

mous stretches of wasteland and waste-time, the West could benefit from some more spontaneous confusion between labor and leisure, between nature and culture, between doing and not doing, between efficiency and contemplation.

Transculture is an experience of dwelling in the neutral spaces and lacunas between cultural demarcations. Transculture is not simply a mode of integrating cultural differences but a mode of creating something different from difference itself, and one form of it is the ordinary, the formless, the random, the indiscriminate. The ordinary is this excess of existence that does not fit into any existing cultural model, including the opposition of culture and nature, which is also modeled and assimilated by culture. The ordinary is what cannot be assimilated, the "trans-cultural," "extra-cultural," the surplus of "just being," something that can be conveyed by such words as "just," "merely," "simply."

Thus we can generalize about at least three transcultural modes: One is exchange, interaction, or integration among existing cultures; another is the creation of imagined or the exploration of potential cultures; and the third is the experience of the ordinary that is extracultural: neither opposed to culture (as nature is) nor inscribed into it.

#### Notes

1. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans., ed., and with an intro. by Kurt H. Wolff (New York: The Free Press, 1950): 402-405.
2. Alfred Schurz, *Collected Papers*, II, *Studies in Social Theory*, ed. and intro. by Arvid Brodersen (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964): 104.
3. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993): 4, 36.
4. *Ibid.* p. 48.
5. "Today everyday, political, social, historical, economic, etc., reality has already incorporated the hyperrealist dimension of simulation . . . . Reality has passed completely into the game of reality. . . . The consummate enjoyment [fouissance] of the signs of guilt, despair, violence and death are replacing guilt, despair and even death in the total euphoria of simulation"—such is a typical postmodern discourse on the death of reality as instigated by Jean Baudrillard in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976), trans. Iain H. Grant (London: Sage, 1993): 74.

## Chapter 7

### The Rehumanization of the Humanities

*Mikhail Epstein*

Mikhail Bakhtin's late writings assume that the fundamental characteristic of the human is its capacity to be other to its own self. To put it as simply as possible, it is a self-consciousness that splits us into subject and object, and thus makes us other to ourselves. If otherness grows from the very foundation of what it means to be human, this allows us to reinterpret the postmodern paradox of the *dehumanization of the humanities* from Bakhtin's point of view, as a necessary stage of human self-awareness.

One of the general tenets of poststructuralism has been to ascribe the source of our activity to some non-human, impersonal structures speaking through us, a kind of Deleuzian "schizoanalysis" invoking the state of a divided self. But if we reappropriate these alienated sources of our activity and understand them as an indispensable otherness inherent in the nature of human self-awareness, then an entirely new perspective of rehumanization becomes possible. The previous emphasis on dehumanized knowledge, including psychoanalysis, Marxism, semiotics, structuralism, and poststructuralism, may be reinterpreted in new terms as signs of a human self-objectifying or self-othering capacity.

How can we rehumanize formerly humanistic disciplines without reinscribing the limitations of traditional humanism as exposed in the deconstructive critique of metaphysics? How can we get beyond this critique? Which interpretive modes or new epistemologies can form the basis of rehumanization?

Bakhtin's ultimate project (never implemented) was the construction of a philosophical anthropology that would focus on the phenomenon of humanity in a much broader sense than is usually considered by the contemporary humanities. According to Bakhtin, the human being is

the witness and judge. When consciousness appeared in the world (in existence) and, perhaps, when biological life appeared (perhaps not only animals, but trees and grass also witness and judge), the world (existence) changed radically. A stone is still stony and the sun still sunny, but the event of existence as a whole (unfinalized) becomes completely different because a new and major character in this event appears for the first time on the scene of earthly existence—the witness and the judge. And the sun, while remaining physically the same, has changed because it has begun to be cognized by the witness and the judge. It has stopped simply being and has started being in itself and for itself (these categories appear for the first time here) as well as for the other, because it has been reflected in the consciousness of the other (the witness and the judge); this has caused it to change radically, to be enriched and transformed. (This has nothing to do with 'other existence'.)

At this point, Bakhtin's position seems to be directly anthropocentric, presuming that the meaning of the world depends on its human cognition and reflection. But what about the world beyond our cognition? Bakhtin further suggests that the existence of human consciousness transforms the entire meaning of the world even if this world is never be reflected and interiorized by consciousness. This is not the traditional category of humanizing the world, its appropriation and transformation for and by human subjectivity. Rather, the world is radically changed precisely because it remains *unknown* and *untouched*, because now this being unknown and untouched acquires a principally different meaning in the presence of a "witness" capable of knowing and touching.

Let the witness see and know only an insignificant corner of existence, and all existence that is not cognized and not seen by him changes its quality (sense), becoming uncognized, unseen existence, and not simply existence as it was before, that is, without any relationship to the witness.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, unknown existence is as related to humans and as meaningful in human terms as known existence. Non-knowledge and the non-knowable are humanistic categories related to and derived from knowledge. The Socratic thesis "I know that I know nothing" makes clear that ignorance is the product and object of knowledge: It is impos-

sible to state one's non-knowledge without knowledge of this non-knowledge. If Kant developed a critique of knowledge, Bakhtin's remark suggests a critique of ignorance as a humanly produced form of knowledge. We suppose that the world is what it is insofar as we do not know it, do not intrude and transform it with our perceptions and instruments of knowledge. But this non-knowledge derives from the very possibility of knowledge, which therefore makes the world different from what it would be in the absence of the unknowing person.

Our knowledge always transcends our non-knowledge, because we know that we do not know. The statement "I know that I know nothing" is the axiom of what I would call optimistic epistemology. How could we know that we do not know unless our non-knowledge is an object of knowledge? Even if we do not know "things-in-themselves," this assertion presupposes that we do know that things-in-themselves exist and that we do not know them. Even when we use the disclaimer "only," saying that we can know "only" things as they appear to us, we include a presupposition of another realm of existence beyond our knowledge called "things-in-themselves." The non-knowable is actually an object of negative knowledge.

All knowledge can be divided into positive and negative knowledge, as well as positive and negative non-knowledge; hence the four categories:

1. I know that I know (positive knowledge)
2. I know that I do not know (Socratic knowledge)
3. I do not know what I know (Platonic knowledge)
4. I do not know what I do not know (absence of knowledge)

The first two categories need no further comment; we will discuss the third and the fourth.

That we do not know what we know (unconscious knowledge) is the Platonic principle: Knowledge is anamnesis, or recollection of the forms that we knew before our birth, before any experience, and not through our senses. We know not less but much more than we hope and claim to know because the larger part of our knowledge is hidden from us. "Learning" is recollection of what I know without being aware of my knowledge. Thus, in the Platonic dialogue "Meno," Socrates elicits geometrical knowledge from a slave boy who never had studied geometry.

It is only the fourth statement that can be characterized as the position of non-knowledge in a strict sense. We cannot discuss what we do not

know in this last instance since it is beyond our knowledge and never emerges in our thoughts and discourses, even in quotation marks or under a question mark. Number 4 is truly unknown, whereas 3 is unconsciously known and 2 is consciously unknown (is present in our consciousness as an unknown, and we have evidence of its existence, though not of its essence). The place of the unknown is within our knowledge, as "x" is present within algebraic formulations and makes the science of algebra possible. Limitations on knowledge belong to the structure of knowledge, which is the transition between the known and the unknown, and therefore includes both of these domains, as a sign includes both the signifier and the signified. Knowledge is the relationship between the known and the unknown, and therefore the unknown belongs to the very condition of knowledge. The field of knowledge consists of three layers, 1, 2, and 3; it is only 4, the unknowable, that is beyond it.

What of those realms of existence posited in twentieth century humanities as impenetrable to human knowledge, such as the realm of the unconscious, or the realm of language, or the realm of economic production? They are quite meaningful and even more dependent on human knowledge precisely because they are transcendent and exterior to this knowledge. Twentieth-century humanities exalted in the discovery of these superhuman or extra-human determinants that set limitations on human activity, in contrast to the post-Renaissance exaltation of human subjectivity. Now it is time to revise this paradigm of dehumanization, not in order to return to the traditional humanism of the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries, but in order to extend the meaning of this humanistic project and incorporate dehumanization as only one of its indispensable dimensions and unavoidable stages. The human manifests its humanness by positing and transcending its limits and becoming non-human. Non-knowledge is no less a human quality than knowledge.

We may designate a specific prefix in order to display the principal difference between existence as it is in itself and existence as it is in the state of being non-known. This would suggest that being unknown and being non-known are quite different states of being. The "unknown" as expressed in statement four is what has no relationship to knowledge; thus we cannot posit the existence of the unknown in principle because by positing it we still acknowledge it, bring it into negative relationship with the known. The unknown cannot be discussed, indicated, or presented in connection with any human concern—we do not even know whether it exists.

It is the "non-known," as expressed in statements two and three, that

is the genuine subject of twentieth-century humanities: the world as non-known to human beings and human beings as non-known to themselves. Now we may recognize that this non-knowledge constitutes part of the very essence and aim of human knowledge, its otherness to itself.

Humanness, as Bakhtin defines this phenomenon, presupposes its otherness to itself. "Not-I in me, that is, existence in me; something larger than me in me." There are two different me's: one is "me" in the narrow sense, separate from the other in me; and another is Me who embraces both me and the other. The other, "not-I in me," includes language and the unconscious that are speaking through us, not spoken by us.

This "not-I" is the major theme and stronghold of twentieth-century humanities that explains their anti-humanistic and anti-personal stance. Bakhtin reminds us, however, that this "not-I" is "in me," though it is "larger than me in me" (me in Me). All of these superpersonal entities are larger than "me," but they still belong to the structure of Me in its self-division, self-consciousness, and therefore non-knowledge of itself. This opens for the dehumanized humanities the prospect of rehumanization.

It is remarkable that for Bakhtin, the other, not-I, is more susceptible and open to consciousness than Me. "My temporal and spatial boundaries are not given to me, but the other is entirely given."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, Me is a more complex object for the humanities than "me" or "other." The radical fallacy of the dehumanized humanities was the reduction of Me to me and the belief that "the other" is beyond cognition, in distinction from "me" that is "immediately given to itself," as the sphere of transparency and introspection. Bakhtin paradoxically shifts the perspective: it is "Me" that cannot be fully cognized and objectified, in distinction from the other that "is entirely given." Thus the sphere of the "non-known" in the humanities belongs to their own human subject, to "Me." Humanness, in its capacity of permanent "self-othering," dividing into "me" and the "other," comprises the ultimate concern and enigma of all humanistic disciplines.

The distinction between the three stages in the development of the humanities may now be formulated in the following way. In the first stage, when the very concept of "humanitas" emerged in Renaissance Italy, the humanities were mostly occupied with me in Me, that is, with humanness that separated and distinguished the human from everything else in the world. In the second stage, the phenomenon of humanity was objectified and analyzed as the other in Me. This otherness was interpreted by Marx as the totality of social relationships, as the generic other

of alienated material production and economic conditions. Freud interpreted this otherness as the psychological id, as the unconscious, spontaneously determining and mastering the human ego. Saussurian and post-Saussurian developments in semiotics interpreted this otherness as those linguistic mechanisms that predetermine the form and meaning of my speech acts. Tolstoy in *War and Peace* presented Napoleon, who believes in the infinite possibilities of his individual will, as a mere toy in the play of myriads of historical factors and objective conditions. If Renaissance humanists believed that the human being was himself directing the course of his historical destination, then Tolstoy, one of the great historical fatalists, viewed the human being as a child who presses his hands against the carriage and imagines that it is he who pushes it ahead. European humanism, born in the Renaissance, was like this child full of confidence in its creative forces and unbounded activity, whereas Marx, Tolstoy, and Freud looked at this child with the knowing smile of an adult who understands that the carriage is moved by forces that are far from obedient to human will and can easily bring the human to the brink of self-destruction.

Now that this paradigm of otherness has been sufficiently explored and elaborated in the humanities of the twentieth century, we can also locate it in the near past as still another aspect of what constitutes the unity of Me in a human being. The stage "me" coincides with the realm of the traditional humanities, and the stage of the "other" with the "dehumanities" of the late nineteenth through the twentieth century (to suggest a term for that approach to the humanities whose principal message was their dehumanization). This rise of the dehumanities was not a mistake or deviation but a necessary stage of exploration of "otherness" as constitutive of humanness in its capacity of self-transcendence and self-awareness. The entire thrust of Marxist, Freudian, Saussurian, structuralist and post-structuralist thought can be described in Bakhtinian terms as following: The *I* hides in the other and in others, it wants to be only an other for others, to enter completely into the world of others as an other, and to cast from itself the burden of being the only *I* (*I-for-myself*) in the world.<sup>3</sup>

Now that the "other" in its opposition to "me" has been theoretically recognized and explored, we are approaching the third stage, when the very phenomenon of Me will become the focus of humanistic knowledge/non-knowledge (since non-knowledge, as we stipulated earlier, is as much a phenomenon as knowledge itself). This new stage of the humanities can be called trans-humanistic since it embraces both human and

its narrow, Renaissance sense ("me") and non-human as it was postulated by the dehumanities of the twentieth century ("other"). Trans-humanistic knowledge is addressed both to intra-human capacities and extra-human forces as inherent in the human capacity for self-transcendence, dividing Me into "me" and "other," into "personal" and "impersonal." Me itself, according to Bakhtin, is the "supraperson," or, to follow his original expression, it is "nachhelovek," "transhuman."<sup>4</sup> Bakhtin connects this discovery of "otherness" in a human being with Me's "transhuman" capacity for self-transcendence and self-awareness. "This is analogous to the problem of man's self-awareness. Does the cognizer coincide with the cognized? . . . Something absolutely new appears here: the supraperson [nachhelovek], the *supra-I*, that is, the witness and the judge of the *whole* human being, of the whole *I*, and consequently someone who is no longer the person, no longer the *I*, but the *other*."<sup>5</sup> *Supra-I*, or Me, is posited here precisely as the open space of non-coincidence between "the cognizer" and "the cognized" ("me" and "other") and thus as the sphere of humanly creative and responsible "self-awareness" that includes the possibility of self-deception and "non-knowledge."

Semiotic, genetic, economic, and other "unconscious" and "inhuman" structural forces are constitutive of the phenomenon of humanness and comprise the potential field of the transhumanities. Therefore, the otherness that was previously apprehended as a dehumanizing factor can now be reappropriated as the self-transcendence of humanity. In Bakhtin's view, which is maintained here, "this [transcendence] has nothing to do with 'other existence'; rather it has to do with the existence of the other. Self-transcendence does not postulate any separate transcendental realm because such an assertion would be a self-contradictory involvement of knowledge in the sphere of the unknown.

#### Notes

1. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986): 137.
2. *Ibid.*, 138.
3. *Ibid.*, 146.
4. *Ibid.*, 147.
5. *Ibid.*, 147.
6. M. M. Bakhtin, *Estetika slovesnogo tvorčestva* (Moscow: Iskustvo, 1979): 342. The reader should keep in mind that the word "man" in the English transla-

tion often corresponds to the Russian "chelovek" ("human being," without any gender specification).

7. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genes and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986): 137.

## Chapter 8

### Nomadic Desires and Transcultural Becomings

Ellen E. Berry

In his essay "Transculture and Society," Epstein delineates three modes within which transcultural dynamics operate: an integrative mode (as a means of unifying existing cultures), an imaginative mode (as a means of inventing new cultural expressions), and an extracultural mode (as a site for the emergence of the ordinary). This chapter explores a fourth, *migratory* modality that emphasizes both the movement of cultural materials between and within cultures (a migratory emphasis suggested by the prefix *trans-*), as well as the nomadic nature of critical thought itself in a postmodern moment. It frames this exploration in relation to some models of the contemporary global system whose radically mobile and interactive nature has definitively altered processes of cultural production and reception.

A number of contemporary scholars have worked on mapping the contours of this still-emerging global system and to specify its multiple effects on cultural production and reception, on social relations, on political processes, and on national economies, among other sites (see, for example, Appadurai, Buell, Featherstone, Harvey, Jameson). There is no widespread agreement on the distinctive features of this global landscape—in part because of its rapidly changing nature and fundamentally mobile character; in part because of the enormity and complexity of any attempts to map its contours; in part because of the range of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives through which various global relations have been conceived. Nonetheless, some specific characteristics might include