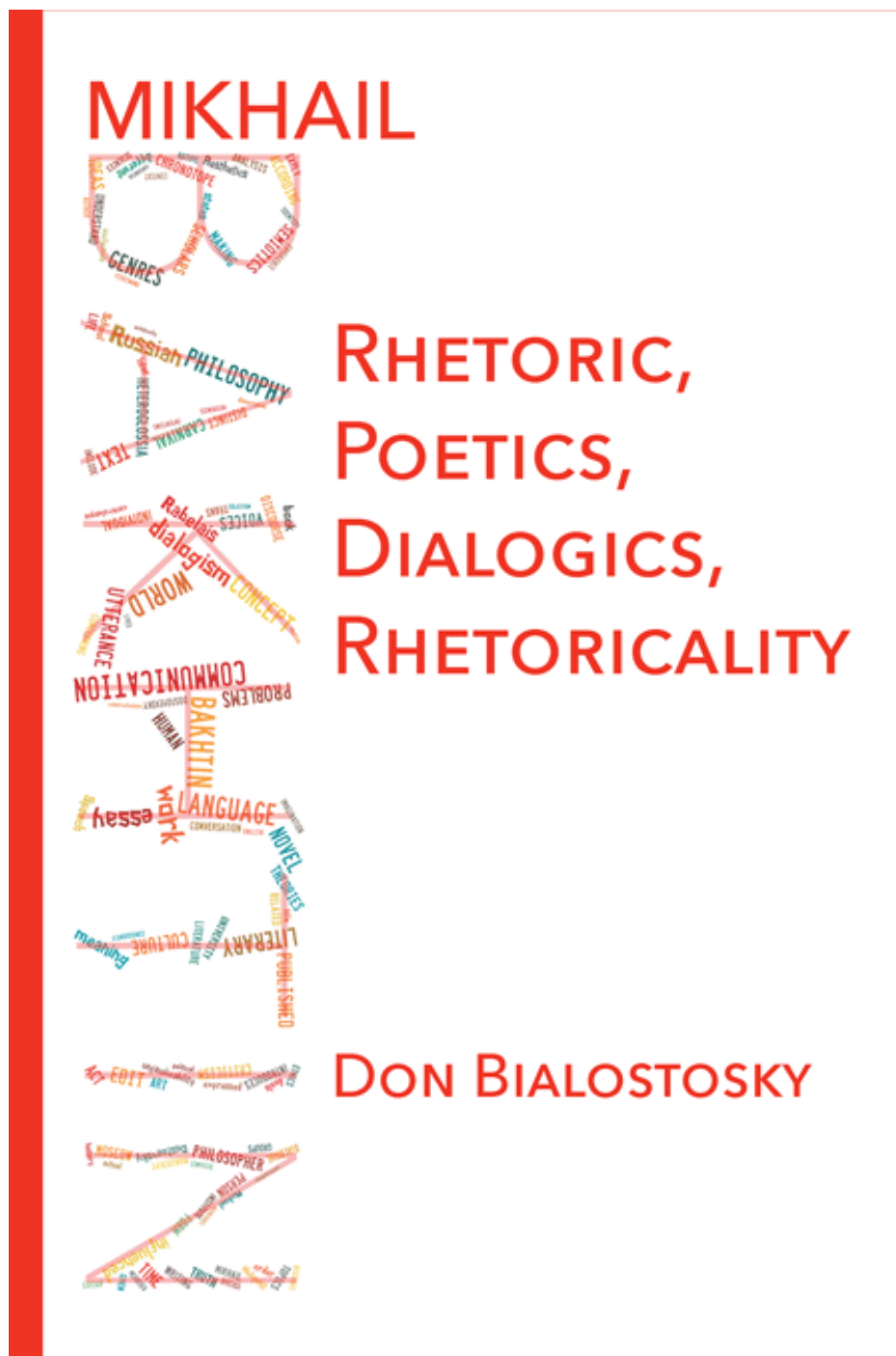


BIALOSTOSKY, Don. *Mikhail Bakhtin. Rhetoric, Poetics, Dialogics, Rhetoricity.* Anderson, South Carolina: Parlor Press, 2016. 191 p.

*Maria Helena Cruz Pistori **



* Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo – PUCSP/*Bakhtiniana*. Revista de Estudos do Discurso, São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil; mhcpist@uol.com.br

I begin this review by highlighting and commenting on its title, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Rhetoric, Poetics, Dialogics, Rhetoricity*. The list of concepts that follows the Russian philosopher's name clearly represents a successful synthesis of two trajectories: first, Don Bialostosky's, who authored this book and whose intellectual journey begins with an interest in the disciplines of the *trivium*, especially Rhetoric and Poetics, and who then related them to Bakhtin's oeuvre; second, the book's approach, which establishes dialogues between Bakhtinian work and these other fields of knowledge and, on many occasions, proposes quite original readings, reaching the concepts of "dialogic" and then "rhetoricity." An aspect that also stands out throughout the articles of the book is the author's commitment to the teaching of written text production, which appears implicitly and gives unity to the texts.

Don Bialostosky, who, in accordance to the book's back cover, is a "Professor in the Composition, Literacy, Pedagogy, and Rhetoric track and Chair of the English Department at the University of Pittsburgh," is a name that draws the attention of Brazilians: either for his interest in the [Bakhtin] Circle's work – for instance, on page 148 of the Afterword of *Para uma filosofia do ato responsável* [Brazilian version of Bakhtin's *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, published by Pedro & João, in 2010), Faraco mentions the (controversial) dialogue between Bialostosky and Morson and Emerson, or, especially, as is my case, for Bialostosky's works that relate Bakhtin's work to rhetoric.

As a result of in-depth research on both the classics and the Bakhtin Circle's works, the texts gathered in this book emerge from the dialogues that Bialostosky produced throughout his career with different interlocutors. In fact, it is the reunion of works published since 1986, sparsely, by academic institutions, such as the *Modern Language Association* (PMLA) or the *Rhetoric Society of America*, or in books edited by scholars, preferably Americans. And, in all of these texts, we will observe that the author is always answering some questions, either by refuting, confirming, disagreeing with, anticipating opposing answers and potential objections, or seeking support, etc. It makes room to contemporary interlocutors, but it always presents them critically, just as it deals with those who are more constant partners, namely, Aristotle and Bakhtin. Although only in the last article he states that he will keep track of the presence of the

voices of his listeners and the comments of his colleagues, the dialogues and polemics inscribed in all texts, which are in general articles derived from presentations in congresses, are easily retrievable in an attentive reading, even if they are veiled.

From the very beginning of the book, i.e. from the Preface, Don Bialostosky tells of his first encounter with Mikhail Bakhtin's work in 1984 and the first presentation of a paper on the implications of Bakhtin's theory for teaching the production of an authentic voice in the texts of university students, during the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC). Of course, he begins by recalling the fact that rhetoric is marginal in Bakhtinian work, with almost hostile and reductionist references. Precisely for this reason, one of the main questions he seeks to answer throughout the articles is on why the oeuvre of Bakhtin, an author who has nothing good to say about rhetoric, is mandatory and productive for students of rhetoric and textual production today.

In the Introduction, he presents us several authors who sought to understand Mikhail Bakhtin and the Circle, relating them to a rhetorical critique, and points out the inclusion of his works in publications in the area of communication, rhetoric and composition. For those interested in both rhetoric and Bakhtin's discourse theory and language teaching, the reading of this beginning is indispensable not only as a necessary and rich context of what follows, but also as a source of bibliographical indications in the area.

The book is divided into two parts, which correspond to the two moments in which the work of the Circle was translated into English. Thus, in the first part Dialogic, Rhetoric, Criticism, the author dialogues mainly with *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (BAKHTIN, 1984),¹ *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (VOLOŠINOV, 1973), *Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art* (VOLOSHINOV, 1987)² and the texts that

¹ BAKHTIN, M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Translated into English by Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984

² VOLOŠINOV, V. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trans. L. Matejka and I. R. Titunik. New York: Seminar, 1973; *Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art*. In *Freudianism: A Critical Sketch*. Ed. Neil H. Bruss. Trans. I. R. Titunik. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. And without being directly referred in the table on p.vi, he also cites: *The Problem of Speech Genres*, which is in BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson. Trans. Vern W. McGee. Austin: University of Texas P, 1986; *Extracts from 'Notes' (1970–1971)*, which is in BAKHTIN, M. *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work*. Ed. Gary Saul Morson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986; and, *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968.

compose the collection *The Dialogic Imagination* (BAKHTIN, 1982),³ all translated before 1990. According to Bialostosky, nowadays, “dialogic” is the most important matter for those who work with rhetoric and composition, and from the very first article he defines it as the fourth art of the *trivium*, *Dialogics as an Art of Discourse* (Chapter 2). In the construction of his argument, he starts with the Aristotelian opposition between rhetoric – the art of speech centered in people, and dialectic – the art of discourse centered in ideas / theses – in order to present the understanding of what he considers the “Bakhtinian art,” the dialogic, which is centered in the inseparability between ideas and people, as Bakhtin states it in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*: the image of an idea is inseparable from the image of a person, the one carrying the idea. If dialectics struggles for conviction in a matter and rhetoric for the persuasion of an audience, the dialogic strives for a comprehensive responsiveness and a consequent responsibility between people and ideas of a time, a culture, a community, or a discipline. From these principles, he dialogues with other writers, such as Tzvetan Todorov, Merle Brown, Richard Rorty and Hans-Georg Gadamer, showing that the 25-century history of the *trivium* in the West has also left its mark on ideas. However, according to him, only the dialogic allows the dialogue between the rhetoric, the dialectic and the discourse of the current theorists, making possible the articulation of the differences between them. This propositional chapter is one of the most important in the book, although in reality the others supplement it, further clarifying Bialostosky's dialogic possibilities between Bakhtinian work and the *trivium* arts.

The following chapter (3), *Booth, Bakhtin, and the Culture of Criticism*, is devoted to the examination of rhetorical criticism from Wayne Booth's pluralistic view of contemporary literary criticism. Booth, to whom the book is in memoriam to, was the adviser of Bialostosky's doctoral dissertation and the author of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*,⁴ introducer of the translation of *Problems Dostoyevsky's Poetics* and an Aristotelian of the School of Chicago. Bialostosky reads Booth's work, claiming that he, in an attempt to be in a good standing with the Circle's work, ends up (impositively) arguing for a position in relation to other possibilities of criticism that makes him closer to rhetoric

³ BAKHTIN, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited and translated by Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982. In this collection, we find the following essays: *Discourse in the novel*, *From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse*, *Epic and Novel*, and *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel*.

⁴ BOOTH, W. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.

perspective than to dialogic. In *Rhetoric, Literary Criticism, Theory, and Bakhtin* (Chapter 4), defending the possibility of a rhetorical critique for the reading of literary works of all time, the chapter is initially dedicated to approach the debate between deconstructivism and the Chicago School (Aristotelian). Afterwards, he dialogues with Jeanne Fahnestock's⁵ reading of the figures of thought as elements of contextual interaction and broadens it by considering the Bakhtinian point of view.

The fifth chapter (5) is titled *Bakhtin and Rhetorical Criticism*. This is a very interesting text for those who are caught by surprise by Bakhtin's hostile stance on rhetoric and want to understand it. It starts with the debate of Kay Halasek's and Michael Bernard-Donals' works presented in a meeting of the *Modern Language Association* in 1990. Bialostosky revisits the text of Nina Perlina for addressing the first scholar, who attributes Bakhtin's hostility to his refusal of the monologism and dogmatism that "defends oppressive authority" (the Soviet regime) and posits a dialogic rhetoric. According to Perlina, Bakhtin is actually opposed to the formalist rhetorical theorist that was his contemporary, Victor Vinogradov, an official voice of Soviet propaganda, for whom rhetoric is an agonistic game "whose main intention is to make his oratory the only effective and authoritative speech manifestation" (p.42) (Which certainly is a position to check!). As to Bernard-Donals, who seeks for a more scientific approach to the rhetorical debate, he responds above all with the Aristotelian oppositions between rhetoric, dialectic and analytic, giving the interlocutor a Platonic position. The end of the articles should arouse a special interest in educators, since the author resumes the rhetorical *exercitatio* and its similarities with the Bakhtinian word appropriation process (one's own word and half someone else's word), proposing that a "critically fruitful and pedagogically powerful articulation of rhetoric and dialogics might well grow out of further excavation of the history and practice of *exercitatio* in combination with further reflection on the dialogic formation of the subject" (p.72).

Concluding the first part, chapter 6, *Antilogics, Dialogics, and Sophistic Social Psychology*, articulates the dialogic with the rebirth of the sophists in the recent rhetorical theory and examines works of the sociologist Michael Billig on the rhetoric of Protagoras. The author then begins to rework the controversial definition of rhetoric

⁵ FAHNESTOCK, J. *Rhetorical Figures in Science*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

previously presented, diluting it in a non-institutionalized discursive process – a “rhetoricity” in the second part of the book.

Bialostosky gathers the articles of the second part, Architectonics, Poetics, Rhetoricity, Liberal Education by taking into consideration Bakhtin’s texts that have a more philosophical tone, later translated into English, namely, the collection of essays *Art and Answerability* (1990)⁶ and *Toward a Philosophy of Act* (1993).⁷ He considers that they are, in fact, equally important for works with language and literature, and continues to seek in them contributions to a renewed understanding of the *trivium* arts, refuting a reading of *Toward a Philosophy of Act (TPA)* basically as a treatise on ethics. Throughout the articles, the author leads the reader to the notion of “rhetoricity,” developed by Bender and Wellbery, which characterizes Bakhtin’s works as “virtual treatises on the nature and functioning of rhetoricity,” a “generalized rhetoric that penetrates to the deepest levels of human experience, ... bound not to no specific set of institutions, ... no longer the title of a doctrine and a practice ... [but] something like the condition of our existence” (p.14). Bialostosky embraces this dynamic perspective, which, according to him, is preferable to a disciplined, restrictive, or regulatory dialogic art.

In Chapter 7, Bakhtin’s Rough Draft, the author’s preferred interlocutors are Gary S. Morson and Caryl Emerson, especially in relation to *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*,⁸ and even others, such as Helen Rothschild Ewald, who defend a new emphasis on ethical issues in these early works, practically invalidating almost a decade of appropriation of Bakhtin’s work in composition studies in a predominantly socioconstructivist way. Basically, Bialostosky disagrees with Morson and Emerson’s reading, which reduces the importance of language and society in Bakhtinian work, arguing that more attention should be paid to the “historical,” as an epithet of the responsible act as well as of the concrete utterance.

⁶ BAKHTIN, M. M. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* by M. M. Bakhtin. Edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Translation and notes by Vadim Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1990. In this collection, we find the following essays: Art and Answerability (1919), Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity (ca. 1920-1923), Supplement: The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art (1924).

⁷ BAKHTIN, M. M. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Edited by Vadim Liapunov & Michael Holquist. Translation and notes by Vadim Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993.

⁸ MORSON, G. S.; EMERSON, C. *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990.

Chapter 8, Architectonics, Rhetoric, and Poetics in the Bakhtin School's Early Phenomenological and Sociological Texts, gives continuity to the earlier argument. Besides, this chapter and the next two chapters, namely, Chapter 9, Aristotle's Rhetoric and Bakhtin's Discourse Theory, and Chapter 10, Rereading the Place of Rhetoric in Aristotle's Poetics in Light of Bakhtin's Discourse Theory: Rhetoric as *Dianoia*, Poetics as an Imitation of Rhetoric, are the essays that seek in greater detail to understand a Bakhtinian rhetoric, concomitantly to rhetoric and a classical poetics from the Circle's discourse theory perspective. In these three chapters, the author leads us to reason in terms of categories of rhetoric, poetics and Bakhtin's discourse theory, addressing the first and the other works of Bakhtin and members of the Circle, and pointing out the impact they have on reconsidering both classical disciplines. I would like to point out only a few issues Bialostosky raises: Bakhtin's opposition to a systematized or rationalized knowledge in *TPA* would bring his thinking closer to rhetorical reasoning; the concern of his texts with participation, evaluation, decision and action, and the issue of the emotive-volitional tone, would reveal a common concern between Bakhtin and rhetoric; the recognition that Bakhtin structures his work on Dostoevsky's poetics from the theoretical background of Aristotle's Poetics; or yet the observation that, in "his theory of discourse, he [Bakhtin] rehabilitates the most abjected part of Aristotle's rhetoric – delivery," addressing the concrete utterance, effectively produced, "and he subordinates Aristotle's most important part—invention—to arrangement, style, and delivery" (p.122). The full exposition of the author's deep argumentative reasoning would not naturally fit into a review ...

Liberal Education, Writing, and the Dialogic Self (Chapter 11), the last article, is his first work on Bakhtin and the teaching of writing. It is in part a metatext, insofar as it is a text about the production of texts, exposing the author's own work of textual production, which tells us about the revisions and updates made in the old manuscript to publish it in this collection, the changes required to make it in accordance with its different audience, or even the editing done to turn a presentation into a written text. Responding to expressivist and socioconstructivist theories, he states that a "dialogic orientation to teaching writing differs from other social theories of discourse in its vision of ideologically situated persons involved in struggles over the meanings of things and the ownership of words" (p.152). By means of such perspective, he states

that it is possible to find the discursive interaction between the disciplines and their different languages, and the dialogical-discursive construction of the individual. Lastly, according to Bialostosky, Bakhtin's theory "alerts us to limitations in our rhetorical models and at the same time suggests ways to transcend them, even at the risk of losing rhetoric, or at least rhetoric as we know it" (p.13). In my point of view, the author theoretically and practically dares face this issue in a successful and fruitful manner, in a work that shows a coherent and unified thinking developed throughout Bialostosky's professional career.

Finally I must add that this book offers a quite useful list of references for an in-depth research on any of the discussed topics and a very well-elaborated index. However, I would like to highlight one more point: the reading of the collection also offers, with great clarity, the concrete conditions in which the different articles are produced. Then, exotopically, we notice, in particular, the great importance of teaching writing in American universities, alongside the effervescence of rhetorical studies, closely connected to the disciplines of (academic, poetic or fictional) writing and textual criticism. This is a great reflection for our universities...

Translated by Bruna Lopes-Dugnani – blopesdugnani@gmail.com

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