

**Toward a Rhetoric of Participation: Monologue and Dialogue in the  
Context of an Intercultural Online Board**

by

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## ABSTRACT

In both scholarly and mainstream discussions of new media practices, the term “participation” has become synonymous with inclusiveness and democratization. However, critical investigations into the nature and limits of participation so far have remained on the fringes of new media scholarship. Using a dialogic approach based on Mikhail Bakhtin’s philosophy of discourse, this dissertation complicates current views of participation from a rhetorical perspective by demonstrating both the constraints and possibilities of online debate within the context of [auswanderer-forum.com](http://auswanderer-forum.com), a well-established German-American discussion board. Building on Mikhail Bakhtin’s concepts of utterance, monologue and dialogue, this dissertation offers an interpretive approach that places a speaker/writer’s unique utterance within a context characterized by pre-existing discursive and non-discursive contents both on the level of the website and on the level of cultural narratives, images, assumptions and beliefs. More precisely, the approach shows how a speaker/writer’s utterance is determined by two spheres of meaning. On the one hand, the utterance attains meaning through its relationship to the hosting website’s visual/textual bias (imagetext). On the other hand, an utterance is determined by the speaker’s unique locatedness in heteroglossia, that is, the culturally and socially circulating languages and images which surround her, in which she partakes and which characterize her as a speaker belonging to a certain cultural context. By describing participants’ communicative activities as dynamically situated between monologic (exclusive, unifying) and dialogic (inclusive, spontaneous) tendencies, the dialogic approach developed in this dissertation goes beyond the scope of traditional approaches to rhetorical analysis, which commonly focus on strategies of persuasion in mostly unidirectional communication situations.