

Lotman and Bakhtin: Voices in the Great Cultural Dialogue / *Lotman e Bakhtin: vozes no grande diálogo cultural*

Instead of the decanted “clash of cultures,”
the Bakhtinian great time postulates the dialogue of cultures,
“the dialogue of different ages and cultures in the great universal time.”
Paulo Bezerra

This issue is dedicated to Yury Lotman and the semiotics of culture developed by the Tartu School – Estonia. It has the special collaboration of Irene Machado (USP - Brazil) and Silvia Barei (UNC – Argentina) as *ad hoc* editors. The articles published here certainly promote a deep dialogue between the ideas of the Bakhtin Circle and Lotmanian semiotics. In reality, however, as readers will see, rather than establishing an initial dialogue, these articles not only place us in direct contact with the literary and cultural dynamics of Russian thought throughout the twentieth century but they also provide us with enriching reflections on the current times. The following quote, which was written by Lotman’s disciple Peeter Torop, sets very clearly the work that that school proposed.

The Tartu–Moscow School accepted as its professional attitude to reconstruct the tradition and connect itself to the forgotten or repressed cultural-scientific achievements of the period of the first decades of the 20th century. One mission of Lotman as one of the leaders of the Tartu–Moscow School was knowing and mediating forgotten heritage. In the situation of censorship many contacts between Lotman and Russian theory were not visible. Thus, the synthesis of Lotman, Tynianov, Bakhtin, Vygotsky, Eisenstein and others, in an implicit dialogue, can be the basis for the formation of the next stage of semiotics of culture. (2019b, p.19).

The same important article by Torop highlights the visible complementarity between schools, showing the interrelationship between the history of Russian formalism, Russian theory and the history of cultural semiotics, emphasizing, *inter alia*, one of the fundamental principles underlying the conception of the semiotics of culture – the Bakhtinian concept of chronotope.

In the 1970s, Mikhail Bakhtin, in the final years of his life, expressed his regard and respect for Yury Lotman at times. In the text *Response to a Question from Novy Mir*,¹ in discussing the conditions of a literary science of that time, Bakhtin refers to Lotman twice. At first, he states:

In our day, of course, fairly good and useful books are being published (especially on the history of literature), interesting and profound articles are appearing, and there are, finally, *large* phenomena to which my general description cannot possibly extend. I have in mind Nikolay Konrad's book, *West and East*, Dmitry Likhachev's *Poetics of Ancient Russian Literature*, and *Research on Sign Systems*, in four installments so far (the school of young researchers headed by Yury M. Lotman). These are the most highly gratifying phenomena of recent years (BAKHTIN, 1986, pp.1-2).²

In the Brazilian version, we can read, on the same page of the aforementioned quotation, more precisely in the fourth translator's note by Paulo Bezerra, the following explanation: "the journal *Research on Sign Systems* (mentioned by Bakhtin) [*Trudy po znakovym sistemam*], from University of Tartu, is the oldest international journal on semiotics published to date (since 1998 in English under the title *Sign Systems Studies*)."³

¹ T.N. This text was translated from Russian into Brazilian Portuguese by Paulo Bezerra as *A ciência da literatura hoje* (Resposta a uma pergunta da revista *Novy Mir*) [The Literary Science Today (Response to a Question from *Novy Mir*)]. In that Brazilian version, we find, in the second translator's note, that "the Russian term (*literaturovedeniye*), which was translated as literary science [in the Brazilian version], encompasses literary history, literary theory and literary criticism, three related areas of literary research. Moreover, Bakhtin himself calls science the deep and comprehensive literary investigation." (BAKHTIN, 2017, p.9). Brazilian readers are also informed on a translator's note that Bakhtin's text was originally published by *Novy Mir*, n. 11, 1970, pp.237-240 (BAKHTIN, 2017, p.9). The readers of the English version of Bakhtin's text are also provided with information on *Novy Mir* in the Introduction written by Michael Holquist. In that section, the editor clarifies that the collection of Bakhtin's essays "opens with a transcript of Bakhtin's remarks to a reporter from *Novy Mir*, the 'liberal' monthly journal read by most Soviet intellectuals" (HOLQUIST, 1986, p.xi). Full reference: HOLQUIST, M. Introduction. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp.ix-xxiii. Paulo Bezerra's quotation in the original: "O termo russo (*literturoviédenie*), aqui traduzido como ciência da literatura, sintetiza história da literatura, teoria da literatura e crítica literária, três áreas correlatas da investigação literária. Ademais, o próprio Bakhtin chama de *ciência* a investigação literária profunda e abrangente." (BAKHTIN, 2017, p.9).

² BAKHTIN, M. *Response to a Question from Novy Mir*. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp.1-9.

³ T.N. The readers of the English version may also find on the last page of Bakhtin's text, more specifically in the second note written by translator Vern M. Gee, that "*Research on Sign Systems* (*Trudy po znakovym sistemam*) is a series of works on topics in semiotic theory of art and culture published at Tartu University (formerly Dorpat) in Estonia." (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.9). Paulo Bezerra's quotation in the original: "O problema dos significados nos sistemas modelares secundários", *Trabalhos sobre Sistemas de Signos*, n.º 2, Tartu, 1965, pp.22-37" and "discordância de Bakhtin com o recente estruturalismo soviético", crítica que "continua nas notas a "Por uma metodologia das ciências humanas" (BEZERRA, 2017, p.26).

The dialogue with the Tartu School continues elsewhere, in the same response to the journal *Novy Mir*, when Bakhtin observes that:

The outstanding works of recent literary scholarship that I have mentioned – Konrad, Likhachev, Lotman and his school – with all the diversity of their methodology are alike in that they do not separate literature from culture; they strive to understand literary phenomena in the differentiated unity of the epoch’s entire culture (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.3).⁴

In two of his final texts, Bakhtin quotes Lotman again. In *From Notes Made in 1970-71*, highlighting the importance of understanding literature at a “higher level of organic unity,” that is, culture, Bakhtin refers to the thinker of the Tartu School in

An understanding of the multistyled nature of Eugene Onegin (see Lotman) as a recoding (romanticism into realism and so forth) leads to a falling away of that most important *dialogic* aspect and to the transformation of a dialogue of styles into a simple coexistence of various versions of one and the same style (1986, p.135).⁵

And in the third translator’s note, Paulo Bezerra clarifies that Bakhtin is referring to a paper by Yury M. Lotman, *Analysis of the Poetic Text*, published in *Research on Sign Systems*, issue 2, Tartu, 1965, pp.22-37.⁶ The translator adds that this is due to “Bakhtin’s disagreement with the recent Soviet structuralism,” a critique that he “continues in his notes *Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences*” (BEZERRA, 2017, p.26).

My attitude toward structuralism: I am against enclosure in a text. Mechanical categories: “opposition,” “change of codes” (the many

⁴ For full reference, see note 2.

⁵ BAKHTIN, M. *From Notes Made in 1970-71*. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp.132-158.

⁶ T.N. The readers of the English version are provided with the following note: “Reference here is to Lotman’s ‘*Khudhozhestvennaja struktura Evgenija Oneginina*’ in *Trudy po rosskoj i slavjanskoj filologii* 9 (Tartu, 1966), pp.5-22. Lotman’s idea of recoding depends on his conviction that literature is a secondary modeling system. He distinguishes between natural languages, artificial languages (‘system of conventional signs and rules of their usage, such as those of algebra or chemistry’), and secondary modeling systems, which he defines as ‘semiotic systems constructed on the basis of natural language but having a more complex structure. Secondary modelling systems include ritual, all aggregates of social and ideological sign communications, and art, all of which merge into a single complex whole – culture’ (Yury Lotman, *Analysis of the Poetic Text*, tr. Barton Johnson [Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1976], p.19).” For full reference, see note 5.

styles of *Eugene Onegin* in Lotman's interpretation and in my interpretation). (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.169).⁷

The dialogic possibilities offered in the different articles are innumerable, and encompass various objects of study, theoretical deepening and even comparisons between different semiotic theories. Therefore, based on this dialogic and interdisciplinary perspective that *Bakhtiniana* 14(4) offers its readers 12 texts by 14 authors representing the following universities: ESPM-SP – Brazil (1); UFF-RJ – Brazil (1); UFRB-BA – Brazil (1); USP – Brazil (3 and the *ad hoc* editor); UNC – Argentina (2 and the other *ad hoc* editor); Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia – Mexico (1); Université de Limoges – France (1); Università di Bologna – Italy (1); Umeå University – Sweden (1); University of Tartu - Estonia (1). Thus, they represent four Brazilian universities and six foreign universities. We invite you, our readers, not only to read these texts, but also to include them in your research, as they once again provide *Bakhtiniana* with the opportunity to actively participate in the cultural and academic life of Brazil and abroad.

A high number of submissions and their rigorous selection by competent reviewers (*ad hoc* and members of our board of reviewers) allowed us to have this excellent result. Internationalization and visibility are demands from research development agencies, PUC-SP [Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo], and SciELO/Scientific Eletronic Library Online. This is why *Bakhtiniana* remains steadfast in its commitment to promoting dialogical possibilities between national and international research devoted to language studies. In this sense, we are immensely grateful for the precious support, assistance and recognition from MCTI [Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation]/CNPq [Brazilian National Research Council]/MEC [The Brazilian Ministry of Education]/ CAPES [Brazilian Federal Agency for Support and Evaluation of Graduate Education] and PUC-SP, through their Plano de Incentivo à Pesquisa [Research Incentive Plan] (PIPEq) / Publicação de Periódicos [Journal Publication] (PubPer-PUCSP) – 2019, especially at this difficult moment for Brazilian research, Brazilian research development agencies, CNPq [Brazilian National Research Council], in particular, and for education in Brazil, in general.

⁷ BAKHTIN, M. Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences. In: BAKHTIN, M. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Edited by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist; translated by Vern W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1986, pp.159-172.

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