

THE NOTION OF “CONTEXT” IN MIKHAIL BAKHTIN AND HIS CIRCLE

Sheila Vieira de Camargo GRILLO*

- **ABSTRACT:** The purpose of this paper is epistemological. We aim at analyzing the notion of context in theories by Bakhtin, Medviédev and Volóchinov. In order to demonstrate the present relevance of such purpose, we start by commenting on recent theorizations about context, developed in François Rastier’s interpretative semantics and in Teun van Dijk’s critical discourse analysis (CDA). The notion of context was discussed in Mikhail Bakhtin’s philosophical works, in Bakhtin, Medviédev and Volóchinov’s sociological method, as well as in Bakhtin’s theory of the novel and metalinguistics. In all these stages, the findings pointed to the centrality and complexity of the notion of context in the theory of language elaborated in the Bakhtin Circle texts, which present three main dimensions: the ethical-valuative context, the extraverbal context and the verbal context.
- **KEYWORDS:** Ethical-valuative context; Extraverbal context; Verbal context; Bakhtin Circle.

Present time and the epistemological relevance of the theme

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the presence and the role of the notion of context in Mikhail Bakhtin’s philosophical texts of the first half of the 1920s, in the sociological method developed by Mikhail Bakhtin, Pável Medviédev and Valentin Volóchinov in the second half of the 1920s, and in Bakhtin’s theory of the novel and metalinguistics, developed from 1930 to 1963. We start from recent theorizations about context by two eminent linguists of text and discourse: François Rastier’s interpretative semantics (1998, 2001, 2022) and Teun van Dijk’s (2012[2007]) critical discourse analysis – CDA –. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is epistemological, as it examines the organization and the functioning of the theories in question by analyzing one of their central notions.

The choice of these two theorists is due to the facts that: context constitutes their approaches to the text (Rastier) and to the text/discourse (Van Dijk); the authors developed explicit and broad reflections on the notion of context; finally, the theorizations have been elaborated in the scope of linguistics or language studies, areas of interest and field of work of the author of this article. By starting from texts by contemporary

* Universidade de São Paulo (USP). São Paulo — SP — Brasil. sheilagrillo@usp.br. ORCID: 0000-0003-0480-2660.

linguists, we intend to show the relevance, in the present time, of the notion of context to language studies. This also enables a better evaluation, by comparison, of contributions and specificities of the philosophical writings, of the sociological method, of the theory of the novel and of metalinguistics by Bakhtin and his Circle.

Let us begin with the French linguist. For François Rastier¹ (1998), the theorization about context reveals aspects of ongoing epistemological change in language sciences, with its increasing use, especially in semantics and pragmatics.

Rastier demonstrates that the contemporary uses of the notion of context are ambiguous. On one hand, it is described in relation to the situation in which the utterance occurs. On the other hand, in cognitive semantics, it is interiorized in the form of scenes and, therefore, it remains extralinguistic. In accordance with this second use, Vandendorpe (1991) defines context “not as an equivalent to the referent or to the objective reality, which would oppose to the verbal, but as a mental reality determined by the thinking activity of a subject placed on a situation of producing or receiving a message”² (Vandendorpe, 1991, p.2); linguistic data are means to activate context in readers’ spirit, by helping them to instantiate adequate schemes of thought.³

According to Rastier (1998, 2001, 2022), context still enables the opposition of two major problematics or traditions in language studies: 1) The logical-grammatical tradition (Rastier, 1998, 2022) is centered on the sign, taken as a type which is deformed by its occurrences. From such approach, the good context puts an end to ambiguities, enabling the relation of occurrences to the adequate type. Therefore, it re-establishes the transparency of a literal meaning. The analysis of the discrete elements (phonemes, morphemes, semes)⁴ is oriented by the principle of compositionality, i.e., the wholeness or the global of the meaning is formed by the sum of its discrete elements or of the space. The logical-grammatical problematics try to decontextualize its object in order to make language objective.

¹ According to Rastier, Bakhtin’s dialogism takes up the work of the early Romantics (especially Schleiermacher) and, despite the Marxist ‘coloring’, is situated, in the tradition of subjective idealism.

² « non pas comme un équivalent du référent ou du réel objectif, qui s’opposerait au verbal, mais comme une réalité mentale déterminée par l’activité pensante d’un sujet placé en situation de production ou de réception d’un message. » In Portuguese: “não como um equivalente do referente ou do real objetivo, que se oporia ao verbal, mas como uma realidade mental determinada pela atividade pensante de um sujeito colocada em situação de produção ou de recepção de uma mensagem”.

³ Representatives of cognitivism, Sperber & Wilson (1995[1986]), oriented by a conception that the basic function of language is processing and storing information, assert that information is accompanied by warranted relevance, and that communication involves the manifestation and the acknowledgment of the speaker’s intentions. Context is a psychological construct, i.e., assumptions about the world with some internal organization (frames, scripts, prototypes etc.), constituted by stereotyped expectations and convictions about events and objects often encountered. Contextual implications arising from some relevant information result from the interaction of old (representations of the world already constituted by an individual and formed by encyclopedic entries) and new information.

⁴ Discreteness, considered an epistemological category of the “primitive”, hence, nondefinable, in structural linguistics, is one of the fundamental properties of language that allows its segmentation in distinct units, with no continuity – part of a system with a finite number of other elements. (Dubois, 1998[1973]). In Portuguese: “Considerada como uma categoria epistemológica dos “primitivos”, portanto, não definível, na linguística estrutural, a discrição é uma das propriedades fundamentais da linguagem que permite a sua segmentação em unidades descontinuas e distintas umas das outras e que fazem parte de um sistema cujos outros elementos são em número limitado” (Dubois, 1998[1973]).

2) The rhetorical-hermeneutical tradition (Rastier, 1998 and 2022) conceives the text as a fundamental linguistic unit, according to a philosophy of action or praxeology (Rastier, 1998, 2022). This philosophy considers language as a system which is “continuously modified by use, and it is practiced in historical dynamics”⁵ (Rastier, 2022, p. 168); in other words, it is a system which is based on the opposition occurrence-source and resumption, and not type-occurrence. Such problematics deal with the continuous, according to the hermeneutical principle that the global determines and shapes the space⁶ (a pass or a discrete unit). Accordingly, recontextualizing language entails restoring intersubjectivity – by differentiating the situation of interpretation and that of utterance, each one with its own referential universe, assumptions and responsibilities – and history, present in the form of contemporary and past intertextuality, i.e., context is not only here and now. It goes beyond the situation. The concept of genre enables the connection between context (or linguistic context) and situation, as it is a text-organizing principle and a semiotic mode of the ongoing practice. Furthermore, all texts are interpreted inside a *corpus* formed firstly by texts that belong to the same genre. Rastier (1998) states that texts are fundamental linguistic units, whose analysis orients the access to lower units and whose high unit is the *corpus*.

In the famous book *Discourse and Context: a sociocognitive approach*, linguist Teun Van Dijk (2008) presents an extensive bibliographic review of the notion of context in human sciences. Like Rastier, Van Dijk also understands that the discussion on context provokes an epistemological change in studies of language and discourse: “contextualism in many disciplines implies that phenomena must always be studied in relation to a situation or environment” (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 11), which contrasts with “context-free, abstract, structuralist, formalist, autonomous” (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 11) theories of language phenomena. According to Van Dijk, after the Second World War, formalist, structuralist or autonomous theories dominated the scientific sphere of linguistics and of human sciences. The author also states that “it was only in the 1970s and 1980s that new (sub) disciplines and approaches, such as the ethnography of speaking, pragmatics, sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis, began to emphasize the importance of an integrated ‘text-in-context’ approach to language use, verbal interaction and communicative events” (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 217).

Van Dijk (2008, p. 16) states that his sociocognitive approach, as the name indicates, has a cognitive basis (subjective *interpretations*).⁷ He also affirms that “contexts are socially based [...] (knowledge, attitudes, ideologies, grammar, rules, norms and values)” (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 17), all of which are shared by a discourse community,

⁵ « un système sans cesse modifié par son usage et travaillé par des dynamiques historiques ». In Portuguese: “incessantemente modificado pelo uso e trabalhado por dinâmicas históricas”.

⁶ « no seulement la compréhension du tout est conditionnée par celle du détail, mais encore inversement la compréhension du détail est déterminée par la compréhension du tout » (1987 [1809-1810], p. 77). Considered the father of modern hermeneutics, Schleiermacher (1998), conciliating the principle of compositionality and the global, asserts: “each particular can be understood via the general, of which it is part, and vice versa” (Schleiermacher, 1998, p. 24).

⁷ The concept of “representation” names the original mode of the presence of an object which is external to the human spirit, that is, a physical external object is “presented again” (re-presented), in a different manner.

in order to propose that mental models of contexts control discourse production and interpretation. In other words, “contexts are not some kind of objective social situation, but rather a socially based but subjective construct of participants about the for-them-relevant properties of such a situation, that is, a mental model” (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 56).⁸ Van Dijk (2008) points out that such mental models are flexible and speakers constantly negotiate their interpretation of relevant aspects of the communicative situation. The relation among the mental dynamic models of context and discourse structures is one that *controls* possible variations of language, text and knowledge.

In light of the thesis on the mental model theory, Van Dijk affirms that, besides “a representation of the meaning of a text”, it is crucial that language users “*also* construct mental models of the events texts are *about*, i.e., the situation they denote or refer to” (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 58). Context models feature a central device, the K-device, for joint action. It regulates the (non)expression of knowledge in discourse by taking as input the current knowledge of the speaker, and calculating how much is shared by recipients. Therefore, “shared knowledge need not be expressed” (Van Dijk, 2008, 2008, p. 87). One last essential aspect of Van Dijk’s theory, for this paper, is his view that, although speech genres prefer certain grammatical and discursive characteristics at several levels, they are more particular in contextual features than textual ones. Hence, an explicit theory of context is important for the concept of speech genres.

1. Context in Mikhail Bakhtin’s philosophical anthropology and aesthetics in the 1920s

Considered by Bakhtin (2003, p. 351) as his “philosophical anthropology”⁹ [философская антропология] or his “moral philosophy”¹⁰ [нравственная философия] (Bakhtin, 2003, p. 354), *Towards a philosophy of the act*, written between 1918 and 1924, according to the editors, results from a greater project, of which such text would be the first part, about the following theme: “the architectonic of the actual world of the performed act” [архитектоника действительного мира поступка] (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 54).

One of the editors, Liudmila Gogotichvíli,¹¹ about the main themes of *Towards a philosophy of the act*, points out that the Bakhtinian challenges, difficult at that time, were to overcome the rupture between culture and life, on one hand, and the problem of theoreticism, on the other. Such challenges resulted in the following elaboration: “Outside the individual volitional act in life’s concrete actuality, the realm of meanings

⁸ In the sphere of a semiotics of interpretation that aggregate cultural sciences, Bouquet (2002) discusses a **situated cognition**, that is, a cognition situated in a cultural framework.

⁹ In Portuguese: “antropologia filosófica”.

¹⁰ In Portuguese: “filosofia moral”.

¹¹ Translator’s note: The publication in English (Bakhtin, 1993) was edited by Vadim Liapunov and Michael Holquist.

and the eternity of values (culture as a whole) and ‘life’ do not have the chance to get in contact” (Gogotichvili, 2003, p. 389).¹² The Bakhtinian proposal of *Towards a philosophy of the act* has, in “the individual volitional act in life’s concrete actuality”, a philosophical orientation to comprehend human life in its concrete deeds, including, as we see it, verbal and non-verbal utterances, of which context – whether ethical (I–the Other relation), situational (addressees, here, now etc.), broad ideological purview (other works, ideologies, culture) – is an integral, constitutive and inalienable part.

In *Towards a philosophy of the act*, Bakhtin defends that “content/sense abstracted from the act” [отвлечённое от акта-поступка смысловое содержание] (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 8) or “the eternity of meaning” [вневременная значимость] is only one of the aspects that enrich the real historicity of the “concrete actuality” [бытия-события] (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 59), of the activity of existence, of the participating thought. Next, he asserts that only the responsible act, which knows a “unique outside-situated place” [единный контекст] (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 67), can be the basis of his primary philosophy. As we see it, the Bakhtinian “philosophical anthropology” – without denying abstract, out-of-context, recurrent meanings – includes the historical, real context at the core of the discussion. It also includes the unique place in Being with his singular individual truth, which has consequences for all later language theorization.

At the end of this text, the word “context” [контекст] is repeated. Initially, the term is accompanied by the adjective “axiological” or “value-governed” [ценностный] (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 87); then by the Russian adjective “событийный” derived from the noun “событие” (occurrence, event), which does not have an equivalent word in Portuguese. It could be translated as “of the act or of the deed”; finally, the combination of the two adjectives in the expression “ценностно-событийный контекст” means context of the “axiological, value-governed, valued-related” (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 87). Through such expressions, Bakhtin develops the idea that the unique place in Being is affirmed in the historical existence of humankind, i.e., the values of the singular and concrete existence of human beings are connected to those of historical humanity. Moreover, the immediate spatial and temporal context is not dissociated from the broad, historical, social context, and the singularity of each human being does not deny his connection with humanity’s historical and social values.

To finish this discussion on *Toward a philosophy of the act*, oriented by the concept of “context”, we quote the analysis by Liudmila Gogotichvili (2003, p. 412). The author notes that the reflection on language is not the central issue in the text, but she considers that: 1) the central theme, “Being-as-event” [событие бытия] (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 100) corresponds, in the linguistic context, to discursive communication [речевое общение]; 2) the act [поступок] corresponds to the utterance [высказывание]; 3) the “emotional-volitional tone” [эмоционально-волевой тон] (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 83) is strengthened

¹² Вне индивидуально-волевого поступка в конкретном событии бытия царство смыслов и вечных ценности (культура в целом) и «жизнь» не имеют шансов соприкоснуться. In Portuguese: “Fora do ato volitivo individual no acontecimento concreto da vida, o reino dos sentidos e dos valores eternos (a cultura no todo) e a ‘vida’ não têm chance de entrar em contato”.

in the concept of intonation [интонация], which overcomes the dualism between the given and the yet-to-be-determined: “the word does not merely designate an object as a present-on-hand entity, but also expresses by its intonation, my valuative attitude toward it; the desirable and the undesirable in it, and the object is set in motion toward that which is yet-to-be-determined”¹³ (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 32-33); and 4) the forms of double-voiced discourse [формы двуголового слова] reflect the architectonics of the world of the performed act or of the concrete actuality as valuative contraposition of I and the Other.

Next, we comment on the essay “The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Verbal Act”,¹⁴ written in 1924, but edited and firstly published in 1975 by Kójinov, and then republished in the collected essays in 2003. The essay was chosen because Bakhtin established a dialogue with Russian formalism, which was famous, especially in its first phase, to prioritize linguistic form as the essence of literary art, to the detriment of its social, historical and ideological context.

In such essay, Bakhtin sets forth the central objective of analyzing the main concepts and problems of poetics, “on the basis of general systematic aesthetics” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 372). The first aspect referring to the concept of context is a criticism of the isolation of art, especially verbal or literary art – within the unity – or of other fields (ethical, cognitive, religious) of human culture. According to Bakhtin, such isolation occurred in poetics through attachment to linguistics. Next, Bakhtin criticizes the attempt to comprehend the aesthetic object, based on its material (colors, marble, word, sound etc.). He states that the essence of the aesthetic object is the activity of the artist-author-creator and of the spectator towards the artistic work, i.e., the addresser and the addressee are constitutive parts of the aesthetic object.

Another essential discussion is the premise that aesthetic objects live on the boundaries of several cultural fields: ethical, cognitive (scientific), political, religious. Accordingly, Bakhtin states that “we can speak about the concrete systematicness of every cultural phenomenon, [...]” (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 392),¹⁵ i.e., phenomena occupy an essential position in relation to the preexisting reality of other cultural attitudes. Hence, the context of an artistic work includes its relation to previous works, which form its broader historical context.

¹³ Живое слово не только обозначает предмет как некоторую наличность, но своей интонацией выражает и мое ценностное отношение к нему, желательное и нежелательное в нём и этим приводит предмет в движение по направлению к заданности.

¹⁴ In English, the text “The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Verbal Act” is published in **Art and Answerability**, listed in the references at the end of this article. In Brazil, this text was translated and published in the collection *Questões de literatura e estética (A Teoria do Romance* in 1988 from the Russian edition of 1975. The first part of the title “Questões de metodologia estética da criação verbal” did not have this translation, and we found it in the volume I of “M. M. Bakhtin. Obras reunidas” (2003), which is accompanied by a short introduction to the article, approximately one page. Next, the name, famous in Brazil, appears: “O problema da forma, do conteúdo e do material na criação artística verbal”.

¹⁵ Каждое явление культуры конкретно-систематично, т. е. занимает какую-то существенную им действительности позицию по отношению к преобладающей им других культурных установок (...)

The very term “context” appears in “III. The Problem of Material” [III. Проблема Материала].¹⁶ Bakhtin, approaching the word as the material of literature, addresses the object of linguistics – language [язык] – and proposes the concept of utterance [высказывание]:

Linguistics is a science only to the extent that it masters its object, language. The language of linguistics is determined by purely linguistic thinking. A single, concrete utterance is always given in a value-and-meaning cultural context, whether it be scientific, artistic, political, etc., or in the context of a situation from everyday personal life. Each separate utterance is alive and has meaning only within these contexts: it is true or false, beautiful or ugly, sincere or deceitful, frank, cynical, authoritative, etc. – there are no neutral utterances, nor can there be. But linguistics sees in them only a *phenomenon of language*, and it *relates them only to the unity of language*, and not at all to the unity of a concept, of practical life, of history, of the character of a person, etc. (Bakhtin, 1990, p. 412, emphasis added).¹⁷

Used three times, “context” is understood as inalienable in relation to the concept of “utterance”. It encompasses the spheres of culture and life, in which utterance assumes an axiological and semantic position. As far as we know, this is the passage in which the concept of utterance – developed in the sociological method by Mikhail Bakhtin, Pável Medviédev and Valentin Volóchinov, in the second half of the 1920s, and in the metalinguistics proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin in the 1950s – acquires its first explicit outlines, in contrast to linguistics of the time: opposition between language, as the object of linguistics, and utterance will correspond to the difference between linguistics and the sociological/metalinguistic method. The distinction between the cultural-axiological-semantic context and the personal, every day, unique situation will correspond to the difference between ideological spheres with their secondary genres and the daily ideology with their primary genres. The opposition between the neutrality of language and the non-neutrality of utterance will be expanded in the opposition between neutral word and ideological sign, in the valued character of dialogical relations that occur in and among utterances.

¹⁶ In English, it is published in “The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Verbal Act” (Bakhtin, 1990).

¹⁷ Лингвистика является наукой, лишь поскольку она овладевает своим предметом - языком. Язык лингвистики определяется чисто лингвистическим мышлением. Единичное конкретное высказывание всегда дано в ценностно-смысловом культурном контексте - в научном, в художественном, политическом и ином, или в контексте единичной лично-жизненной ситуации; только в этих контекстах отдельное высказывание живо и осмысленно: оно истинно или ложно, красиво или безобразно, искренне или лукаво, откровенно, цинично, авторитетно и пр.: нейтральных высказываний нет и быть не может; но лингвистика видит в них лишь *явление языка, относит их лишь к единству языка*, но отнюдь не к единству познания, жизненной практики, истории, характера лица и. т. п.

2. Context in Bakhtin/Medviédev/Volóchinov's sociological method

In this section, we analyze the notion of context in articles and books written by Mikhail Bakhtin, Pável Medviédev and Valentin Volóchinov, during the time when they became members of or close to the Institute for the Comparative History of the Literatures and Languages of the West and East (ILIAZV) in Leningrad, from 1925 to 1930 (Grillo; Américo, 2019). Our bibliographical investigation follows the chronology of the publication of the texts and include the articles with the most elaborated formulations of the notion of context, by Valentin Volóchinov, in “Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry” (Volóchinov, 1983a), as well as in more comprehensive texts by the three scholars: *The formal method in literary scholarship: a critical introduction to sociological poetics*, by Pável Medviédev and Bakhtin (1991),¹⁸ *Marxism and the philosophy of language*, by Valentin Volóchinov (1973) and *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* by Mikhail Bakhtin (1999).

The general purpose of “Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry” (Volóchinov, 1983a) is to demonstrate that the sociological method can overcome the rupture between form and content, theory and history, theoretical poetics (which deals with form, theme and poetic styles) and sociological poetics (which addresses the influence of the social, non-artistic environment on literary forms).¹⁹ Literary art is one of the fields of ideological creation (next to legal, cognitive etc.): a “*particular form of social interaction which is realized and fixed in the material of the artistic work*” (Volóchinov, 1983a, p. 9). From such perspective, Volóchinov establishes the specific objective to “understand the form of the poetic utterance as a form of this special aesthetic interaction realized in the material of discourse” (Volóchinov, 1983a, p. 9-10).

In order to achieve such goal, the author addresses verbal utterance in everyday discourse, in which the foundations of literary form are. The relation between utterance and the surrounding social milieu is clearer and more precise. By analyzing an utterance with a single word, which is almost void of meaning, “well” (Volóchinov, 1983a, p. 11), the author demonstrates that it only makes sense when we know the extraverbal situation or context:

- 1) the understanding of the utterance involves a social evaluation (it is true, it is untrue, etc.), which merges the verbal part with the extraverbal context of the utterance into an indivisible unity;
- 2) the extraverbal context is comprised by “a *spatial purview* common to the speakers”, their “*common evaluation* of these circumstances” (Volóchinov, 1983a, p. 11);

¹⁸ T.N. In English this book is authored by Medviédev and Bakhtin (listed in the references at the end of this article).

¹⁹ In this text, Volóchinov, by criticizing the formal method for reducing form to material organization and for proposing that the artistic object corresponds to the interrelation between creator and contemplators, fixed in the artistic form, gets close to Bakhtin's 1924 essay, analyzed herein in the previous section. This shows the close theoretical connection among the members of the Circle in the 1920s.

- 3) the verbal utterance is not a mere reflection of the extraverbal situation, but an evaluated conclusion of such situation, i.e., a continuance and a development thereof: “the situation enters into the utterance as an essential constituent part of its sense/structure” (Volóchinov, 1983a, p. 12);
- 4) the evaluations are mainly socially objective, i.e., they comprise “*the material unity of the world* which enters the purview of the speakers”, i.e., objects and events of the immediate social milieu, and “*the unity of active real-life conditions* which give rise to *the community of evaluations*” (Volóchinov, 1983a, p. 12);
- 5) individual emotions are supported by social evaluation. In other words, individual emotions “can only accompany *the fundamental tone of the social evaluation* as *overtones*” (Volóchinov, 1983a, p. 12);
- 6) social evaluations determine the verbal form of the utterance and are expressed in intonation, which is “between discourse and the nonverbal context” (Volóchinov, 1983a, p. 13);
- 7) The utterance reflects “*the social interaction of three components: the speaker – (author) the listener (reader) and the one of whom (or of which) they speak (hero)*”, (exterior world and others), as “the product and fixation in verbal material” (Volóchinov, 1983a, p. 17-18) of the word. In everyday utterance, agreement or disagreement, presupposed by the speaker in relation to the listener, determines style and intonation.

From such elements of everyday utterance, Bakhtin states that poetic utterance relates to unsaid everyday contexts and to social evaluations, which organize literary form as its expression. The listener and the hero (also called the object of the utterance) participate in the creative process, when they take an active position in relation to the content by means of form, which is its evaluation. In the sociological poetics proposed by Volóchinov (1983a), form should be studied, on one hand, as an ideological evaluation of content and, on the other, as technical realization of such evaluation in the material (word, sound, colors). The word in the artistic utterance comes to life in the process of social communication.

By comparing everyday utterance to literary utterance, Volóchinov concludes that

We have analyzed all the elements which determine the form of the artistic utterance, as follows: 1) the hierarchical value of the hero or the event which is the content of the utterance; 2) the degree of intimacy between the author and the hero; 3) the listener and his interrelationship with the author on one hand, and with the hero on the other. All these elements are *points where the social forces of non-artistic reality are applied in poetry*. Precisely because of its *inner social* structure, artistic creation is *open on all sides to social influences from other areas of life* (Volóchinov, 1983a, p. 28).

By discussing Volóchinov's main arguments, we hope to have demonstrated that the extraverbal context is an integral element of the concept of the literary and non-literary utterance; it integrates utterance by means of what is perceived, understood and evaluated by the speaker, by the hero/event and by the listener; social evaluations connect the verbal part to the context of the utterance in the material of the word.

* * *

In *The formal method in literary scholarship*: a critical introduction to sociological poetics (1991), Pável Medviédev (as we have already observed in a text by Mikhail Bakhtin and in another one by Valentin Volóchinov) formulates his sociological poetics, dialoguing, especially, with the Russian formalists' first writings, produced between 1914 and 1919. As presented in the introduction of this paper, Van Dijk considers that formalist theories dominated the scientific sphere in human sciences after the Second World War. Medviédev and Bakhtin (1991) point out that the "homeland" of formalism is seventeenth-century France, but he focuses on nineteenth-century art formalists of Western Europe (who discussed the crisis of positivism and idealism) and on the 1910s, in Russia.

In the beginning, the author explains that the leading issue of the book is to overcome the rupture between the study of a phenomenon or ideological product (a work of art, a scientific paper, a religious ceremony, composed by their materials, forms and purposes) and the specificities of the fields of ideological creation. In other words, the question is: "How, within the unity of the artistic construction, is the direct material presence of the work, its here and now, to be joined with the endless perspectives of its ideological meanings?" (Medviédev; Bakhtin, 1991, p. 118).

The answer to this question is in accordance with the thesis that external social factors influence the internal nature of literature (story, style, composition etc.), and, therefore, become internal. Bearing such purpose in mind, we present the components of ideological phenomena: Firstly, "their genuine realization" takes place "in the processes of social intercourse" (Medviédev; Bakhtin, 1991, p. 7), i.e., they involve social relations between addresser and addressee; secondly, as signs, they are part of the social and material reality; thirdly, they comprise and are influenced by the environment or the general ideological purview of a certain time and a certain society, formed by a group of objects-signs (works of art, religious symbols etc.), which constitute the "social consciousness of a given collective" (Medviédev; Bakhtin, 1991, p. 14); fourthly, an ideological phenomenon is under the privileged influence of other phenomena or products, contemporary and past, of a certain ideological field: a literary work is part of the literary milieu, a scientific article is part of the scientific milieu etc.; finally, the relation between an ideological phenomenon, on one hand, and the environment or general ideological purview and the economic basis, on the other, is one of reflection and retraction, i.e., not totally autonomous nor completely submissive.

Such components show that the methodology of isolating the object of study from the sociological method – the ideological object – cannot separate it from the system of social interaction. Without such system, “a naked object will be left” (Medviédev; Bakhtin, 1991, p. 77).

This discussion leads to the proposition that the utterance is a social act, which is the indissoluble union between a particular material group (sound, pronunciation, visual) and a historical phenomenon, inseparable from the communication event. The context of the utterance, as a sociohistorical act, is composed by sociohistorical conditions and by the concrete situation, i.e., the broad ideological purview and immediate context. According to Medviédev and Bakhtin (1991), social evaluation, which joins the material presence of the word and its ideological meanings, determines the selection of linguistic resources and their combination in the utterance, or the choice and connection between content and form. Further in the book, the author identifies social evaluation as the axiological atmosphere and its valuative orientation in the ideological purview, i.e., understanding an utterance in the context of its contemporaneity and in the context of its contemporary readers. The words are chosen by the poet and other authors (scientist, publicist, journalist) due to social evaluations contained in them.

The last aspect analyzed by Medviédev and Bakhtin is the genre, defined as a “typical totality of the artistic utterance” (Medviédev; Bakhtin, 1991, p. 129), which is oriented, on one hand, towards its listeners and recipients and their modes of reception (silent reading, specific time and place, ideological sphere etc.), and, on the other hand, towards life and its thematic content – “each genre possesses definite principles of selection, definite forms for seeing and conceptualizing reality, and a definite scope and depth and penetration” (Medviédev; Bakhtin, 1991, p. 131).

In Medviédev’s work, the material part (verbal, sound, plastic etc.) and the extraverbal part or context are again united in the composition of the utterance, mediated by social evaluation. The sociohistorical context of the utterance or of any ideological phenomenon is formed by the immediate communicative situation, by the specific ideological field of the utterance (literary, artistic, scientific) and by the general ideological purview of a certain time and society (group of objects-signs – works of art, religious symbols, scientific statements etc. – which will constitute the social consciousness of a collective). The relation between utterance and context is one of reflection and refraction, i.e., the utterance is not totally autonomous nor completely “submissive” to context. Such understanding orients the methodology of isolating the research object from the sociological method: the ideological phenomena (works of art, scientific papers etc.) are sociohistorical; they cannot do without context.

* * *

In 1929, Bakhtin published the first version of his famous book about Fiódor Dostoevsky: *Problems of Dostoevsky’s poetics* (Bakhtin, 1999). In the foreword, the author proposed, from the methodological perspective, to overcome the separation

between an ideological analysis and a formal one, in order to find “the ideology that determined his [Dostoevsky’s] artistic form” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 276). Therefore, he explains his conviction that

[...] every literary work is internally and immanently sociological. Within it living social forces intersect; each element of its form is permeated with living social evaluations. For this reason a purely formal analysis must take each element of the artistic structure as a point of refraction of living social forces [...] (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 276).

There is great coherence among the texts of the Circle analyzed so far: artistic forms (the author’s object of study, but they could also be scientific, journalistic, religious etc.) cannot be understood without the social forces refracted in them. Both – artistic forms and social forces – are mediated by social evaluations. In the analysis of the polyphonic novel, Bakhtin argues that the ideological theses from Dostoevsky’s social, historical and ideological context are refracted in the content of the novel, and mediated by the “artistic architectonics of Dostoevsky’s works” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 9), also called form, artistic visualization or will, or the ideology that constitutes form.²⁰ Bakhtin states that such architectonics, form, artistic visualization or will, represents the world according to the criterion of the “*coexistence* and *interaction*” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 28), i.e., the spatial coexistence of contradictions, which differs from the time series criterion in development, as in the Hegelian dialectics. Such criterion is oriented by the dominant of the hero’s self-consciousness and by the interrelation of “selves” as structuring principles of Dostoevsky’s works. Finally, Bakhtin affirms that the “unfinalizability and dialogic openness” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 272) is the essence of Dostoevsky’s novels and the defining feature of human beings. Such principles lead to the following conclusions at the end of the last chapter:

The “man with man” dialogue analyzed by us is a highly interesting sociological document. An exceptionally keen sense of the other person as *another* and of one’s *I* as a naked *I* presupposes that all those definitions which clothe the *I* and the *other* in socially concrete flesh – family, social, and economic class definitions – and all variants on these definitions, have lost their authoritativeness and their form-shaping force. A person, as it were, senses himself in the world as a whole, without any intervening stages, apart from any social collective to which he might belong (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 280).

²⁰ Bakhtin observes that Vietchsláv Ivánov’s work did not show how Dostoevsky’s worldview became “the principle behind Dostoevsky’s *artistic* visualization of the world, the principle behind structuring of a *verbal* whole, the novel” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 11).

Bakhtin affirms that this artistic form occurs in the nineteenth-century Russian sociohistorical context, characterized by the contact among worlds and social groups that used to be isolated, and also by a process of acute social differentiation, separation and decay of groups that used to be “self-sufficient, organically sealed” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 19). Such context should reveal and clarify the very material, subject to a socioeconomic explanation. Bakhtin demonstrates a theoretical-methodological concern about not reducing the artistic work to a reflection of the extraverbal context. He is also concerned about analyzing the verbal material of the literary work as an artistic reconstruction of the socioeconomic environment oriented by the author’s artistic principles, such as those briefly presented above.

Another aspect of the context in this paper is the relation with the object of representation – the characters of the novel. Bakhtin opposes the verbs “to create” and “to invent” characters: “[...] to create does not mean to invent. Every creative act is bound by its own special laws, as well as by the laws of the material with which it works. Every creative act is determined by its object and by the structure of its object” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 65). The principles of representation, the authorial architectonics, are determined by the referent of the novel: the characters are created from life, whose features establish the author’s creation, i.e., the author is not totally free to create, but he does not simply perform a mere reflection of non-artistic beings.

In the last part of the book, in the analysis of Dostoevsky’s verbal style, which creates a point of intersection in the characters’ horizons, the extraverbal context regains several aspects of the literary work: the orientation of the authorial word toward its object; the author’s intention, which may or may not be directly expressed in the novel; the “specific rays of social evaluations” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 276), reflected and retracted in the author’s style; the anticipation of responses, evaluations and viewpoints of the addressee in the literary word; the authorial orientation towards the word of the other, whether in the same semantic direction or in distinct semantic directions, such as in parody (within the limits of the author’s intention), and in polemic (influencing the word of the author, externally). By defending that the orientation towards or in relation to the word of the other is one of the main characteristics in Dostoyevsky’s novels, Bakhtin affirms the social internal nature of language as a means of social communication in “*perpetuum mobile*” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 230). Accordingly, “the life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 202, emphasis added).

In *Problems of Dostoevsky’s poetics* (1999), Bakhtin aims to reveal the principles of Dostoevsky’s artistic architectonics or worldview. This ideology that orients the artistic form mediates the author’s sociohistorical context and the material construction of the work. On one hand, we cannot reduce the analysis of an artistic work to the reflection of its context. On the other hand, the author elaborates his artistic principles in light of an acute and original comprehension of his social, historical and ideological purview. In the previously analyzed works by Volóchinov

and Medviédev, social evaluation seems to occupy the mediating place that artistic architectonics occupy in Bakhtin's texts.

Finally, the analyses of utterances of other ideological spheres (scientific, religious journalistic etc.) may benefit from such conception in a comparative way, when, for example, one questions whether the scientific form of an article would be determined, in such a decisive manner by its author, as a literary work. Wouldn't social evaluations of the ideological sphere be more determinant in the scientific form of the article than the author's architectonics? Could we detect articles in which the author formally re-creates, in benefit of an original content?

* * *

In *Marxism and the philosophy of language* (1973), Volóchinov aims to (mentioning the interest in the word, propelled by the formalists) investigate the place of language in Marxist thought, oriented by the following central issues: the concrete reality of linguistic phenomena, the productive role and "the social nature of the utterance" (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 93), as well as the problem of someone else's utterance.

Volóchinov (1973) defends "the material of the word" or of the verbal ideological signs, proposing that they are 1) constituted in ideological spheres "(...) the artistic, the religious and so on)" (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 23) or in whole ideological contexts, and also in everyday ideological communication, in which they acquire specific forms of orientation in reality; 2) formed in the social and ideological purview; 3) determined by and being part of the conditions and "means of social communication" (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 199); 4) constituted in the intersection of "valuative", "social" or "ideological" emphases, i.e., they get society's attention.

Volóchinov, by delimiting and isolating the object of the philosophy of language, states that language is composed by sound as acoustic phenomenon, by the physiological process of sound production and perception, and by inner signs of speaker and listener. However, all these aspects only become language under two conditions: in the unity of the social milieu (in the same linguistic collective and in a specifically organized society) and in the event of immediate social communication. Therefore, immediate situation and broad context are elements that integrate what he understands as language or verbal human language.

When he finishes criticizing the individualistic subjectivism and the abstract objectivism, Volóchinov affirms that "the meaning of a word is determined entirely by its context" (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 79) and proposes that the approach of meaning should be oriented by a "dialectical combination of the unity of meaning with its multiplicity", constituted in "varidirectional contexts" in "a state of constant tension, or incessant interaction and conflict" (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 80). This occurs, for example, when a word pronounced by two speakers in a dialogue acquires different meanings, due to the distinct valuative emphasis on the context of each response.

Meaning is resumed in the chapter “Theme and meaning in language”, in which “the theme of an utterance is determined not only by the linguistic forms that comprise it [...], but also by extraverbal factors of the situation” (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 10). Furthermore, the fixity of meaning of the utterance connects “what came before with and what comes after” (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 100), i.e., the original utterances and the responsive ones. In the rhetorical-hermeneutical tradition proposed by Rastier, presented earlier in this paper, such connection takes place inside a *corpus*, which is firstly formed by texts that belong to the same genre.

Under the perspective that the “*word is a two-sided act*” (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 86), orientation of the word is emphasized toward the addressee, defined by his social group, hierarchical position (higher or lower) and social connections (father, brother, friend etc.) with the addresser. Then, the utterance is determined from within its structure and style by the immediate social situation (especially, by the participants – addresser and addressee) and by the broader social milieu: “The immediate social situation and the broader social milieu wholly determine – and determine from within, so to speak – the structure of an utterance” (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 4). In the same book (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 87), “social orientation” gets a broader and imprecise sense: the determination of the inner experience and of the utterance by the immediate social situation, by the addressee (also called potential listener), by the addresser’s social position, by the valuative context (appeal, advertising, protest etc.), by the more distant situation (group of conditions of a speaking community), and by the former discourses of the same sphere. As we see it, all of this is synthetized in the central concept of the book – “the actual reality of language-speech” is “the social event of verbal interaction implemented in an utterance or utterances” (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 164).

Volóchinov, addressing the third central concern in the book – the problem of someone else’s utterance –, reiterates that dialogue is the real unity of language, in order to defend that forms of transmitting someone else’s discourse reveal the mutual orientation between authorial context and reported speech, as well as the role of the authorial context that assimilates and reports someone else’s discourse. Someone else’s speech loses its primary context, but maintains its “referential content”, “rudiments of its own linguistic integrity” and “constructional independence” (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 116). This mutual orientation or active perception of someone else’s utterance and of “the personality of the speaker” (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 90) is manifested in the transmission patterns of reported speech and in the modifications in those patterns “which may be said to be the indices of the balance between reporting and reported messages achieved at any given time in the development of a language” (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 125). Further ahead, about one of the modifications of direct speech, the author states that “elements of the reported message creep into and are dispersed throughout the authorial context” (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 133, emphasis added). Volóchinov analyses one of Dostoevsky’s works and concludes that “almost every word in the narrative [...] figures simultaneous in two intersecting contexts, two speech acts: in the speech of the author-narrator (ironic and mocking) and the speech of the hero (who is far removed

from irony)” (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 136, emphasis added). This means that words get different meanings and intonations, according to the context of the utterance in which they are assimilated and transmitted. Volóchinov also developed the notion that someone else’s speech is perceived, firstly, in the “inner-speech” context of the speaker, who actively comprehends and evaluates it (Volóchinov, 1973, p. 117). Finally, the third aspect is the fact that models and their changes are due to “some displacement, some shift” that “had to have occurred within socioverbal intercourse and with regard to the mutual orientation of utterances” (Volóchinov, 1937, p. 143). This indicates that the extraverbal conditions of the socioverbal intercourse play a major role in constituting different forms of transmitting someone else’s discourse.

After discussing the presence of “context” in this book, we conclude that context may be formed by **extraverbal aspects** – the immediate communicative situation (addressers and their social positions, time, space etc.), the broad socio-ideological context (ideological spheres, the same linguistic collective, a specifically organized society etc.), the orientation for the addressee, social evaluations – and by **verbal contexts** – the original and the responsive utterances, the speaker’s inner speech, the verbal discourse (authorial or the hero’s), which assimilates and transmits someone else’s discourse. Volóchinov, answering the question about the concrete nature of language, states that the extraverbal context is an integrated part of the social event in discursive interaction. The latter is understood as the essence of language and as an element which determines theme or singular meanings of utterances, in constant tension with the most fixed meanings of language.

* * *

Next, we address context in the three articles that compose the project of scientific popularization:²¹ “Literary Stylistics” (1930): I. What is language?; II. The construction of the utterance; III The word and its social function (Volóchinov, 1983b).

Firstly, context encompasses the economic organization (social organization of labor) and the sociopolitical organization of a collective, factors and forces that produce human verbal language, i.e., human language is the result of a collective activity that occurs under certain economic, social and political conditions. Secondly, language – as the materialized form of social communication – exerts an inverted influence on such conditions when there is a “*sharp break with the world of nature*” (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 101), and when it creates the world of culture or of ideological systems (science, art, morality, law etc.).

²¹ As informed in the introductory essay “Registros de Valentin Volóchinov nos arquivos de ILIAZV” (Grillo; Américo, 2019), these three articles were published in the journal *Literatúrnaia utchióba. Jurnál dljá samoobrazovániia* [Estudos da literatura. Revista para auto-formação], in 1930. As far as we know, they are the three last texts published by Valentin Volóchinov. The journal *Literatúrnaia utchióba* was created in 1930 by writer Maksím Górkí, editor-in-chief, with the purpose to teach literary writing to beginning authors from the popular social levels.

In “Literary Stylistics II”, Volóchinov resumes such factors and forces, affirming that: 1) “*the true essence of language is the social event of speech, manifest by one or several utterances*” (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 115); 2) the situation of article I becomes “a particular variety of social communication” (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 116) (production communication, everyday communication, ideological communication).

Next, the inner speech is again the condition for socioverbal intercourse, as it enables the “*understanding of the sign and the response to it*” (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 102). Although Volóchinov does not use the term context, we understand that it has the same meaning as that in *Marxism and the philosophy of language*, concerning the inner speech context of comprehending and evaluating someone else’s discourse.

In “Literary Stylistics I”, Volóchinov, approaching the passage from inner speech to exterior speech or utterance, addresses context as “immediate social circumstances” [...], which “give shape to the utterance” (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 106). The author emphasizes the role of the immediate and the distant participants or speakers. In the passage from inner speech to exterior speech, he stresses the social orientation in both of them: the inner speech is oriented towards a presupposed addressee; then the work, utterance or exterior speech considers a “real, present, listener” (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 110) and should “master the exterior technical conditions (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 111), (in case of literary work, writing, typography, publishing market and so on).

In “Literary Stylistics II and III”, Volóchinov addresses four questions: 1) the term “audience” is used to refer to the “audience of the utterance” (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 116). The “social orientation of the utterances” is defined as its “*dependence on the socio-hierarchical weight of the audience*” (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 139); 2) every utterance is formed by a “*verbal and a non-verbal part*” (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 125), without which it is not possible to understand the utterance itself ; 3) the utterance, becoming a “particular speech interaction, itself generated by a particular kind of social communication” (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 116), is configured as a genre; 4) the utterance is formed by a non-verbal part: “hand gesture, facial expression and bodily posture” (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 123); 5) the utterance is formed by “sense”, “content” (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 123), dependent on the “most immediate environment” (space and time of the event of the utterance, as well as its theme and the speakers’ evaluation) and on the “the most remote social causes and factors underlying that particular speech communication” (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 124). The article concludes that the immediate situation and the distant one – with emphasis on the audience – determine theme, intonation,²² word choice and word arrangement in the utterance.

Finally, in “Literary Stylistics III. The word and its social function (Volóchinov, 1983b), Volóchinov resumes *Marxism and the philosophy of language*, about how a

²² In a footnote of article I, Volóchinov defines intonation as “voice rising or falling, expressing our relation to the object of the utterance (joy, sadness, surprise, challenge etc.). In Portuguese: “é o aumento ou diminuição do volume da voz, que expressa nossa relação com o objeto do enunciado (de alegria, de tristeza, de surpresa, de questionamento etc.)” (Volóchinov, 2019[1930], p. 255). T.N. In Volóchinov (1983b), no such note was found in article I). In article II, he adds that intonation is “the expressed sound of the word”. (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 126).

“*phenomenon of material reality has become a phenomenon of ideological reality*” (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 142). He argues that, even though the “word” is part of the material reality, it is from the beginning a purely ideological phenomenon, which depends on a socially organized collective. In social communication and in discursive interaction, the word reflects and refracts contradicting points of view of individuals and of social groups from a sign-laden collective, which impregnates it with evaluations and intonations (Volóchinov, 1983b, p. 145).

Due to the popularization purpose of these three articles, Volóchinov teaches, exemplifies, explains, and revisits the aspects of context already approached in *Marxism and the philosophy of language*. Three highlights of context are worth mentioning: firstly, context as the extraverbal part of the utterance; secondly, the role of language in the creation of culture or constituted ideological systems; finally, the influence of the broad immediate context on the definition of theme, intonation, word choice and word arrangement in the whole of the utterance.

3. “Context” in Mikhail Bakhtin’s work from 1930 to 1963

The 1930s are particularly productive for Bakhtin: he wrote a series of long texts about the theory of the novel, as well as his book, which became a dissertation later, on the French novelist François Rabelais. By analyzing the bibliographical production in this period, we assert that “Bakhtin’s theory of genres is developed in a tense dialogue between the completed literary past and the developing, in crisis, non-literary and literary contemporaneity”²³ (Grillo, 2022, p. 1185).²⁴

Firstly, Bakhtin asserts that someone else’s word is the main object of representation in the novel, in which it becomes double-voiced. We perceive in it someone else’s style and worldview, parodied, stylized, polemized or ironized by the authorial discourse and worldview: the writer of the novel engages in dialogical relations with language-worldview of characters and other genres. In terms that are similar to those by Volóchinov, presented in this paper, the author assimilates, interprets, evaluates the words of the other and interacts with them in his novel, which becomes the discursive-authorial context of someone else’s discourse (Grillo, 2022).

Secondly, Bakhtin characterizes the extraverbal context or the historical and cultural conditions of the ancient Greeks that propelled the emergence, on one hand, of the epic, lyric and tragedy and, on the other, of what would become the novel:

²³ In Portuguese: “a teoria dos gêneros de Bakhtin desenvolve-se em um diálogo tenso entre o passado literário concluso e a contemporaneidade extraliterária e literária em crise e formação”.

²⁴ Due to limitations of space, we synthesize Bakhtin’s formulations on the relation between utterance (especially novel) and the context. Further information about theoretical, social and institutional circumstances of such texts, can be found in the article: Grillo, S. V. C.. Mikhail Bakhtin: pensador do riso, da crise e da mudança na teoria dos gêneros do discurso. *Revista de Estudos da Linguagem*, v. 30, p. 1185-1205, 2022.

Out of the heart of this confident and uncontested monoglossia were born the major straightforward genres of the ancient Greeks – their epic, lyric and tragedy. These genres express the centralizing tendencies in language. But alongside these genres, especially among the folk, there flourished parodic and travesty forms that kept alive the memory of the ancient linguistic struggle and that were continually nourished by the ongoing process of linguist stratification and differentiation (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 1109).²⁵

According to Bakhtin, the Greek novel, despite having incorporated a multiplicity of genres (dialogues, lyrical plays, letters etc.), could not express the heteroglossia consciousness of such parodying and travesty creation. From the seventeenth century on, the European novel was formed on the boundaries between centralizing linguistic tendencies and renewed tendencies from the non-literary heteroglossia, which pointed to future unfoldings of language. Medieval laughter and heteroglossia, typical of the emergence of modern European languages, paved the way for the Modern Age novel (Grillo, 2022).

Thirdly, Bakhtin proposes the distinction between the epic and the novel in the following terms: “the epic [...] has not only completed its development” but is “one that is already antiquated” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 302). Its past “is called the absolute past” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 462), whereas the novel “takes place in the full light of the historical day” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 299).²⁶ Bakhtin argues that the novel is constructed in close connection with unfinished contemporary events, crossing the boundaries of artistic-literary specificities, and relating to the non-literary: “the novel makes wide and substantial use of letters, confessions, the forms and methods of rhetoric associated with recently established courts and so forth [...]” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 694). The novel “crosses the literary- non-literary boundaries, which also characterizes it ‘as a developing genre’” (Grillo, 2022, p. 1193).²⁷

In this process, as we have pointed out (Grillo, 2022), other genres “become dialogized” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 346) through contact with heteroglossia, “laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody” and the “unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 347). The context that favored such particularities, according to Bakhtin, was European people’s openness toward a variety of cultures, languages (in close relation and “*mutually illuminating one another*” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 899) and times (ongoing present, without beginning nor end). Bakhtin finds the sources of such

²⁵ Из лона этого уверенного и бесспорного одноязычия родились великие прямые жанры эллинов – их эпос, лирика и трагедия. Они выражали централизующие тенденции языка. Но рядом с ними, особенно в народных низах, процветало пародийно-травилирующее творчество, сохранявшее память древней языковой борьбы и питаемое постоянно происходящими процессами языкового расслоения и дифференциации.

²⁶ It is worth noting that Mikhail Bakhtin states that this is not about value judgment. The author declares that Homeric epics were the works that gave him the most aesthetic pleasure.

²⁷ In Portuguese: “A ruptura das fronteiras entre o literário e o extraliterário é outro aspecto que faz do romance um gênero em formação”.

particularities in popular laughter, in folklore and in the informal, without ceremony, style of these genres, ready to reflect contemporaneity, popular languages and their ambivalent, destructive and innovative character. For Bakhtin, laughter is the essential factor that approximates the novel, as a genre, to a realistic perception of the world. Such idea was developed by the author in the analyses of Rabelais's novels (Bakhtin, 2010) and of the Socratic dialogue in Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel.

* * *

The last text analyzed herein is *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (Bakhtin, 1999), as it enables the perception of the development of Bakhtin's ideas in comparison with *Problems of Dostoevsky's work* (2022[1929]).²⁸ It also contains the proposal of metalinguistics, a fundamental discipline for all linguists and discourse analysts who understand the word in its intrinsic relation to verbal and extraverbal context.

About the objectives of the book, Bakhtin asserts that only the problems of Dostoevsky's poetics are addressed, and that his purpose is "bringing out this fundamental innovation" in the artistic form, considering the "basic principles of European aesthetics" (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 3), i.e., Dostoevsky's novels-utterances represent an innovation in the context of European literary or aesthetic sphere before him. In the 1929 text, the emphasis was on the relation between the sociohistorical extraverbal context and on its reconstruction through the author's architectonics. Without losing such perspective, Bakhtin focuses on Dostoevsky's dialogue with the literary, aesthetic, artistic context (or tradition).

Bakhtin, analyzing Dostoevsky's literary criticism, finds German author Otto Kaus, who considers the emergence of polyphonic novels a result from the advance of capitalism in nineteenth-century Russia. Although Bakhtin criticizes the fact that Kaus does not reveal the peculiarities of the construction of these novels, he positively assesses considerations of the Russian socioeconomic context for comprehending the emergence of polyphonic novels: "the contradictory nature of evolving social life [...] was bound to appear particularly abrupt, and at the same time the individuality of those worlds, worlds thrown off their ideological balance and colliding with one another, was bound to be particularly full and vivid" (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 20). Further on, commenting on another author, Bakhtin states that: "the objective contradictions of the epoch did determine Dostoevsky's creative work – although not at the level of some personal surmounting of contradictions in the history of his own spirit, but rather at the level of an objective visualization of contradictions as forces coexisting simultaneously" (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 28). Even though the ideological extraverbal context is not Bakhtin's focus, it is deemed a determining factor in Dostoevsky's creation.

²⁸ First version of *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*.

In the same direction, Bakhtin analyses the famous review by Lunatchárski (1929),²⁹ concluding that: “new forms of artistic visualization prepare themselves slowly, over centuries; a given epoch can do no more than create optimal conditions for the final ripening and realization of a new form. To investigate this process of artistic preparation for the polyphonic novel is the task of a historical poetics (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 36). Bakhtin acknowledges, on one hand, the importance of the extraverbal sociohistorical context for explaining and understanding the emergence of a literary genre. On the other hand, the aesthetic tradition (or, in general terms, in other areas, the history of the evolution of a certain genre in its scope) is also fundamental for such emergence. Two dimensions of context are under discussion: the extraverbal social, historical and economic, as well as former utterances of a certain sphere of culture or of human or activity.

Next, Bakhtin (1999) analyzes how the characters are constructed in the polyphonic novel and identifies an inversion in the relation between the characters and their reality: the social conditions of the hero and his world are objects of reflection. Therefore, the hero does not coincide with himself, nor is predetermined by his life conditions. There is always exceeding humanity in the characters’ self-consciousness.

In the chapter “The idea in Dostoevsky”, when Bakhtin analyzes the poetic function in Dostoevsky’s works, the word context is used in two circumstances:

- 1) In the “artistic context of his creative work”, Dostoevsky’s ideas “become thoroughly dialogized and enter the great dialogue of the novel on *completely equal terms* with other idea-images” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 92); in his journalistic texts, Dostoevsky’s ideas have “*systemically monologic* or rhetorically monologic (*in fact, journalistic*) form” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 91). In other words, Dostoevsky’s ideas gain distinct forms of existence, according to the sphere, genre and authorial project in which they are formulated: literary novel or journalistic article;
- 2) When he comments on how ideas, in Dostoevsky’s artistic project, are inseparable from the voice that produced them and from their verbal context: “It is characteristic that in Dostoevsky’s work there are absolutely no *separate* thoughts, propositions of formulations 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, 1999, p. 95). For Bakhtin, the idea, the person who uttered it and its context are indissociable in Dostoevsky’s works.

Further ahead, the polyphonic novel created by Dostoevsky is “connected with other generic traditions” of the “adventure novel” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 102), and of the “serio-comical” associated with the “*carnavalistic folkore*” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 106) –

²⁹ There is an excellent review of this article in Nuto (2021).

Socratic dialogues, symposia, Menippean satires etc. Bakhtin (1999, p. 154), oriented by the “historical poetics of the genre”, aims to reveal the historical and genetic tradition of European literature, in which Dostoevsky’s work is inscribed – “A genre lives in the present, but always *remembers* its past, its beginning (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 106). Moreover, the theorist wants to show that “the traditional features of the genre are organically combined, in Dostoevsky’s use of them, with an individual uniqueness and profundity” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 154).

The sociohistorical context of genre development is approached in two moments of historical poetics: 1) Bakhtin recovers the context of genre development in Menippean satires: “in an epoch when national legend was already in decay”, of “intense struggle among numerous and heterogeneous religious and philosophical schools and movements”, of “preparation and formation of a new world religion: Christianity” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 119); 2) the dynamic and flexible character of carnivalization was effective at the time when Dostoevsky produced his works, i.e., the time when capitalism was introduced in Russia, in the nineteenth century:

By *relativizing* all that was externally stable, set and ready-made, carnivalization with its pathos of change and renewal permitted Dostoevsky to penetrate into the deepest layers of man and human relationships. It proved remarkably productive as a means for capturing in art the developing relationships under capitalism, at a time when previous forms of life, moral principles and beliefs were being turned into “rotten cords” and the previously concealed, ambivalent, and unfinalized nature of man and human *thought* was being nakedly exposed. Not only people and their actions but even ideas had broken out of their self-enclosed hierarchical nesting places and had begun to collide in the familiar contact of “absolute” (that is, completely unlimited) dialogue (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 166-167).

Bakhtin jointly addresses two dimensions related to context: literary tradition – by revealing the “transposition of carnival into the language of literature” in what he calls “carnivalization of literature”, one of the ramifications of “history of culture” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 122) – and sociohistorical context. He concludes that “our diachronic analysis confirms the results of the synchronic one” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 177-178). As we see it, such theoretical-methodological approach is close to, in certain ways, the rhetorical-hermeneutical tradition proposed by Rastier, as Bakhtin associates the history of genre with the social, temporal, ideological situation of its emergence and development, without losing the author’s individual singular contribution.

In order to finish analyzing this book, we point out the proposition of metalinguistics as a discipline that studies “*discourse*, that is, language in its concrete living totality” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 181), whose object is “dialogic relationships, which are “extralinguistic” and occur inside and among “whole utterances” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 182)

of different subjects or authors. When Bakhtin defines the artistic-speech phenomena to be studied by linguistics – “stylization, parody, *skaz*, and dialogue” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 185), he repeatedly uses the word “context” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 212) to refer to the “single monologic context” of an author³⁰ and to the “second context of someone else’s speech” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 185) in the author’s discourse. He synthesizes this as follows:

For the word is not a material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction. It never gravitates toward a single consciousness or a single voice. The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation. In this process the word does not forget its own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of these concrete contexts into which it has entered (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 202, emphasis added).

In this passage, Bakhtin uses the word context, primarily, in reference to the verbal context of an authorial utterance, and, secondly, in reference to an extralinguistic context of an utterance.

Findings

The notion of context is central in theories of text and discourse. It has recently gained extensive discussions that place it at the core of language epistemologies. Whether from François Rastier’s rhetorical-hermeneutical perspective, or from Teun van Dijk’s sociocognitive viewpoint, context in language sciences resulted in a research field that expanded scientific discussion on human verbal language, which used to be exclusive of grammatical and formalist approaches.

In Bakhtin’s philosophical anthropology, context is present firstly in the theorization about human existence: the **historical-real and ethical-valuative contexts** integrate the reflection on the unique place in Being with his singular individual truth and his valuative opposition I/The Other, with impacts on all subsequent theorization about culture and language. The unique place in Being is affirmed in humanity’s historical existence, i.e., the singular status of each human being does not deny his connection to sociohistorical values of human kind.

Russian formalism, in its first phase, prioritized linguistic form as the essence of literary art, to the detriment of social, historical and ideological context. About such approach, Bakhtin proposes an aesthetics of the work of art in association with

³⁰ In the same text, Bakhtin (1999, p. 252) uses the expression “authorial discourse” [авторская речь] meaning “authorial context”.

preexisting cultural works, and an aesthetics of literary works, which, in relation to language linguistics of the time, conceives the artistic utterance as a unit in **an axiological, semantic, cultural context**.

Bakhtin's statement that "context is potentially inexhaustible" (2017[1970-71], p. 44)³¹ expresses the complexity of this notion in the sociological method developed by Bakhtin/Medviédev/Volóchinov in the second half of the 1920s. At the core of the discussion is the concept of utterance, understood as a specific form of social communication, realized and fixed in the material of the word. Hence, context encompasses the following dimensions: **the extraverbal situation** – immediate communicative situation, specific ideological field of the utterance (literary, artistic, scientific etc.), the same linguistic collective, a specifically organized society – which influence the definition of theme, intonation, word choice and word arrangement in the whole of the utterance; **the ideological purview of a certain time or society** (a group of objects-signs – works of art, religious symbols, scientific statements etc. – which will constitute the social consciousness of a collective or the social evaluation understood as the axiological atmosphere of contemporaneity). The extraverbal context determines **theme or singular meanings of utterances** in constant tension with the most fixed significations of language, similar to the rhetorical-hermeneutical tradition of language (Rastier, 2022) as a system which is constantly modified by use and history.

Bakhtin, Medviédev and Volóchinov recurrently demonstrate the theoretical-methodological concern about not reducing the artistic work to a reflection of extraverbal context. For that, they have two postulations: Bakhtin defends that the verbal material of the literary work is an artistic reconstruction of the socioeconomic environment oriented by the author's artistic principles or architectonics; Volóchinov and Medviédev propose that the combination of the verbal and extraverbal parts of the utterance is done through social evaluation, i.e., the expression of the active relation of the addresser/author with the object of the utterance (what he perceives, understands and evaluates), which takes on overtones accompanying the fundamental tone of the axiological atmosphere of contemporaneity. Another proposal is the relation between the verbal and extraverbal parts of the utterance as reflection and refraction, in order to show that the utterance is not totally autonomous nor completely "submissive" to the extraverbal reality.

Context can also be **verbal** and, as such, encompasses the **original and responsive utterances** of an utterance; **the speech genre**; **the inner speech of the speaker**, who actively perceives, evaluates and assimilates someone else's discourse, always oriented by the perception of a presumed addressee; the **discourse or verbal context** (the author's or the hero's) in which someone else's utterance is assimilated and perceived.

Finally, **verbal and extraverbal context**, as characterized above, are indissociable from the object of study in Bakhtinian metalinguistics – dialogical relations inside and among utterances – of discursive phenomena (dialogue, parody, open and subtle polemic etc.) in which they are realized.

³¹ In Portuguese: "contexto é potencialmente inacabável".

GRILLO, S. A noção de contexto na obra de Mikhail Bakhtin e do Círculo. Alfa, São Paulo, v. 67, 2023.

- **RESUMO:** *O propósito deste artigo é de caráter epistemológico, ao analisar a noção de contexto nas obras de Bakhtin, Medviédev e Volóchinov. Para evidenciar a atualidade da proposta, o ponto de partida são as teorizações recentes do contexto, desenvolvidas na semântica interpretativa de François Rastier e na análise do discurso crítica (ADC) de Teun van Dijk. A noção de contexto se revelou presente nos trabalhos filosóficos de Mikhail Bakhtin, no método sociológico de Bakhtin, Medviédev e Volóchinov e, por fim, na teoria do romance, bem como na metalinguística desenvolvidas por Bakhtin. Em todas essas fases, a análise apontou para a centralidade e a complexidade da noção de contexto na teoria da linguagem elaborada nos textos do Círculo de Bakhtin, nos quais apresenta três dimensões principais: o contexto ético-valorativo, o contexto extraverbal e o contexto verbal.*
- **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Contexto ético-valorativo; Contexto extraverbal; Contexto verbal; Círculo de Bakhtin.*

REFERENCES

BAKHTIN, M. **Problemas da obra de Dostoiévski.** Tradução, notas e glossário S. Grillo e E. V. Américo. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2022[1929].

BAKHTIN, M. Fragmentos dos anos 1970-1971. In: BAKHTIN, M. **Notas sobre literatura, cultura e ciências humanas.** Org., tradução, posfácio e notas P. Bezerra. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2017[1970-71]. p. 21-56.

БАХТИН, М. М. [BAKHTIN, M. M.], *М. М. Бахтин. Собрание сочинений. Т. 4(2).* Творчество Франсуа Франсуа Рабле и народная культура Средневековья и Ренессанса (1965 г.). Рабле и Гоголь. Искусство слова и народная смеховая культура (1940, 1970 гг.). Комментарии и приложения. [M. M. BAKHTIN. *Obras reunidas* vol. 4(2). A criação de François Rabelais e a cultura popular na Idade Média e no Renascimento (1965). Rabelais e Gógol. A arte da palavra e a cultura cômica popular (1940, 1970). Comentários e anexos]. Москва: Языки Славянских Культур, 2010.

БАХТИН, М. М. [BAKHTIN, M. M.] **Собрание сочинений т. 1.** Философская эстетика 1920х годов [*Obras reunidas* vol. 1. Estética filosófica dos anos 1920]. Org. S. G. Botcharóv, N. I. Nikoláev. Moscou: Издательство русские словари/Языки славянской культуры, 2003[192-].

BAKHTIN, M. **Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics.** Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

- BAKHTIN, M. **Towards a philosophy of the act**. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993.
- BAKHTIN, M. **Art and answerability**. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990
- BAKHTIN, M. **The dialogic imagination**. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- BOUQUET, S. De l'hexagramme cognitiviste à une sémiotique de l'interprétation. In : RASTIER, F. ; BOUQUET, S. **Une introduction aux sciences de la culture**. Paris : PUF, 2002. p. 11-35.
- DUBOIS, J. *et al.*. **Dicionário de lingüística**. 10. ed. Tradução I. Blikstein *et al.*. São Paulo: Cultrix, 1998[1973].
- ГОГОТИШВИЛИ, Л. А.[GOGOTICHVÍLI, L. A.] Комментарии. In: БАХТИН, М. М. [BAKHTIN, M. M.] К философии поступка [Por uma filosofia do ato]. **Собрание сочинений т. 1**. Философская эстетика 1920х годов [*Obras reunidas vol. 1. Estética filosófica dos anos 1920*]. Org. S. G. Botcharov, N. I. Nikoláev. Moscou: Издательство русские словари/Языки славянской культуры, 2003. p. 351-438.
- GRILLO, S. V. C.. Mikhail Bakhtin: pensador do riso, da crise e da mudança na teoria dos gêneros do discurso. **Revista de Estudos da Linguagem**, v. 30, p. 1185-1205, 2022.
- GRILLO, S.; AMÉRICO, E. V. Registros de Valentin Volóchinov nos arquivos do ILIAZV. In: VOLÓCHINOV, V. (CÍRCULO DE BAKHTIN). **A palavra na vida e a palavra na poesia**: ensaios, artigos, resenhas e poemas. Org., tradução, ensaio introdutório e notas S. Grillo e E. V. Américo. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2019. p. 7-56.
- KAUS, O. **Dostoevski und sein Schicksal** [*Dostoiévski e seu destino*]. Berlin: E. Laub, 1923
- LUNATCHÁRSKI, A. V. O mnogogólonosti Dostoiévskogo [“Sobre a multivocalidade de Dostoiévski”]. **Nóvií Mir**, n. 10, Moscou, p. 195-209, 1929.
- MEDVIÉDEV, P; BAKHTIN, M. **The formal method in literary scholarship**: a critical introduction to sociological poetics. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- MEUNIER, J.-G. Représentation, information et culture. In : RASTIER, F. ; BOUQUET, S. **Une introduction aux sciences de la culture**. Paris : PUF, 2002. p. 137-155.
- NUTO, J. V. Bakhtin e Lunatcharski: um diálogo. **Bakhtiniana - Revista de Estudos do Discurso**, v. 16, p. 53-69, 2021.
- RASTIER, F. Au milieu du chemin: entretien avec François Rastier par Éric Trudel. **Acta semiotica et lingvistica**, v. 27, n. 2 (46), p. 168-176, 2022.
- RASTIER, F.. **Arts et sciences du texte**. Paris: PUF, 2001.

RASTIER, F. Le problème épistémologique du contexte et le statut de l'interprétation dans les sciences du langage. **Langages**, n. 129, p. 97-11, 1998.

SCHLEIERMACHER, F. **Hermeneutics and criticism and other writings**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

SCHLEIERMACHER, F. D. E. **Herméneutique**. Pour une logique du discours individuel. Tradução C. Berner. Alençon (Orne) : CERF/PUL, 1987[1809-1810].

SPERBER, D.; WILSON, D. **Relevance, communication & cognition**. 2. ed. Oxford UK; Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1995[1986].

VANDENDORPE, C. Contextes, compréhension et littéarité. **RSSI**, n. 11, p. 9-25, 1991.

VAN DIJK, T. A. **Discurso e contexto**: uma abordagem sociocognitiva. Tradução R. Ilari. São Paulo: Contexto, 2012[2007].

VAN DIJK, T. A. **Discourse and context**: a sociocognitive approach. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

VOLÓCHINOV, V. O que é a linguagem/língua? *In*: VOLÓCHINOV, V. **A palavra na vida e a palavra na poesia**: ensaios, artigos, resenhas e poemas. Org., tradução, ensaio introdutório e notas S. Grillo e E. V. Américo. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2019[1930]. p. 234-265.

VOLÓCHINOV, V. Discourse in life and discourse in poetry. *In*: SHUKMAN, A. (ed.). **Bakhtin school papers**. New York: RPT Publications, 1983a. p. 5-30.

VOLÓCHINOV, V. Literary Stylistics. *In*: SHUKMAN, A. (ed.). **Bakhtin school papers**. New York: RPT Publications, 1983b. p. 93-152.

VOLÓCHINOV, V. **Marxism and the philosophy of language**. New York: Seminar Press, 1973.

Received on March 5, 2023

Approved on July 15, 2023