

In the summer of 2002, I had the pleasure of teaching a six-week-long seminar at Cornell's School of Criticism and Theory. Founded twenty-five years earlier in order to provide younger academics and graduate students with a blitz introduction to "theory" (mainly French), it had evolved into a place where younger (and older) faculty and students well versed in theory came to work together. In this sense, the SCT is indicative of what has been often recently labeled the "death" of theory. It is clear that what has happened is that theory (now to be understood as the self-conscious awareness of the methodological approaches that one uses) has become an inherent part of not only most graduate programs in literature and culture but most published scholarship in these domains. In other words, the wish of twenty years ago when I was at the beginning of my own career that theory had to be taken seriously has been fulfilled.

Now, as with all wishes, this too comes with its own private poison pill. Theory no longer means continental (read: French) theory. Not Foucault but Benjamin is hot today; not Cixous but Agamben. Cultural studies has developed in directions unimagined by its Anglo-Marxist originators. Theory has truly become not only "continental" but also global. Not only are European and North American critics read throughout the world, but in Europe and North America critics are now reading more and more thinkers in (or at least from) the "rest of the world." Indeed, the very line between these two arenas has vanished in the world of global theory and the theory of globalization. Is Anthony Appiah an American, an African, or a British theorist? Actually he is a global one in addition to being all three of these categories. Of equal importance is that the assumption of rational, critical self-consciousness, especially in those theories espousing the claims of the irrational (in the form of psyche, power, or society) as the motor of action has also been undone. Adorno has finally won his struggle with the Enlightenment, and this may well account for the fact that his stock has risen radically in the past few years, especially among feminist theorists. Few today believe that even with years of deep analysis or constant practice one can plumb the depths of all of one's motivation or reduce all phenomena to a single, common cause or form. Thus we have concomitantly seen the rise of biography as a substantial genre for the presentation of literary and cultural history. This signals our increased, posttheory desire for coherent narratives but also an attempt to plumb the critics' projected self. (Luckily we have not had to suffer an explosion of novels by critics for this same reason. Biography is safer and still somewhat more legitimate than pure fiction.) This movement to biography has no small role in winning readers (and viewers) to complex, often contradictory presentations of lives and times. It is not the Rankean presentations of the facts of a life that engages to reader today, but the unresolved underlying processes that biography seems at least to hint at if not reveal. (And we know how constructed that sense of revelation is!)

All of this points to the success of theory and its own limitations. Is "pure" theory being written today? The closeness of contemporary philosophy and literary studies is evident. But this theory often takes a very different form; in virtually every arena of literary and cultural studies, from new historical to feminist to Holocaust or postcolonial studies, theoretical questions frame presentations that are themselves substantive. They are often highly theoretical and use case studies to present complex theoretical issues, applicable to a wider range of topics, in the pursuit of any given specific study. Often the best theory today is found in these contexts.

Theory has even entered into the realm of professional education. The medical humanities have embraced the problems of narrative and theory as the new core of a new discipline. No place else in professional education (including law where critical theory seems to have waned) is the training of professionals more impacted than in medicine. Here one can find a model for the importance of theory as an inherent component of pedagogy. The very acts of

reading and seeing in their most abstract and critical modes become one of the means by which young physicians are trained.

The medical humanities may also signal a more pragmatic move for the study of theory. Much of the reaction to theory in the study of literature has indeed been a greater emphasis on the aesthetic, without much sense of whether this is a psychological or social phenomenon. In the medical humanities the stress, at least for the medical historians and narratologists, is how the tools of interpretation are inherent to the profession itself. Doctors interpret—they read signs and symptoms, generate and collect life histories. They are constantly dealing with real and constructed texts, which demand ethical, moral, scientific, and critical acumen. Unlike a reading of a literary text, the reading of a patient history has immediate consequences.

The model for the generation as well as the dissemination of knowledge is also placed into question. The literary theorist is a loner; given the Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Cixous, Spivak model, she or he may become a cult figure. This is oftentimes the result of the deification of the individuality (read: originality) of the thinker rather than any true collaboration. Deleuze and Guattari may be the exception to this older model. This is the model that has dominated the humanities since the romantic image of the isolated poet and thinker. At the very same time, the scientific laboratory arose as an answer to how knowledge was to be generated. Here collaborative work brings a group of specialists together (within or beyond a discipline) to undertake a project greater in form, scope, depth, or complexity than any individual could undertake him- or herself. There is of course a cult of personality in science, but at least there is recognition of the need for specialists to work together. The integration of theory means that this can now take place. With a clear awareness of how one works, the ability of specialists to join together to generate larger and more meaningful projects seems evident.

These projects may well not be disseminated in the form of the scholarly monograph or article. The conventionally published scholarly work by a single hand will remain standard in the humanities for the near future. But it is also clear that there are media that lend themselves to different forms of dissemination of humanistic scholarship. From websites to exhibitions, from radio shows to innovative long distance pedagogical projects, from popular books to films, we now can reach well beyond the ever more circumscribed audience of the scholarly book. (And perhaps even generate new interest in scholarly books while we do this!) This is not a charge to water down or prostitute one's academic credentials. It is a charge to work in a team with other scholars and media specialists who can help shape one's scholarly work for a different, broader, or more critical audience. The "death" of theory seems to have been paralleled by the "death" of the book. But the reality is that theory has not died but been metamorphosed into different projects and forms; so too must we imagine the future for alternative forms for the dissemination of humanistic knowledge.

The integration of theory means a chance to undertake such larger projects for a broader audience. We who claim to know about theory also know about media, about performance, about film; we are learning daily more about the infinite pleasures and dangers of the web. We need to think more intensely about how our wider theoretical expertise can, indeed must, mesh with alternative forms for the presentation of humanistic knowledge and experience. In some areas, such as the medical humanities, this has already taken place, if still in a tentative way. We are entering the most fruitful epoch for the humanities, assuming we see the changes that have and will take place as positive ones. Demanding that the successes of the past be the goals of the future is not only wrongheaded but also self-defeating. Let us plan for a new future, yet unknown, and therefore still full of hope and anxiety.

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