with our reading. We will never directly approach his work. Instead, when we go through them, we are full of other

¹² See footnote 8.

¹³ We use the term DDA in order to distinguish it from another theoretical viewpoint that constitutes DA, especially inspired by French thinkers. Brait (2011) clarifies the need to distinguish among the terms as, despite their points of contact, there are also some specificities concerning the ideas of thinkers who integrated the Russian Circle. The Brazilian researcher remarks that this terminology is not related to an exact conceptualisation that is applicable to a certain *corpus* with the aim to clarify it and investigate it so as to name it with accuracy. The terminology should be mobilised to enable the understanding of the complex relations with language, the other, and the world, and in which ways this subject is constituted as a social being through the live and concrete communication chain in which he or she is inserted. The DDA perspective is distant from a technical and instrumental analysis of a certain *corpus* in which it definitely seeks to demonstrate, verify, and prove the ventured hypotheses. For DDA, the relation between the researched subject and the object is always established through social discourses that tell us about this object.

speeches that contain them. Canonic texts make reading difficult as they undergo numerous comments throughout its existence in the successive readings that they allow. This complex discursive mesh in which the text is effective is thus exposed by Bakhtin: “We repeat, an utterance is a link of speech communication, and it cannot be detached from the preceding links that determine it both from within and without, given rise within it to unmediated responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations” (1986, p.94).¹⁴

Unfortunately, the readings of Marx’s works, especially by the left wing, do not know this dialogue direction. We have often seen the German author being interpreted as a single voice, an exclusive source of his saying, that holds the truth over his time. The intensive dialogue with his contemporary fellows and previous voices is forgotten; his capacity to tell and define the object is mystified as well. His work has been transformed into an absolute, definitive, and closed truth about Capital, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The monological attitude prevails over a discursive ethical perspective. Marx emerges as a voice that cannot be questioned, as a single and unrepeatable source of speech and absolute and universal truth. When highlighting the important of ideology in everyday life, the Russian authors stress the active reception of works amidst the community that reads them: “The work combines with the whole content of the consciousness of those who perceive it and derives its apperceptive values only in the context of that consciousness. It is interpreted in the spirit of the particular content of that consciousness (the consciousness of the perceiver) and is illuminated by it anew” (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.91).¹⁵ Still about the ideological life of the written work, we have:

A book, i.e.; a *verbal performance in print*, is also an element of verbal communication. It is something discussable in actual, real life dialogue, but aside from that, it is calculated for active perception, involving attentive reading and inner responsiveness, and for organised, *printed* reaction in the various forms devised by the particular sphere of verbal communication in question (book reviews, critical surveys, defining influence on subsequent works, and so on) (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.95; emphasis in original).¹⁶

¹⁴ See footnote 8.

¹⁵ See footnote 2.

¹⁶ See footnote 2.

As we have already stressed, an author is also a reader. As an example, we have the reinterpretation of the tragedy *Medea* by Euripides, by Chico Buarque in his work *Gota d'água (The Last Straw)*. The Brazilian playwright clings to Euripides as he recalls the Greek writer when writing his text and distances himself from the Greek writer when reframing him. He is author and reader at the same time. There is also the dialogue between Adelia Prado and Carlos Drummond de Andrade, who meet based on different positions about the poem *E agora, José [What now, José]*, which is now emblematic in Brazilian literature. Adelia, reading Drummond's poem, displaces it to her axiological field and recreates it as counterpoint. In her poem *Agora, ó José [Now, oh José]*, she opposes the vision of human ending by urging the character José to fight and accept his destination. She is also a reader and a writer at the same time.

Dalton Trevisan and Vinícius de Moraes are another example. The former, when resuming the latter's famous poem *Receita de mulher [Recipe of a Woman]*, provokes a tense dialogue in which he contradicts, criticises, and disregards Vinícius by recreating the female character originally idealised by Vinícius and then carnivalised in his rereading. The short story writer from Paraná is the reader of a classic and brings it close to himself, colouring it and changing it. In all these cases, writers are also readers who build their work in a dialogue with other works, responding to them sometimes in respectful ways, sometimes ironically or critically.

Therefore, we should ask ourselves: How do Chico Buarque, Adélia Prado and Dalton Trevisan receive and respond to the authors with whom they dialogue? From discontinuity, continuity, displacement, counterpoints, and confluences. What ethical dimension moves them when they face the other and his text? How do they read the other's work and how do they mobilise dialogue? In carnivalised, officious, respectful ways? The other's discourse constitutes them as they depart from it. What ethical discursive action moves them when they resume the other's speech and recontextualise it? And we, how do we receive the other's discourse and voice? What is our ethical attitude towards this other? Receiving, assimilating and incorporating the other's words is an extremely important theme for the Russian theoreticians. Many forms enable this dialogue with the other. It will depend on society's socio-economic formation and, above all, the relations of power and hierarchy defined there.

The issue of exotopy and finalisation also interferes with writing and reading. For Bakhtin, it is only possible to know the self through the other's eye and the counterposition with the other. There is no isolated knowledge of oneself. The others have the power to finalise us as they have an exotopic view of us. Thus, through reading it is possible to build a vision about the author and his/her work as both of them resist the exotopic reduction. The other reads, interprets, classifies and finalises me but can also reduce me, defining me so as to mock, weaken, disqualify me, etc. However, this other's finalisation of me can be relativised through another reading, for example, seeing me through a positive key.

A work is finalised through reading but will continue to be open to other readings throughout its existence. A text can be finalised and limited by a certain reading while praised by another reading, thus enjoying uninterrupted dynamics. For example, a given discourse that is considered scientific and is Darwinian-oriented reads the Creationism-oriented Biblical discourse from a mundane, secular perspective that disqualifies and disregards it. Such reading complies with the modern episteme in which a certain empiric rationality and verification constitute the speeches and criterion of truth. However, in another chronotope, this discourse with transcendent appeal will be read as true and right. Readers finalise this discourse, but it remains open throughout its existence to be read in different ways. In Bakhtin's words:

When I contemplate a whole human being who is situated outside and over against me, our concrete, actually experienced horizons do not coincide. For each given moment, regardless of the position and the proximity to me of this other human being whom I am contemplating, I shall always see and know something, that he or she, for his or her place outside and over against me, cannot see himself (1990, pp.22-23).¹⁷

The author creates a world from the writing of this universe and the reader recreates it from a translation of this world into their own perspective. Every enunciative statement, be it in writing or reading, is always creative, that is, the author creates a world and the reader recreates it. Readers create their Drummond, their Guimarães Rosa, their

¹⁷ BAKHTIN, M. M. Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity. In: BAKHTIN, M. M. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*. Transl. Vadim Liapunov. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990.

Adélia Prado, but not without feeling their resistance. There is no such thing as a correct reading monology and interpretation for a given work. The text can in fact be reframed, but from what it provides.

The Circle contradicts the Hegelian thought that perceives the movement of consciousness and of the spirit as being continuous between the outside and the inside, reaching its apex through a unitary consciousness that reaches self-consciousness. For the Russian theoreticians, the direction of this movement is the opposite, that is, from unit to the other. The apex of the linguistic-ideological consciousness is reached when one realises that he or she is not alone, that is, one's consciousness happens in the boundary with the other's consciousness, which is different from me. Human history does not move through the path of dialectic synthesis that overcomes opposite sides in a vision of itself, of oneness, of monology. If there is alterity, reading and writing cannot converge but each one of them has certain autonomy as I am only formed by opposing the other. For the Circle, there is no possibility of strengthening a dialectic perspective in which the opposites are overcome by a synthesis that soothes conflicts. The eternal agonistic dimension is more promising to the Russian thinkers as there is no stability of the Hegelian synthesis of the absolute spirit and Marx's synthesis of the end of class struggle. Reader and writer don't share the same axiological position, yet interact. Bakhtin actually highlights the fact that, in the Western discursive tradition, the phenomenon of verbal interaction and centrality of the dual and dialogic word in the formation of the social being has never been sufficiently studied, not to say neglected as mentioned previously.

With reading, the text can be brought to an area of critical lowering, that is, the reader can deconstruct, diminish, and disqualify the other's text. This is what happens both to press texts and to utterances with life ideology, in which daily spoken and written texts circulate. Canonic texts are disqualified less because they are in a way armoured with tradition. When we approach, for example, the work by Fyodor Dostoyevski, which is considered as classic by critic discourses, we can hardly ever carnivalise or disqualify the work as it becomes armoured after successive praising readings that reconstruct it in positive ways. Readers hardly ever receive a text by Dostoyevski with a negative reaction. On the other hand, texts in the news media, data in the border zone with the everyday ideology of concrete, pragmatic and immediate relations of day-to-day life, are more prone to criticism and destructive readings. For example, texts of the national

newsmagazine *Veja* or the *Globo TV* station meet with a strongly negative reception from a significant group of readers, especially those considered left-wing. They are easily brought to a carnivalisation and diminishing zone by part of the readers. Another example: Note how Marxist readers receive non-Marxist texts. What do they do? Disqualify them? Qualify them? We should think of how Marx followers read Marx. Often in monological ways, never criticising or finding any limitations or contradictions in Marx's work. They only enthrone it and immobilise it, taking it as the right word. Reading can be monological and closed, taking the text as the final truth. However, it is open to other ways of reading that may trigger it in different ways. The reader may either adhere or reject the author, carnivalising or enthroning the author. Here an ethical stance is configured before the text, the author, the other. How should we handle them? Should we disqualify them or should we not?

Another vision that is important for the Circle is that every statement is in fact a translation. To read a text, I must translate it over to my own repertoire and see it from the standpoint of my personal values. However, obviously, if there is no sharing between reading and writing, a monological reading shall then occur with no respect for the other. Hence every act of reading is also an ethical action because as I face a text, I face the other who is there. However, when I write a text, I also dialogue with the other and have them as my interlocutor. There we have an ethical relation again: How should we then answer? How should we ask? What and how should I narrate? What is the purpose of my writing? What humanistic contributions does my text have? Can my text act in social transformation? To what extent? And will my reading of the text mobilise social practices? Therefore, every act of writing or reading is a social practice and constitutes ethical actions of must-be and must-act upon society. Every utterance is authorship and co-authorship. It comes from me and from the other. It comes from the author and from the reader. We build the world along this clash as the bridges between words and things are built through the everyday discursive struggle that creates and recreates social and cultural practices that guide our day-to-day life. "Such a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixed. It retains its own unity and open totality, but they are mutually enriched" (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.7).¹⁸

¹⁸ See footnote 1.

There is also the issue of speech genres and reading context that predetermine, in part, both writing and reading. We communicate through genres and we read and write from them. Here there is certain stability in reading and writing. “If speech genres did not exist and we have not mastered them, if we had to create them for the first time during the speech process, and if we had to construct each of our statements, spoken communication would be almost impossible” (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.79).¹⁹ What is the purpose of breaking discursive protocols and partially break up with a certain discursive genre? Is there an attitude of resistance, struggle, or political clash via language? There can be total subjection, which reveals fear, unofficial respect, reactionary behaviour.

It is noteworthy that Bakhtin and the Circle provide a substantial contribution against monologising reading and focusing exclusively on the reader or on the writer. In addition, there is still an internal interlocutor to the work, since without interlocution there is no language, but the external interlocutor also takes ownership for the work. This is the case of the *Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels, which is partly aimed at the proletariat. Obviously, there are other parties present in the text as the German thinkers address their criticism to supporters of Liberalism, Utopian Socialism, and the industrial bourgeoisie. Nevertheless, the subject of change is defined there and urged to act, that is, it is the world and industrial proletariat. Then there is an interlocutor that is triggered in the work and is constituted there. The work brings its ethics, that is, a possibility of a “must-be” for the interlocutor.

The work, as the rejoinder in dialogue, is oriented to the response of the other (others), towards active responsive understanding which can take on various forms: educational influences on the readers, persuasion on them, critical responses, influence on followers and successor, and so on. [...] The work is a link in the chain of the speech communion (BAKHTIN, 1986, pp.75-76).²⁰

However, after more than one century of the publication of Marx’s and Engels’ work, we are also interlocutors of this work and should read it in all its sheer complexity. Through a DDA, we shall approach the text, investigating its immediate context while we also read it from our chronotope, which contains the previous one in a tense dialogical process. The author expresses himself or herself in his or her whole intellectual and

¹⁹ See footnote 8.

²⁰ See footnote 2.

political entirety and I, as his/her reader, will also express myself ethically and politically with regard to his or her text. How do I act before the text that utopically promise humanity the turning point to a better society in the author's view? This is reading's ethical instigation.

Final Comments

After this investigation, we believe that Bakhtin and the Circle award us with an extensive and complex work that should not be used for application to a determined *corpus* to merely complete an academic paper, but should actually be read and reread as our very life and our social relationships, and enable the other's voice to flourish; however, we do not always have to agree with it. The Circle's proposal is to always bear in mind the other's presence and action. It is a perspective of alterity. I can respect, de-enthroned, disqualify, carnivalise, or reaffirm the other. What I must not do is invalidate the other, because they are the uncircumventable part of our existence. This is the Russian group's great insight at the beginning of the 20th century. In the Circle's words: "Ethical and aesthetic objectification requires a powerful *point d'appui* outside itself; it requires some genuine source of real strength out of which I would be capable of seeing myself as another" (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.31).²¹ Seeing a viewpoint, an interlocutor, a constant presence in the other is the required transcendence, the fundamental exotopy for us to leave the insulation of the ideology of individualism that has imprisoned us for so long.²² A dialogical discursive ethics may provide us with the understanding that the various social voices are not to be neutralised as they emanate from real subjects with whom we live. The other is a real and uncircumventable presence from the Circle's perspective.

²¹ See footnote 18.

²² Other contemporary thinkers, with due respect for the differences, also point to the perspective of alterity as a way to a possible human emancipation. The instance of others as the foundation of more liberating social relations is also a highlight, especially in Martin Heidegger's thinking (respect to introduction, to the other's presence via *aletheia*), Jürgen Habermas' belief in communicative action and reason, Hans Jonas' new ethics for a technological society that takes into account the other who is different from me, and Zygmunt Bauman who stresses the need to resume Agora as a means of ethical commitment with the other. We mention these authors in order to highlight that the Circle thinking is not unique but reveals convergence points with other works of important authors of the 20th and 21st centuries. Finally, there is the other-oriented ethics, which is very present and substantive in the Biblical text's tradition and also has an influence upon these authors, as it is an often revisited cultural and historical discourse and an integral part of our Western discursive tradition as well.

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