

## BEYOND REIFICATION: MIKHAIL BAKHTIN'S CRITIQUE OF VIOLENCE IN COGNITION AND REPRESENTATION

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### Introduction

The publication of Mikhail Bakhtin's *Collected Works* (1996–2012, henceforth *CW*) has brought to light the fragmentary nature of his critical writings, especially in the years between 1940 and 1962 (Bocharov, *CW* 5: 379).<sup>1</sup> Today, the Bakhtin reader inevitably finds himself face to face not with a finished corpus of texts, but with drafts and notes, with alternate variants, and with a Bakhtin who has been constructed and canonized out of “bits and pieces” (Sandomirskaia). Such a Bakhtin, if he is to be made sense of, requires an active theory of reading that engages with its subject dialogically, an approach based on the “active understanding” of which Bakhtin so often wrote. Such an active theory of reading can follow several trajectories: one that provides a close reading of Bakhtin's texts (with or without other thinkers) and another that reconstructs his intellectual roots. These trajectories are by no means mutually exclusive, but the former grounds the latter and allows us to see differences obscured by an apparent repetition of terms and structural similarities, disrupting the calloused recognition that afflicts our reading. Such a strategy seems especially relevant for fragmentary writing, which unfolds not (only) in accordance with linear logic, but (also) between words, etymologies, metaphors, lists, and repetitions.

In what follows, I attempt to reconstruct Bakhtin's theory of cognition from a distinct set of concerns that emerges in his 1940s notebooks. By offering a comparative, close reading of three texts from these notebooks, “On the Philosophical Foundations of the Human Sciences” (c. 1940–1943), “Rhetoric to

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1. Throughout the article I cite forum translations by their abbreviated English titles, followed by page numbers in the forum. When citing Bakhtin's *Collected Works* (*CW*), I use the following format: “Abbreviated title,” *CW* volume: page(s). All translations that do not appear in this forum are my own, unless otherwise noted.

the Extent That It Lies” (1943), and “On Questions of Self-Consciousness and Self-Evaluation” (c. 1943–1946), two of which are translated in this forum, I highlight Bakhtin’s 1940s take on what it means to know and represent something. In these essays Bakhtin not only proposes a methodology for the human sciences based on what he calls “personality”-directed cognition, but also offers an important corrective to persistent efforts to split “personality” and “thing” as objects of cognition into pure, mutually exclusive categories. Instead of presenting “personality” and “thing” as fundamentally different objects of knowledge, he reconceptualizes them as *limits* of cognition. Thus, while Bakhtin adopts anti-positivist discourse in critiquing the application of scientific methods to the domain of the spirit (*Geisteswissenschaft*), he ultimately distances himself from its early variants by rejecting the essentialism implicit in binary oppositions of “nature” and “spirit,” “thing” and “personality,” and other parallel categories. After laying out Bakhtin’s 1940s vision of cognition, I reflect on what his theory of cognitive limits means for the possibility of non-violent representation both on its own and against available forms of representation.

### Bakhtin’s Theory of Cognition

“Towards the Philosophical Foundations of the Human Sciences” (c. 1940–1943), written thirty years prior to the more familiar “Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences” (1974),<sup>2</sup> contains the clearest outline of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of cognition. Among its contributions to a philosophy of the human sciences is the idea that cognition can be directed toward two “limits”—“thing” (*veshch’*) and “personality” (*lichnost’*) (“K filosofskim osnovam gumanitarnykh nauk” (“On the Philosophical Foundations of the Human Sciences,” henceforth “Philosophical Foundations”), *CW* 5: 7). Cognition directed toward the limit “thing” is a “unidirectional act” of understanding or “mastering” (*ovladienie*) that attempts to “examine exhaustively” its object (*CW* 5: 7, 8). Practical and serious, such cognition delimits its object, arrests and stabilizes it, creating the impression of stasis (*CW* 5: 7, 8, 10). Caught up in a desire for “precision,” “thing cognition”<sup>3</sup> assigns ob-

2. Only the latter essay has previously appeared in English (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 159–72). As the editors of the *CW* note, the 1975 Russian publication of “Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences,” as well as its later, reedited publication in *Estetika slovesnogo tvorчества* (1979; henceforth *EST*), on which the English translation is based, is an editorial compilation of Bakhtin’s notes by Vadim Kozhinov (Gogotishvili *CW* 6: 535–37, 655–57). It does not exist as a single, seamless text in the way that it was published in *EST* and translated in *Speech Genres*. For an English-language summary of the issues with what was thought to be Bakhtin’s last text, see Shepherd 35.

3. Henceforth, I use “thing cognition” and “personality cognition” as shorthand for “cognition directed toward the limit thing” and “cognition directed toward the limit personality,” respectively. As I expound below, “thing cognition” and “personality cognition” should not be

jects final definitions, with which the object in the process of becoming cannot coincide (*CW* 5: 7, 8). Cognition directed toward the limit “personality,” by contrast, calls for “free self-revelation” of the cognized object (*CW* 5: 7); it allows the object to speak for itself. Rather than “precision,” the criterion here is “the depth of penetrating understanding” (*CW* 5: 7). “Personality cognition” takes into account not only the object’s “surroundings” (*okruzhenie*), but also its “horizon” (*krugozor*) and its “inconsumable core” (*CW* 5: 7). In contrast to thing cognition’s show of mastery, personality cognition is an exercise of dialogic understanding that requires “a preservation of distance” vis-à-vis the object and an attitude of “pure selflessness” (*CW* 5: 8, 9).

Bakhtin repeatedly stresses that “personality” and “thing” are “limits,” that is, parameters of possibility, rather than essences or “substances.”<sup>4</sup> Akin to the limits of a mathematical function, “personality” and “thing” cannot be met by an act of cognition; these limits can only be asymptotically approached. Put otherwise, any individual act of cognition can be *directed* at the limits, but never *coincide* with them. While evoking anti-positivist binaries that divide nature and spirit into separate epistemological domains, Bakhtin challenges the unbridgeable separation between “personality” and “thing” by reconceptualizing them as limits.<sup>5</sup> That is, instead of insisting on substantive binaries,

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conflated with *types* of cognition; I use this shorthand to indicate *directedness* or orientation towards limits. This distinction is important for understanding Bakhtin’s departure from similar attempts to divide “thing” and “personality” (or parallel conceptual pairings) into clearly distinguishable objects of knowledge that require fundamentally different approaches.

4. “Cognizing a thing and cognizing a personality. It is necessary to characterize these as limits [*predely*]. [...] A dead thing does not exist as a limit; it is an abstract (conditional) element” (“Philosophical Foundations,” *CW* 5: 7). Cf. Bakhtin’s later formulation, “Thing and personality (subject) as *limits* of cognition. The degree of thingness and of personality,” and “thing and personality are *limits*, not absolute substances” (“Rabochie zapisi” (“Working Notes”), *CW* 6: 423, 427; Bakhtin’s emphases).

5. Specifically, Bakhtin appears to be polemicizing with Max Scheler, whose take on personality Bakhtin quotes in an earlier summary from 1927–1928: “Personality is an unrecognizable, individually experienced *substance* of the unity of all acts carried out by a being, a substance that cannot be translated into “knowledge”; that is, [it is] not an “object,” and much less a “thing” (Scheler, quoted in Bakhtin’s summary of *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, *CW* 2: 666). This and similar summaries in Bakhtin’s archive can serve as a guide to understanding the thinker’s intellectual contexts. However, the mere presence of such materials does not by itself indicate Bakhtin’s agreement with these sources. Even when Bakhtin accepted and appropriated others’ ideas, he reshaped them to his own purposes. For a more detailed exploration of Bakhtin and Scheler’s relationship, see Brandist, *Bakhtin Circle* 39, 46; Gogotishvili, *CW* 1: 370–72, 457–92; Liapunov, *CW* 1: 499–503; Poole; Wyman 14–63. In the Russian philosophical context, Bakhtin is possibly evoking the division between “I” and “thing” of Aleksandr Meier (Meier 171; Gogotishvili, *CW* 5: 390), who, along with Bakhtin, was arrested in 1928 for participation in a religious-philosophical discussion group (Savkin; Emerson, *First* 185). Although the evidence of Bakhtin’s involvement in the “Resurrection” group was tenuous (Savkin 109), Bakhtin was sentenced to five years in the Solovki prison camp. The sentence was eventually commuted to exile in Kustanai. On the importance of Meier’s ideas for Bakhtin, see Isupov.

Bakhtin destabilizes the possibility of pure categories in relation to how objects are known.<sup>6</sup>

Such a view does not imply that there is no qualitative difference between “thing” and “personality”; Bakhtin’s suggestion has more to do with how we experience these limits in a concrete cognitive act. In another contemporaneous fragment, “On Questions of Self-Consciousness and Self-Evaluation” (c. 1943–1946), Bakhtin articulates the impossibility of reaching the personality limit more clearly:

From the kingdom of objecthood, thinghood, the kingdom of clear-cut doneness, of necessity, where thingifying cognition operates, from there we enter into the kingdom of freedom, of non-predetermination, of unexpectedness, and absolute newness, of infinite possibilities and of one’s non-coincidence with oneself. But *the boundaries of this kingdom of freedom*, as cognition makes its inroads, *recede further and further*: in personality there appear ever newer and newer shells of the thingish and the necessary [...]: that which had seemed to be the last free kernel turns out to be a new shell of the soul’s flesh (even if this shell is thinner). (“On Questions” 221–23; my emphasis)

This passage suggests that when cognition is directed toward the “personality” limit, the “personality” of the object evades the cognitive act, revealing only a more complex picture of the object without access to its ultimate core. In other words, Bakhtin’s model of limits rules out the possibility of cognitive acts that coincide with either limit. Rather than a simple binary, Bakhtin’s model resembles a sliding scale, along which a whole spectrum of cognitive acts—ranging between the limits “personality” and “thing”—is possible.<sup>7</sup> Implicit in such a model of cognition is the idea that an object can never be completely reified or completely personalized, and, conversely, an object can never be completely free of reification (*oveshchestvlenie*)<sup>8</sup> or per-

6. While Bakhtin rejects the possibility of strict boundaries between “thing” and “personality” as objects of knowledge, he also steers clear of positions like that of Gustav Shpet, who opts to dissolve the boundaries between “I” and “object”: “I am an object” (*ia est’ predmet*) (Shpet 101; quoted in Gogotishvili, *CW* 5: 390).

7. The non-binary aspect of Bakhtin’s proposal here has not been sufficiently appreciated, perhaps because it continues to be eclipsed by his monologic-dialogic dyad. Brandist has mapped Bakhtin’s view of the monologic method of the natural sciences and the dialogic method of the human sciences onto the distinction between *Willkür*, which he glosses as “naturally determined will,” and *Wille*, understood as “morally legislative will” (“Neobkhodimost” (“Necessity”) 58–59; *Bakhtin Circle* 166). Tihanov has suggested that the relationship between the monologic and dialogic can be understood in dialectical terms, where the dialogic sublates the monologic (the reified word), at least for Bakhtin of the 1930s (79–80). Already in the 1940s, however, the relationship between “personality” and “thing” as objects of cognition cannot be described either as a binary or as dialectics for Bakhtin.

8. The connection between “thing cognition” and “reification” is clearer in Russian, where the Marxist term *oveshchestvlenie* (“reification”) preserves the etymological connection to *veshch’* (“thing”) that is obscured in English. Although *oveshchestvlenie* can be translated as “thingification,” in this forum we chose “reification” to preserve the Marxist overtones of this term, which carries a negative normative judgment.

sonalization. The resulting reification or personalization of a cognized object in a given cognitive act is a matter of the act's proximity to either limit, not of identity.<sup>9</sup>

In theory, an individual act of cognition can fall anywhere between the two poles, depending on the aims of the cognizer. However, Bakhtin's sliding scale is further complicated by the idea that "thing cognition" appears to be the default way of approaching an object.<sup>10</sup> Bakhtin suggests that we gravitate toward "thing cognition" not only or not necessarily because we selfishly look for practical knowledge, but because it is easier for us to understand an object when we let cognition circumscribe or delimit it: "a dead thing, which possesses only exteriority" can be "laid bare completely" ("Philosophical Foundations," *CW* 5: 7). Even when the cognized object is another human subject—be it a real human being or a fictional hero—the gravitational forces of "thing cognition" are at work. Thus, "personality cognition" can be thought of as resistance to the gravity of "thing cognition" and easy solutions to the challenge of cognizing change. Only through conscious labor and practice can one cognize an object in its becoming. If "thing cognition" is the rule, "personality cognition" is the exception, an overcoming of the force of gravity that requires a dialogic effort.

In addition to cognitive *limits*, Bakhtin introduces *types* of cognitive acts, which tend toward different poles on the sliding scale of cognition. Complementing Bakhtin's outline in "Philosophical Foundations" with details from his later writing, I identify two major types: "artistic" and "abstract" ("Dostoevskii. 1961 g." ("Dostoevskii. 1961"), *CW* 5: 366), the latter of which is sometimes referred to as "scientific" (*nauchnoe*) or "positivist" ("Iz arkhivnykh zapisei k 'Probleme rechevykh zhanrov'" ("From the Archival Notes on 'the Problem of Speech Genres'"), *CW* 5: 252; "Iazyk v khudozhestvennoi literature" ("Language in Fiction"), *CW* 5: 287–97). Insofar as "artistic cognition" involves representation of human beings, whose personhood is more difficult to ignore than that of nature or inanimate things, this type *tends* toward the "personality" limit. "Abstract" cognition, by contrast, tends toward the limit "thing" insofar as its task is to extract practical knowledge. In abstract cognition, orientation toward the limit "thing" is elevated to the level of methodology, since its primary aim is to construct rigid concepts. It is no surprise then, that the two types of cognitive acts can be correlated to

9. Cf. "Our *thought* and our *practice*—not technical, but *moral* (i.e., our responsible acts)—are conducted between two limits: relations to *thing* and relations to *personality*. *Reification* and *personification*. Some of our acts (cognitive and moral) strive toward the reification limit, never reaching it; other acts strive toward the personification limit, never fully reaching it" ("Rabochie zapisi," *CW* 6: 432; Bakhtin's emphases).

10. The default status of thing-cognition might be one of the reasons why in his notebooks Bakhtin occasionally refers to cognition directed toward the limit thing simply as "cognition."

two types of sciences—the exact (*tochnye*) and the human.<sup>11</sup> Although there is a correlation between types of cognition and gravitation toward one or the other cognitive limit, types should not be equated with directedness toward limits, which remains an issue of each individual act of cognition. That is, the proximity to either limit of any individual cognitive act ultimately depends on the cognizer. For example, in the mind of a selfish author, who refuses to grant his hero a part in the making of his own image, artistic cognition slips into reifying monologism. Thus, while cognitive types contain different possibilities for cognitive acts, directedness of individual acts depends on the immediate aims of the cognizer.

### Development of Bakhtin's Cognitive Theory in "Rhetoric"

In "Rhetoric, to the Extent That It Lies" (1943; henceforth, "Rhetoric"), Bakhtin explores the violent potential of artistic cognition directed toward the limit thing. Although Bakhtin does not consistently use the terminology worked out in "Philosophical Foundations"—neither of the notebook entries was prepared for publication—I maintain that he is nevertheless engaged in developing his cognitive theory from an abstract philosophical postulate into an actual creative tendency in the history of representation. Throughout the 1930s, Bakhtin thought seriously about the evolution of narrative form, which resulted in his essay on the chronotope.<sup>12</sup> Unsurprisingly, in mounting a critique of thing cognition of the artistic type in the 1940s, Bakhtin introduces a historical component into his theoretical vision. The historicity of violent artistic cognition complicates the choice between thing and personality cognition by restricting historically mediated forms of representation. In other words, choosing between personality and thing becomes a question not only of the cognizer's ethic, but also of the possibility of realizing that ethic within available forms of representation. After discussing the correspondences between the fragmentary essays in his 1940s notebooks and elaborating Bakhtin's theoretical schema, I address its historicization.

Of Bakhtin's wartime fragments, "Rhetoric" has produced the most diver-

11. Cf. "Rabochie zapisi," *CW* 6: 401–403, 423. In his other late writing, Bakhtin repeatedly insists that there are no strict boundaries between the human and the non-human ("exact" or "natural") sciences ("Problema teksta" ("The Problem of Text"), *CW* 5: 306; "Rabochie zapisi," *CW* 6: 403, 407). Indeed, if no difference can be drawn between them on the basis of their objects of study (as Bakhtin's limit theory implies), then there is no necessary difference between them. While Bakhtin accepts their nominal division based on their respective end goals and methodologies, he goes beyond early anti-positivist frameworks like that of Wilhelm Dilthey and moves closer to Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert ("Rabochie zapisi," *CW* 6: 403).

12. "Formy vremeni i khronotopa v romane" ("Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," 1937–1939), *CW* 3: 340–503; *Dialogic* 82–285. More broadly, Bakhtin's 1930s essays on the novel fill out some of the historical background that was "excluded" from his more "theoretically"-oriented study on Dostoevskii from 1929 (*Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo* (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*, henceforth *PDA*), *CW* 3: 7).

gent interpretations in secondary scholarship.<sup>13</sup> The reception of this fragment can be partially explained by the seemingly non-canonical image of Bakhtin it offers. The Bakhtin of “Rhetoric” appears to darken and radicalize his own earlier theory of author-hero relations,<sup>14</sup> making explicit the violence entailed in the finalization of heroes and in representation more broadly. The fragment is filled with seemingly unambiguous statements like, “The creative process is always a process of violence that truth commits against the soul.” Frequently quoted, this and other similar utterances are often interpreted against the historical context in which they were produced.<sup>15</sup> To be sure, the historical conditions of war, starvation, and chronic illness have left a trace in Bakhtin’s reformulation of his older ideas and his choice of new topics, including his reconsideration of seriousness in the planned changes to his work on Rabelais (“Dopolneniia i izmeneniia k Rable” (“Additions and Changes to *Rabelais*”), *CW* 5: 81). In this article, however, I attempt to make sense of such statements in light of the fragment in which they occur, reading them “from within” (Popova, “Pochti” (“Almost”) 50), as well as in the context of other fragments written during the “long Stalinist night” (Emerson and Holquist, *Dialogic Imagination* xv). I maintain that the apparent radicalization of Bakhtin’s earlier ideas can be understood and qualified not only through the catastrophes of Soviet history, but also, and primarily, through the lens of cognitive limits.

Although in “Rhetoric” Bakhtin mentions “limits” only in passing (“Rhetoric” 209),<sup>16</sup> I argue that they are presupposed from the outset and apparent in the very structure of his argumentation. “Rhetoric” unfolds around a series of at times opposing, at times complementary conceptual pairs, which share descriptive features with the thing and personality division. Bakhtin launches his critique of violent artistic cognition and representation with the following dichotomy: “Rhetoric, to the extent that it lies, strives to evoke pre-

13. Sandomirskaiia and Lipovetsky’s dialogue, as well as the 2006 issue of *NLO* in which it appeared, is representative of the multiplicity of interpretations this text has yielded. For further discussion of “Rhetoric,” see Brandist, “Neobkhodimost” 58–62; Sandomirskaiia, *Blokada* 168–72; Romanovskaia; Erdinast-Vulcan 135–65, as well as the other articles in this forum.

14. First conceived in the 1920s, the theory was elaborated in “Author and Hero” (“AH,” *CW* 1: 69–263; *Art and Answerability* 4–256), but remained unpublished until 1979.

15. For example, Sandomirskaiia places Bakhtin’s discussion of violence in “Rhetoric” in the middle of the Stalinist machine of language production (*Blokada* 111–72). For an entirely different take on the importance of the Stalinist historical context for Bakhtin’s writing (in connection with his work on Rabelais), see Clark and Holquist; Ryklin. For a less embodied and locally embedded understanding of Bakhtin’s historical context, see Brandist’s discussion of Bakhtin within a broader context of European intellectual history (“Neobkhodimost”).

16. Note that the Russian word for “limit”—*predel*—is etymologically linked to *opredelit’* (“to define”), *opredelenie* (“definition”), and *predel’nyi* (“total,” “extreme,” “taken to the limit”). Thus, despite the relative infrequency of the word “limit” in “Rhetoric,” the concept of “limits” nevertheless pervades Bakhtin’s text.

cisely fear or hope. [...] Art (authentic) and cognition, on the contrary, strive to liberate us from these feelings” (“Rhetoric” 203).<sup>17</sup> In this initial opposition, art and cognition join forces against rhetorical manipulations. Note that while “art” is supplemented with the adjective “authentic,” “cognition” is left without a qualifier that would make room for such a normative distinction. In other words, Bakhtin appears to be making a claim about all cognition here. And yet, soon after this positive evaluation, cognition comes under criticism for participating in violence. Bakhtin unambiguously states: “The element of violence in cognition and artistic form” (“Rhetoric” 205). Instead of assuming, as some commentators have done, a contradiction or an inconsistency here,<sup>18</sup> I maintain that the word “cognition” does not carry stable normative content. Rather, in the raw notes that constitute “Rhetoric” the word “cognition” is defined contextually, and each occurrence of the word must be evaluated on its own terms.

Bakhtin’s positive and negative evaluations of cognition—as an agent of freedom or as an agent of violence—correspond to its orientation toward the personality and the thing limit respectively. The proximity of thing cognition to the violent cognition of “Rhetoric” can be surmised from the details of the process by which it carries out its violence. Bakhtin clarifies that “the element of violence in cognition” consists in “the preliminary deadening of the object” with the aim of nothing less than “the subjugation of the world” (“Rhetoric” 205). In “Philosophical Foundations,” as I have noted, “deadenning” is ascribed to thing cognition, which treats its object as “a pure dead thing” (*CW* 5: 7). In “Rhetoric,” this “deadenning force” extends beyond cognition to the artistic image. Blending together the deadening processes of cognition and artistic representation, Bakhtin writes:

What constitutes the deadening force of the artistic image: [an attempt] to circumvent the object from the side of the future, to display it in all its exhaustiveness, and thus deprive it of an open-ended future, to present the object with all of its boundaries—both internal and external—without a way out of this boundedness. The object is all here and nowhere else; and if it is all here, in its entirety, then it is dead and can be devoured. It is extracted from unfinalized life and be-

17. Cf. “K voprosam teorii romana” (“On Questions of the Theory of the Novel,” 1941), where the same lines appear almost verbatim with the exception of the word “authentic” (*CW* 3: 566). In this essay, Bakhtin evokes authenticity in his prior discussion of “authentic realism,” which is contrasted with realism of the “photographic” type (*CW* 3: 565). The juxtaposition of these two essays suggests that non-authentic art can resemble rhetoric. Moreover, it allows one to speculate about of what “authentic” art might be, if we take “photographic” realism as its opposite. Brandist links Bakhtin’s opposition of rhetoric and art in “Rhetoric” to Kant’s view of rhetoric as an “interested” use of language and of poetry as disinterested use of language (“Neobkhdimost” 60).

18. For a different interpretation of this inconsistency as a feature of the note-taking genre (“pisanie na kolenke”), see Lipovetsky and Sandormiskaia 17–18. For an overview of how inconsistencies and discontinuities among Bakhtin’s various texts are treated in secondary literature, see Morson and Emerson 4–10.

comes an object for possible consumption [...] it has already spoken its last word and no inner open kernel is left to it, no inner infinity. It is denied freedom, the act of cognition wants to encircle it from every side, to cut it off from unfinalizedness and, consequently, from freedom, from the temporal and sense-bearing future, from its indeterminacy and from its inner truth. The artistic image does the same [...]. ("Rhetoric" 205–207; Bakhtin's emphasis)

In this passage, Bakhtin traverses between the violent potential of artistic images and acts of cognition with such ease that their modes of operation become indistinguishable, even as they remain marked by different terms. The repetition of words like "dead," "devour," and "consume" points to rhetorical as well as conceptual parallels between "Rhetoric" and "Philosophical Foundations." The images of boundedness from the latter essay are amplified by the spatially oriented metaphors of "Rhetoric." Here, the object is not only "tied up" ("Philosophical Foundations," *CW* 5: 8–9), but imprisoned in closed geometrical spaces, signaled by verbs like "encircle" and "cut off," among others ("Rhetoric" 205). It is as if the perspective has shifted from that of the hero who examines his own shackles in "Philosophical Foundations," to the author's bird's-eye view of the situation in "Rhetoric."<sup>19</sup>

Alongside the violent consequences of cognition, there are glimpses of the object's true being in positively inflicted words, such as "inner open kernel," "freedom," "unfinalizedness," "indeterminacy," and so on. These very same terms can be found in "Philosophical Foundations," specifically in reference to personality cognition. Juxtaposition of the two fragments thus helps reconcile the tension between Bakhtin's initial statement on the liberating role of cognition in "Rhetoric" and the seemingly contradictory descriptions of cognitive violence that follow. More specifically, a comparative reading of these fragmentary essays suggests that not all cognition is violent. Only a specific type of cognition—one that is connected to the production of artistic images that close off the represented object and ignore its extension beyond the boundaries of the created image—becomes a deadening force.

### Violence and Reification in Words and Images

In order to bring into focus thing cognition of the artistic type in "Rhetoric," Bakhtin introduces two terms—"violence" and "reification"—which have hitherto rarely entered his theoretical vocabulary.<sup>20</sup> Bakhtin first

19. "On Questions" also abounds in similar figurative language.

20. Prior to "Rhetoric," the word "violence" occurs primarily in reference to physical conflict ("Tetradi k 'Rable'" ("Notebooks on 'Rabelais'"), *CW* 4(1): 665; "K romanu vospitaniia" ("On the *Bildungsroman*"), *CW* 3: 225; "Formy vremeni," *CW* 3: 283) and to the power of official culture. The word "reification" as an abstract noun can be found in Bakhtin's writing on the novel ("Slovo v romane" ("Discourse in the Novel"), *CW* 3: 100, 101; "K voprosam teorii romana," *CW* 3: 561; "Problemy teorii i istorii romana" ("Problems of the Theory and History of the Novel"), *CW* 3: 659). Echoing Galin Tihanov but departing from his interpretation of reification, I have argued that "reification" as a distinctly Marxist term borrowed from Lukács enters Bakhtin's vocabulary in the 1930s (Tihanov 80–1; Denischenko). Bakhtin's concern with

uses “violence” in relation to cognition and artistic representation: “The element of violence in cognition and artistic form” (“Rhetoric” 205). “Reification” appears at the end of the essay, in close proximity to violence: “The one who is deceived is transformed into a thing. This is one of the methods of violence and reification of the human being” (“Rhetoric” 213). Both “violence” and “reification” are also latently present in “Philosophical Foundations”; the former in the images of death, devouring, and consumption, the latter in the etymology of “thing” (*veshch*) and “thingish” (*veshchnoi*). But their explicit articulation in “Rhetoric” clarifies Bakhtin’s vision of cognition: a source of violence, thing cognition reifies objects in stable images and final definitions. Moreover, in so far as cognition relies on words and images as its media of expression, thing cognition “infects” them with violence.

After the initial mention of violence, Bakhtin shifts to discussing how cognitive violence manifests itself in words:

Word-violence presupposes an absent and unspeaking object, unhearing and unanswering; it doesn’t address the object and doesn’t demand its consent; it exists in absentia. The content of a word about an object never coincides with the object’s content for itself. The word gives the object a definition [*opredelenie*], with which the object can never, in principle, agree from within. This word-violence (and the lie) aligns with a thousand personal motives in the creator, which cloud its purity—thirst for success, influence, recognition (not of the word, but of the creator), with the aspiration to become a force that oppresses and consumes. The word wants to exert influence from without, to define [*opredelit*] from without. (“Rhetoric” 207)

In this passage Bakhtin frames “word-violence” as a kind of anthropomorphic force that violates everything with which it comes into contact. The anthropomorphic quality of Bakhtin’s language, however, should not be mistaken for an attribution of an independent consciousness to language. For Bakhtin, language exists only as an embodied phenomenon.<sup>21</sup> That is, we do not know language outside of its concrete uses in utterances, which are always accompanied by the intentions of a speaker (Voloshinov 265–98). In the above passage, Bakhtin explicitly links “word-violence” to selfish “creator[s]” motivated by personal gain. The force of violence belongs not to language, but to the consciousness of the cognizing and speaking “creator,” who directs his cognitive act toward the limit thing. In the process, the word becomes “*infected* with violence and the lie” (“Rhetoric” 209; my emphasis). Bakhtin’s

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cognitive violence in the 1940s, in addition to building on his philosophical work from the 1920s, likely stems from his polemics with Lukács’s theory of reification, which the Russian thinker finds “incomprehensible” or “difficult to understand” (*ne poniatno*) in the very same essay that raised the question of rhetoric and cognition (“K voprosam teorii romana,” *CW* 3: 561). While Bakhtin recognizes reification as a problem, he is out to provide a more convincing explanation of how it takes hold of the imagination and becomes an all-pervasive phenomenon in human relations.

21. In the 1920s, this idea was explored in the context of the Bakhtin Circle and is most clearly articulated in the work of Valentin Voloshinov. Bakhtin returns to the ideas developed in the work of the Circle in the 1950s.

choice of the metaphor of infection also suggests that the word is a (contaminated) site of violence, rather than its source.

According to the quoted passage, the word becomes a site of violence when the cognizing creator aims to “define” [*opredelit'*] an object in such a way that it cannot exceed the borders of this definition. Such a cognizer uses the word to insist on the identity of the object and his representation of it, to command the object to “be what [it] ought to be” (“Rhetoric” 207). Here the idea of the “limit” [*predel'*] once again becomes palpable insofar as limits, unlike borders, cannot be crossed. The object that is “defined” or, literally, “de-limited” [*opredelen'*] appears to be completely contained within the given “definition” [*opredelenie*]. Such definitions can be constructed only if the object is torn from its becoming and projected in a static image. Apart from defining the object in such a way, the cognizer also insists on the accuracy of his definition, his view of the object in an effort to “exert influence” (“Rhetoric” 207). He pretends that the borders of his definition are in fact intransgressible limits.

Images, like words, can become tools in the service of thing cognition and carriers of violence. In reference to the image, Bakhtin at first uses a subtler formulation than the striking compound “word-violence” which suggests a kind of equivalence between the two terms. He writes not of image-violence or even violence of the image, but of “violence *in* the image” (“Rhetoric” 207; my emphasis). Soon however, violence seems to fuse with the image:

The object itself does not participate in its own image. The image, in relation to the object itself, is either a blow [*udar*] from without, or a gift [*dar*] from without [...]. The fundamental in-absentia nature [*printsipial'naia zaochnost'*] of the image. The image locks the object in and consequently ignores its ability to change, its ability to become something else. [...] The image forces the object to coincide with itself, plunges it into the hopelessness of the finalized and done. The image deploys in full all the privileges of its outsideness. The back of the head, the ears, the back of the object are in the foreground. (“Rhetoric” 209)

Here too Bakhtin errs on the side of anthropomorphization. But behind Bakhtin’s anthropomorphic descriptions of the image one can once again discern a cognizer, who wants to instantiate numerical identity between the static image he has created and the object of cognition-representation. The position of outsideness, here ostensibly ascribed to the image, actually belongs to the cognizing creator. It is he who abuses the “privileges of outsideness,” approaching the object from behind in a scene eerily evocative of execution (Sandomirskaja, *Blokada* 169). Here the outside (*izvne*) position of the creator refers not to the kind of outsideness that is present in every act of creation,<sup>22</sup> but specifically to outsideness of the monologic type. The word “*izvne*” (“from without”) appears in “Rhetoric” repeatedly in reference to violence of artistic representation: “prescribed from without,” “necessity imposed from without,” “influence from without,” “define from without,” and

22. The construction of the artistic image depends on the surplus of vision which results from the interaction of the outside position of the author and the inside position of the hero.

so on. It represents the position of a monological author who refuses to abandon his superior position vis-à-vis his heroes.

The word “violence” often occurs side-by-side with “reification” in the small number of Bakhtin’s texts that touch on these issues. For example, when discussing the problem of “lies” or “lying” in “the artistic image” and in “forms of seriousness,” Bakhtin states: “The one who is deceived is transformed into a thing. This is one of the methods of violence and reification of the human being” (“Rhetoric” 213).<sup>23</sup> At first glance the distinction between the two terms may appear insignificant. But they are complementary rather than synonymous: while “violence” describes the process by which thing cognition turns its object into a dead thing, “reification” refers to both the result and the visible sign of cognitive violence having already taken place.<sup>24</sup> “Reification” (*oveshchestvlenie*)—literally, “the making into a thing”—is the result of ignoring the personality of an object in favor of grasping it as a thing. But it is also a sign of cognitive violence that is invisible to the naked eye. In the absence of physical evidence (after all, the cognized object as a “dead thing” is only a metaphor), “reification” serves as a trace of a past act of violence. In other words, reification is the material trace that allows us to recognize an act of cognitive violence.

Reification afflicts not only the object of cognition, but also the word itself. In fact, reification of the word seems to precede the reification of the object. A cognizer who exercises thing cognition imagines that he uses a word in accordance with its stable definition, that his understanding of the word’s meaning is the only correct one, and that he can isolate the word from its prior history of uses and its orientation toward the future words of others. Such a cognizer ignores the dialogic nature of the word and the potential of the word’s double-voicedness to overthrow hegemonic discourse.<sup>25</sup> When its sta-

23. Cf. “Reification of the human being. Social and ethical conditions and forms of this reification. [...] Criticism of all external forms of approach and influence: from violence to authority; artistic finalization as a variety of violence” (“1961 god. Zametki” (“1961. Notes”), *CW* 5: 349).

24. While the verb “to reify” focuses on the *process* of reification, the abstract noun “reification” in Bakhtin’s usage seems to emphasize the result. Although Bakhtin never fully explains his take on “reification,” he returns to it again and again in several fragments, including “On Questions” (c. 1943–1946), “The Problem of Sentimentalism” (1958–1959), “1961. Notes,” and “Dostoevskii. 1961.” On reification in Bakhtin, see Tihanov 65–82.

25. I do not mean “dialogic” here in the sense of Bakhtin’s ideal of dialogism, but in the strict sense of always responding to something else, “The word is social in nature. *The word is not a thing, but a forever mobile, forever changing environment of social communication.* One consciousness, one voice is never sufficient for it [the word]. The life of the word is in the passage from mouth to mouth, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation. Meanwhile the word does not forget its path and cannot free itself completely from the power of those concrete contexts, of which it was part. *Every member of the speaking collective pre-finds the word not at all as a neutral word of language, free from intentions, uninhabited by other voices. No, he receives the word from the other’s voice and filled with the other’s voice*” (*PDA, CW* 2: 99; my emphases). For a disambiguation and further explanation of dialogic and double-voicedness, see Morson and Emerson 130–33, 147–59.

tus as “an always changing and flexible sign” is obscured in this way, the word becomes reified.<sup>26</sup>

Images and words alike can fall victim to selfish cognizers. But violence and reification are not inevitable or insurmountable. Half way through “Rhetoric,” Bakhtin announces: “Remnants of violence in the image. The task of sense-bearing transfiguration [*smyslovoe preobrazhenie*]. Dematerialization through meaning [*smysl*] and love” (“Rhetoric” 209). Alongside love,<sup>27</sup> words as carriers of transfigurative meaning (*smysl*) play a central role in overcoming violence. Although Bakhtin would later develop a more nuanced understanding of the image,<sup>28</sup> in the 1940s he accords the privileged role of overcoming thing cognition to words. Despite the cognizer’s attempts to reify the word and object, the word always extends beyond itself; it remains firmly grounded in the past and, at the same time, dialogically oriented towards the future. The word is always a response in dialogue, independently of whether or not we know to what it responds. Any severance of the word from its symbolic baggage of past and future uses is an illusion. The cognizer may be under the impression that he is using the word in accordance with its static definition and meaning, but the word always exceeds even those violent uses that try to make it coincide with itself: “The word does not know whom it serves; it comes from darkness and does not know its own roots” (“Rhetoric” 207–209).

Due to its dialogic extension in both space and time, the word can act as the bearer of “meaning” (*smysl*) that has the potential to transfigure artistic representation. Meaning as *smysl* (sense) rather than as *znachenie* (denotation; dictionary meaning) involves the recognition that language is not a stable system of given meanings, that in each new utterance “living” (*zhivye*), unrepeatable meanings are created.<sup>29</sup> The dictionary meaning of a word contains only the potential to mean,<sup>30</sup> whereas its *smysl* refers to the act of signification or meaning-making in a concrete instance. In addition to a certain understanding of the

26. Voloshinov 282. See also Bakhtin, “Slovo v romane”; Medvedev.

27. On the role of love, see Spektor’s forum article (234–45) and Wyman 19–20, 28–32.

28. Bakhtin’s view of the image in the 1960s is influenced by his understanding of the word: “The image is impossible when there is only one point of view; the essence of the image is in its peculiar combination (and fusion) of ‘from within’ and ‘from without’ [...]” (“Dostoevskii. 1961 g.,” *CW* 5: 366).

29. “The utterance is never only a reflection or expression of something already existing outside of it, of something given and ready-made. It always creates something that did not exist before, absolutely new and unrepeatable” (“1961 god. Zametki,” *CW* 5: 330).

30. “Denotation [*znachenie*], in essence, does not signify anything, but possesses only the potential, the possibility of signifying something in a concrete theme” (Voloshinov 319–20). Here Voloshinov uses “theme” (*tema*) and “meaning” (*smysl*) interchangeably. “The theme is a complicated, dynamic system of signs, which tries to be adequate to the given moment of becoming. The theme is the reaction of the becoming consciousness to the becoming of being. Denotation [*znachenie*] is the technical apparatus for the realization of theme” (Voloshinov 318; emphasis in original).

word, Bakhtin's *smysl* entails a particular relation to one's interlocutor. This relation involves the recognition of the interlocutor's ability to create his own meanings, rather than simply reproduce the given. It also requires the cognizer to open himself up to an act of dialogic understanding:

Understanding as the seeing of *meaning* [*smysl*], seeing that is not phenomenal, but that is rather the seeing of the living meaning [*smysl*] of experience and expression, the seeing of that which has been made sense of [*osmyslen*] inwardly, a phenomenon that has made sense of itself [*samoosmyslen*], so to speak.

Expression as matter that has been made sense of [*osmyslenmaia*], or expression as materialized meaning [*smysl*], as an element of freedom that has permeated necessity. ("Philosophical Foundations," *CW* 5: 9; Bakhtin's emphasis)

In concrete utterances, words are "materialized" as meaning (*smysl*), which is subsequently "dematerialized" by the dialogic understanding of the cognizer, who contributes yet another meaning (*smysl*) to the endless dialogue. This seeing of the "living meaning" (*zhivoi smysl*) of the one who is opening up in a dialogic interaction is the aim of personality cognition ("Philosophical Foundations," *CW* 5: 9).

To sum up my argument in this section: words and images are not violent in themselves; however, they can become carriers of violence when they are put into service of thing cognition. The result of cognitive violence is the reification of the object, preceded and enabled by the reification of the word. The attribution of violence to a force outside of the word and the image opens up the possibility of overcoming violence. Because of the differences inherent in the image and the word as forms of representation (the word is dialogic in space as well as time), the word takes on the primary role in the transfiguration that is announced in "Rhetoric."

### Historicizing the Limits

In "Rhetoric," in addition to fleshing out the details of how thing cognition operates, Bakhtin also attempts to historicize the theoretical schema of the "Philosophical Foundations." The different possibilities for cognition and representation are projected against specific stages in the history of representation. Or rather, it is the shift in the possibilities of representation that marks the separation between two different stages in literature and "humanism" more broadly. While violent artistic cognition and representation belong to an earlier stage, which is dominated by the writing of selfish authors, the non-violent alternatives mark the onset of a new stage, in which a loving author manifests himself in his writing. The introduction of a historical perspective into the problem of limits supports my reading of violence as a feature of thing cognition that, with conscious effort, can be overcome. At the same time, it transforms the problem of cognitive orientation toward limits from an issue of personal ethical choice into a question of how such choice takes shape against the available forms of representation. In other words, the pos-

sibility of personality cognition and loving authorship does not present itself to all authors at all times, but is restricted by specific developments in the history of representation.

Though it is not entirely clear where Bakhtin locates his own time vis-à-vis these stages, the first stage is associated with violence of the word and image, and the second with the overcoming of violence through love:

The human word that has been uttered until now is exceptionally naïve; and the speakers—children—are vain, self-assured, full of hope. [...] A genuinely kind, selfless, and loving person has not yet spoken; he has manifested himself in areas of everyday life; he has not touched the organized word, infected with violence and the lie; he has not become a writer. [...] The word was stronger than the person; a person could not be responsible while in the power of the word; he felt himself to be the herald of alien truth, in whose higher power he found himself. He did not feel his own son-ness or this power of truth. [...] The creative process is always a process of violence that truth commits against the soul. Truth has not yet been kindred to the human being, it has not come to him from within, rather than from without; it has always been an obsession. It has been a revelation, but it has not been sincere; it has always held something back, surrounded itself with mystery, and consequently with violence. It has conquered the human being, it has been violence; there has been no son-ness. [...] Grace has always descended from without. (“Rhetoric” 207–209)

Relative to this passage, the present state of representation is undoubtedly violent.<sup>31</sup> But the repetition of “not yet” anticipates a future shift, which can be glimpsed negatively vis-à-vis the violent “now.” The speaking and writing of a loving person in this passage mark a new stage, where the human being as the object of representation is allowed to take part in the making of truth, instead of being dominated by externally imposed “grace.”<sup>32</sup> The very division of time into “now” and “then” already implies that things can be other than how they are at the present moment, and suggests that violence and reification is not an inevitable outcome of representation.

The two stages implicit in this passage map Bakhtin’s concept of authorial presence onto the Christian coordinates of God’s presence in the (material) world before and after the Incarnation, as well as onto the subsequent change in the status of the Word (Logos) after the Incarnation. Bakhtin’s evocation of

31. Since the omission of the verb “to be” in Russian normally indicates present tense, this passage at first appears to be in the present: *do sikh por skazannoe chelovecheskoe slovo iskluchitel'no naivno* (“The human word that has been uttered until now is exceptionally naïve.”). However, in this instance the omission of the verb “to be” is not necessarily an indicator of Bakhtin’s own position vis-à-vis the described present. Since “until now” normally signals a change of state relative to the present, it suggests that Bakhtin possibly left off *bylo* or “has been” on accident. If *bylo* is restored, the sentence would read: “The human word that has been uttered until now *has been* exceptionally naïve.” I am inclined to interpret the omission of *bylo* as accidental, since Bakhtin would have probably used a different construction involving *eshche* (“still”), had he wanted to say “the uttered human word is still exceptionally naïve” (*skazannoe chelovecheskoe slovo eshche iskluchitel'no naivno*).

32. The negative evaluation of “grace” here is also played out on the etymological level. Bakhtin extracts *dat'* (“to give”) out of *blagodat'* (“grace”), connects it to *dar* (“gift”) and then phonetically to *udar* (“blow”) in the lines following this passage.

a Christian, and specifically Christological context, is signaled by references to “revelation” and “grace,” as well as by the importance accorded to 1 Corinthians 13 as intertext, which touches on the themes of “love” and “knowing.”<sup>33</sup> But it is Bakhtin’s repeated recourse to the word “son-ness” (*synovstvo*), which occurs in religious texts in connection with the doctrine of Incarnation,<sup>34</sup> that reveals his indebtedness to the incarnational model. Regardless of what such reliance might mean for Bakhtin’s personal beliefs, engagement with this analogy yields productive insights into his argument.<sup>35</sup> I read the evocation of “son-ness” in the above passage as an epistemic device that allows Bakhtin to structure his model of non-violent artistic representation on particular kinds of relations between the creator and the created, rather than as evidence of any hidden religious subtext or agenda.

The implicit suggestion of this analogy is that the incarnation of the author in his created world makes the “son-ness” of the represented person possible. In a work of literature, through “son-ness” the hero comes to have impact on the words and images that represent him. The hero is thereby transfigured from a mere marionette in the hands of an all-knowing author into a human being who can open up and speak for himself (even as he is prompted by the author to do so), and who can consequently participate in the act of representation. I want to emphasize that in “Rhetoric” Bakhtin is not concerned with what the Incarnation, as an event in the history of salvation, made possible for representation in general. He is interested in what the writer can change by becoming ‘incarnate’ in his text. Bakhtin’s mapping of the “now” and “then” of “Rhetoric” onto the pre- and post-incarnational stages of history is a conceptual correspondence, not a historical one. The above quoted passage relies on the incarnational model in order to explain the shift in the possibilities of representation in our historical time, as well as to intimate love’s role in nurturing and bringing out potentials already contained in words and images.

The burden of responsibility for bringing about such a transformation is laid on the author. However, in “Rhetoric” this radical transformation appears to be restricted by the available forms of representation and cannot take place under all historical conditions. A certain evolution of forms is a precondition for the emergence of new authorship. First, the pre-incarnational model of authorship must run its course and reach a dead end in the “total in-absentia” image. The very fact of coming to a dead end, however, does not guarantee a change. Only after the development of literary forms makes incarnate authorship possible, it is up to the author to take matters into his own hands. Thus,

33. I thank Valentina Izmirlieva for drawing my attention to the importance of the Corinthians intertext. For a more detailed discussion, see Spektor’s forum article.

34. See, for example, Cyril of Jerusalem.

35. On the question of faith in connection with Bakhtin’s writing, see Clark and Holquist; Coates; Mihailovic.

the search for a new authorial position takes place between the necessity of historical forms and the freedom of personal authorial choice. In the remainder of this section, I read Bakhtin's scattered references to Nikolai Gogol' and Fedor Dostoevskii in his 1940s notebooks as clues to the necessary historical conditions for the emergence of loving authorship. Bakhtin's discussion of the formal peculiarities of Gogol' and Dostoevskii can also help us place the unsettling present tense of the "until now" passage quoted above vis-à-vis Bakhtin's own time.

In "Rhetoric" and other fragments from the 1940s, Gogol' appears to occupy the last place in the stage of violent, pre-incarnational authorship. Bakhtin's first mention of him occurs immediately before his discussion of violence ("Rhetoric" 205). According to Bakhtin, Gogol' felt deeply responsible for his hero as for another human being, but he could not overcome the deadening power of his in-absentia images:

In Gogol', a particular ethical responsibility in relation to the hero was extremely well developed, in spite of the almost total in-absentia nature of his images. It is precisely this in-absentia quality, taken to the limit, this deadening of people in the image that sharpened for him the question of their salvation and transfiguration as human beings. ("Rhetoric" 213)

Gogol' never found a way of overcoming the tendency towards finalization that is typical of pre-incarnate authors:

The tragedy of the finalizedness of Gogol's hero. The non-acceptance of complete finalizedness, of the hopeless completedness of his heroes (Chichikov, Pliushkin): they haven't yet spoken their last word, they can still be transfigured. [...] Gogol' only pushed to the limit the specifics of the prosaic image of the human being, the image-nickname, pushed it to its boundaries. But at the boundary, the problem of the image inevitably had to arise. It was necessary to return to the human being (to the hero) his lost name. ("On Questions" 225–27)

In this passage, Bakhtin suggests that it is in the in-absentia image that Gogol' hit a dead end of finalizing artistic representation. He hit upon a limit, or a boundary that could not be crossed, so long as the author remained absent from or outside of his created world. Despite his concern for the hero, Gogol' did not realize that the only possible way out of this enclosure of the in-absentia image was authorial incarnation, which would allow the subsequent restructuring of the image of representation.

In "Rhetoric," Dostoevskii is not explicitly associated with the creation of this new authorial position. However, in Bakhtin's elliptical evocations of the "stage of an event" and "crisis points," one can glimpse the image of the novelist familiar from *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* (1929).<sup>36</sup> A clearer explana-

36. In the 1963 edition of the book, Bakhtin links Dostoevskii's restructuring of novelistic time and space with his discovery of polyphony more explicitly: "[...] polyphony itself, as the event of interaction between autonomous and internally unfinalized consciousnesses, demands a different artistic conception of time and space; to use Dostoevsky's own expression, a 'non-Euclidian' conception" (*PDP* 176).

tion of Dostoevskii's contribution to the history of representation emerges in "On Questions." After outlining the basic structure of self-consciousness at the beginning of this essay, Bakhtin notes how this structure, which reveals the inevitable presence of others in one's own I, is translated into literature by Dostoevskii:

This dependency on the other (in the process of self-consciousness and self-justification) is one of Dostoevskii's main themes, which also determines the formal particularities of his image of the human being. ("On Questions" 221)

Alluding to what in literary criticism has been called Dostoevskii's forceful treatment of his heroes, Bakhtin continues,

[Dostoevskii] knows a single movement—into the human being; precisely inward does he displace the human being, driving him in from the external world, but even this core of the human being, his inner depths turn out to be a boundary, a threshold (the threshold of another soul), the point of contiguity between consciousnesses (and a bifurcation of one's own consciousness), an endless dialogue. ("On Questions" 221)

According to Bakhtin, Dostoevskii drives his hero inside himself, where, instead of the expected "core" or "kernel" of himself, the hero finds another consciousness. Instead of being enveloped in and comforted by the "warm masses" of the world, Dostoevskii's hero is driven into the precarious position of an "endless dialogue," which permits no conclusions and no clear boundaries between the self and others ("On Questions" 221). The discovery of the dialogic structure of self-consciousness and the dialogic "core" of the human being is both grounded and represented in the word.<sup>37</sup> With such formal and thematic realization of the process of self-consciousness, Dostoevskii initiates "a new page in the history of humanism" ("On Questions" 225).

If Dostoevskii underlies Bakhtin's implicit contrast with Gogol', who represents the artistic type of thing cognition, then the polyphonic novel can be interpreted as the new stage of non-violent artistic representation connected to personality cognition. Indeed, there is no lack of parallels between Bakhtin's description of personality cognition and polyphony. The cognizer who directs his cognitive act toward the limit personality allows the object "to express itself," even demands its "free self-revelation" ("Philosophical Foundations," *CW* 5: 7). Such cognizer addresses the object directly: "Here the question is posed by the cognizer not to himself or to a third in the presence of a dead thing, but to the one cognized" ("Philosophical Foundations," *CW* 5: 7). Similarly, the polyphonic author enters his text in order to speak with his heroes face to face, from the inside, rather than from a superior outside position. If polyphony is personality cognition's artistic parallel, then the

37. The importance of the word in transforming the hero's image and the authorial position of Dostoevskii is discussed in detail in *PDA* (*CW* 2: 50, 54, 102–54, 127–37).

'failure' of Dostoevskii, in the eyes of many critics, to successfully instantiate polyphony in his novels (or the failure of Bakhtin to find an appropriate author for his vision of polyphony)<sup>38</sup> can be reevaluated. As discussed above, according to Bakhtin's model, reaching the personality limit is impossible for any act of cognition-representation; the cognizer can come infinitely close, but never coincide with the limit. Polyphony, reinterpreted as an artistic act of personality cognition, becomes an ever elusive ideal, but one that nevertheless allows the cognizer-author to transcend the violence of representation.

One could also interpret the "now" and "then" of "Rhetoric" along apocalyptic lines suggested by the Corinthians intertext. In the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Paul seems to refer to a state of more perfect "knowledge"—rendered in Russian with the same word Bakhtin uses for "cognition" (*poznanie*)—that comes at the end of time: "For *now* we see only a reflection as in a mirror; *then* we shall see face to face. *Now* I know in part; *then* I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Corinthians 13:12; my emphases). If Gogol' and Dostoevskii could be taken to represent the "now" and the "then" of "Rhetoric," then Bakhtin's stages need not be read apocalyptically. That is, for Bakhtin, the "then" is not the anticipation of a more perfect state after time, but a real historical possibility of transcending violence and reification in artistic cognition in our time. This is why the incarnational model of authorship plays such an important role in "Rhetoric"—the Incarnation is not only a promise of a future change, but one that already radically alters the history of human salvation in historical time. Likewise, Bakhtin's stages are not merely a yearning for a better future; they are tied to concrete historical developments in literary forms.

The broader implication of Bakhtin's stages is that personality cognition and non-violent representation may not have been available until certain formal developments took place, of which the most important was a restructuring in the authorial position. In other words, in "Rhetoric" Bakhtin's vision of loving authorship is contingent on the available forms of representation. But regardless of whether it is Dostoevskii who inaugurates the new stage in representation or another author who has yet to write, Bakhtin's stages show that violence in cognition and representation is not inevitable.

### Conclusion

The aim of this article has been twofold: 1) to outline Bakhtin's theory of cognitive limits and its consequences for the possibility of non-violent, non-reifying cognition and representation, and 2) to offer an optimistic reading of "Rhetoric," not as a text of despair written amidst the Stalinist nightmare, but as a hopeful essay that believes in the transformational role of loving authorship. On such authorship Bakhtin models the structure of both the human con-

38. Lipovetsky and Sandomirskiaia 7.

sciousness and the human sciences. I have argued that violence and reification for Bakhtin are tied to the orientation of cognition toward the thing limit. Moreover, I tried to show that Bakhtin's vision of violent artistic cognition in "Rhetoric" unexpectedly leaves room for the word and image that are free from violence. The possibility of a non-violent, non-reifying representation is grounded in personality cognition.

The aim of personality cognition is not to "know fully," or to have perfect knowledge, but to try to see becoming and to remain open to the possibility of unpredictability and change. Aiming toward the personality limit means opening oneself up to the possibility of not knowing, if knowledge necessarily means a fixed fact. Aiming towards the personality limit entails acknowledgement of the object of cognition as a personality, as well as the recognition of the inevitably dialogic nature of the word. The fact that aiming at this limit (personality) is all that we can do should not be held against Bakhtin, for death would be the condition of actually reaching this limit, if we take seriously the Corinthians intertext. Partial knowledge is the condition of being in this world. Paradoxically, personality cognition that keeps the object forever out of reach is not motivated by utopian thinking, but by the need for an intervention in the everyday that draws us toward thing cognition. Even if the personality limit is only an imagined ideal, its transformational role—freeing us from violence and reification—cannot be underestimated.

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276 *Slavic and East European Journal*

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## Тезисы

И. М. Денищенко

По ту сторону овещствления: к критике насилия в познании и изображении у М. М. Бахтина

В статье рассматриваются три ключевых фрагмента бахтинских записных тетрадей 1940-х годов как единый, но прерванный, текст-письмо (*texte scriptible*, Р. Барт), который несёт на себе следы определённой теории познания. Согласно этой теории, каждый познавательный акт может быть направлен к двум пределам — к пределу «личности» и к пределу «вещи». Находясь в подвешенном состоянии между вещью и личностью, познание не может совпасть ни с одним,

ни с другим пределом; оно может лишь максимально приблизиться к ним. Выдвигаемая Бахтиным теория имплицитно отрицает возможность субстанционального различия между личностью и вещью по отношению к нашему познавательному-когнитивному аппарату. Автор данной статьи утверждает, что познание, направленное к пределу «вещи», есть процесс символического насилия, поскольку такое познание овеществляет свой предмет в неподвижных образах и определениях. Несмотря на то, что овеществляющее познание прибегает к слову и образу как к средствам выражения и заражает их насилием, насилие не является неотъемлемой частью ни слова, ни образа. В зависимости от цели познающего и от имеющихся художественно-изобразительных форм, слово может стать локализацией либо «насилия», либо «свободы». В заключении ненасильственное познание рассматривается наряду с историческим развитием художественных форм, обнажая в бахтинских текстах военного времени переплетение этически-философских задач с вопросами исторического развития романа.

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