ARTICLES

From Singularity to Polyphony: A Re-Reading Proposal of the Bakhtinian Theory / *Da singularidade à polifonia: uma proposta de releitura da teoria bakhtiniana*

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ABSTRACT

In the Bakhtin Circle's propositions, the concepts elaborated do not appear completely split from one another, but inter-connected. Therefore, we believe there are key concepts that are in the foundation of other concepts' formulation, even though such association does not occur explicitly, as is the case of the notion of singularity. Our goal consists, thus, in establishing a theoretical reflection regarding the relations between singularity and polyphony based on the works *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* [1920-24] and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* [1963]. Based on that reflection, we understand that the artistic construction of the polyphonic novel may be perceived as enabled by a recognition of the singularity of each subject and, consequently, of their isonomy in relation to the truth. Such reading key corroborates the perspective that *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, launcher of the notion of singularity, acts as a project of philosophical reflection that assists in the comprehension of subsequent Bakhtinian productions.

KEYWORDS: Singularity; Polyphony; Truth; Point of view; Bakhtin Circle

RESUMO

Nas proposições do Círculo de Bakhtin, os conceitos elaborados não aparecem cindidos completamente uns dos outros, mas inter-relacionados. Diante disso, acreditamos que existam conceitos-chave que estejam na base da formulação de outros, ainda que tal associação não ocorra de forma explícita, a exemplo da noção de singularidade. Nosso objetivo consiste, assim, em estabelecer uma reflexão teórica acerca das relações entre singularidade e polifonia a partir das obras Para uma filosofia do ato responsável *[1920-1924] e* Problemas da poética de Dostoiévski *[1963]. Com base nessa reflexão, entendemos que a construção artística do romance polifônico pode ser percebida como possibilitada por um reconhecimento da singularidade de cada sujeito e, consequentemente, de sua isonomia em relação à verdade. Tal chave de leitura corrobora a perspectiva de que* Para uma filosofia do ato responsável*, inaugurador da noção de singularidade, atua como um projeto de reflexão filosófica que auxilia a compreender as produções bakhtinianas subsequentes.*

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Singularidade; Polifonia; Verdade; Ponto de vista; Círculo de Bakhtin

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Introduction

Even though the Bakhtinian theory has taken a significant role in several discussions on language studies and become a part of the language and literature academic curriculum and of official documents that guide and regulate education in the country, there is an early work by Bakhtin that remains meagerly analyzed in the Brazilian context: *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, written between 1920 and 1924 and published posthumously.[1] Among those who dedicated themselves to study it, one of the reading keys is for the work to fulfill the role of a moral philosophy project (Sobral, 2008a; Bubnova, 2013), which guides the Bakhtin Circle's following production, a perspective we adopt in this study. In that regard, we understand that this initial project is undertaken in the subsequent Bakhtinian production, so that the concepts contained in it allow and help us to contemplate other concepts from the dialogical discourse theory.

One of the central concepts in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* is singularity, used by Bakhtin to expose his reflections on duty not as a universal principle, but as justly determined based on a unique situation and an also unique and concrete time-space in which the subject finds himself (which is equally unique), i.e., based on a conjecture and on a singular subject. This notion of singularity allows us to understand, thus, the reason why each subject presents a unique point of view on the world and, consequently, certain perceptions on the truth of an event.

Although this concept is no longer a main concern of the Bakhtinian reflections in following works, we believe it is on the foundation of other concepts' formulation, even if such association does not occur explicitly, as in the case of the notion of polyphony, coined in the 1920's and debated again by Bakhtin in his subsequent production. This notion may be understood as equally valid voices, in which the narrator does not talk about the character, but to the character, placing different points of view on the same event in dialogue, so that the character reaches his own truth.

Thus, this paper's objective consists in establishing a theoretic-conceptually natured reflection on the notions of singularity and polyphony based on the works *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* [1920-24] and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* [1963].

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[1] This work's first edition in Portuguese is from 2010.

Therefore, we understand it is necessary, firstly, to resume and retrieve each of those concepts separately, so that, after, we can proceed to an analysis of the possible relations between the two. We believe that this reading and interpretation movement may contribute to deepen the comprehension on the Bakhtinian production, understanding it under globalizing optics, which emphasizes the specificities of each concept, as well as their intersecting points.

1 Weaving Concepts and Connections

1.1 The Concept of Singularity

The concept of singularity is elicited in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* to resume a topic already presented in *Art and Answerability*, Bakhtin's first work, dated from 1919, in which the author discusses the existent split between the world of life, the world of science and the world of culture, commenting that only the subject, in his singularity, would be able to unite these worlds. Such discussion is developed and expanded in the work from 1920-24, when Bakhtin explains that the historical description, the theoretic-discursive thought, and the aesthetic perception "establish a fundamental split between the content or sense of a given act/activity and the historical actuality of its being" (1999, p.2)[2] and that only a perspective that acknowledges these two elements would be able to understand the value of this act in its entirety.

Bakhtin (1999)[3] states, also, that life in a nutshell may be understood as a complex act, i.e., "as a single-current event (...) of uninterrupted performance of acts-deeds: the acts and experience that I live are constituent moments of my life, which is, thus, an uninterrupted succession of acts" (Sobral, 2008b, p.21).[4] Each subject's life is, therefore,

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[2] BAKHTIN, M. M. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Translation and notes by V. Liapunov. Edited V. Liapunov and M. Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999.
[3] For reference, see footnote 2.
[4] In Portuguese: "como um evento unicorrente (...) de realização ininterrupta de atos-feitos: os atos e experiência que vivo são momentos constituintes de minha vida, que é assim uma sucessão ininterrupta de atos."

"formed by a succession of concrete acts; these are singular, unrepeatable acts (they only happen once)" (Sobral, 2008a, p.225).[5]

Thus, in the Bakhtinian perception, each of the subject's thoughts constitutes a singular act that integrates the life as an uninterrupted acting. In that regard, all thoughts are composed by a content and a factual character, i.e. by an individual-historical aspect, which concerns such matters as the author, time and circumstances of the thought and has the ability to transform something theoretically valid into something actually valid for the one who thinks it. Therefore, although there are certain judgments of universal validity (*istina*), such validity is linked to the inside of a theoretical domain, such as biology and physics, for example, existing only in the actual conjecture of the one who thinks – of the singular historical unit of their life – that such judgment may or may not be true (*pravda*).

In this fashion, Bakhtin (1999)[6] understands that overcoming the dualism between content/sense of a thought and a historical act of its actualization will never be able to occur inside a theoretical domain, because in this domain the subject is not present as someone active and singular. The theoretical knowledge is based exactly on the abstraction of the individual historical act and, consequently, the unique way of existing of each subject, so that, in case it tried to encompass such existence, it would produce in its propositions a world with predetermined, ready, finished beings, and, therefore, they would be indifferent to the act in its singularity. Hence, the theoretical world cannot offer any criteria for the subject's actual life, any parameter to define what is valid and what is not, as it is based precisely on the abstraction of that subject's singular and concrete existence, remaining identical and the same as itself whether it exists or not. It does not mean, however, that the theoretical world does not have implications on the subject's life or that the subject ignores it. According to Bakhtin himself (1999, p.20),[7] this world, to a participating subject's conscience, "is in a certain sense actual, that it possesses validity. But what it can also see is that this world is not the once-occurrent world in which I live and in which I answerably perform my deeds."

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[5] In Portuguese: "(...) formada de uma sucessão de atos concretos; trata-se de atos que são singulares, irrepetíveis (só acontecem uma vez)."
[6] For reference, see footnote 2.
[7] For reference, see footnote 2.

In the Bakhtinian view, the act – considered not based on its content, but on its performance – is oriented towards the singular context in which it is performed. It is necessary, therefore, to contemplate the act not aesthetically or theoretically from the outside, but from the inside, that is, the perspective of the one who acts. From this perspective, there is not only a unique context, but, overall, a unique concrete context in which life is actualized.

Similarly, for the one who acts, "[it] is not a principle as a starting point, but the fact of an actual acknowledgment of one's own participation in unitary Being-as-event" (Bakhtin, 1999, p.10).[8] It is, in fact, a unitary and unrepeatable participation in the Being-as-event, based on a place that is also unique and, consequently, irreplaceable, and impenetrable by others. The acknowledgment of this Being's singularity gives rise to what Bakhtin calls "no-alibi of existence," i.e. the impossibility to act from a place other than the unique one that each person already occupies.

Therefore, in the Bakhtinian approach, according to Bubnova's understanding, "The respective optics of the I and the other are unique and autonomous" (2013, p.12).[9] It is necessary to consider, also, that, at the same time that one finds oneself in the Being-as-event, therefore passive in this sense, they participate in this Being-as-event actively. Therefore, one's singularity is given, but also needs to be updated, that is, it needs to be affirmed, which occurs in each of the subject's act. There is, thus, a singularity that is both existence and duty: "I *am* actual and irreplaceable, and therefore *must* actualize my uniqueness" (Bakhtin, 1999, p.11, emphasis in original).[10] It is unavoidable, therefore, to act from a unique place, even though such action takes place only inside, as, for example, in the form of thinking.

Accordingly, it is precisely the affirmation of the no-alibi of existence that forms the foundation for existence, constituting both something that happens when the subjects are born (already given) and a task that they perform continuously until they die (to be actualized) (Pires; Sobral, 2013). Under this conception, only the no-alibi of existence is capable of making the possibility an actuality, that is, a concrete and actual act. Ergo, everything that is determined based on its content as a valid value in itself, as something

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[8] For reference, see footnote 2.
[9] In Portuguese: "As respectivas óticas do eu e do outro são únicas e autônomas."
[10] For reference, see footnote 2.

true in terms of universal value, is nothing but some potentiality that may become actual only in the act founded on the acknowledgement of the being's singular participation.

Such passage – from a possibility to a unitary actuality, i.e. from *istina* to *pravda* – is not possible from inside the content itself, as the content's scope is self-sufficient, being indifferent to the subject's existence. It is possible, then, to assert that "The abstract-sense aspect, when it is not correlated with inescapable actual uniqueness, has the character of a project: it is something like a rough draft of a possible actualization or an unsigned document that does not obligate anyone to do anything" (Bakhtin, 1999, p.11).[11] Instead, the subject's experience is from the order of uniqueness, so that experiencing an object, for example, that is, to be in contact with it, requires considering it in its uniqueness. Thus, what is from the order of the content acquires weight only when related to singularity.

It is, therefore, the act that provides value to the content, and the world in which the act occurs presents itself as: "a unitary and unique world that is experienced concretely: it is a world that is seen, heard, touched, and thought" (Bakhtin, 1999, p.56),[12] as is the subject that performs this act. It is, therefore, a concreteness in which the subject and the object are in a relation established upon the act and experienced in the world and in which all these elements – subject, object, act and world – are unitary and unrepeatable.

Therefore, it is exactly the subject's participation based on a concrete and unitary point that grants the effective weight to space and time in which the act occurs, valuing this space-time axis and singularizing it. This is not an abstract axis, but a concrete one, whose concreteness is established by the relation with a subject that is also unitary. Thus, in case the subject abstracts from this point in which they participate in the Being-as-event, the world's singularity disintegrates, giving rise to only possible and abstract relations and replacing the concrete architectonic of the experienced world "by a non-temporal, non-spatial, non-valuative systematic unity of abstractly universal moments" (Bakhtin, 1999, p.58).[13] Even though each of these moments is logically necessary to each unit, it is only when related to the one who acts that these moments are, in fact, included in the architectonic of the actual world.

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[11] For reference, see footnote 2.
[12] For reference, see footnote 2.
[13] For reference, see footnote 2.

Under this approach, the I-for-myself is established based on the I-for-the-other, which means that the singularity is not completely established beforehand, originating a positive value in itself, but it is built in correlation to other singularities. From that follows that the other has an essential role in the constitution itself of this singularity: "the actualization of my singularity is also something that completes the other's being. The non-coincidence with the other, with their place, is also a space that generates sense, which, once again, takes place in the articulation of the differences" (Amorim, 2009, p.35).[14] Under this perspective, we can assert that the I's singularity is established in a relation with the other's singularity.

The Bakhtinian focus defends, thus, the perspective that, "In life, each of us occupies a unique place, i.e., a place that is irreducible to the one occupied by any other person" (Faraco, 2011, p.24).[15] Therefore,

> When I contemplate a whole human being who is situated outside and over against me, our concrete, actually experienced horizons do not coincide. For at 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, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze (his head, his face and its expression), the world behind his back, and a whole series of objects and relations, which in any of our mutual relations are accessible to me but not to him (Bakhtin, 1990, pp.22-23).[16]

We return, then, to the understanding that singularity is established, but also built, always based on relations established with other beings and, consequently, with other points of view, and that the other is essential for such construction. Under this perspective, there are no universal rules that extend to all subjects equally, but only rules that are validated by certain socio-historical contexts and by the reality of the one who acts, that

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[14] In Portuguese: "a realização da minha singularidade é também algo que completa o ser do outro. A não-coincidência com o outro, com o seu lugar, é também lugar produtor de sentido que, mais uma vez, se dá na articulação de diferenças."

[15] In Portuguese: "Na vida, cada um de nós ocupa um lugar único, isto é, um lugar irredutível ao ocupado por qualquer outra pessoa."

[16] BAKHTIN, M. M. Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity. *In*: BAKHTIN, M. M. *Art and Answerability*. Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin. Edited by M. Holquist and V. Liapunov. Translated and notes by V. Liapunov. Supplement translated by K. Brostrom. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. pp.4-256.

is, by the subject's singularity and the moment one experienced. Ergo, the actual Being-as-event is determined not in itself, but in correlation with the subject's singularity.

Therefore, the truth in terms of *pravda* is determined by each one from the unique space one occupies, which generates as many different worlds, that is, as many faces to one same event as the unitary subjects that take part in it: "The truth [*pravda*] of the event is not the truth that is self-identical and self-equivalent in its content [*istina*], but is the rightful and unique position of every participant – the truth [*pravda*] of each participant's actual, concrete ought" (Bakhtin, 1999, p.16; emphasis in original).[17] That occurs because there are no values that are *a priori*, self-identical and applicable to all those that comprise an event.

Taking that into consideration, it is possible to assert that singularity characterizes the being and the context in which it is placed, making, consequently, the responsibility to perform a duty also something singular and unitary, as well as the act that follows from this duty. Therefore, the duty and the act's unique and punctual character integrates a totality that encompasses several instances, including the space-temporal axis in which the act is performed and enabled by this concrete truth – *pravda* – that the being sees, hears, lives and understands during the responsible act-performing.

1.2 The Concept of Polyphony

The concept of polyphony initially appears in the Bakhtin Circle's work in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Creation* (1929), a work that was re-written and re-edited in 1963 with the new title *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. In this study, the considerations regarding the notion of polyphony are based on the revised work, published in the 1960s, as it comes from Bakhtin's late reflection, which allows us to infer that such work presents an improved perspective of the concept, originally conceived in the 1920s.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin (1984)[18] asserts that Dostoevsky created a type of artistic thinking that was so far inexistent: the polyphonic one.[19] One of

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[17] For reference, see footnote 2.

[18] BAKHTIN, M. M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Edited and translated by C. Emerson. Introduction by W. C. Booth. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.

[19] In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin (1984) explains that, even though isolated elements of polyphony may be perceived in authors prior to Dostoevsky and even in some of his novellas, it is only in

the aspects that characterizes a polyphonic novel under the Bakhtinian perspective is what could be called an independence of the characters regarding the author, in a way that characters do not fuse with the author, in the same way as they do not become a mean for the author's voice.

In that regard, the author's word regarding the character (also called hero) is organized in the Dostoevskian novel as a word of someone who is present, who hears the author and can answer him (Bakhtin, 1984).[20] In this scenario, it is not the author who provides the characters' definition, presenting them as finished and concluded beings, but it is the character who defines himself: the author introduces everything "(...) into the field of vision of the hero himself" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.48).[21] Thus, the characteristics and aspects that, in a homophonic novel, would define the character as a finished and sentenced image of reality begin to constitute, in the polyphonic novel, material for the character's self-conscience.

Ergo, in Dostoevsky's narrative construction, the point is not who the character is, but how he acquires consciousness regarding himself and the world that surrounds him. In that regard, Bakhtin (1984, p.49)[22] asserts:

> Dostoevsky carried out, as it were, a small-scale Copernican revolution when he took what had been a firm and finalizing authorial definition and turned it into an aspect of the hero's self-definition. (...) The dominant governing the entire act of artistic visualization and construction had been shifted (...). Not only the reality of the hero himself, but even the external world and the everyday life surrounding him are drawn into the process of self-awareness, are transferred from the author's to the hero's field of vision.

Thus, it is possible to say that the vision provided by the author in the polyphonic novel regards the character's self-awareness and the inconclusiveness of this self-awareness, which is yet another feature of a polyphonic novel. With that in mind, Bakhtin (1984, p.290)[23] observes that this inconclusiveness is put into focus because "Beginnings

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his novels that such phenomenon is presented in its entirety. Therefore, in this study, all mentioning to Dostoevsky's artistic creation refers specifically to this writer's novels.

[20] For reference, see footnote 18.
[21] For reference, see footnote 18.
[22] For reference, see footnote 18.
[23] For reference, see footnote 18.

and ends lie in the objective (and object-like) world for others, but not for the conscious person himself."

Therefore, there is not, in Dostoevsky, an object-like attitude on the author's part regarding the character – as occurs in monologic novels, in which "nowhere does the word of the author encounter resistance from the hero's potential word, a word that might illuminate the same object differently, in its own way – that is, from the vantage point of its own *truth*" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.71; emphasis in original).[24] As Lopes (2011) observes, the monologic perspective associates precisely to the impossibility to discuss the truths conveyed by a type of discourse, which allows for the character's finishing touches, as well as the deletion of his individual universe and his subjection to the author's horizon.

In Dostoevsky's novels, differently, the author's position can only be a dialogic one, which affirms and acknowledges both the hero's autonomy and lack of finishing touches. This is a free hero, entitled to his own voice, who is not seen by the author as "'he' and not 'I' but a fully valid 'thou,' that is, another and other autonomous 'I' ('thou art')" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.63).[25]

However, it is necessary to observe that that does not make the author assume a passive position.

> It would be absurd to think that the author's consciousness is nowhere expressed in Dostoevsky's novels. (...) But the function of this consciousness and the forms of its activity are different than in the monologic novel: the author's consciousness does not transform others' consciousnesses (that is, the consciousnesses of the characters) into objects, and does not give them secondhand and finalizing definitions. Alongside and in front of itself it senses others' equally valid consciousnesses, just as infinite and open-ended as itself. (...) The consciousnesses of other people cannot be perceived, analyzed, defined as objects or as things-one can only *relate to them dialogically*. To think about them means to *talk with them* (Bakhtin, 1984, pp.67-68, emphasis in original).[26]

Such perspective makes it so that "Instead of the absolute, we find a multiplicity of points of view: the characters' and the author's (...) and they know no privilege or

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[24] For reference, see footnote 18.
[25] For reference, see footnote 18.
[26] For reference, see footnote 18.

hierarchy" (Todorov, 2010, p.XXI).[27] In this regard, it is possible to assert that such consciousnesses, in Dostoevsky's works, are placed in dialogic interaction, in such a way that their ideas become precisely the object of artistic representation, revealing themselves "(...) not at the level of a system (philosophical or scientific), but on the level of a human *event,*" in which dialogism emerges "as a special form of interaction among autonomous and equally signifying consciousnesses" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.284; emphasis in original).[28]

Thus, the hero is incorporated to the plot as a personified being, localized in life, wearing the "concrete and impenetrable garb of his class or social station, his family position, his age, his life and biographical goals" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.104), which leads Tezza (2003, p.183) to conceive the "polyphony as a complex structure whose heroes (each the bearer of a defined point of view, rooted in a concrete situation in life, autonomous and unfinished on the narrator's eyes) live in an everlasting present."[29]

Such aspect, that is, construction of characters as points of view, could be defined as another feature of polyphonic novels. In Dostoevsky's novels, each hero is portrayed in the plot in opposition to other heroes and also to the author as an indivisible whole, and not as a form that may be dismembered step-by-step or thesis-by-thesis. This way, the characters are presented as specific points of view regarding the world and themselves, that is, as valorized positions regarding themselves and the surrounding reality. Thus, the idea is to represent in the novel what the world is like for the characters and what they are for themselves – the character's point of view on himself and the world.

In his novels, Dostoevsky conciliates, thus, "*different voices singing variously on a single theme*" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.42; emphasis in original).[30] These are positions that never lead to

> a *merging* of voices and truths in a single *impersonal* truth, as occurs in the monologic world. It is characteristic that in Dostoevsky's works there are absolutely no *separate* thoughts, propositions or formulations

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[27] In Portuguese: "No lugar do absoluto encontramos uma multiplicidade de pontos de vista: os das personagens e o do autor (...) e eles não conhecem privilégios nem hierarquia."
[28] For reference, see footnote 18.
[29] In Portuguese: "polifonia como uma estrutura complexa cujos heróis (cada um portador de um ponto de vista definido, enraizado numa situação concreta na vida, autônomo e não finalizado com relação ao olhar do narrador) vivem num perpétuo presente."
[30] For reference, see footnote 18.

such as maxims, sayings, aphorisms which, when removed from their context and detached from their voice, would retain their semantic meaning in an impersonal form (Bakhtin, 1984, p.95; emphasis in original).[31]

Thus, for Dostoevsky, the truth can only constitute the object of an active vision, being directly associated to a certain character and not to a notion of abstract knowledge about the world. It distances the Dostoevskian universe from the monologic universe, in which what matters is that a true idea is expressed, independently of who expresses it and in which circumstances. In the monologic novel, ideas are no one's, and the hero emerges as a mere agent of these ideas: there are true ideas that tend to an impersonal monologic-systemic context.

For Dostoevsky, there are no nobody's ideas, as each idea represents the man as a whole, who reaches his own truth only through dialogue, be it with himself or with other characters comprised in the novel. Therefore, the search and the founding of the truth happen via the interaction of equally valid consciousnesses, which may be understood as another feature of a polyphonic novel: the construction of characters as equally valid voices placed in dialogue. In that regard, it is possible to understand that the character is not able to become an "I" for himself without the other, having to find himself in the other and find the other in himself, as the awareness of oneself may only occur through the other, that is, through interactions with another consciousness. The "I" can comprehend itself only with the help from the other and the acknowledgement of this "I" by the other (Pires; Tamanini-Adames, 2010).

Thus, in polyphonic novels, the own existence of the idea and, therefore, of the truth depends on the other, because

> The idea *lives* not in one person's *isolated* individual consciousness – if it remains there only, it degenerates and dies. The idea begins to live, that is, to take shape, to develop, to find and renew its verbal expression, to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of *others*. Human thought becomes genuine thought, that is, an idea, only under conditions of living contact with another and alien thought, a thought embodied in someone else's voice, that is, in someone else's consciousness expressed in discourse. At that point of contact between voice-

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[31] For reference, see footnote 18.

consciousnesses the idea is born and lives. (...) The idea is a *live event*, played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousnesses (Bakhtin, 1984, pp.87-88; emphasis in original).[32]

From that, we are able to understand the importance of polyphonic novels settling in a same level in which different voices intertwine, as it is the existence of such a common level that allows for such voices to be placed in dialogue, situating them in a contrastive relation. There are, thus, worldviews that are personified in voices and placed in dialogue, in a way that all central characters in polyphonic novels hear "(...) everything that is said by others about them, and respond to everything (nothing is said about them secondhand or behind closed doors). And the author is only a participant in this dialogue (and its organizer)" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.297).[33] Therefore, in the universe created by Dostoevsky, there is no common denominator or a dominant discourse that determines the narrative's style and tone, so that the object of representation in this universe consists of different conscientious "I's" that judge the world based on their own point of view.

1.3 From Singularity to Polyphony: Some Possible Relations

Based on the conceptualizations formulated in the previous sub-items, we move on now to explore some of the connections detected between the notions of singularity and polyphony. In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin (1999)[34] proposes and discusses the concept of singularity, explaining that both the subject and the context in which the former is are unique and singular. Thus, as it is a singular conjuncture, it would not be possible to establish a universal value judgment *a priori*, which is valid to all and, consequently, a unique truth on the events. Similarly, in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin (1984)[35] explains that Dostoevsky places different perspectives on the same topic in dialogue, presenting a multiplicity of points of view and questioning the notion of truth as something universal and impersonal, which may part from the character, neither merging these voices nor subduing them to the author's positioning. As Todorov

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[32] For reference, see footnote 18.
[33] For reference, see footnote 18.
[34] For reference, see footnote 2.
[35] For reference, see footnote 18.

points out (2010, p.XIX), Dostoevsky attributes to the characters the same weight he attributes to the author, which entails important consequences to the novel "as no more is there, on the one hand, the (author's) absolute truth and, on the other, the character's singularity; there are only singular positions, and no place for the absolute,"[36] i.e., there are only *pravdas*, adopted by each character, and not an absolute *istina* that hovers over the narrative.

Thus, Dostoevsky does not conclude or closes the characters in his novels. For this closing to take place, it would be necessary to take an abstract-monologic perspective, that is, a perspective that considers the existence of a single truth, independent of context and character to which such truth regards. That seems to be the reason why, in polyphonic novels, there are no destitute ideas of characters: the idea in this type of novel is represented via the characters that embrace a certain point of view, personifying it, always based on the concrete context in which they find themselves.

We can state, then, that differently from a theoretical world that remains identical and the same as itself, regardless of the involved subjects' singularity, therefore incapable to apprehend the act in its totality, the world in a polyphonic novel establishes a scenario where the author is not indifferent to the character's singularity, being affected by it via dialogue. Thus, in Dostoevsky's work, the author talks to the character as someone who is present, that is able to answer and, consequently, affect the constitution of the author himself and other characters – ergo, the character is not treated as an object, which can be seen from outside and concluded, but as another being, who has his own worldview.

In that regard, it is worth observing, also, as Bakhtin (1999)[37] in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* states, that only through the optics of the one who acts is it possible to comprehend the act in its totality. Thus, who watches from the outside is not capable to comprehend. It is necessary, then, as it is not possible to explain someone's act without it happening through a mere abstract and content-oriented optic, to establish a dialogue with this someone, treating them as a "you," which is what the author seems to do in Dostoevsky's novels when he dialogues with the characters.

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[36] In Portuguese: "(...) pois já não há, de um lado, a verdade absoluta (do autor) e, de outro, a singularidade da personagem; existem apenas posições singulares, e nenhum lugar para o absoluto."
[37] For reference, see footnote 2.

As Emerson (1997, p.154)[38] mentions "If there existed a single unitary standard by which all acts could be judged, it would be easy to chart the moral (or immoral) life. But since there is no such single standard, every individual consciousness must (...) seek out and defend the truth as he or she sees it." Thus, by letting the characters speak for themselves and express their points of view, Dostoevsky gives room for the act to be contemplated from the perspective of the one who acts, placing everything in the character's own singular field of vision. For Dostoevsky, there is, thus, no duality between a private idea and the idea's single, concrete system, as there are no "separate thoughts, assertions, propositions that can by themselves be true or untrue, depending on their relationship to the subject and independent of the carrier to whom they belong" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.93). [39] Therefore, in a polyphonic novel, it is not a matter of representing integrating ideas from a logical system, which constitute abstractly universal moments of the act and life, but of situating them on the level of a human event.

As it is not indifferent to such singularity, the Dostoevskian novel promotes a dialogue between the hero and the author and other characters, as this singularity is – as Bakhtin (1999)[40] proposes in his initial work – given, but also constructed based on the interaction with the other. Thus, Dostoevsky places on a same level different characters talking among themselves, so that each, through this dialogue that is constitutive of the being, reaches his own truth. That is in accordance with the fact that the "I-for-myself" is constituted based on the "I-for-the-other," there not being a singularity entirely given *a priori* and, consequently, a character that becomes an "I" for himself without interacting with the other.

With that in mind, it is also worth highlighting that each subject's singularity and, consequently, truth are established in contact with and in contrast to other subjects. Bakhtin (1999)[41] names such contrast "architectonic." We may think this architectonic of the actual world presented in Bakhtin's (1999)[42] first work, in which the "I" and the other constitute two centers of values that intertwine, as represented in the Dostoevskian novel,

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[38] EMERSON, C. *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
[39] For reference, see footnote 18.
[40] For reference, see footnote 2.
[41] For reference, see footnote 2.
[42] For reference, see footnote 2.

in which a contrast of voices with the same value founds a polyphonic architectonic that is in the narrative's basis.

In that regard, what Dostoevsky focuses on in his novels is the characters' self-consciousness, in order to demonstrate the process of awareness as seen from the *inside*, that is, from the own character's perspective. Such focus may be approximated to Bakhtin's (1999)[43] understanding, stated in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, that only the act considered from the inside, that is, from the reality of the one living it, may determine what is valid for each subject, overcoming the split between process and product.

We understand, thus, that the inconclusiveness of polyphonic novels finds support precisely on self-awareness, which is constructed in dialogue, as – "from the perspective of the created character who is undergoing the particular pleasure or torment in question – events are of course experienced as partial, unshaped, cognitively open" (Emerson, 1997, p.136).[44] That is, from the perspective of the one who lives it, life is a succession of uninterrupted acts, which could only be concluded by some non-participant person in this dialogue, which does not occur in Dostoevsky's work, where the author is not someone above, but in the same level as the character.

Therefore, we believe that the notion of singularity may be used to understand the concept of polyphony, as there are, as we tried to demonstrate in this paper, aspects that are similar in these two formulations proposed by Bakhtin. This interpretation is also supported by Tezza (2003, p.182), when he defines polyphony as "a worldview recreated by Bakhtin based on Dostoevsky's universe and a direct consequence of it, strongly influenced by the Bakhtinian philosophical project from the 1920's,"[45] that is, from the project presented in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*.

In accordance with Emerson's understanding, which comprehended "(...) Bakhtin as a thinker who used literature to illustrate his philosophical principles" (Emerson, 1997, p.120),[46] we are able to think polyphony as a concept that, beyond its application in literature studies, may act as a notion to help understand human life, which is an ever-present aspect in all the Circle's production. This positioning is in accordance with other

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[43] For reference, see footnote 2.
[44] For reference, see footnote 38.
[45] In Portuguese: "uma visão de mundo recriada por Bakhtin a partir do universo de Dostoiévski e diretamente decorrente dele, fortemente influenciada pelo projeto filosófico bakhtiniano dos anos 20."
[46] For reference, see footnote 38.

investigations concerning the Bakhtinian theory, as is the case of such studies as Clark and Holquist (1998), Lopes (2011) and Oliveira (2011), which understand the concept of polyphony as strong to serve as foundation for reflections that surpass the literary creation field.

Final Considerations

Based on the considerations exposed in this paper, it seems possible to approximate the concepts of singularity and polyphony proposed by Bakhtin. While singularity elucidates in which way the truth is apprehended by the subject, whose own singularity is given, but also constructed in interaction with the others, assigning them a unique point of view in the world, polyphony establishes equally valid voices and places different points of view on a same event in dialogue, so that the character reaches his own truth, which only occurs in interaction with other characters. It seems valid to establish a correlation between the concepts of singularity and polyphony, as we perceive the polyphonic novel's artistic construction as enabled by an acknowledgement of each subject's singularity and, consequently, isonomy regarding the truth. Thus, the dialogical focus in Dostoevsky's novels may be comprehended as based on the acknowledgment of another consciousness's existence, with as much value, that occurs based on the dialogue with a "you," in which it is talked to, and not about a "him" that is objectified, regarding which it is possible to establish a unique and conclusive point of view from the outside. A reciprocity relation is therefore established between the I's and the other's truth.

Such reading and association possibilities for these concepts are in accordance with the perspective that *Toward the Philosophy of the Act*, work that launches the notion of singularity, acts as a philosophical reflection project that allows us to understand later propositions by the Bakhtin Circle as a group of thinkers and also by Bakhtin himself after this group's dissolution. In this paper, we established a correlation between singularity and the concept of polyphony, proposed by Bakhtin in as early as the 1920's and picked back up in his later work; however, we believe this same correlation may also be established, even if in different levels and distinct ways, with other concepts from discourse's dialogical theory, such as utterance, dialogism and otherness.

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Reviews

Review I

This article clearly states the intention of relating the idea of singularity, coming from Bakhtin's Philosophy of the act, with the concept of polyphony, coming from Dostoevsky's Poetics. My only observation is that the author takes the idea of singularity somewhat abstractly, almost without relating it to the act. This way, it would turn out that the act is "singular and unitary," just as the responsibility is "singular and unitary." Which means that the unique and objetive character of the act, of responsibility, etc., is integrated into a complexity, a totality that encompasses several instances: the actual occurrence of the act, "the concrete truth of the event, to which the actor sees, hears, lives, understands in the midst of the singular act of responsible behavior" (I quote directly from the page in Russian). Being is singular and unitary, so is the context of the act. It seems to me that it could be important to take it into account. ACCEPTED WITH SUGGESTIONS

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Review II

The text presents an excellent level for publication. I can only point out some aspects related to the title and in one paragraph, on page 4. This was the only point in the article

that I thought deserves reflection. In the base text there are 255 locations of the word 'world' and some with adjectives 'aesthetic world', 'world of theoretical cognition', 'psychic world', 'world of culture', 'real world' etc. This paragraph here in the text refers to a paragraph in Bakhtin's base text that has the footnote number 36. The original text, I quote here: "Any kind of practical orientation in my life is impossible within the theoretical world: it is impossible to live in it, impossible to carry out responsible actions. In this world I am unnecessary; I'm fundamentally non-existent in it." Your paragraph is a synthesis of it, but in Bakhtin we cannot fix on a single point, because it later reverses, transposes, opposes itself. So I highlight other paragraphs besides this one in which he asserts the validity of the theoretical world, at least its existence and implication in the historical subject. I only highlight this one right after the footnote number 65 (page 38 of the pdf): "My participative and demanding conscience can see that the world of modern philosophy, the theoretical and theorized world of culture, is in a certain sense real, that it has validity. But what my conscience can also see is that this world is not the only world in which I live in and which I responsibly perform my actions." So it is clear what the author of the article intends to assert; however, it is necessary to broaden the considerations so as not to reduce Bakhtin's ideas by stating that 'the theoretical world cannot offer any criteria for the subject's real life'. The paragraph only needs rewriting considering other aspects and not just one. ACCEPTED WITH RESTRICTIONS

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Final Remark

Considering the attached opinion, the article "From singularity to polyphony: a proposal for reading the Bakhtinian theory" is ACCEPTED with small restrictions/suggestions. We ask that you consider them, redo what you deem pertinent to meet the requests of the reviewers and then carefully read the guidelines, with the next steps for editing and publishing in Bakhtiniana. Journal of Discourse Studies. We await the original text and English language version until April 30, 2021.