

Regressus ET reflexivity: Belletristic semantique problematique, ET dissimulare

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ABSTRACT: The paper attempts interrogation of theoretics in the present: “theory in its selective tradition” (Williams, 1989), to highlight major departures of the said genre from the past writings in the domain, which were liberal, democratic, egalitarian, dialogic, and interacted to continue extended dialogue with earlier prevailing thought. Such writings interacted by attempting to comprehend the earlier insights and negotiated amendments, elaborations, and even transformations, where needed. However, in the “selective tradition” such features have receded and combative politics, coupled with irresolution, dissembling, with insurrectionary core are present predominantly. Eschewing *telos*, with mere negotiations, always (!) in the interstices, to proclaim genesis through rupture, wherein abstention from former insights is the prominent feature. This is not restricted to one or two theorists, but extends across the spectrum. There is recursivity and reflexivity, turning regressive, severed from *praxis*, wherein political remains restricted only to its articulation, without connecting with organization(s) so as to be transformative and melioristic. Here, there is theoretical rigour, *per se*. The intention in the paper is as Brandom (1994) says, to make it “explicit”.

KEYWORDS: regression; interpretant; autopoiesis; transjunctural; dissensus

1. Prolegomenon

The intention of the paper is to revisit to retrace the history of ideas vis-à-vis theory in the present time, since in the said discipline there were contingency and reflexivity in the Derridean theoretics that turned regressive later, followed by dissimulation. The earlier egalitarian that stressed verity, veracity and candidness turned into inane expressions where the effect was sought at the cost of the cogency of arguments, leading to the employment of rhetoric, janiformity, with the compulsion to hyper complexity. The aim and the effort of the paper throughout has been to (re-) trace the voyage of theory. Comparisons between the former and the latter versions, wherever needed, have been provided. The underlying thought has been influenced by “Theory Revisionism” throughout the paper unravelling present-day polemics, and employing jargon, which gives the feeling of *déjà vu* to the reader. The title of the paper and the opening lines make it clear. Hence, theory today lacks the participatory and the dialogic. The paper attempts to reveal this.

Belles-lettres is in the throes of “Theory Revisionism” since recent theoretics seem to thrive on sheer polemics. Deconstruction came to be equated with destruction, and so is the poststructural, where Derridean “*il n’y a pas dehors texte*” took away the “structurality of the structure” to herald withering away

of metaphysical assumptions (Derrida, 1967). There have been “destructive discourses” as Derrida elaborated: “The Nietzschean critique of metaphysics... critique of the concepts of being and truth... the Freudian critique of self-presence, that is, the critique of consciousness, of the subject, of self-identity, and of self-proximity or self-possession; and more radically, the Heideggerian destruction of metaphysics, of onto-theology, of the determination of being as presence” (Derrida, 1967).

Indeed, deconstruction stressed demise of the definitive semantic, unbounded verity, ecumenical values, and flights of the theoretical and discursive, or as Derrida said: “Tournee vers la presence, perdue ou impossible, de l’origine absente, cette thematique structuraliste de l’immediatee rompue est donc la face triste, negative, nostalgique, coupable, rousseauiste, de la pensee du jeu dont l’affirmation nietzscheenne, l’affirmation joyeuse du jeu du monde et de l’innocence du devenir, l’affirmation d’un monde de signes sans faute, sans verite, sans origine, offert a une interpretation active, serait l’autre face. Cette affirmation determine alors le non-centre autrement que comme perte du centre. Et elle joue sans securite. Car il y a un jeu sur: celui qui se limite a la substitution de pieces donnees et existantes, presentes. Dans le hasard absolu, l’affirmation se livre aussi a l’indetermination genetique, a l’aventure seminale de la trace.” [As a turning toward the presence, lost or impossible, of the absent origin, this structuralist thematic of broken Immediateness is thus the sad, negative, nostalgic, guilty, Rousseauist facet of the thinking of freeplay of which the Nietzschean affirmation—the joyous affirmation of the freeplay of the world and without truth, without origin, offered to an active interpretation—would be the other side. This affirmation then determines the non-centre otherwise than as loss of the centre. And it plays the game without security. For there is a sure freeplay: that which is limited to the substitution of given and existing, present, pieces. In absolute chance, affirmation also surrenders itself to genetic indetermination, to the seminal adventure of the trace] (Derrida, 1967).

Thus, there is no Kantian a priori assumption (albeit archaic now); instead, there is demise of transcendent signified (Derrida), “like the Lyotardian death of master-narratives”, and even mentioning the authority of presence, “without truth, without origin... limited to... substitution of given and existing, present, pieces” since there is “genetic indetermination”, leading to “difference” from “differer”, which is to “defer”. In other places, Derrida used the German *Aufschub* which can be translated as “postponement”, alluding to Freud’s “*Verspatung, Nachtraglichkeit*”, on to “detours to death” in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Ch.5) (Freud, 1961).

This led Norris to articulate apprehensions, shared by many of us. Norris said: “We have reached a point where theory has effectively turned against itself, generating form of extreme epistemological scepticism which reduces everything—philosophy, politics, criticism, and ‘theory’ alike—to a dead level of suasive or rhetorical effect” (Norris, 1990).

Norris would thus agree to term *postmodern as an autopsy* (a post-mortem) of disciplines listed by him: “philosophy, politics, criticism, and theory”. The presiding deity of deconstruction (grammatology!), of course, offers a subtler response. Derrida says: “Those who think they stand outside institutions are sometimes those who interiorize its norms and programmes in the most docile manner. Whether it is done in a critical or deconstructive way, the questioning of philosophy’s relation to itself is a trial of the institution, of its paradoxes as well, for I try to show nonetheless what is unique and finally untenable in the philosophical institution: It is there that this institution must be a counter institution, one which may go as far as to break, in an asymmetrical fashion, all contracts and cast suspicion on the very concept of institution. And then, however untenable it may be, it is in this institution that I live...” (Derrida, 1995).

Thus, the movement is not related to disruption (or destruction), or else Derridean abode is

threatened. Alternately, deconstruction has also been viewed as a “device for disjunction” of texts. Barbara Johnson translated Derrida’s *Dissemination*, and in the “Introduction”, she says: “The deconstruction of a text does not proceed by random doubt or generalized scepticism, but by a careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself. If anything is destroyed in a deconstructive reading, it is... the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another” (Derrida, 1981b).

2. Explication

It seems Johnson misses the point, since deconstruction is not delimited to text and its “explication”. Derrida himself contested this reduction, rather associated it with demise, a finality of sorts in the contestation of epistemological-philosophical space, in an interview with Stephens, Derrida said: “All my writing is on death. If I don’t reach the place where I can be reconciled with death, then I will have failed. If I have one goal it is to accept death and dying” (Stephens, 1994). Thus, Derrida accepts both death as well as dying, seeking rapprochement, a conciliation (*conciliatio*). It needs to be mentioned here that for the purpose of the present paper, deconstruction is viewed broadly, stressing only its commonly accepted concepts, keywords and insights. Here, Taylor’s contextualizing comments concerning deconstruction need to be recalled vis-à-vis theoretical model’s relations with literature and philosophy. Taylor says: “By attempting to deconstruct both the constructive subject and the horrifying world it has created, Derrida points beyond the certainty of post-modernity... Deconstruction repeatedly demonstrates the impossibility of modernity by soliciting the other which, though never present, ‘always already’ haunts presence... Derrida is the postman whose letters bear a message that never arrives” (Taylor, 1986).

Derrida chose the term “deconstruction” under, primarily, Heideggerian, and secondarily, Nietzschean influence. It was in some detail that he himself expatiated upon the concept. Derrida said: “When I chose that word [deconstruction], or when it imposed itself on me ... I think it was in *Of Grammatology*, I wished to translate and adapt to my own ends the Heideggerian word *Destruktion* or *Abbau*. Each signified in this context an operation bearing on the structure or traditional architecture of the fundamental concepts of ontology or of Western metaphysics. But in French *destruction* too obviously implied an annihilation or a negative reduction much closer perhaps to Nietzschean “demolition” than the Heideggerian interpretation or to the type of reading that I proposed” (Derrida, 1988a).

Herein lies explanation of part of the problem concerning Derridean “deconstruction”: While Derrida advocated “Heideggerian... *Destruktion* or *Abbau*”, the world at large discussed his philosophy vis-à-vis “French *destruction*” that “implied an annihilation or a negative reduction much closer... to Nietzschean ‘demolition’.” It is also true that discussion concerning deconstruction has reached saturation point. The theoretical model seems to have largely gone out of fashion. Intellectuals, scholars and critics of the nineties of the last century, aspired to analyze literary texts in the light of Derridean theoretics, replacing the earlier *explication de texte*, or attempting revelation of immanent textual semantics also to unravel Saussurean/Jakobsonian “message”, appraising “semanticization” of the semiotic as well as the projecting of the paradigmatic axis onto the syntagmatic axis (Ruwet, 1982). Hermeneutics became effete, reduced to a strategy, engendering circularities to first insert meaning and then excavate it, in a text. Its sole charm lay in the insight that (in Chomskian terms) it is the deep structure “that has to be comprehended for the text’s semantics, since the ‘surface structure’ won’t yield riches. Hogarth had much earlier counselled regarding the ‘inner eye’ to match ‘the internal surface and the external surface’”

(Hogarth, 1955). Glanville also opined to the same effect (Glanville and Varela, 1981). Thus, there remained the idea of (in Hogarthian terms) the “external” and the “internal” that Derrida came and deconstructed and proclaimed (much like Caesar’s pompous polemics of *veni, vidi, vici*), through his “*La Structure, le signe et le jeu dans le discours des sciences humaines*” at the Johns Hopkins University Colloquium (Wellbery, 1992). Also, then, Hegelian dialectics, and Peircean semiotics with his taxonomy of the sign were available. Deconstruction, however, was unlike the prevailing theoretical models, since it advocated reading forms, in texts, literary or otherwise, as distinctions or differences, never in unison, and with the absence of “transcendent signified” or Peircean “interpretant”. Present times are those of cultural pluralities and diversities, and deconstruction also seemed headed towards these multiplicities. Of course, deconstruction does not have fixed norms to lead to results or *denouement*, and, moreover, all frames are susceptible to deconstruction. Alternately, the application of deconstruction may occasion regression and recursion and not result in stable semantics, or what Spencer-Brown terms *eigen values*, since Derrida advocates just *differance* (Spencer-Brown, 1979).

It was in “*Letter to a Japanese Friend*” that Derrida explained the importance of the theoretical model: “What deconstruction is not? Everything of course! What is deconstruction? Nothing of course!” (Derrida, 1988a).

Earlier in an interview with Creech et al., Derrida had expatiated upon the formerly prevalent Heideggerian ontics concentrated upon “be or not be” (Derrida, 1985). But Derridean theoretics deconstructs “is/is not”, to undermine the supposition of presence, rather any constant connection between absence/presence (Derrida, 1985). The distinction itself between the two is problematized, where only the deferring difference of *differance* prevails, and the notion of “*centre*” is uncoupled. It is in the relation of instability that Derridean *differance* joins with his other concepts like *blanc*, *trace*, *marge*, *supplement* and *écriture* to articulate “*trace de l’effacement de la trace*”, i.e., “trace of the erasure of the trace” (Derrida, 1982).

3. Critique

It is because of the restricted domain of Derrida’s theoretical model that it has been censured by scholars and critics. Luhmann says: “Looking at... discussion of deconstructionists and their critics, the most remarkable fact may well be the narrowness of its span of attention. It is almost a one-word discussion, or a text/context discussion, where deconstruction is the text and the history and the usages of the word the context” (Luhmann, 2002).

However, Sweetman’s criticism of Derrida is quite elaborate. He first opines that Derridean deconstruction is “ideal representative of postmodern philosophy in general”, and then indicts it on a number of counts. He says: “

- 1) it confuses aesthetics with metaphysics;
- 2) it mistakes assertion for argument in philosophy;
- 3) it is guilty of relativism (both epistemological and moral);
- 4) it is self-contradictory;
- 5) it is guilty of intellectual arrogance because its proponents insist that its critique of traditional philosophy can still succeed even though its positive claims have not been established” (Sweetman, 1999).

Derrida’s answer to such indictments and others, like Searle’s criticism is provided by him, elaborately in *Limited Inc.*: “Every concept that lays claim to any rigour whatsoever implies the alternative of ‘all or nothing’. Even if in ‘reality’ or in ‘experience’ everyone believes he knows that there is never

‘all or nothing’, a concept determines itself only according to ‘all or nothing’. Even the concept of ‘difference of degree’, the concept of relativity is, qua concept, determined according to the logic of all or nothing, of yes or no: Differences of degree or nondifference of degree. It is impossible or illegitimate to form a philosophical concept outside the logic of all or nothing” (Derrida, 1988b).

Derrida’s rumination on the genesis of a “concept” (or “le signe linguistique”) attempts at enumeration of its salient characteristics, i.e., it should be distinct, its delineation should be specific. Thus, Derrida’s elaboration continues: “It neither can nor should avoid saying: It’s serious or nonserious, ironical or nonironical, present or nonpresent, metaphorical or nonmetaphorical, ... etc. To this oppositional logic, which is necessarily legitimately a logic of ‘all or nothing’ and without which the distinction and the limits of a concept would have no chance, I oppose nothing, least of all a logic of approximation (*a peu pres*), a simple empiricism of difference in degree; rather I add a supplementary complication that calls for other concepts, for other thoughts beyond the concept and another form of ‘general theory’, or rather another discourse, another ‘logic’ that accounts for the impossibility of concluding such a ‘general theory’”.

Nevertheless, it stands that a concept holds value, efficacy only in a context. A changed context brings another (equally or nearly equally valid) concept into play. Even otherwise, a limit is not a disaster. Also, knowledge is contingent (Another Derridean favourite) upon a number of variables.

4. Differential schema theoretical models and philosophy

It was around this time, the ending of the previous and the beginning of the present century that theoretical models with stress on difference schemas and productivity of paradoxes became popular. Rasch, while alluding to Husserl, terms these as “sceptical nonphilosophies” which came through a whole lineage of philosophers (Husserl, 1970a). Rasch says: “It is perhaps a fitting irony that if Husserl begot Heidegger, and Heidegger begot both Gadamer and Derrida, then the ‘sceptical nonphilosophies’ that Husserl feared seem not only to have carried the day but also, perversely, to have issued from his own more fundamental aspirations” (Rasch and Luhmann, 2002).

Rasch (following Husserl) terms them as “sceptical nonphilosophies” because these philosophico-theoretical perambulations and peregrinations dramatically diametrically diverged from Western philosophy’s once avowed aim and ambition, which may have been utopic, but its possibility was meant to be affirmed. Strauss reiterates the earliest Greek, and later looked up to as an ideal of Western philosophy: “Philosophy, as quest for wisdom, is quest for universal knowledge, for knowledge of the whole... Instead of ‘the whole’ the philosophers also say ‘all things’: The whole is not a pure ether or an unrelieved darkness in which one cannot discern anything. Quest for knowledge of ‘all things’ means quest for knowledge of God, the world, and man—or rather quest for knowledge of the natures of all things: The natures in their totality are ‘the whole’” (Strauss, 1988).

Comprehending “the whole... all things” may remain only an ambition, but the first step is “discovery of nature... discovery of the distinction between nature (natural right) and ancestral or conventional authority” (Rasch and Luhmann, 2002). Strauss had, in his earlier study, explained the core of contemplation, wherein he said: “Philosophy appeals from the ancestral to the good, to that which is good intrinsically, to that which is good in nature... the human faculty that, with the help of sense perception, discovers nature is reason or understanding” (Strauss, 1953).

So, it is reason that has served to join the human beings amongst themselves as well as with the world at large, and without it there will be disjunction and unintelligibility as both human nature and

phenomenon will be incomprehensible. Modernism ushered scepticism and loss of faith in reason, and the universe no longer appears to be operating or linked rationally. In Heidegger's terms the "world picture" cannot be viewed as a "whole" any longer, as modernity has led to our "forgetting Being" (Heidegger, 1977). This "severing" has come about in the twentieth century, although a few philosophers like Husserl still held on to "faith" in "philosophical reason". Husserl, even in the thirties, says: "... philosophical reason represents a new stage of human nature... this stage of human existence under ideal norms for infinite tasks, the stage of existence *sub specie aeternitatis* [under the aspect of eternity] is possible only through absolute universality, precisely the universality contained from the start in the ideal of philosophy" (Husserl, 1970b).

Husserl himself, of course, had to soon admit that "immanent, partial, and severed world, the posited world... [has taken] centre stage" (Rasch and Luhmann, 2002). The world once viewed in holistic terms "now becomes... field of observations, descriptions", (Rasch and Luhmann, 2002) "a totality of facts" (Wittgenstein, 1974) with ruptures, schisms and divisions *ad infinitum*.

Prominently, rational faculties in the present have been preoccupied with critiquing epistemologies like, for instance, ... the critique of ideology derived from Marx and the psychoanalysis of Freud... with the purpose... to locate "latencies" (class interest, traumatic experience) that account for error (ideology, pathological behaviour) (Rasch, 2002).

5. Luhmannian insights

European enlightenment and intellectuals in its wake searched for "latencies" through "observations of others' observations" (Luhmann, 2002) to

- 1) rupture orthodoxies,
- 2) to critique them in order to render them harmless through "making them explicit" (Brandom, 1994),
- 3) to gain consensus through the discursive, by reasoning and argument in order to "correct" the deviant on the socio-political plane,
- 4) to impart to the proletariat the consciousness of class-conflict or its residues, thus aiming at the therapeutic, although the insights of Nietzsche (1954) and Weber (1958) have all but eroded trust in such therapies.

This was accentuated by end of the century "philosophies of... pragmatism, hermeneutics and poststructuralism" (Luhmann, 2002). Mention here may be made of Luhmannian oeuvre, since Luhmann indulged in "radicalization of the observation of latencies by locating latencies in all observations, including his own" (Luhmann, 2002). However, latencies render themselves visible through perspectival differences, where Saussurean differences are accretions of the semantic, but according to Bateson it is "information as a difference that makes a difference" (Bateson, 1971). Thus a "difference" is the turning visible of a "distinction" that "demarcates the boundary between the unmarked and the marked state" (Spencer-Brown, 1979).

Deconstruction treads similar path: "*depuis un certain dehors, par elle inqualifiable, innommable*" [from a certain outside, unqualifiable and nameless in itself] (Derrida, 1981a).

Derrida, at places, in his work seems to be anticipating Spencer-Brown's *Laws of Form*, because *Positions* was first published in 1968, and *Laws of Form* in 1969, since the latter's calculus is anticipated by the former in philosophy: "*Le progres effectif de la notation mathematique va donc de pair avec la deconstruction de la metaphysique*" [the effective progress of mathematical notation goes together with the deconstruction

of metaphysics] (Derrida, 1981a).

There is a distinct possibility of improving upon Derridean deconstruction by using Spencer-Brown's insights (Roberts, 1995). Luhmannian self-referential systems (*autopoiesis*) "mean that an observer has to focus on the self-determined and self-determining distinctions a system uses to frame its own observations" (Luhmann, 2002).

Von Foerster has critiqued the domain of "second order cybernetics" and "second order observations" (Von Foerster, 1969, 1981, 1984, 2003). He explains in "*Cybernetics of Cybernetics*" (Von Foerster, 2003): "... it appears to be clear that... cybernetics must be second order cybernetics—a *cybernetics of cybernetics*—in order that the observer who enters the system shall be allowed to stipulate his own purpose: He is autonomous".

Luhmann also says: "One has to know which distinctions guide the observations of the observed observer and to find out whether any stable objects emerge when these observations are recursively applied to their own results. Objects are therefore nothing but the eigen behaviours of observing systems that result from using and reusing their previous distinctions" (Luhmann, 2002).

These observations are discussed by Gunther under the "concept of transjunctural operations" (Gunther, 1976). They are "neither conjunctions nor disjunctions but positive/negative distinctions at a higher level" (Gunther, 1976). Interestingly, this also is reflected in Derrida's theoretical model of deconstruction which reads: "An opposition that is deconstructed is not destroyed or abandoned but reinscribed" (Culler, 1982). According to Gunther, "transjunctural operations become unavoidable as soon as a system shifts from first-order to second-order observations or... polycontextural observations" (Gunther, 1976). This is nearer to Derridean repudiation of "logocentrism", without rejecting formalism or logic. Gunther, of course, launches search for the logical through enhanced complexity of systems.

6. Luhmannian autopoiesis: Self reference and other reference

Thus, investigation into observations of the second order helps unravel further signification of Derridean deconstruction and greater comprehension of the theoretical model. He also differentiates between "the meaning of meaning (*le sens de sens*)" and "making and deferring distinctions" as also "indications (signalisation)" (Derrida, 1978). His writings, according to him are "inscriptions (*écriture*)" (Derrida, 1981b). The writings, in the nature of self-reflexivity and recursivity have to be deconstructive of their own "écriture" in keeping with Derrida's philosophical dispositions. A by-product of our disputations and deliberations helps unravel the "architecture" of sundry theories.

There is another confluence in view. Maturana and Varela, in the light of their insights into cognitive biology, said: "Everything that is said, including the present statement, is said by an observer" (Maturana and Varela, 1980). Margolis in his study of deconstruction presented opinion of the same kind: "Everything we say... is and cannot but be deconstructive and deconstructible" (Margolis, 1985).

Thus, Derridean theoretical model and its close reading by Luhmann vis-à-vis his "observing systems" and observatics (triggered by system-environment binary) envisions, rather envisages the omnipresence by observers, at the first-order, second-order, or even (later on) third order for all operations, but leading on to paradox (remember Spencer-Brownian dictum: Paradoxes are productive), and/or "re-entry" with no "unfoldment" or distinguishing of system from the environment. This is an excellent discursive discourse (!) in aporetics (Derridean aporia), whose prominent characteristic is recursivity, a receding into regression. Furthermore, observing observations of observers, by observers

(*ad infinitum!*) “Remains a selection, remains contingent on specific observational interests... [and] not produce cognition” (Luhmann, 2002). The avowed intention was “replacing the old cosmology of substances and essences (*hypokeimenon, subiectum, ousia, essentia*),” but it turned otherwise, and hence the “overall tendency” has been “to emphasize discontinuity... conflict” (Luhmann, 2002).

Thus, in this “theoretical environment... undecidability” is a “redemptive feature” (Brennan, 2010). It “denies in advance and as a matter of political principle any hermeneutic endeavour that pretends to render the signified comprehensible, seeing meaning itself as a foreclosure of alternative possibilities” (Brennan, 2010).

This is precisely the argument presented by Spivak in *Death of A Discipline* (Spivak, 2003). There is a need for objectification of theoretics, in manner of style. The need is to reinscribe the (political) agenda. Gesticulation of ideology is not to be presented *per se*, rather there is a need for redescription of its formal logic, which is covert politics, an agenda of the socio-politic. The requirement is to go back to the text to render the rhetoric unambiguous. Theory position analytics is the need of the hour. Brennan opined that there have been “pressures on cannon-formation within theory as well” and described “theory as a polemical rewriting of a targeted political stance” (Brennan, 2006).

7. Deconstruction: Politics and public sphere

There have been attempts to imbue the Derridean with the political, to carve for it a role in the public domain, by alluding to especially Derrida’s later works: (i) on gift, (ii) on being a cosmopolitan, or (iii) on friendship, and envisioning “literary or cultural studies not as a science, a theory, or even a mode of inquiry but as an instrument in the development of a new form of politics and a new political project based on the performative act of doing theory” (Hall and Birchall, 2006). Thus, theory has changed ways: from being in the discursive mode with philosophic-linguistic analyses to launching itself in the public sphere, taking up issues of socio-political urgency. This, of course, is inconsistent with its earlier stance of theoretical rigour, and this attempt at supplanting and superseding the former is not tenable, to say the least, since this repositioning amount to disowning its past. The liberty to opt for an approach or perspective is not contested, it is, in fact, doing so, without the acknowledgement of the former, which is being abandoned: Its earlier configuration of discourse, tight-coupling with emancipation; achievements made through productive negotiations, debates, appraisals and construction of scenario for such rigorous exchanges. Nevertheless, it takes some of theory’s earlier characteristics and features. On the one hand, it repudiates the former liberal humanist mode as ineffective and not combative enough, and then departs from its being melioristic to also share its values and aesthetics. Thus, it goes through repudiations and reappraisals, hence lending an air of indeterminacy to their exegesis; cogency of their arguments is imbued with an overall scepticism. There, then, arises a basal contradiction, although their attempt is for a pluralism, for attaining complexity, for being open-ended, the end result is purposelessness. Theory, thus, is perplexed, trying to embrace dissidence for effectivity in the former left-Hegelian mode, it loses commitment to traditional ethic in civil society, and lacks systematic thinking. However, it retains mere/sheer form. Turning our gaze back, we discern great “conversationalists”, rather dialogical thinking, which was the prominent characteristic of their oeuvre. Consider, for instance, the writings of Lukacs (*Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, especially “*Marx and Engels on Aesthetics*”, or *Studies in European Realism*), wherein he elaborated upon the domain of Western Marxism vis-à-vis literature (Lukacs, 1950, 1970). Then there is *Theorie des Kommunikativen Handelns* by Habermas (Habermas, 1981). The intellectual’s *raison d’être* is the public sphere, to deliberate upon “the unfinished project” (Habermas, 1985, 1987) in a, say, and colloquium. Gramsci’s *Lettere dal Carcere* (Gramsci, 1988) or Fanon, perpetually

“*In Defence of the Other*” (Fanon, 1952, 1961; Singh, 2001) were always involved and engaged with the insights and critiques of the discussants. This is substituted by individualistic pronouncements, and instead of meaningful dialogue with the earlier practitioners leading to amendments and elaborations, the work of these latter ones is merely derivative, in nature, eschewing interaction. It is the core tenet of philosophy and theory to converse with academic opponents and adversaries on their terms to criticise and critique and not to be reductive and aphoristic. The arguments are pugnacious and non-accommodative. Here, theoretical rigour becomes an end in itself leaving out egalitarianism, assessments and negotiations. Rationale of this latter-day theory arises from its assimilating the political in the nature of the adversarial and the conflictual, leading to scepticism and inscrutability. Since, here the subject is decentered, it is recursive. Williams said: “the tropes of theory in its selective tradition closely resemble the tropes of literary modernism... for both contemporary theory and modernism, literature is still, just as it had been for the New critics of the 1940s and 1950s, what escapes the system. It is the unverifiable” (Williams, 1989).

8. Insights from Williams and Bourdieu

The writings of Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1995) present a comprehension of this problem of “theory in its selective tradition” (Williams, 1989). He expatiates upon the theoretics “that aesthetic thinking is its own exalted end, and emerges as the disposition of the intellectual worker” (Bourdieu, 1995). Bourdieu also discusses “the internal logic of the claim that politics resides within aesthetics, and [there is] ... an insurrectionary core to the practices of autonomous art” (Bourdieu, 1995). Brennan appraises Bourdieu’s work in the field: “*The Rules of Art* brings to the literary field what his *Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*... brought to the philosophical: An elaboration of the social situation of the ‘thinker’, which decodes the philosophical underpinnings of ideas by exposing the competing interests of various parties in the environment of their setting. The textually enigmatic in this light (and in Bourdieu’s hands) can be seen to be actually the quotidian and the banal” (Brennan, 2010).

Bourdieu also presented cogent analyses of “theory in its selective tradition” (Williams, 1989) in *Homo Academicus* and *In Other Words: Essays Towards A Reflexive Sociology*, and pointed out the dubious dual nature of their work, and later in *Rules of Art* he critiqued the works of Baudelaire and Flaubert to arrive at this characteristic duplicity in such literature and theory. Bourdieu said: “This discourse which speaks of the social or psychological world as if it did not speak of it; which cannot speak of this world except on condition that it only speak of it as if it did not speak of it” (Bourdieu, 1995).

The artist, according to Bourdieu is “torn” between the *avant garde* art and the commercial commonplace that makes him indulge in such “mercurial” composition. Hence the artist’s work is imbued with sundry elements consisting of the political, polemical, marketplace, propagandist, intransigent, insurrectionary, indeterminate, and volatile, et al. When too much is aimed at, then, less than little is achieved. Brennan in *Wars of Position* explains the dichotomous nature of such writing, at least in relation to recent theory: “My argument... has been that this is the general condition of Anglo-American theory: A select group of thinkers who in media renderings are portrayed as proxies for the left traditions they were trying to displace” (Brennan, 2006).

Brennan goes on to explain that “outward turning gesture” of critiquing “demands... inward-turning emphasis on... plasticity and materiality of words, the now objectified language upon which the new status of the artist depends” (Brennan, 2010). Bourdieu shifts the focus of analysis from such a writer to his reader: “The intensified experience of the real that they have helped to produce in the very mind of the writer, is to oblige the reader to linger over the perceptible form of the text, with its visible and

sonorous material” (Bourdieu, 1995).

Bourdieu expects the discerning reader to unravel patterns of rhetoric in a text (especially) vis-à-vis their political portamento. A closer look at such theoretics that complacently prides itself on its complexity as also subtlety where “form” itself tends to be “content”, is needed. Thus, critiquing, in the sense of the earlier manner of the egalitarian, of dialogical, and engagement with the ideas of other thinkers is in order, which is presently the abandoned characteristic.

9. Instances: Williams and Derrida

Since the broader concerns are with the use of language to render phenomenon, in the domains of both the linguistic and the cultural, an instance (a little longish) from Williams deliberating upon such issues may be quoted, to draw inferences in the mode of the earlier tradition of exposition, analysis and critique. Williams elucidates: “... question of the distinction between ‘language’ and ‘reality’... forced into consciousness... Descartes, in reinforcing the distinction and making it more precise, and in demanding that the criterion of connection should be not metaphysical or conventional but grounded in scientific knowledge... It was in response to Descartes that Vico proposed his criterion that we can have full knowledge only of what we can ourselves make or do...this response was reactionary. Since men have not in any obvious sense made the physical world, a powerful new conception of scientific knowledge was ruled out a priori... Yet, on the other hand, by insisting that we can understand society because we have made it, indeed that we understand it not abstractly but in the very process of making it, and that the activity of language is central to this process, Vico opened up a whole new dimension” (Williams, 1977).

A plethora of ideas are concentrated that extends from Cartes to Vico, as well as a mix-up of “reality” and “language” in the domain of epistemics, where Williams efficiently presents a composite of a whole chronicle of concepts. It is in just a score of sheets that he synthesizes language theoretics from the earliest Greek times, to formalists through philologists. Language from being an aide to thought gradually became a sovereign in itself. As Volosinov explained: “... perfection of classical language came to be viewed as the outcome of a conqueror nation of an old and once mighty culture, enrolled by a newcomer nation, wherein the nineteenth century found the fountainhead. This prevailed, *mutatis mutandis*, during the Heideggerian, as also the Nietzschean, with support from ancient Greek thought, impacted in the founding of the jargon of present day theory” (Volosinov, 1973).

This explains the concentrated thought of Williams, wherein we understand the significance of the idea that language constitutes the world, since “reality” is expressed through language. Furthermore, it led to the travails of the linguistic sign, and a blurring of meaning (*semantique problematique*). Language’s environment is distinct and delimited, wherein norms of a language are managed as per a user’s wishes and desires. Here, the naivete of structural as also poststructural thought emerges. They elevate and dignify an “argot” that is severed from the colloquial, and language of everyday parlance. It is a linguistic imposition, wherein the poststructural more than the structural, stresses contrapuntal and rhetorical amidst stagnation, instead of flux. The semantic remains minus contextualization, and speaking (the exercise of vocal chords) amidst a collectivity, in a community is sidelined. What about the intellectual, his interlocutors and the egalitarian, emancipatory public sphere, as also the absence of the demotic and the populist. Williams’s use of language is to “convey”: An idea, a cogent argument or elucidation of a concept. Of course, his range is vast and his concentrated writing demands a mental alertness, since it is, in the best possible manner, orchestral, where individualities of thought coalesce to convey synthesis of insights. The architecture is complex, intricate.

Herein, by way of contrast, another example, from Derrida's later writings would serve as an apt illustration of the characteristic nature of Derridean thought and expression. This is from his *Donner le temps. 1. La fausse monnaie* [*Given Time: 1. Counterfeit Money*]: To join together, in a title, time and the gift may seem to be a laborious artifice. What can time have to do with the gift? We mean: What would there be to see in that? What would they have to do with each other, or more literally, to see together, *qu'est-ce qu'ils auraient à voir ensemble*, one would say in French. Of course, they have nothing to see together and first of all because both of them have a singular relation to the visible. Time, in any case, gives nothing to see... one can only be blind to time, to the essential disappearance of time... Nothing sees the light of day, no phenomenon, that is not on the measure of day, in other words, of the revolution that is the rhythm of a sun's course... We will let ourselves be carried away by this word revolution. At stake is a certain circle whose figure precipitates both time and gift toward the possibility of their impossibility... Of this privilege of circular movement in the representation of time, let us take only one index for the moment. It is a note by Heidegger... Some time ago I attempted a reading of it in "Ousia and Gramme..." (Derrida, 1991).

First and foremost, to a new comer to theory it appears awesome because of being self-reflexive, in the extreme. It is like, deep reflection craning its back to see itself reflect, in the very act of reflecting, where the writer and the peruser of the writing are amidst a performance, in its simultaneity and adulation. Derrida seems to be in the philosophic mode, but the domain of activity is belletristic, with familiar hermeneutical devices, as also attempting to be polysemous, with syntactical, rather linguistic virtuosity. A close look at sentence formation for the purpose of carrying on the line of argument does not follow, say, the basic sentence pattern, i.e., much of the thought is suffixal in nature, and seems to be an afterthought to an already begun sentence. Much of the language used is like a game, a play: *avoir* is to have, and *a voir* is to see. Williams in the passage quoted earlier, said: "... the activity of language is central to this process... [of] understand [ing] society," (Williams, 1977) but in Derrida there is severing of the two. Language alone lives, moves, triumphs with its paronomasia and equivocations. Derridean phraseology demands closer look: "*Le temps... donne rien a voir* [time... giving nothing to see]" metamorphoses into "*la disparition essentielle du temps* [disappearance of time]." Then, "*rien ne vient au jour* [nothing sees the light of day]" voyages into "*rythme la course d'un soleil* [rhythm of the sun's course]." An attempted virtuosity of thought and language turns into deliberate double-entendre and involved syntax. The irony of the passage also turns self-reflexive. As here, Derrida turns to Heidegger, again and again, ad infinitum, which he kept on doing for more than four decades of his intellectual life, thus rendering his writings repetitive.

Zizek explains that "Heidegger... like Derrida... is Hegel's reflected light... Derrida... petrifies Hegel's notion of ... contradictory, doubling character of thought, reducing them to... a reading practice" (Zizek, 1989). Zizek elaborates: "The 'logic of the supplement' is... a pale dialectics in which A is not opposed to B so much as A is both added to and replaces B, making A and B neither equivalent nor opposed but different (which is to say, self-alienated, indecisive, unresolved, seeking, in fact, the state of deferment as a salvational irresolution)" (Zizek, 1989).

Borradori says: "Under the pressure of deconstruction, classical philosophical constructions assume the semblance of baroque facades: ... they now look twisted and deformed" (Borradori, 2003).

As we read to comprehend theorists we seem to be voyaging into ethics from the erstwhile political. It may be added that on the immediate ground of the micro, with relation to affects and logic, the writings are characterized by evasion and refraining, albeit politic. However, on the level of the macro constituting

chronology of intellection, it is to move beyond Hegel, implying going beyond Marx, of course, in the manner of allegory to overcome the political, especially on the level of an organisation. With Hegel we comprehend that sense-data-as-valid-information is untrue because in the precise moment of its comprehension it is already prone to decay and decomposition, i.e., its contrary, in the very act of its contemplating as concept(s). With Derrida this “declaration” itself is an act contrary to itself in the very moment of its articulation. This reveals it is simultaneous uniformity, where Derridean characteristic of opposing opposite is the strategy, as it gets revealed to the reader. Thus, presence is nonpresence, where lacking something and desiring it exist, simultaneously, implies, in Derridean parlance, that nonpresence is presence as it lacks. Truth is made to look dissembling and, in Derrida’s earlier work itself there is “violence of the letter” (Derrida, 1974).

Derrida was also accused of obscurity, of being in a “relativist position”, and his theoretical model ailing from “performative contradiction”, by Habermas (1987, pp. 185–210) in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. Derrida defended himself in the “Afterword” to *Limited Inc*. He wrote: “These things are difficult, I admit; their formulation can be disconcerting. But would there be so many problems and misunderstandings without this complexity and without these paradoxes? One shouldn’t complicate things for the pleasure of complicating, but one should also never simplify or pretend to be sure of such simplicity where there is none. There you have one of my mottos, one quite appropriate for what I take to be spirit of the type of ‘enlightenment’ granted our time. Those who wish to simplify at all costs and who raise a hue and cry about obscurity because they do not recognize the unclarity of their good old *Aufklärung* are in my eyes dangerous dogmatists and tedious obscurantists. No less dangerous (for instance, in politics) are those who wish to purify at all costs”.

Armstrong examines conventional mode of interpretation that was constructed on the strategy of “doubling... [or] reading into the text that which is not there” (Armstrong, 2007). The language was made “intentionally cryptic... [used] for polemical purposes, ... the hermeneut as the technician of the sacred” (Armstrong, 2007). Such a mode of interpretation gained popularity “between BCE and CE... when... politics of textual authority took acute turn”. This mode, according to Armstrong, was established by the Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, named Philo (died AD 50).

10. A theoretical model: Mandatory features

This discussion by Armstrong on “doubling” brings us back to “theory in its selective tradition” in the present, with links to ecclesiastical hermeneutics and to committed politics. However, such theoretics is not limited to one or two theorists, but is prevalent across the whole spectrum. For instance, Ranciere used “*dissensus*”, and immediately clarified that by this word he does not mean adversarial or conflictual: “It is a perturbation of the normal relation between sense and sense” (Ranciere, 2010). This abstinence from the adversarial is treading the centrist liberal path, metaphorically, where another aspect, as mentioned above, is committed political theoretics; thus, a mercurial amalgamation. It delimits its repertoire. Ranciere goes on to explain the formulaic: “What is specific to politics is the existence of a subject defined by its participation in contraries” (Ranciere, 2010). Furthermore, a look at the rhetorical reveal’s collusion between critique and its object, hence precluding the possibility of the former, wherein rebirth of the repudiated and criticized takes place. For instance, Jameson explains: The structuralist perspective always grasps contradiction in the form of the antinomy: That is to say, a logical impasse in which thought is paralyzed and can move neither forward nor back (Jameson, 2010).

It is a different matter that Jamesonian dialectics, at places, reminds of Derridean deconstruction: “The opposition between truth and falsity... was the vocation of the dialectic (and its unity of opposites)

to overcome and to transcend” (Jameson, 2010).

Even otherwise, the idea of “rupture”, popular with theorists, suggests delinking from former schools of thought, thereby diminishing possibility of engaging in dialogic. Thus, manner of reading a text (or a writing) also changes, and instead of deciphering authorial intention, or the insight offered, the focus is on the “effect” of such writing. Thus, stress on “effect” drains it of veracity, exhibiting deviant nature of theory in the present. Macherey uses terms “deviant” and “necessary” to stress this characteristic, as is clear from the following: explains: “What at first glance appeared to be on the order of planned or involuntary falsification turns into forms of expression which, by virtue of being deviant, are no less authentic in their own way, and in any case are necessary: These are, if I may put it this way, ‘true errors’, which reveal meanings that no one can claim to be radically foreign to the work itself” (Macherey, 1998).

Even Adorno and Horkheimer disagreed that “fruitfulness” could be an important yardstick for a theory (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979). So much so that now a jargon (vocabulary!) has come to be associated with such writing: (i) abstain from “telos”; (ii) always “negotiate”; (iii) remain in the “interstices”; (iv) if you doubt efficacy of a concept or insight, “put pressure on it”, and (v) alongside “rupture”, made famous, initially, by Derrida. Bourdieu, of course, prefers the idea of “continuity” rather than rupture, and opines that “concepts...be cumulative” (Bourdieu, 1995). With regard to the latter idea, he alludes to his employing the word “habitus”, by way of an instance. Bourdieu says: “The intention in taking up a word from tradition and reactivating it—diametrically opposed to the strategy of trying to associate one’s name with a neologism or, on the model of the natural sciences, with an ‘effect’, even a minor one—is inspired by the conviction that work on concepts may also be cumulative” (Bourdieu, 1995).

The idea is analogous to Williams’s well-known insight concerning such “elements as are residual”, the ones that continue to thrive with those that have just emerged (Williams, 1977). This led Said to formulate his acclaimed concept of “travelling theory” (Said, 1982).

11. Conclusion—Theory: Present impasse (also *déjà vu*)

Theory could prosper since its practitioners’ understood significance of language and its way to cognition. They showed to the masses that language is not merely a vehicle for the expression of everyday information, where we could wrestle with meaning, but as the *primum mobile* of societal interrelations and interactions, of the political and the civil, which granted a privileged position to the theorist with language/power (like the Foucauldian Power/Knowledge) (Foucault, 1980). Of course, in the academe, there is censoring and censor, whose powers must be acknowledged, even when we dwell amidst theoretics, with sustained interaction, which brings its own set of restrictions. “Theory in its selective tradition” did exemplify committed politics, but as the old concept illustrates, there is a hiatus, a severing, between theory and practice, just like that breed of Marxists who fume and fret, with the slogans of “exploitation”, “revolution”, and simultaneously eschewing organizations and revolutionary movements. Their combat remains restricted only to theoretics. An entire vocabulary of freedom and the innate good of democracy is paraded, but participation in any form of resistance is summarily repudiated. Hence, theory, in the present, is sloganeering pertaining to political emancipation, but continues with its dissembling; so, it continues to remain alienated from itself. Interrogating and critiquing critique continues, thus articulating what it does not articulate and expressing what it disclaims. The aim and effort, herein, has been as Brandom explained, to make it explicit (Brandom, 1994) for the purpose of elucidation and amelioration.

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