UNIVERSITE PARIS OUEST NANTERRE LA DÉFENSE

TROPISMES

N° 16

The Relevance of Theory

LA Résonance de la théorie

Publié avec le Concours du Conseil Scientifique
de l'Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense

2010

CENTRE DE RECHERCHES ANGLOPHONES

Theory Coming in Turns: Epistemology, Heuristics, and Fashion

That theory has been coming in "turns" will hardly be a new insight for anyone who has observed the field in recent decades. To what extent this is the case I was made aware of when I came across Doris Bachmann-Medick's recent book on *Cultural Turns* in which she deals with no fewer than seven different ones in the domain of cultural theory and criticism alone: the Interpretive Turn; the Performative Turn; the Reflexive Turn; the Postcolonial Turn; the Translational Turn; the Spatial Turn; and the Iconic Turn. With so many turns taken in so short a time, she is understandably led to the question of what their appearance on the scene actually implies. Are they evidence of the fact that the process of theoretical investigation has speeded up so much because it has developed an enormous dynamic? Are they the product of unpredictable shifts in intellectual fashion, as suggested by Pierre Bourdieu in his essay "Haute Couture or Haute Culture?" or are they to be considered more seriously as so many necessary "historical manifestations or linguistic transformations of the Kantian a priori," as Heinz Dieter Kittsteiner maintains (Kittsteiner 164)?

I mention this only briefly because I will not be dealing here with causes or origins but more or less exclusively with consequences – with what it means heuristically and above all epistemologically when, in the

domains of the humanities and social sciences, theory has been and is coming in turns.

Bachmann-Medick, in this regard, distinguishes between "turns" and scientific "paradigms" as postulated by Thomas S. Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* because she holds that a "paradigm" marks what is shared by the entire scientific community of a particular discipline whereas – and here she follows Peter V. Zima in his *Was ist Theorie?* - in the humanities and social sciences, with their constant jockeying for theoretical paramountcy and their "generations of theory," such a commonshared view of the social and cultural world cannot be expected. Yet though this sounds pragmatically convincing, it deserves further scrutiny, especially since she deduces from this situation that Kuhn's notion of scientific progress has, as she calls it, been "left behind" (Kuhn 16). Is it really the case that the theoretical turns she deals with are distinguished by the modest stance of claiming no more than heightened attention to a perspective, aspect, or approach that is held to be unduly neglected? Or is the tendency to transform the newly introduced descriptive terms into operative categories and to greatly enhance their dissemination by metaphoric use not, rather, an indication that the new "vocabulary" (in Rortyan parlance) is meant to replace rather than enrich or refine the one in place? And what does such aiming at substitution rather than supplementation mean for the relevance of theory?

*

In order to create some common ground for the discussion of these questions by pointing out what regularly gets lost by the usual procedure of substitution, I will first call to mind those major theoretical shifts or "turns" that have occurred in the humanities since the advent of the New Criticism. That event, the new focussing on the individual text by what came to be called "close reading", was the first major shift in criticism away from the prevailing biographical approach that had been in place since the eighteenth century. The theoretical foundation was laid by C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, who, in *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923), presented the view that rich ambiguity was a characteristic of poetic language; William Empson in *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) demonstrated how rich this ambiguity can actually

be, and the new theory and praxis was given its label by John Crowe Ransom, who, together with Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, greatly helped to disseminate it. From the point of view of Gestalt theory, the literary text was conceived of as an autonomous whole distinguished by a particular kind and organisation of language, and along with the criterion of "ambiguity" a whole set of descriptive and evaluative categories was developed.

In retrospect, the discovery of the semantic and aesthetic potential of an artificially isolated text that could be teased out by close reading may well be considered as a long-overdue complementation of the previous view that textual meaning had to be constructed on the basis of the author's biography or by philological historicization. This all the more so, since it provided an opportunity to link literary theory to art theory, which also had moved in the direction of stressing the autonomy of the work of art, thanks to the advent of abstract painting. So the New Critics had good reason to be proud of their achievement. What has to be said, though, is that the enthusiasm about having found something new and precious soon developed into the arrogant conviction that the new approach was the only theoretically tenable and practically fruitful one, and that all others, especially the one previously dominant, were just "wrong" and must be combatted or discredited with the aid of such labels as the "biographical fallacy" or the "intentional fallacy." We will soon see that such a transformation of a logic of discovery into a striving to become and then remain hegemonic theory and praxis, with the option of complementation rather than substitution being wilfully neglected, will appear again and again with the advent of a new theoretical turn in the humanities – notwithstanding its dire epistemological consequences.

The next turn from the New Criticism to structuralism proved to be less incisive, because the structuralists also focussed on the way language is organised, the most significant change being the shift from the study of the singular order to be found in a particular text to the enquiry into more general patterns as these were to be found in genres, kinds of discourse, and other collective systems of signification. In linguistics, a structuralist approach was, of course, introduced much earlier, yet it only became a more encompassing turn with its

application to other fields. Mentioned first in this context must be the ethnologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Anthropologie structurale* (1958) and Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957). What Lévi-Strauss assumed was the existence of an unconscious system of relations that guarantees the coherence of our experience of the world. And as he used the structuralist method he found in phonology in order to describe it, the link with the analysis of language remained quite strong.

This link was even stronger in the well-known structuralist approaches to literature undertaken at that time by Lucien Goldmann in his *Pour une sociologie du roman* (1964), Algernon Julien Greimas in his *Sémantique structurale* (1966), Gerard Genette in his *Figures I-III* (1966-72), Tzvetan Todorov in his *Littérature et signification* (1967), and Claude Bremond in his *Logique du récit* (1973). Yet beyond language and literature, the impact of structuralist thought was so strong that it was also adopted by the Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, whose structuring of the social world became widely known for his conception of the incisive influence of "Cultural Institutions" on both the social integration and self-image of the individual. It must not be forgotten that the structuralist turn was, after all, consolidated on the theoretical level by the further development of a general theory of signs that now went under the name of semiotics. First laid out by Charles Sanders Peirce a whole century earlier, and taken up by William Morris in his *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (1938), semiotics became influential mainly due to the earlier work of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco. Barthes in his *Mythologies* conceived of myth as a semiological system grafted on the system of natural language, a system functioning in bourgeois society to transform anti-nature into pseudo-nature, and in his *Eléments de sémiologie* (1964) presented a more general theory of signification. Eco first focused on the founding of the concept of the sign in logic, information theory and linguistics in his *Il segno* (1973) and his *Theory of Semiotics* (1976) before he in *Lector in fabula* (1977) came to expand the field of semiotics by including a complex theory of interpretation.

When, finally, important elements of structuralist theory were disseminated in the Anglo-American academy by Robert Scholes and Jonathan Culler, the structuralist turn arrived in college teaching at a

time when "cutting edge" theory and criticism had already become "poststructuralist".

The structuralist turn was basically a "linguistic turn", and with the possibility it offered to construct comprehensive and complex wholes by using a simple and general principle of differentiation it seemed to fulfil long-standing hopes for a truly scientific method in the humanities. This explains why it has remained in place in some fields like micro-linguistics and narratology and has thus escaped the normal fate of theoretical turns, which can provisionally be labeled "death by cultural amnesia".

Apart from these fields, structuralism was succeeded by what was soon called "poststructuralism", a term leaving the decision graciously open whether the turn that followed left structuralist thought behind in terms of theoretical insights or was a theoretical scene that was so variegated that the only common feature was its temporal appearance after the high tide of structuralism. Often mentioned as a common feature is the "crisis of representation", something more than a mere crisis if we consider that what, according to some theorists, is at stake is not the always given possibility of misrepresentation but the infinitely greater dilemma that the so-called representation is actually no more than a presentation because, in linguistic terms, there is no "transcendental signifier". For the sake of correctness, what can at most be said is that one can never be sure whether there is one or not, but poststructuralist theory is particularly weak regarding epistemology. Structuralists had already taught us that apparent or surface structures were actually determined by normally hidden deep structures; poststructuralists began to persuade us that all structuring was done by us to produce particular views and notions of the world and the self. That space and time are but forms of sensation and that the categories of understanding that determine the identity of and relations between whatever we perceive are also ours, leaving the "Ding an sich" unattainable, was, of course, demonstrated by Kant more that two centuries ago. But now the message was that the multicolored, multifaceted outer world and inner self were actually determined by the lexicon and grammar of the (in principle arbitrary)

particular language and similar symbolic sign systems used in the culture we happened to grow up in.

The most widely disseminated and most influential poststructuralist theory in the English speaking world – and, I assume, also in France – has, of course, been that presented by Jacques Derrida – indeed, so much so that the method of reading he termed "deconstruction" often has been used as a label for the whole poststructuralist turn. Derrida's most ambitious project was a rewriting of the whole history of Western philosophy with the intention of revealing what he called its "logocentrism" and the "metaphysics of presence" connected with it. To mark the unresolvable paradox that "signifying events depend on differences, but these differences are themselves the products of events" (Culler, "Structuralism and Since" 164), in "La Différance" (1968) he presented his most famous term, a paradoxical non-concept that was nevertheless to serve as a quasi-transcendentalist principle of the very possibility of language or what he called "archi-writing": the play of signifiers that depends on differences which in turn come about only by moving from one to the other in an open process of continuous deferral. And deconstruction as a foregrounding of this situation is thus a method bent on turning the argument of a text against itself by showing how some lines of that argument call into question what the very same lines rely on.

Derrida knew quite well that this method could also be applied to his own argument, and he therefore sought a way out by combining philosophical with literary discourse, for literary discourse cannot be deconstructed, because it has always already deconstructed itself. As Sir Philip Sidney stated as long ago as the sixteenth century, the poet "nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth" (Sidney 32). At any rate, Derrida's writing style and manner of argumentation have been responsible for an extremely uneven reception. There are still a considerable number of Derrideans who adore everything he has written and, at the other end of the scale, a great number of those who share the view of Foucault, who accused Derrida of "obscurantisme terroriste" because "he writes so obscurely you can't tell what he's saying, and when you criticise him, he can always say, 'you didn't understand me, you're an idiot'. That's the terrorist part" (Searle,

"Reality Principle"). We will have to keep such a contrarious reception in mind, because it reminds one somewhat of reactions to sectarian religion, where the only thing that counts is whether one is a believer or not, rather than the testing of a philosophical theory.

This has to be said because it applies at least as much to other varieties of poststructuralist theory, especially those presented by Jacques Lacan and Deleuze and Guattari. There are many Lacanians and Deleuzeans who think they have understood enough to adore and follow their masters, and the opaque kind of discourse involved has not been a major obstacle to the dissemination of their writings. I will first mention a few of what I hold to be the more important concepts of the Lacanian turn, even at the risk of committing sacrilege. Derived from the assumption of a "mirror stage" between the ages of 6 and 18 months in which the image in the mirror is recognized as an *imago*, a replica of the self, is the idea that, right from the beginning, the human self appears to be alienated, and desire from that moment onwards is held to be always the desire of the Other. It is not the place here to discuss to which extent the large conclusions drawn from a particular event are convincing; for the Lacanian turn to come about it was sufficient that someone with the prestige of Althusser his 1964 Nouvelle Critique article "Freud et Lacan," made Lacan's ideas look attractive to a large number of French intellectuals.

This most probably happened because Lacan, in his unorthodox re-reading of Freud, had interpreted the Oedipus complex in a way amenable to an unorthodox Marxism focussed on the inescapable subjection of the individual by society. For what a child at the age of five or six must learn to accept as a limit to desire is the "Law" or, in Lacanian parlance, "the name of the father", that is, the words and norms of its cultural collective. What definitely further helped was that Lacan, with his well-known thesis that the unconscious is structured like a language, had gone over to framing his theory in the prevailing structuralist mode, and he could present his innovations as a return to the "true" Freud because the reception of Freud in France had been rather poor to that date.

That a new theory can profit greatly by linkage to an already well established authority – in this case both Freud and Lacan – even when

the connection consists in a radical opposition, was demonstrated by the 1972 *succès de scandal* of *L'Anti-Oedipe* by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The additional title phrase, *Capitalisme et schizophrenie I*, through its combination of a socio-economic concept of Marxist theory and a term designating psychosis in psychoanalytical and medical discourse, already hinted at the position from which the assault on the source of the establishment of law and order, the so-called Oedipal phase, was launched. The fundamental opposition to both orthodox and Lacanian psychoanalysis resides in the revaluing of desire from what Lacan had called *manque* or lack to a positive free-floating energy of production that was also held to invest the whole social field. The new turn seemed so attractive because Deleuze and Guattari in *L'Anti-Oedipe* presented a universal history of desiring production from what they call "the primitive desiring machine" to the most recent "civilized capitalist machine" with its deterritorialized schizophrenic flows, a history that seemed as subversive as the history of power that Nietzsche had presented in *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Probably the most widely known Deleuzean element, however, was a new central metaphor introduced in a separate publication devoted to it from 1976: the rhizome. It was meant to replace the traditional root/tree metaphor, or "arborescence", which had served to symbolize and uphold hierarchical, stratified structures, by one that would signify horizontal, non-hierarchical and unregulated networks. And the rhizome also has the ability to "mushroom" in all directions, while its parts form additional tiny roots that allow them to survive even when severed from the whole. And this contributed to the fact that Deleuze and Guattari's rethinking of the relationship between language, thought, desire, social institutions and material reality with its sometimes open irrationalism appeared so congenial to a postmodern stance that it soon took on the format of a new turn.

My concentration on the European scene – actually, almost exclusively on Paris – has delayed my taking into account the fact that Derridean deconstruction first became a new turn in the United States. It not only originated there but in the later 1970 and 1980 it was the dominant kind of theory. What has to be added, though, is that due to the work of Fredric Jameson "New Left" Marxism remained as

influential over there as it was in Britain where Raymond Williams and Terry Eagleton made it attractive. With his insistence on the Hegelean view of history as a meaningful totality with a discernible logic of development defended the broad frame of Marxist theory against the then prevailing poststructuralist view according to which such wholistic conceptions are mere fictions or what Jean-François Lyotard called *grands récits*. In reversing the theoretical hierarchy he made first a structuralist approach, then a psychoanalytical one and then also the poststructuralist one subservient to a historically oriented Marxist view.

In Britain, where the influence of postmodern and poststructuralist ideas was less strong and came rather late, Terry Eagleton kept Marxist theory on the agenda by also using various strategies. First leaving hardly any room for a critique of ideology within capitalist bourgeois society under the influence of Trotzki and Althusser, he reverted to Gramsci's concept of hegemony to open up better chances for an analytical and critical approach even within the dominant system, and then he the took up the new focus on the body that had shortly before been introduced by feminism to present an alternative access to an objective determination of human needs and to grant to aesthetic discourse at least a possible role of resistance.

Although Marxist theory kept the historical aspect in view, it was New Historicism that became the most important theoretical turn of the nineteen-eighties as a reaction to a felt neglect of the historical in the praxis of deconstruction. The name that comes to mind when the New Historicism is mentioned is, of course, Stephen Greenblatt, who introduced the term and, thanks to his persuasive rhetoric and a new approach to the writing of history in his studies of the English Renaissance and early modern discoveries and colonialism, supplied impressive applications of the new theoretical stance. What most of the contributors to the new turn have in common is a combination of an idea of cultural history influenced by Foucault with the concept of "thick description" as developed by the cultural anthropology of Clifford Geertz and the concept of an anecdotal writing of history. Yet this turn is different from those I have referred to so far; "New Historicism", or "Cultural Poetics" as Greenblatt attempted to rename it, remained a rather vague term applied to various attempts to problematize and

historicize the relation between text and context, especially from the point of view of postcolonialism and gender studies. What these attempts had in common was – to use a phrase of Louis A. Montrose – "a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (Montrose 20), in a project that "reorients the axis of intertextuality, substituting for the diachronic text of an autonomous literary history the synchronic text of a cultural system" (Montrose 17). This synchronic text is then conceived of as being kept continuously in a dynamic state by a circulation of socio-cultural energies, and though literary texts theoretically are primarily of value only insofar as they demonstrate this, in practice they reveal their exceptional semiotic power.

In spite of its motivating the study of history, the work of the New Historicists has met with some scathing criticism on the part of historians, especially for its lack of critical scrutiny regarding sources and for covering up its avoidance of the necessary work in the archives by making up some fancy stories under the title of "anecdotal history". Nevertheless, the New Historians have brought about a revival of the insight that there is always less historically possible than systematically possible, and by demonstrating the necessity of interdisciplinary work the New Historical turn helped to initiate the subsequent Cultural Turn. This new turn was, however, at least as much influenced by the British variety of the new turn to history that, with its frequent combination of Althusserian Marxism with Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, became known under the label of "Cultural Materialism", a term disseminated, for instance, by the critical anthology *Political Shakespeare. New Essays on Cultural Materialism*, edited by Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield.

Though often developed alongside or in alliance with the turns already mentioned, further important theoretical frames and insights were developed within the two new major domains of research and criticism arising out of the cultural revolution of the 1960s: Feminist criticism or Gender studies and Post-colonialism. Most influential regarding the further development of the former was the distinction between "sex" and "gender", biological and cultural identity, taken over by Kate Millet from the social sciences in the late 1960s, and significant

of the later turn from feminist criticism to gender studies was Judith Butler's interpretation of gender as a signifying practice. In between, Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous in their sophisticated theoretical work had already laid the focus on language, with the assertion of a specific "*écriture feminine"* being the most widely disseminated hallmark.

As to the turn to Post-colonial studies, after the work done earlier by Frantz Fanon in the 1960s, it was Edward Said who with his linking of the theory of discourse with politics became most influential for the further development, and Homi K. Bhabha's introduction of the metaphor of "hybridity" as a concept to describe postcolonial identity proved to be a most fruitful idea that was taken up by cultural studies. Based on key concepts like "writing back", "re-writing", "re-mapping" and aiming at a deconstruction of "race", an impressive amount of theoretical work was done in this domain that was particularly valuable regarding a better understanding of both individual and collective identity under complex political and cultural conditions.

With the Cultural Turn, or, rather, a whole cluster of Cultural Turns, we have arrived at the currently dominant kind of theorizing in the humanities. The earliest variety was the Interpretive Turn, which was based on the then new American anthropology's view as expounded by Clifford Geertz that culture consisted of webs of signification, was to be studied like a text and had to be approached by a "thick description" of particular cultural practices.

The relativizing of Western culture in this theory was an important factor in bringing about the Reflexive Turn (or, rather, Self-Reflexive Turn) with its questioning, "Who has the authority to speak for a group's identity or authenticity?", for which the contributions to the influential critical anthology *Writing Culture* edited by James Clifford and George Marcus are typical examples. And from there it was only a small step to the so-called Performative Turn, in which all cultural phenomena, including theorizing, were interpreted in terms of the vocabulary of performance and staging. Beginning already in the late nineteen-eighties, with seminal work done by Victor Turner, this trend has become more and more powerful with the growing awareness

of the performativity of culture and politics under the influence of the new media.

From the late nineteen-eighties onwards two other versions of cultural theory gradually became so strong that for some time now we have been speaking of a Translational Turn and a Spatial Turn. The former gained wider attention in the nineteen-nineties due to publications like *The Translatability of Cultures*, edited by Sanford Budick and Wolfgang Iser, and *Postcolonial Translation*, edited by Susam Bassnett and Harish Trivedi. It encouraged a focus on the problematic of interdisciplinary translatability with, for instance, the helpful notion of "travelling concepts", and on intercultural translatability in the age of globalization. The Spatial Turn originated with postmodern geographers like the American city planner Edward Soja, and I need only mention metaphoric terms like "marginality", "edges", "limits", "borders", "territory", "mapping" or "mental maps" to call to mind what it is about.

Bachmann-Medick in her book on Cultural Turns further includes an "Iconic Turn", which consists of recent studies of visual culture with a focus on connections between pictures, discourses, knowledge, and power and for which Margaret Dikovitskaya's *Visual Culture. The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn* is a pertinent example. And if we are ready to extend the term "turn" to any attempt to develop new categories of analysis by focussing on particular aspects of culture or anthropology, we will easily be able to make out a "Mnemonic Turn" in the recent study of cultural memory, an ecological, ethical and emotional turn in recent literary theory, a cognitive turn in psychology, and a neuro-biological turn in the brain sciences that attempts to capture the domain of the humanities in what business people call a hostile take-over.

Regarding literature and the specific experience it enables, there seems to be no new Literary Turn in sight, and those who - like me - do not want literature to be left out of the discussion can only be grateful to critics like Peter Widdowson, Jean-Jacques Lecercle and Ronald Shusterman, as well as Derek Attridge who together with quite a few others have taken care in recent years to keep it in.

*

Regarding the "relevance of theory", how are we to assess the sequence and even synchronicity of all these "turns"? What first has to be said is that quite obviously we have been experiencing a flourishing of theory both in terms of scope and intensity that is truly amazing. It is sufficient to think of the great names mentioned in my perfunctory sketch of the development during the last seven decades or so to realize the vast amount of new insights resulting from the great number of theoretical turns that came up in this period. And besides the sheer intellectual harvest: what motivation, what excitement! No wonder that those who invested their time and energy in the one or other of those theoretical projects were under the impression that what they were experiencing was finally a veritable turn towards the truth, a total change of direction and relevance.

From the outside, and especially in retrospect, the changes so urgently felt and enthusiastically supported look partly less incisive and partly less fruitful than their instigators thought and proclaimed, and in any case neither final nor irrevocable but in some respect not too dissimilar to those in the domain of fashion. In fashion, regular changes satisfy the desire for novelty and at the same time the development of trends makes it possible for the individual to acquire social recognition by sharing it and a boost of self-confidence from the sense of being up to date. And in view of the way the many turns of theory I have mentioned came about, flourished, and petered out, it can hardly be denied that there is a similar situation in the academy, at least in the humanities and social sciences: regular changes satisfy the intellectual desire for something new or even create the illusion of progress, and the development of trends in the shape of "turns" makes it possible for scholars to join the latest game in town, thus signalling that they are on the "cutting edge" and thereby reaping the recognition desired. On closer examination, the similarity even extends to the structural change in the domain of fashion that has taken place in the last two decades. While the earlier pattern consisted of a more or less linear sequence of hegemonic trends, the more recent is more complex because of a synchronicity of several competing styles in constantly renewal, with new styles coming in and older ones slowly fading out. I hope that my brief references to the varieties of the Cultural Turn have

sufficed to convey the impression that the situation regarding theory in the humanities has developed in exactly the same direction. Instead of one dominant theory being succeeded by another one, there have been several versions of cultural theory existing side by side, with a new one coming up from time to time and another one beginning to look old-fashioned and finally lapsing into neglect.

Whoever considers such a description of the theoretical scene as adequate, however, may with some reason held to be cynical. At least one should – and here I come to the second aspect of the title of my paper – acknowledge the heuristic value of viewing the process of theory generation as occurring in turns. The emergence of a new turn means, after all, that attention will be paid to a previously neglected aspect, the necessity to assert itself under vigorous competition will ensure a certain level of quality, and it will also create research opportunities for those who want to "make it new" and need some guidance on how to do it. For those who still believe in a connection between the more general development of history and the history of ideas and theories there is more food for speculation, and for those under the sway of the postmodern rule of contingency there is still the chance to see the turns as an antidote to stagnation and boredom. Above all it has to be said that even those who are somewhat sceptical of the development will have to admit that such changes have kept the domain of theory lively and attractive.

Thus the problematic of the procedure can only lie in the third aspect mentioned in my title, in epistemology. Though often claiming much more, from an epistemological point of view each turn will provide a particular kind of theoretical insight and therefore deserves to be welcomed as an addition to the theoretical work that has already been done. Yet it can serve this function only if it is presented, or at least received, as a complementation of, and not as a substitute for, what is already there. What comes into play here is, of course, the question of truth, or at least the conviction of having found it and thus being obliged to disseminate it and put it in a position to make sure that only those who will agree will be considered being – in Foucauldian parlance – "in the truth" and all others, either stubborn or stupid or both. Yet by now it should have become evident that, differently from the domain of

religion, degrees of subjective conviction in matters of theory are no reliable measure of the quality of a view. Of course, it must be conceded that there are even those who tend to attribute the function of a secular religion to a particular theory, but whether this is an acceptable stance or not is a moot point. Speaking of turns on a grand scale, there have actually been only very few since the Middle Ages: an anthropological one at the time of the Renaissance, an ontological one brought about by the Enlightenment, an epistemological one in Modernism, and a postmodern one regarding representation. What we are dealing with in literary and cultural theory are much more limited projects, defined by a particular perspective, methodology, or field of investigation.

Yet even granted that each new turn is presented and received as a complementation to the theoretical insights already in place, there still are two serious problems connected with theory's arriving in turns, and these problems consists in both the prevalence of cultural amnesia and the lack of a more or less compulsory meta-theoretical framing of any new project in the humanities or *Geistes-* and *Kulturwissenschaften*. As to the former, some of you may have wondered why I rehearsed a whole number of turns and some of their theoretical insights as if there had not been a sufficient number of much better published surveys of the recent history of literary theory. But while giving a master class last summer for a select group of postgraduate students from all over Europe I observed that very few of them had a fair knowledge of more than one or two of all the turns rehearsed here, and I wanted to do no more than point out how much is constantly getting lost, because there is hardly any methodological or institutional safeguard against this kind of cultural amnesia. As to the second problem, we have a situation where it seems to be sufficient to devise a new theoretical project, find some better-known colleagues to join in or support it, and soon a new trend is created and disseminated with the aim in view to make the paradigm in place look superseded or outmoded. "Over here, you can't do that any more," I was told already in the 1980s by an American colleague when I told him that I was planning a symposium on aesthetics. (Now, of course, I could do it again.)

Yet what, you may ask, can be done to remedy the situation? The first and foremost and probably most difficult change would be to

relativize the prevailing policy of setting a premium exclusively on the new. It would seem necessary to demand of those who propagate a new turn to place it transparently within the broad frame of already existing insights and in this way to demonstrate not only their talent for innovation but also their responsibility for the preservation of what has already been achieved. What seems necessary for this purpose is a meta-theoretical frame within which any particular theoretical project or trend or turn can be positioned - even if under the impact of poststructuralist scepticism the validity of such a frame can only be a heuristic one. And in order to guarantee the continuity of theoretical work in the humanities we should, in the face of all scepticism regarding *grands récits*, make sure that sufficient attention and room are given in our academic curricula to substantial surveys of the more recent turns from which we have, as it were, turned away. Otherwise we will remain in a situation in which, for want of pertinent information, everything tends to be considered newly invented. That theory has arrived and will continue to arrive or arise in turns proves, if not its relevance, then at least its vital necessity as something worthwhile doing. If we are able to deal with turns in terms of complementation rather than sheer substitution, it will certainly help us to make headway in the humanities.

Herbert GRABES
Justus-Liebig - Universität Giessen

Works Cited

Althusser, Louis. "Freud et Lacan." *La Nouvelle Critique* 161/162 (1964/65). 88-108.

Althusser, Louis. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. London: New Left Books, 1971.

Attridge, Derek. *The Singularity of Literature*. London and New York: Routledge, 2004.

Bachmann-Medick, Doris. *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*. Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2006.

Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Paris: Seuil, 1957.

Barthes, Roland. *Éléments de sémiologie*. Paris. Seuil, 1964.

Bassnett, Susan and Harish Trivedi, eds. *Postcolonial Translation. Theory and Practice*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Bhaba, Homi K. *Nation and Narration*. London: Routledge, 1990.

Bourdieu, Pierre."Haute Couture or Haute Culture?" *Soziologische Fragen*. Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1993. 187-96.

Bremond, Claude. *Logique du récit*. Paris: Seuil, 1973.

Brooks, Cleanth and Robert Penn Warren, eds. *Understanding Poetry. An Anthology for College Students*. New York: Henry Holt, 1938.

Budick, Sanford and Wolfgang Iser, eds. The *Translatability of Cultures. Figurations of the Space Between*. Stanford: University of California Press, 1996.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge, 1992.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Cixous, Hélène. *La Jeune née*. (co-authored with Catherine Clement). Paris: U.G.E., 10/18, 1975.

Cixous, Hélène. *Entre l'écriture*. Paris: Editions des femmes, 1986.

Cixous, Hélène. *L'Heure de Clarice Lispector.* Paris: Editions des femmes, 1989.

Clifford, James and George Marcus, eds. *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

Culler, Jonathan. *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and theStudy of Literature*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975.

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *L'Anti-Oedipe: capitalisme et schizophrénie : I*. Paris: Minuit, 1977.

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Rhizome : introduction*. Paris: Minuit, 1976.

Derrida, Jacques. "La Différance." Original presentation on 27 January 1968 to the Societé française de philosophie and published in the volume *Théorie d'ensemble* of the collection "Tel Quel", by Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1968, and reprinted in *Marges de la philosophie*.

Derrida, Jacques. *De la grammatologie*. Paris: Minuit, 1967.

Derrida, Jacques."Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences." Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, eds. *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970. 247-72.

Derrida, Jacques. *Marges de la philosophie*. Paris: Minuit, 1972.

Dikovitskaya, Margaret. *Visual Culture. The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005.

Dollimore, Jonathan and Sinfield, Alan, eds. *Political Shakespeare. New Essays in Cultural Materialism.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985.

Eagleton, Terry. *Criticism and Ideology*. London: New Left Books, 1976.

Eagleton, Terry. *Walter Benjamin or Towards a Revolutionary Criticism.* London: New Left Books, 1981.

Eagleton, Terry. *The Ideology of the Aesthetic*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993.

Eco, Umberto. *Il segno*. Milano: Isedi, 1973.

Eco, Umberto. *Lector in fabula*. Milano: Bompiani, 1979.

Empson, William. *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1930.

Foucault, Michel. *Les m© ots et les choses*. Paris: Gallimard, 1966.

Foucault, Michel. *L'Archéologie du savoir*. Paris: Gallimard, 1969.

Foucault, Michel. *L'Ordre du discours*. Paris: Gallimard, 1971.

Grabes, Herbert, ed. *Literature, Literary History, and Cultural Memory*. REAL 21. Tübingen: Narr, 2005.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. New York: International Publishers, 1971.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Geertz, Clifford. *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*. New York: Basic Books, 1983.

Genette, Gérard. *Figures I*. Paris: Seuil, 1966.

Genette, Gérard. *Figures II*. Paris: Seuil, 1969.

Genette, Gérard. *Figures III*. Paris: Seuil, 1972.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Shakespearean Negotiations. The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Berkeley University of California Press, 1988.

Greenblatt, Stephen. "Towards a Poetics of Culture." H. Aram Veeser, ed. *The New Historicism*. New York: Routledge, 1989. 1-14.

Greimas, Algernon Julien. *Sémantique structurale*. Paris: Larousse, 1966.

Irigaray, Luce. *Speculum : de l'autre femme*. Paris: Éditions Minuit, 1974.

Irigaray, Luce. *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un*. Paris: Minuit, 1977.

Irigaray, Luce. *Je, tu, nous : pour une culture de la différence*. Paris: Grasset, 1990.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*. Princeton, NJ, and London: Princeton UP, 1972.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act. London: Routledge,* 1981.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Capitalism.* London: Verso, 1991.

Kant, Imanuel. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Riga: Johan Friedrich Hartknoch, 1781.

Kittsteiner, Heinz Dieter. "'Iconic Turn' und 'innere Bilder' in der Kulturgeschichte." *Was sind Kulturwissenschaften. 13 Antworten.* München: Fink, 2004. 153-82.

Kristeva, Julia. *Smeiotike = Recherches pou une sémanalyse d'une structure discursive transformationelle*. Paris: Seuil, 1969.

Kristeva, Julia. *Étrangers à nous-mêmes.* Paris: Fayard, 1988.

Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

Lacan, Jacques. "Le Stade du miroir comme formateur de la function du Je telle qu'elle nous est révélée dans l'expérience psychanalytique." *Ecrits*. Paris: Seuil, 1966.

Lacan, Jacques. *Séminaires* I-XVIII. Paris: Seuil, 1975-2007.

Lecercle, Jean-Jacques and Roland Shusterman. *L'Emprise des signes. Débat sur l'expérience littéraire.* Paris: Seuil, 2002.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Anthropologie structurale*. Paris: Plon, 1958.

Millet, Kate. *Sexual Politics.* New York: Doubleday, 1970.

Morris. Charles William. *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1938.

Montrose, Louis A. "Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture." H. Aram Veeser, ed.. *The New Historicism.* New York: Routledge, 1989. 15-36.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Zur Genealogie der Moral: Eine Streitschrift*. Leipzig: C.G. Naumann, 1887.

Ogden, C.K. and I.A. Richards. *The Meaning of Meaning*. London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1923.

Peirce, Charles Sanders. *Writings of Charles Sanders Peirce: a Chronological Edition*. Vols. I-V. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982-93.

Ransom, John Crowe. *The New Criticism*. Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1941.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. London: Routledge, 1978.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Cours de linguistique générale*. Ed. Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye. Lausann and Paris: Payot, 1916.

Scholes, Robert. *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974.

Searle, John R. "Reality Principles: An Interview with John R. Searle." Reason.com February 2000 12 May 2008. <http://www.reason.com/news/show/27599.html>

Soja, Edward W. *Postmodern Geographies. The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso, 1989.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*. London: Routledge, 1987.

Sidney, Philip. *The Defense of Poesie* [1595], ed. Wolfgang Clemen. Heidelberg: Winter, 1950.

Todorov, Tzvetan. *Littérature et signification*. Paris: Larousse, 1967.

Turner, Victor. *The Anthropology of Performance*. New York: Performing Arts Journal I, 1988.

Widdowson, Peter. *Literature*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Zima, Peter V. *Was ist Theorie? Theoriebegriff und Dialogische Theorie in den Kultur- und Sozialwissenschaften*. Tübingen: A. Francke, 2004.