

# Theory, Culture & Society

*Theory, Culture & Society* caters for the resurgence of interest in culture within contemporary social science and the humanities. Building on the heritage of classical social theory, the book series examines ways in which this tradition has been reshaped by a new generation of theorists. It also publishes theoretically informed analyses of everyday life, popular culture, and new intellectual movements.

EDITOR: Mike Featherstone, *Nottingham Trent University*

## SERIES EDITORIAL BOARD

Roy Boyne, *University of Durham*

Mike Hepworth, *University of Aberdeen*

Scott Lash, *Lancaster University*

Roland Robertson, *University of Piusburgh*

Bryan S. Turner, *Deakin University*

## THE TCS CENTRE

The Theory, Culture & Society book series, the journals *Theory, Culture & Society* and *Body & Society*, and related conference, seminar and postgraduate programmes operate from the TCS Centre at Nottingham Trent University. For further details of the TCS Centre's activities please contact:

Centre Administrator, The TCS Centre, Room 175, Faculty of Humanities,  
Nottingham Trent University, Clifton Lane, Nottingham, NG11 8NS, UK.

e-mail: tcs@ntu.ac.uk

*Recent volumes include:*

### **Deleuze and Guattari**

An Introduction to the Politics of Desire

*Philip Goodchild*

### **Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory**

Critical Investigations

*Bridget Fowler*

### **Re-Forming the Body**

Religion, Community and Modernity

*Philip A. Mellor and Chris Shilling*

### **The Shopping Experience**

*edited by Pasi Falk and Colin Campbell*

### **Undoing Aesthetics**

*Wolfgang Iser*

### **Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings**

*edited by David Frisby and Mike Featherstone*

### **Contested Natures**

*Phil Macnaghten and John Urry*

### **Nation Formation**

Towards a Theory of Abstract Community

*Paul James*

### **The Consumer Society**

Myths and Structures

*Jean Baudrillard*

# BAKHTIN AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES

No Last Words

edited by

Michael Mayerfeld Bell and Michael Gardiner



SAGE Publications

London · Thousand Oaks · New Delhi

1998

**Hwa Yol Jung** teaches political theory at Moravian College, Bethlehem, USA. His academic interests cover phenomenology, hermeneutics, postmodernism, comparative cultural studies, literary criticism, and ecophilosophy. His recent publications include *The Question Of Rationality and the Basic Grammar of Intercultural Texts* (1990), *Rethinking Political Theory* (1993), and 'Phenomenology and body politics' which appeared in *Body and Society* in 1996.

**Raymond Morrow** is Professor of Sociology and Adjunct Professor of Educational Policy Studies, University of Alberta, Canada. Recent publications include *Social Theory and Education* (with C.A. Torres, 1995) and *Critical Theory and Methodology* (1994).

**Greg Nielsen** is Associate Professor and Director of the Concordia Centre for Broadcasting Studies, Canada. He is on leave from the Sociology Programme at York University's Glendon College in Toronto where he is also a member of the Graduate Programme in Social and Political Thought. His first publications on Bakhtin date from 1984 and his most recent, 'Bakhtin and Habermas: toward a transcultural ethics', appeared in *Theory and Society* in 1995.

**Jennifer de Peuter** is completing her doctorate in sociology at Carleton University, Canada. Her dissertation explores the implications of a dialogical perspective for theories of narrative identity. Jennifer lives in Calgary, Alberta, and works as a freelance life historian. She has published in the *Journal of Social Psychology*.

**Barry Sandywell** is Senior Lecturer in Sociology in the Department of Sociology at the University of York, UK. He is the author of *Logological Investigations* (1996), a multi-volume work on the history of reflexivity: *Reflexivity and the Crisis of Western Reason* (volume 1), *The Beginnings of European Theorizing* (volume 2) and *Presocratic Reflexivity: The Construction of Philosophical Discourse* (volume 3).

**John Shotter** is a professor of interpersonal relations in the Department of Communication, University of New Hampshire, USA. His long-term interest is in the social conditions conducive to people having a voice in the development of participatory democracies and civil societies. He is the author of many books, most recently *Conversational Realities: The Construction of Life through Language* (1993).

**Dorothy E. Smith** is in the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies at the University of Toronto, Canada, and is the author of *Writing the Social* (forthcoming), *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge* (1990), *Texts, Facts, and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling* (1990) and *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (1987).

## PREFACE

We begin this preface on the day after we first met in the flesh, or, to use more Bakhtinian vocabulary, in chronotopic co-presence. Although we had recently sent the first draft of this manuscript off to Sage for review, and had become close colleagues and collaborators over many months of working together, until this point we had met only in cyberspace. Such are the delights of the Internet and the work of Bakhtin that scholars find themselves plunging into intimate and excited conversation despite being thousands of miles and a national border apart – in this case, the distance and the national border between St John's, Newfoundland and Ames, Iowa.

This meeting consummated a project that had grown out of a correspondence between us on the philosophy of nature in Bakhtin's writings. We both recognized a gap in the literature on alternative appropriations of Bakhtin – in the area of ecology, and in other domains in the social and human sciences as well. Michael Gardiner suggested that we co-edit a volume that would bring together some of the diverse strands of the new scholarship on Bakhtin, drawing not only on established scholars in this area, but also authors who are newly discovering his rich and suggestive writings. We were delighted that our solicitations by letter and by electronic means generated an enormous, perhaps even overwhelming, response – an embarrassment of riches. As the volume took shape, certain thematic configurations of this new scholarship began to suggest themselves. And, in the end, we selected the thirteen chapters that, as we saw it, best reflected the promise of a Bakhtinian legacy for the human sciences.

But, again, we had never met, nor even spoken on the phone. Our relationship was entirely virtual, and hence curiously decorporealized – yet not undialogical. To be sure, there is a lack of immediacy in a dialogue lacking full co-presence. Some textual and biographical evidence suggests that Bakhtin himself was suspicious of electronically mediated communication, and that, like Martin Buber, he considered the face-to-face encounter to be the most genuine manifestation of dialogue. Certainly, a purely electronic relationship tested the meaning and limits of dialogue, both as a metaphor and in terms of the practicalities of linguistic interchange.

A series of contingencies, however, has happily brought us together on this hot summer day in July, on an island in the St Lawrence River, where we are jointly composing this preface on a laptop computer in Mike Bell's boathouse. And even this briefest of chronotopic encounters confirms Bakhtin's main insight: that dialogue is not only unfinalizable, but that it always retains an element of surprise, of a loophole in time and space, of

something that remains yet to say. This open-endedness is what nourishes the will to dialogue – which, of course, is the central theme of this volume.

The portion of the book written by us is dedicated to our respective families – Rita Gardiner, Diane Mayerfeld, and Samuel Bell. We would also like to acknowledge in particular Chris Rojek, whom we initially approached with this idea, and Robert Rojek, for being such an exemplary and enthusiastic editor, and for helping to nurture this project from its earliest phases to its eventual completion. We also recognize the work of Pascale Carrington, Teresa Warren and Melissa Dunlop at Sage, and the anonymous external reviewers. And finally, of course, the contributors to the volume are to be congratulated for their patience, attention to detail, and fidelity to various deadlines. To all we offer our thanks and hopes for future communions of, as Bakhtin would have put it, ‘participatory thinking’.

MB

MG

30 July 1997, Tar Island, Ontario, Canada

Amended, mid-October, 1997, in Cyberspace

1

## BAKHTIN AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Michael Gardiner and Michael Mayerfeld Bell

[T]ruth itself, in its uttermost, indivisible, ‘atomic’ kernel, is dialogue  
– Vladimir Bibler<sup>1</sup>

By anyone’s standards, the life of the social philosopher and cultural theorist Mikhail Bakhtin was an extraordinary odyssey, during a period of Russian history not noted for its uneventfulness. Trained as a classicist and philologist in St Petersburg, his promising academic career was cut short by the cataclysmic revolutionary events of 1917. The ensuing terror and civil war even split his family asunder, as his older brother, also a scholar of high repute, rejected Bolshevism and fought for the Whites.<sup>2</sup> Bakhtin’s own initial cautious support for the new Soviet regime was eventually replaced by intellectual dissent, prompted by the termination of the relatively open New Economic Policy (NEP) era and Stalin’s consolidation of power in the late 1920s. Official banishment to Kazakhstan for ideological reasons; the disappearance of friends, family, and colleagues; continual harassment and censorship by state authorities; physical deprivation and chronic illness – these were the defining moments of a personal narrative that paralleled the plight of countless others during the darkest days of the former Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup>

Miraculously, however, Bakhtin was granted a second lease on life – and scholarship. Partially rehabilitated by the regime in the 1950s during the Khrushchevite thaw and allowed to return to the Moscow area, he was once again able to engage in active theoretical work. This, in turn, led to the rediscovery of his writings by a new generation of Soviet intellectuals and subsequently by the West. This rediscovery yet continues.

The reasons for Bakhtin’s renaissance are compelling. Despite the difficult vicissitudes of his personal life, Bakhtin managed to prosecute a highly successful intellectual career that encompassed a prodigious range of topics, which survives today as a challenging, complex, and many-hued body of work. If we include the writings of the Bakhtin circle as well as Bakhtin’s own undisputed single-authored texts,<sup>4</sup> such an *œuvre* could be said to encompass, as a partial list, the following areas: an existential phenomenology that focuses on human perception, the body, and intersubjectivity; the

aesthetics of cultural creation; the philosophy of language; literary theory; the revolutionary potential of humour; social ecology; the temporal and spatial constitution of human life; critical interrogations of Freudianism, Marxism, Russian formalism, and Saussurean linguistics; and the ethical and moral implications of all of the foregoing. These interventions were supplemented by a series of more programmatic reflections on the nature of the human sciences, mainly written in the post-war era and collected in the posthumous volume *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (1986), as well as various applications of his theoretical and philosophical insights to textual and linguistic analysis, European literature, and cultural history. Bakhtin's death in 1975 was a significant event within Russian dissident and academic circles, and, aided by the openness of the *perestroika* period, his reputation grew dramatically in subsequent years, both in his native land and abroad.

The sheer breath, complexity, and conceptual richness of Bakhtin's intellectual legacy has much to offer to a panoply of academic disciplines. Judging from the current international interest in Bakhtin's ideas and the upsurge of articles and books that evoke his concepts and theoretical vocabulary, it might appear, at least on the surface, that this promise has been largely fulfilled.<sup>5</sup> Curiously, however, the impact of Bakhtin's ideas has remained somewhat asymmetrical and selective, with the possible exception of that increasingly nebulous domain generally referred to as 'cultural studies'. In spite of his repeated insistence that his project was an inclusive and open-ended one, with broad relevance for all the human sciences – centring around an approach that has been variously termed 'dialogism' or 'translinguistics'<sup>6</sup> – the majority of scholarly work using Bakhtin can still be located in the realm of literary theory and textual analysis.<sup>7</sup> Disciplines like sociology, philosophy, political science, and so forth have been slow to recognize the potential of Bakhtin's ideas.

Indeed, despite his growing international notoriety, there remains considerable resistance to the development of Bakhtinian-inspired theoretical frameworks within many academic spheres.<sup>8</sup> The reasons for this situation are complex and multifarious. At least in part, it has to do with the fact that Bakhtin's texts were made available to Western audiences in an oddly haphazard fashion. For instance, his early philosophical works are only now being published in English, whereas the literary and textual analysis from what is often termed his 'middle period' work, and best represented by the influential study *Rabelais and His World* (written in the late 1940s), has existed in English translation for nearly three decades.

And these well-known middle-period works, which are far more than literary criticism, have been mis-framed by many potential readers from other disciplines – which is not to belittle the importance of literary criticism. But there has been a problem of intellectual cataloguing. Bakhtin's project was too complex, too interdisciplinary – to raise that much-used and much-abused and rarely fulfilled term – to be contained on only one bookshelf. Despite suggestions from many quarters that disciplinary confines are now undergoing a process of irreversible dissolution, academic boundaries

in Western post-secondary educational institutions still retain a depressing resiliency, and works like Bakhtin's continue to be rejected out-of-hand or consigned to a single box by the potato-sorters.<sup>9</sup>

Also, it must be noted that much of what Bakhtin wrote during his lifetime was never intended for publication, and was hence written in a cryptic and highly allusive style that has not encouraged a wide, multidisciplinary readership or promoted a broadly synthetic approach to the appropriation and extension of his ideas. This has, of course, been further complicated by the exigencies of translation and the reception of translated texts within particular national and linguistic intellectual cultures.<sup>10</sup> And then there is the sheer density of some of his writing, particularly the early philosophical works. Nevertheless, Bakhtin was a good, and highly quotable, writer – as the chapters in this book attest – and an extraordinarily rewarding partner in the dialogue of reading.

Finally, for many years, the reception of Bakhtin's work was tainted by ideological differences fostered by the lengthy post-war geo-political stalemate between the state-socialist Eastern bloc and the liberal-capitalist West. This encouraged a very proprietorial attitude towards Bakhtin's legacy and a number of fierce, and sometimes unhelpful polemics, especially between Slavistic interpreters of Bakhtin, who have tended towards the conservative side of the political spectrum, and those who have favoured the utilization of Bakhtinian ideas for a progressive sociocultural critique and praxis, including feminists, Marxists, poststructuralists, and others (Hirschkop, 1986; Shepherd, 1993). Equally proprietorial was the debate in the West over whether Bakhtin was a Marxist, which for a number of years preoccupied some scholars and probably alienated some others. This kind of intellectual tribalism is, of course, distressing and regrettable, but also seems now to be waning. Perhaps the time is upon us when Bakhtin can be evaluated in a fresh light, without the distorting influence of academic boundary-making and cold war clichés and platitudes.

For these and other reasons, the result is that Bakhtin is generally associated with literary studies by individuals working in other academic areas. When he *has* been recognized as a figure of note outside literary criticism, Bakhtin has often been (quite inaccurately) lumped in with the 'new wave' of mainly French poststructuralist and postmodernist thinkers, represented by the likes of Derrida, Foucault, Kristeva, and Lacan. One effect of this conflation is that Bakhtin has been absorbed willy-nilly into the modernity versus postmodernity debate, and held up as an iconic figure to be either scorned or celebrated, depending on one's theoretical and ideological convictions. Such selective enlistment has often obscured the originality of Bakhtin's project and the complex nature of his relationship to postmodern thought. This, in turn, has militated against the creative utilization of his ideas by a wide range of intellectual domains, as a fecund source of inspiration for theorizing about and responding to current sociopolitical and cultural developments.<sup>11</sup>

It could also be noted that the recent publication in English translation

of some of Bakhtin's earliest writings – including *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* (1990) and *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1993) – adds impetus to the suggestion that his ideas have considerable relevance outside literary studies proper. (It seems there are still more manuscripts of these early works currently being prepared for publication in Russia.) These texts, written when he was only in his mid-twenties, are best described as philosophical and social-theoretical works that address a wide range of key issues in the human sciences, including aesthetics and the nature of cultural creation, the ontology of intersubjective life and the life-world (centring around a phenomenology of the 'deed' or 'act'), interhuman ethics, the process of value construction in sociocultural life, and the critique of an abstract, formalized rationality. Although written before he developed his characteristic metalinguistic paradigm in the late 1920s, these formative studies contain *in nuce* Bakhtin's ideas about the dialogical character of language, culture and selfhood, the open-ended or 'unfinalizable' nature of such phenomena, and the central importance of ethics and responsibility in human life. They also reveal more clearly some of his key formative influences, including Bergson, Husserl, Kant, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer, all of whom can be regarded primarily as philosophers and social thinkers. These writings reveal a quite different side to Bakhtin, one that has received much less attention to date than his later texts, which contain such by now familiar concepts as 'carnival', 'polyphony', and 'heteroglossia'. They demonstrate conclusively that he is a *social* theorist in a very significant and profound sense. The debate over this aspect of Bakhtin's work and its contribution to theoretical development in the human sciences is only at a very embryonic stage.

Thus far, we have argued for the potential importance of Bakhtin's ideas for the human sciences, with respect to the chronotope of our present-day consumer society. But, in more specific terms, why should Bakhtin interest contemporary sociologists, philosophers, political theorists, psychologists, historians, geographers, social ecologists and so forth? Eschewing a general exegesis of Bakhtin's central ideas, a function that has already been admirably discharged by a number of existing studies,<sup>12</sup> we will focus on briefly situating Bakhtin *vis-à-vis* the current climate of theoretical work.

First, Bakhtin is of topical interest because, in a quite remarkable fashion, he anticipated a number of later developments within poststructuralist and postmodernist theory which have been part of the broad assault on the axioms of Western science and rationality in recent years. It is significant to note, for example, that he was at the forefront of the 'linguistic turn', perhaps the defining feature of twentieth-century social thought, in that he early identified communicative and symbolic practices as the *locus classicus* of human life. All sociocultural phenomena, according to Bakhtin, are constituted through the ongoing, dialogical relationship between individuals and groups, involving a multiplicity of different languages, discourses, and symbolizing practices. In prioritizing the relation over the isolated, self-sufficient monad, his ideas dovetail neatly with present attempts to

supersede what is often called 'subject-centred reason'. As Wald Godzich puts it, Bakhtin offers us 'an alternative conception of the constitution of the subject to the prevailing one that is anchored in the theoretic and produces the familiar dyad of subject and object' (1991: 10). Furthermore, Bakhtin is no less incredulous than Jean-François Lyotard regarding the metanarrative. He is fully sensitized to the domineering potential of abstract Reason, and he strives to resist the seductive blandishments of Hegelian-style dialectics. As such, Bakhtin, like his postmodernist counterparts, privileges the marginal, the de-centred, the contingent, and the unofficial. In highlighting the dialogical relations between different symbolic systems and practices that have generated the kinds of 'heteroglot' and composite cultural forms that we are becoming increasingly familiar with today in the wake of a pervasive globalization process, a Bakhtinian model holds considerable promise with respect to the theorization of such phenomena as the new media, popular cultural forms, 'hybridization' and multiculturalism, and the emergence of post-colonialist discourses, just to name a few (Featherstone, 1995; Young, 1995).

Secondly, Bakhtin's work parallels the current reawakening of interest in the everyday lifeworld, and with the nature of 'intercarnal' and intersubjective experience, as opposed to the theorization of general 'laws' of socio-historical development (Dallmayr, 1991). Throughout his investigations, Bakhtin was concerned with a number of interlocking phenomena that are only now receiving sustained attention in social and cultural theory – such as the body, the chronotopic organization of 'lived' time and space with respect to the constitution of social experience, the nature of 'primal' or pre-reflective intersubjectivity, the role played by value, affect, and desire, and many others. Bakhtin's approach indicates a pronounced hostility towards transhistoric and deterministic theorizing, such as Saussure's structural linguistics and orthodox Marxism, not only because such theories ignored or denigrated the sphere of everyday sociality, but also inasmuch as they violated his stress on the open-endedness of history and the 'unfinalizable' nature of the thoughts and actions of the human subject with respect to what he liked to call the 'event of Being'. In this sense, Bakhtin's work has considerable relevance with respect to the recent upsurge of research on sexuality, gender issues, everyday life studies, body politics, new social movements, postmodern identities, spatiality and temporality, and so forth.

Thirdly, there is a significant ethical component to Bakhtin's thought that runs through all of his writings. Ethics, as well as the nature of sociocultural value, has recently emerged as a central topic in social theory and philosophy, as evinced by the writings of Habermas, Derrida, Levinas, and many others (Bauman, 1993; Connor, 1992; Seidman, 1994). For Bakhtin, ethics is interpreted as a primordial concern for the other and an unequivocal recognition of difference, which is linked inextricably to the experience of alterity, the self/other relation, which constitutes the basis of his dialogical outlook. In developing such a conception of the necessarily ethical character of human life, one that is rooted in everyday sociability and the

dialogical encounter between subjects, Bakhtin avoids the twin extremes of moral absolutism and an 'anything goes' postmodern relativism. As such, he manages to adumbrate a moral vision that is highly apropos for our times.

Finally, this preoccupation with ethics raises another significant feature of Bakhtin's thought: that although there are broad affinities between his ideas and recent developments in postmodernist and poststructuralist theory, Bakhtin is not easily assimilated to the latter. Sharply critical of ego-logical reason and the philosophy of consciousness, Bakhtin is nonetheless clearly at odds with those who would celebrate the fragmentation or dissolution of the subject. For Bakhtin, the self is an embodied entity situated in concrete time and space, and which is constituted in and through its dialogical relations with others and the world at large. This subject is certainly 'decentred', but not erased altogether, for Bakhtin places a considerable premium on human creativity, responsibility, and agency. We relate to language and other social processes dialogically, as practices that are simultaneously structured and structuring; hence, human beings are not simply 'effects' of linguistic systems or apparatuses of power/knowledge, as many postmodernists would have it. In developing this stance, Bakhtin attempts to reconcile the false dichotomy between objectivism and subjectivism, and to sidestep the limitations of the anthropocentric and hubristic tendencies of modernity, no less than the extreme 'post-humanism' of a Baudrillard or Deleuze. Hence, Bakhtin's social thought holds considerable potential for the development of a new humanistic outlook that is not centred in the monologic, self-contained subject but on the boundary between self and other, or what Augusto Ponzio has usefully termed a '*humanism of otherness*' (1991: 3). In focusing on the realm of the 'interhuman', Bakhtin's thought displays numerous affinities with Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, and many feminist approaches (Gardiner, 1996).<sup>13</sup>

Bakhtin therefore retains a more nuanced, and indeed more social, view of modernity than most postmodernists, which has at least some parallels with Jürgen Habermas's defence of a 'radicalized modernity'. Cognizant of its considerable capacity for violence and domination, Bakhtin is also keenly aware of a strong potential in the postmetaphysical age for an expansion of participatory democracy and dialogue. He would seem to have considerable empathy with what Agnes Heller and Ferenc Fehér (1988), as well as one of us (Gardiner, 1997), have called a 'radical tolerance'. This is not a form of tolerance that simply allows us to 'put up with' the existence of a multiplicity of forms of life and world-views. Rather, it aims at mutual recognition and co-understanding in a manner that opens up each such form of life to a diversity of reciprocal influences and points of view.<sup>14</sup> This is why Bakhtin regards 'truth' as something that is constituted dialogically and intersubjectively. In short, he envisages the widening and deepening of the public sphere, again anticipating recent developments in social theory, most notably those advocated by Habermas in this case (Hirschkop, 1990; Nielsen, 1995). In taking this position, Bakhtin does not abrogate the need for ideological criticism, as have numerous postmodern theorists, and he

continues to entertain Utopian alternatives to existing sociopolitical conditions, most notably in his writings on carnival. All of his works bespeak of the necessity to overturn structures of domination, to challenge illegitimate curtailments of human freedom, and to establish more just and equitable relations of power between individuals and groups. In short, it is possible to read Bakhtin both with and against the grain of postmodernist modes of thinking, although it is clear that his work provides little succour for what Ben Agger terms 'establishment' postmodernism.<sup>15</sup> If this is postmodernism, then it is *practical* postmodernism – postmodernism we can do something with.<sup>16</sup>

The goal of the present collection is to provide a focal point for some of the diverse new scholarship that is beginning to emerge on Bakhtin from a wide range of disciplines, and to extend the concept of 'dialogue' from linguistic communication in the narrow sense to a multiplicity of different social, cultural, and ecological phenomena. It is our feeling that this volume will help to fulfil a pressing need to resituate and foreground Bakhtinian problematics *vis-à-vis* the current debate over the nature and direction of critical theoretical inquiry within the human sciences, and to extend his ideas into new research domains. Much of the existing literature has been characterized by a superficial appropriation of Bakhtinian tropes or neologisms, to the neglect of a serious philosophical engagement with his core ideas and a sustained reflection on their implications for contemporary theoretical practice. The intent of this anthology is, therefore, to go well beyond the 'add Bakhtin and mix' mentality that sometimes prevails in the existing academic milieu. The various chapters included here strive to explore the theoretical and philosophical roots of Bakhtin's dialogical imagination, to engage his concepts with a plethora of figures and intellectual developments, and, finally, to enlist Bakhtinian ideas for the project of developing genuinely post-Cartesian human sciences.

In the pages that follow we offer four manners of exploration, engagement, and enlistment – four means of congress between Bakhtin and the human sciences. We have designated these means *Dialogics*, *Carnivals*, *Conversations*, and *Ethics and Everyday Lives*, and bunched together the anthology's thirteen chapters along these plural and permeable lines. The lines are plural in their names, but also, we hope, in their encouragement of other responding voices, their inducement to sociability, and, ultimately, their stimulation of the eclipse of any implied singularity of the printed word. The lines are permeable in their receptivity, we hope, to other ways of understanding Bakhtin's work – and, we hope, as well in the receptivity of other ways to what is offered here. This book is not comprehensive, far from it. Nor would we want it to be, for that would suggest that there is nothing left to say on Bakhtin and the human sciences, beyond these pages. Rather, the book is intended to suggest something of the scope and potential of what could be said, while simultaneously increasing that scope and potential. More is neither possible nor desirable. Indeed, more would in the long run be less.

The first section, *Dialogics*, contains four such suggestions, concentrating on the utility of Bakhtin's concept of dialogics for sociology and psychology. The first, by John Shotter and Michael Billig, asks what a dialogic psychology would look like; the other three, by Jennifer de Peuter, Michael Mayerfeld Bell, and Dorothy E. Smith, ask the same question of sociology, exploring themes of identity, culture, and disciplinary practice, respectively. The second section, *Carnivals*, shelters a rumination on the often painful bodily boundaries of the cyborg life by Peter Hitchcock, an examination of the body's politics by Hwa Yol Jung, and a discussion by Michael Bernard-Donals of how we might welcome those who are unheard into the carnival of the human sciences. *Conversations*, the third section, presents creative engagements between Bakhtin and Merleau-Ponty, Mannheim, and Bourdieu, hosted, in turn, by Michael Gardiner, Raymond A. Morrow, and Ian Burkitt, and emphasizing how such engagements might speak to the problem of knowledge and problem of the author. The concluding section, *Ethics and Everyday Lives*, houses a chapter by Courtney Bender on a Bakhtinian approach to everyday life, drawing primarily on the early Bakhtin; a chapter by Barry Sandywell on the complex ethical and phenomenological connections between our experience of time, communication, and the other; and a final chapter by Greg Nielsen on answerability, the ethical foundation of Bakhtin's notion of dialogue.

This is obviously only the briefest of introductions to the chapters. (An examination of the table of contents would tell nearly as much.) We have refrained from the editorial hubris of providing a reader's digest of the chapters, as is often done in collected volumes, finding these prevent engagement more than they encourage it by giving the impression that there is no real need to proceed further. But we hope to have indicated the diversity – or, better put, the polyphony – of the collection, and to have provided an invitation to join us in the café as we converse, confer, contest, and confabulate over what Bakhtin has suggested we all consider.

In bringing together such wide-ranging readings of Bakhtin, we hope to make readers more aware of the rich promise of utilizing dialogical theory in the human sciences. Vladimir Bibler, a prominent Russian scholar, has argued that '*Bakhtin has outlined the transition from cognizing reason to dialogic reason whose mode is mutual understanding*' (Akhutin and Bibler, 1993: 356 original emphasis). It is our belief that it would be unwise not to reflect on the immense significance this paradigmatic shift represents.

## Notes

- 1 Quoted in Akhutin and Bibler (1993).
- 2 One of the characters in Terry Eagleton's novel *Saints and Scholars* (1987) is Nikolai Bakhtin, Mikhail's brother. See also his 'Wittgenstein's Friends, in *Against the Grain* (1986).
- 3 For a full-length biography of Bakhtin, see Clark and Holquist's *Mikhail Bakhtin* (1984).
- 4 Opinion for many years has been divided as to whether Bakhtin actually wrote *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1986), *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique* (1976) (both

originally attributed to V.N. Voloshinov) and *The Formal Method* (1985) (attributed to Pavel Medvedev), or whether Bakhtin was simply a major influence on these texts, both stylistically and intellectually. In their comprehensive study *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (1990), Morson and Emerson argue convincingly that the evidence that Bakhtin did in fact write these works is anecdotal and unconvincing, and many Bakhtin scholars have of late come around to accepting this position.

5 For instance, a series of highly successful biennial international symposiums on Bakhtin is now in its second decade. The 1995 gathering, which coincided with the centenary of Bakhtin's birth, was celebrated in Moscow amid considerable fanfare and a high level of international scholarly interest. Scholarly articles mentioning Bakhtin number in the thousands, and in 1996 *Rabelais and His World* (1984) was the second most cited text in the *Humanities Citation Index*. Recently, the University of Sheffield has sponsored the establishment of a 'Bakhtin Centre', together with a website, electronic newsletter, and on-line database. A number of Bakhtin pages and discussion groups, both 'official' and 'unofficial', have sprung up on the Internet. A new Russian edition of Bakhtin's complete writings is in the works, and an interdisciplinary journal called *Dialogism: An International Journal of Bakhtin Studies*, edited by David Shepherd, the Director of the Bakhtin Centre, will begin publication in 1998.

6 Michael Holquist defines dialogism as 'a pragmatically oriented theory of knowledge' that seeks to 'grasp human behaviour through the use human beings make of language' (1990: 15), whereas Tzvetan Todorov designates 'translinguistics' as 'the discipline that studies the stable, non-individual forms of discourse' (1984: 82).

7 It is worth pointing out that Bakhtin has long been considered as a philosopher and social thinker in Russia, as opposed to the West. To quote the Russian critic Anatolii Akhutin:

[I]t is very easy to confine [Bakhtin], so to speak, within the field of literary studies. That is, to think of him as a gifted, interesting, original – but still quite traditional literary critic; or (more imaginatively) to conceive of him as a structuralist, a semiotician. . . . Bakhtin has certainly made a name for himself in these fields by taking notice of such things as the significance of the dialogic structure of texts, the necessity of taking into account all those components of a text that determine its specific genre, etc. But his *philosophical* intention – and the fact that his intention was first and foremost *philosophical* – this remains unnoticed by the great majority of his Western commentators. (Akhutin and Bibler, 1993: 357)

8 This is not to say, of course, that no significant work has appeared on Bakhtin outside literary studies in the last two decades. Rob Shields (1991), for instance, has productively utilized Bakhtinian notions in the area of cultural geography, as has Mireya Folch-Serra (1990). Indeed, many of the contributors to this volume have already sought, in other works, to extend Bakhtin beyond literary criticism. We would call attention to Bell (1994, 1998), Bender (1997), Billig (1991, 1997), Gardiner (1992, 1993, 1996), Hitchcock (1993a, 1993b), Sandywell (1996), and Shotter (1992).

9 For an example of one such recent suggestion, see Seidman (1994: 325).

10 On this score, it is highly instructive to consult the fifth edition of *The Bakhtin Newsletter* (Ed. Lee and Thomson, 1996), which is devoted to how Bakhtin's ideas have been received within particular national cultures and intellectual traditions, including Germany, Russia, Israel, and many others.

11 Wall and Thomson's observations on this point are illuminating:

[I]f there was ever an intellectual profile that would prompt us to go beyond the chronotopes represented in *literature* and to venture into the chronotopes in which and through someone's ideas might be connected to the contemporary problems and issues generated by our consumer societies, Bakhtin must surely represent such a figure. At the very least, any practical use of ethical philosophy would compel us to transcend the bounds of the literary text. (Wall and Thomson, 1993: 75)

12 This would include, in addition to the Clark and Holquist (1984) biography and Morson



and Emerson's encyclopedic *Mikhail Bakhtin* (1990), such works as Gardiner (1992), Holquist (1990), Stam (1989), and Todorov (1984).

13 For a good introduction to feminist approaches to Bakhtin, albeit from a mainly literary point of view, see Horne and Wussow (1994).

14 In other words, Bakhtin's dialogical principle must be central to the interrelationship of different forms of life in the postmodern era, in which each interlocutor is open to modifying one's own viewpoint through a dialogical engagement with the other. 'The person who understands must not reject the possibility of changing or even abandoning his already prepared viewpoints and positions. In the act of understanding, a struggle occurs that results in mutual change and enrichment', as Bakhtin puts it (1986: 142). Classical liberalism, no less than the extreme forms of postmodernism – although they pay lip service to the value of tolerance and inclusiveness – are not really open to transforming their own position through dialogical contact with the other. Symptomatic of this is Lyotard's (1984) contrual of postmodern society as a collection of discrete and incommensurate forms of life.

15 According to Agger (1992: 294–302), there is a distinction to be made between what could be termed a 'critical' postmodernism, one that is aware of the limitations of absolute Reason and the aporias of modernity, but which continues to hold out the possibility of a progressive political praxis and non-dogmatic critique, and 'establishment' postmodernism, which favours a purely ironic or satirical relationship to the *status quo* and has thus made its peace with consumer capitalism.

16 For an analysis of a social movement that advocates a practical, or pragmatic, reading of postmodernism's insights, see Bell et al.'s (1997) account of the dialogical development of sustainable agriculture in the Midwest of the United States of America.

## References

- Agger, Ben (1992) *The Discourse of Domination: From the Frankfurt School to Postmodernism*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Akhutin, Anatolii and Bibler, Vladimir (1993) 'Bakhtin's legacy and the history of science and culture: an interview with Anatolii Akhutin and Vladimir Bibler', *Configurations*, 1 (3): 335–86.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. (1984) *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. Hélène Isowolsky. Foreword by Krystyna Pomorska. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. (1986) *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Ed. C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Trans. V.W. McGee. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. (1990) *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Ed. M. Holquist and V. Liapunov. Trans. and notes V. Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. (1993) *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Ed. M. Holquist. Trans. and notes V. Liapunov. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. and Medvedev, Pavel N. (1985) *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. Trans. Albert J. Wehrle. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bauman, Zygmunt (1993) *Postmodern Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bell, Michael M. (1994) 'Deep fecology: Mikhail Bakhtin and the call of nature', *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism*, 5 (4): 65–84.
- Bell, Michael M. (1998) *An Invitation to Environmental Sociology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bell, Michael M., Bauer, Donna M., Jarnagin, Susan and Peter, Greg (1997) 'Postmodernism on the farm: toward a pragmatic sociology of sustainable agriculture'. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Agriculture and Human Values, Madison, Wisconsin.
- Bender, Courtney (1997) 'Kitchen work: the everyday practice of religion, cooking, and caring for people with AIDS'. PhD dissertation, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.
- Billig, Michael (1991) *Ideology and Opinions: Studies in Rhetorical Psychology*. London: Sage.
- Billig, Michael (1997) 'The dialogic unconscious: psycho-analysis, discursive psychology and the nature of repression', *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 36: 139–59.
- Clark, Katerina and Holquist, Michael (1984) *Mikhail Bakhtin*. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.
- Connor, Steven (1992) *Theory and Cultural Value*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Dallmayr, Fred (1991) *Life-World, Modernity and Critique: Paths between Heidegger and the Frankfurt School*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Eagleton, Terry (1986) *Against the Grain: Selected Essays*. London: Verso.
- Eagleton, Terry (1987) *Saints and Scholars*. London: Verso.
- Featherstone, Michael (1995) *Undoing Culture: Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity*. London: Sage.
- Folch-Serra, Mireya (1990) 'Play, voice, space: Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogical landscape', *Society and Space*, 8: 255–74.
- Gardiner, Michael (1992) *The Dialogics of Critique: M.M. Bakhtin and the Theory of Ideology*. London: Routledge.
- Gardiner, Michael (1993) 'Ecology and carnival: traces of a "green" social theory in the writings of M.M. Bakhtin', *Theory and Society*, 22 (6): 765–812.
- Gardiner, Michael (1996) 'Alterity and ethics: a dialogical perspective', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 13 (2): 120–43.
- Gardiner, Michael (1997) 'A postmodern utopia? Heller and Fehér's critique of messianic marxism', *Utopian Studies* 8 (1): 89–122.
- Godzich, Wald (1991) 'Correcting Kant: Bakhtin and intercultural interactions', *Boundary 2*, 18 (1): 5–17.
- Heller, Agnes and Fehér, Ferenc (1988) *The Postmodern Political Condition*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hirschkop, Ken (1986) 'The domestication of M.M. Bakhtin', *Essays in Poetics*, 11 (1): 76–87.
- Hirschkop, Ken (1990) 'Heteroglossia and civil society: Bakhtin's public square and the politics of modernity', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 23 (1): 65–75.
- Hitchcock, Peter (1993a) *Dialogics of the Oppressed*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hitchcock, Peter (1993b) 'Exotopy and feminist critique', in D. Shepherd (ed.), *Bakhtin: Carnival and Other Subjects*. Amsterdam: Rodopi. pp. 196–209.
- Holquist, Michael (1990) *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*. London: Routledge.
- Horne, Karen and Wussow, Helen (eds) (1994) *A Dialogue of Voices: Feminist Literary Theory and Bakhtin*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lee, Scott and Thomson, Clive (eds) (1996) *Bakhtin around the World: The Bakhtin Newsletter*, no. 5. Sheffield: University of Sheffield Press.
- Lyotard, Jean-François (1984) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Morson, Gary S. and Emerson, Caryl (1990) *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Nielsen, Greg (1995) 'Bakhtin and Habermas: towards a transcultural ethics', *Theory and Society*, 24 (6): 803–35.
- Ponzio, Augusto (1991) 'Humanism of the other man in Bakhtin and Levinas'. Unpublished manuscript.
- Sandywell, Barry (1996) *Logological Investigations* (3 vols). London: Routledge.
- Seidman, Steven (1994) *Contested Knowledge*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Shepherd, D. (1993) 'Introduction: (mis)representing Bakhtin', in D. Shepherd (ed.), *Bakhtin: Carnival and Other Subjects*. Amsterdam: Rodopi. pp. i–xxxii.
- Shields, Robert (1991) *Places on the Margins: Alternative Geographies of Modernity*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Shotter, John (1992) 'Bakhtin and Billig: monological versus dialogical practices', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 36: 8–21.
- Stam, Robert (1989) *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism and Film*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.



- Todorov, Tzvetan (1984) *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Voloshinov, V.N. (1976) *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*. Eds I.R. Titunik and N. Bruss. New York and London: Academic Press.
- Voloshinov, V.N. (1986) *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trans. L. Matejka and I.R. Titunik. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wall, Anthony and Thomson, Clive (1993) 'Cleaning up Bakhtin's carnival act', *Diacritics*, 23 (2): 47–70.
- Young, Robert (1995) *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London and New York: Routledge.

## PART I

### DIALOGICS

#### 2

## A BAKHTINIAN PSYCHOLOGY: FROM OUT OF THE HEADS OF INDIVIDUALS AND INTO THE DIALOGUES BETWEEN THEM

John Shotter and Michael Billig

It is an unfortunate misunderstanding (a legacy of rationalism) to think that truth can only be the truth that is composed of universal moments; that the truth of a situation is precisely that which is repeatable and constant in it. – Mikhail Bakhtin<sup>1</sup>

'Language lives', says Bakhtin, 'only in the dialogic interaction of those who make use of it' (1984: 183). Thus the move to the dialogical in psychology leads us more towards a focus on people's social practices, rather than on what is supposed to be occurring within their individual heads. Our attention is drawn both to the responses of others to what we do as well as to our own embodied responses to them and to our surroundings – that is, we are confronted once again with the question of whether it matters that we exist in the world as living bodies in a society with a culture and a history, rather than as isolated inanimate mechanisms. But more than just reminding us of our embodiment and our living relations to each other and to our surroundings, the turn to dialogue also confronts us with something else quite remarkable, for something very special occurs when one human voice addresses another: 'An utterance is never just a reflection or an expression of something already existing and outside it that is given and final. It always creates something that never existed before, something absolutely new and unrepeatable, and, moreover, it always has some relation to value (the true, the good, the beautiful, and so forth)' (Bakhtin, 1986: 119–20). In other words, dialogical events always give rise to something unique and unrepeatable. And, as we shall argue, it is in these only 'once-occurrent event[s]