

## INTRODUCTION POST-THEORY?

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The common assumption behind this volume of essays is that current discussions of ‘post-theory’ often lack serious engagement with the legacy of theory or any strong commitment to a renewal of critical practice. All too often, the prefix in post-theory is taken to indicate a straightforward surpassing of a necessary but now dated and overcome theoretical stage within the humanities. The term ‘post-theory’ therefore often serves as a concise articulation of the barely disguised desires, anxieties, repressions and blind spots of those who would move on, in all manners of ways, ‘after’ theory. The semantic extensions of the prefix ‘post’, however, envisage possibilities that are more problematic than that, and provide the foundation for a questioning of the desire to ‘forget’ theory.

It is with those possibilities and that questioning that *Post-Theory, Culture, Criticism* is concerned. This volume provides the space for a reevaluation of theory by bringing together a collection of essays that produce provocative re-articulations of theory, culture and criticism. What the essays share, in their response to the ‘post-theoretical’ condition, is an interest in the following pressing questions:

- Have we ever been theoretical (enough)?
- What exactly is the relation between (post-)theory, culture and criticism? How can it, or how should it, be (re-)articulated today?
- What are the implications of post-theory for the relation between culture and politics?
- Is there anything ‘new’ to be read in the time of post-theory, and if so, how is one to read it?

The current desire for 'post-theory' needs to be put in perspective; it must be understood in the historical context of theory's institutionalisation, particularly in the Anglo-American academic world (see Lothringer & Cohen 2001: 1-9; and Rabaté 2002). Post-theory in this volume is not understood in its facile and improbable sense of a condition 'after theory', 'theory overcome' or even 'without theory', but rather as an undertaking (without, necessarily, any of an undertaker's duties). This undertaking involves, first of all, theory's task in theorising its own institutionalisation and internationalisation; and secondly it envisages a critical return upon theory's 'others' (its repressed, its excluded, its unthought) in terms of a theory 'yet to come' (see McQuillan et al. 1999: ix-xx).

In terms of the prospects for such a post-theoretical renewal, which would proceed through a reconsidered critical practice, it is highly improbable that any rigorous rearticulation of critical discourse could suspend a discerning reading and criticism's objects have become so diverse that they exceed textuality to embrace culture as a whole, thereby increasing the temptation to overlook certain important lessons from theory's pasts. In many ways, it is this exceeding of textuality and the increased focus on culture that could be seen as the inheritance of post-theory: a legacy that renders more urgent the re-articulation of the relation between theory, critical practice, textuality and culture.

The essays in the volume cohere in offering precisely this kind of rearticulation. A prominent feature they share is their acknowledgement of the need for evaluating the seemingly irresistible extension of 'theorems' to the field of culture, and the consequent importance of a readjusted critical practice. Indeed, the essays provide a concerted and noteworthy effort to perform the 'and' in the phrase 'critical *and* cultural theory', attempting readings of culture that variously affirm or trouble the viability of a critical practice that would be post-theoretical. After all, does not 'and' typically denote the articulation of distinct entities, which may or may not retain their identity following their conjoining, and is it not this that post-theory would be above all: moving on the articulation between culture and critical practice?

The volume contains essays by Fred Botting, Ivan Callus, Stefania Cassar, Andrew Cooper, Thomas Docherty, Rainer Emig, Stefan Herbrechter, Donald Morton, Christopher Norris and Scott Wilson. The contributors provide essays on alternative critical histories of cultural theory, on current issues involved in the reading

of culture, and on the options for an original and trenchant reaffirmation of critical practice. Through their efforts, the essays put forward striking examples of readings that take the re-articulation of theory, culture and criticism seriously.

In powerfully probing the feasibility and desirability of that re-articulation, the essays demonstrate that theory can only reinvent itself as worthwhile 'post-theory' through its own critical self-revaluation. There are two sections in this volume, each carrying a different stress on post-theory – *post-theory* and *post-theory*. *Post-theory* contains essays that all contain "critical assessments" of theory and thus form a 'metatheoretical' discourse on theory in its 'post-theoretical' condition, or how to continue practising theory after 'high theory', theoreticism and 'theorrhoea' (theory as mere self-legitimizing jargon). The section on *post-theory*, on the other hand, is subtitled "critical upgrades" and while being equally critical of theory's scholasticism it is at the same time more 'pragmatic' in terms of possibilities for renewals and continuations of theory's critical practices.

One way of understanding the post-theoretical crisis in English departments is, in fact, that theory is now taking place elsewhere, namely in this strange conglomerate of disciplines called 'cultural studies'. Even though some sources of cultural studies are certainly to be found in English studies, others are definitely not. It is the cohabitation of a textual critical and a sociological empirical aspect in cultural studies which makes it almost unreadable for some theorists who feel more comfortable with exploring new (cultural) territory from within the well-established subject of English (and literature in particular). The first three essays all engage with this unease in their own ways.

In the first essay of the volume Donald Morton asks the question: what is it about cultural studies that gives it the potential to shake up its institutional and disciplinary hosts as it moves into and onto them? As the dominant definition goes, cultural studies is an interdisciplinary study of all those cultural practices through which society makes sense of itself. One further familiar feature – one that is said to mark it as 'progressive' when it is contrasted with 'literary studies' – is that cultural studies is a de-hierarchizing mode of intellectual inquiry and form of pedagogy: it dehierarchizes cultural practices so that literature no longer has a special privilege when it is placed in conjunction with science, sports, music, or any other elements of popular culture.

The disciplinary identity of cultural studies, however, is not the essay's main subject. The focus is rather on the potentially transformative effects of cultural studies and the various institutional and intellectual resistances being put up against its radical practice in order to block its potential for encouraging intellectual and institutional change. This question of the transformative capacities of theory, and their identification with post-theory, is opened up by focusing on a crucial aspect of cultural studies. This relates to the fact that cultural studies, above and beyond being an interdisciplinary study of all cultural undertakings, declares the public nature of the aesthetic with unprecedented emphasis. In other words, by relating the literary to the non-literary and studying both in relation to the larger structures of understanding and intelligibility of a culture, cultural studies indicates that practices which were thought to be private and a mark of the 'singularity' of personal experience are instead revealed to be part of a common encompassing structure. In other words, one of the most important and – so far – less noticed aspects of cultural studies is that it puts an end to the myth that aesthetic practices are instances of 'uniqueness' and 'singularity'. From this perspective, then, cultural studies, insofar as it remains one of the most dynamic denominations of (post-)theory, is in a position to contribute to the politics of knowledges and to the politics of institutions at the present historical moment, which is characterized (as recent national and international events suggest) by the hard shift to the political right.

As everyone recognizes, the present right-oriented climate has created intense pressures for the privatization (and corporatization) of most spaces of culture. This extends to the university, which has traditionally been defended as the space of basic research, unfettered intellectual inquiry, and academic freedom, where the usual rules of corporate 'pragmatism' and utilitarianism do not reign. Today's hard shift to the right makes it more urgent than ever to reject the notion of cultural processes as 'autonomous' and unconnected to class and economic exigencies. It is these aspects of cultural studies, and the various manners of their moving on in the time of post-theory, that Donald Morton's contribution examines and critiques.

Andrew Cooper's essay also engages with the legacy that resides within conceptualisations of cultural studies: the historical, pedagogical and political consequences, for post-theory, of the 'linguistic turn' within theory. As recently as the summer of 1999 these issues were re-played through the pages of the academic press. Summer season *ennui*, or *fin-de-siècle* crisis of academic identity

perhaps, but there is one area in which exchange of word-play in postmodern language games has material impact. Institutions of higher education are subject to a pedagogical demand for theory (the term itself has a distinctly English resonance). Not only are students of 'English' expected, for example, to have a firm grounding in the modes of interpretation and analysis developed over the last three decades, but it is also now increasingly the case that external bodies expect one to have adopted such theoretical exchanges as the basis or defining principle of English as an academic discipline. Consequently, students are very much within the cultural studies camp; after all, who would wish to exclude themselves by suggesting that a discipline such as English can stand alone, impervious to these theoretical incursions? And yet, even though those who come under the cultural studies umbrella may be well versed in the various effects of those ideas, they usually have limited knowledge of previous theories of language, their ideological impact and their political purview. In such a context, theory's moving on appears both suspect and undesirable.

Rather than providing a history of the continuity and seamless development of theories of language, Andrew Cooper's essay explores what popular culture of the nineteenth century can contribute to our understanding of nineteenth-century language theory. However, this is both the agenda and its central problematic. The definition of popular culture and identification of its textual corpus are reliant upon theories that constitute cultural studies today: and yet, the professed aim is to use those texts to raise historically specific questions that will lead to a critique of the linguistic methodology that defines them. Whilst there may be some who derive self-satisfaction from having one's theoretical cake and eating it, the main concern here is with issues relating to the citing/siting of appropriate texts, and the appropriation of texts by cultural studies in the post-theoretical prison-house of language theory.

In "The Fate of Culture", Thomas Docherty criticises the anthropological (merely descriptive) definition of culture which has allowed cultural studies to extend its field across the entire domain of the humanities (and beyond). Treating all phenomena as 'signifying practices' and as 'culturally constructed', however, does not lead to increased democratisation and a more egalitarian society but rather to 'barbarism'. Docherty claims that the kind of attack on humanistic cultural study (which remains prevalent in cultural studies) inevitably leads to the demise of democratic participation in the social or public sphere. The (true) understanding of culture, instead, is based on

cognitive competence. His example is that of the current *Big Brother* television craze which seems to completely forget the literary origins and the semantic content the phrase had in Orwell. The question is whether it is important that the audience of *Big Brother* has an awareness of the literary source or not, and, if yes, might that affect how its viewers relate their 'voting off' of candidates to their political voting practices in the democratic public sphere?

It could be said that the 'populism' of cultural studies in the choice of its objects has in fact been complicit in bringing about what Docherty calls "cultural barbarism". Ironically, the goal of 'empowering' those members of society who are usually excluded from the centres of power and self-expression has produced quite the opposite effect. The reason Docherty gives is that cultural studies with its relativistic stance towards values tends to paralyse the faculty of judgment. Against Raymond Williams, Docherty provocatively proclaims that culture is not ordinary, but rather an 'event', namely the advent of the extraordinary. Culture is also indissociable from its 'edifying' content, its community-forming purpose, and tradition understood as a remembering, as being spoken by the dead. Docherty goes on to propose that in order to be able to defend democratic values, (cultural) theory needs to reclaim the place of cultural studies.

Rainer Emig's and Christopher Norris's essays provide quite different forms of post-theoretical critical assessments (of theory). Emig addresses theory's ironic failure to do justice to 'eccentricity', and Norris reassesses the translation of (French) theory in its historical and conceptual contexts. Emig argues that debates about binary oppositions and their hierarchies constitute an established routine in (critical and cultural) theory. The jury is no longer out on the use and dangers of binary oppositions, but seems to have decided almost unanimously that they are to be regarded with great suspicion because of their metaphysical entanglement (on the idealist side) or their practical consequences of marginalisation and oppression (on the empirical and historical front). In terms of culture, the arts, and literature, concepts of deviance and abjection (as the 'other' of the 'normal') have had an equally significant share of the spotlight – and this is what post-theory is, also and already, about.

Only recently, however, has an interest in hybridity and translation signalled an at least partial farewell to such views of culture as binary. This shift has happened simultaneously with an increased interest in the hegemonic constructions that provide the norms and centres from which abjection happens, and in a parallel

interest in normality and normalising or indeed normalist structures. This latter interest has corrected the often implicit idea of the stability of such supposed centres of cultural meaning and has reminded us of their dependence upon that which they abject. In these debates the concept of eccentricity has rarely featured. Eccentricity seems too quaint and harmless and perhaps also too parochial and 'English' to be of much use for cultural analysis. At the same time, a closer look at cultural production, especially again in an English context, shows how much of it is, at least at the time of its creation, regarded as eccentric. A delicate relation between what is considered 'centric' in culture at a given time and that which deviates from it without ending up in the realm of the deviant altogether (as criminal, immoral, or sick) seems to determine much cultural production. At the same time, this centric hegemony appears to depend for its flexibility, development, and perhaps even survival exactly on the tolerated and sometimes ridiculed realm of the eccentric.

Rainer Emig's contribution describes eccentricity as a productive cultural concept. It situates it historically in the context of emerging ideas of culture as centric in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries (while also glancing briefly at its 'prehistory'). Yet it also questions if eccentricity has an at least partial specificity for English culture, and if this specificity could in turn be relevant for a consideration of eccentricity not only as a productive, but also as a critical concept in post-theoretical debates on culture, art, and literature, in general. Examples are derived from literature as well as the popular culture of several historical periods. In this way, the contribution serves as an appraisal and critique of the place of the eccentric within post-theoretical articulations of culture and critical practice.

Theory's existence in an Anglophone context of institutionalisation is often explained by the fact that philosophy, as a traditional bastion of analytic and empiricist thought, resisted the 'continental' assault by 'literary' or 'social' thinkers like Derrida and Foucault with their mainly phenomenological (Kantian, Nietzschean, Husserlian and Heideggerian) tradition. Post-theory, in this context would mean a reassessment of the misunderstandings and mistranslations that have made the opposition between theory and philosophy such an entrenched one. Christopher Norris's attack on cultural relativist excesses is thus at the same time a defence of theory against some wrong accusations and common misunderstandings. The essay starts by re-evaluating the perceived rift between the 'two traditions' of continental (post-Kantian) philosophy and Anglophone

analytic but post-empiricist thought. According to Norris, there have been signs of a growing *rapprochement* between these two traditions around various issues of shared philosophical concern. What this essay argues for is a continued and less confrontational translation between philosophical traditions across the Channel. From an analytical point of view for example the greatest challenge is to reconcile a realist conception of truth with an epistemology that takes into account the cultural, historical and political conditions of human understanding. The latter are, of course, issues that have found a great deal of attention in the work of ‘cultural theorists’, following the continental tradition, as well as in pragmatists like Richard Rorty. On the other hand, extreme cultural-relativist stances tend to do away with empiricism and objective truth altogether (as seen for example in the so-called ‘science wars’). Relativism of this sort, however, can only be blamed on the continentals if one fails to take into account the influence of Wittgenstein, Kuhn and American pragmatism on the analytic tradition. It could indeed be said that there are strong arguments against cultural relativism within continental philosophy itself produced by thinkers like Bachelard and Canguilhem. Post-theoretical, for Norris, would thus mean to break with the old ‘two cultures’ mindset in terms of philosophical traditions and with regard to an integrated form of philosophy of science.

The stress for the second section falls on the first part of the compound, *post*-theory. The subtitle, “critical upgrades”, points towards a major area into which theory will have to move if it wants to play a part in the current transformation of the humanities (‘posthumanism’; see Rabaté 2002: 141-50, and Cohen 2001). Posthumanism needs to be understood as that combination of discourses that take as their object the current disorientation of humanity – whether ethical, political, or technological. Theory could have a major impact in making these discourses on the ‘posthuman condition’ more critical, at once less celebratory-idealist and less cultural pessimist and apocalyptic. The essays in this second section provide inroads into this new and critical posthumanist theory which nevertheless do not forget theory’s own anti-humanist origins.

One reason why theory finds itself ‘posted’ is that, in a sense, postmodernism has caught up with it. Theory as a more or less critical promoter of postmodernism (or at least the ‘academic postmodern’) is in crisis because of the current backlash against everything postmodern. Stefan Herbrechter’s “Toying with the Postmodern” engages with the peculiar logic of the post- by defending Lyotard’s

philosophical and aesthetic notion of the postmodern against more sociological understandings of postmodernism and post- or late modernity. It argues that a psychoanalytic and deconstructive reading of major forms of contemporary cultural representation, as for example Disney/Pixar's *Toy Story* films, constitute a more effective approach to understanding the postmodern, namely as a symptom of the repressed which prevents a 'traumatic' modernity from coming into its 'own'. The paradoxical logic of modernity's "To Infinity and Beyond" is constantly being undermined by an undialectisable and unrepresentable otherness which compels modernity to repeat itself in increasingly 'parodical' forms. The *Toy Story* series can be read as 'symptomatic' of this ongoing process, whose most recent manifestation is a Baudrillardian 'hyperrealisation' and 'virtualisation' of culture.

While *Toy Story I* mainly negotiates the problem of subjectivity in rather 'traditional' Hollywood terms of moral self-realisation and freedom, *Toy Story II* is concerned with 'posthumanist' threats posed by advanced techno-science and virtualisation to existing notions of representation and objectification/commodification, and their effects major cultural institutions like Hollywood. In a double move, the essay then proceeds to discuss the role of theory in this scenario of toying with 'posts' and 'growing up'.

In "The Joy of Things", Scott Wilson investigates posthumanism and post-theory from a Nietzschean, Foucaultian and Deleuzian point of view. His focus hereby lies on historical changes within the experience of 'joy' and formations of knowledge, supported by particular modalities of pleasure. Historically, the main argument put forward here is that the 'modern' (humanist) formation of knowledge and enjoyment has given way to a new conceptualisation, namely the couple 'information and joy'.

Wilson argues that a general economy of pleasure, enjoyment and joy no doubt shapes particular orders of subjective existence. Pleasure and pain constitute a continuous, fluctuating surface that provides the interior and exterior boundary of the subject in its sensitive broaching of the real. In the intermediate position between the subject and the real there are things. Useful things, nice things, terrifying things, favourite things, phantasmatic things, desirable things, vision things, epistemic things, things of nothing, real things that find their own contours in the subject's negotiation with its own reality. That reality is not simply the subject's own, of course, but is

shared as far as it is symbolized and rendered sensible by vision, language and discourse. But just as there are different languages and different formations of discourse, so there are different modalities of pleasure. Wilson's contribution starts from the contention that there is no hierarchy in the relationship between language and pleasure, words and things. The suggestion is that different modalities of pleasure – including pain, suffering and misery, laughter and tears – inhabit the gaps in language and articulate the experience and knowledge of things in different ways. Pleasure silently shapes and configures the order of things. All order is in-formed by pleasure, and historically different orders of knowledge therefore also imply different orders of pleasure, enjoyment or joy. From 'passion' in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, and 'woman' taking over from God and the supernatural as the main 'source of pleasure', 19<sup>th</sup>-century modernity turns toward the 'enjoyment' of the 'thing'. Rather than in infinite pleasures, modernity finds enjoyment in transgression, crossing imaginary limits and exhausting itself in the positing of the 'ends' of Man. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries joy in the 'network' and 'cyber-society' becomes 'hyper-enjoyment'. The 'superhuman' (or posthuman) experiences joy in a new relationship between body and network. Modern 'suffering-enjoyment' gives way to the technological joy ride, as humanity speeds into an uncertain future in which, in countless fevered fictions and fantasies, it imagines its death, not as an 'end' but as an evolutionary overcoming. Technophilia and technophobia are conjoined in a double fantasy of liberation/annihilation in which the one directly implies the other.

Stefania Cassar's essay is much more sceptical of posthumanist developments in post-theory. Its focus is on the conjunction of literary and scientific discourses and, like Norris's contribution, is located in the context of contemporary versions of the 'two cultures debate'. It examines the tendency of those who promote science as a form of post-theory to represent science as the last meta-narrative and (as Lyotard pointed out) to judge literary and narrative knowledge by the scientific criteria of evidence and proof (Lyotard 1984: 27). On the other hand, it also considers whether those on the other side of the divide are tempted to construct science according to what could well turn out to be the equally incommensurable terms of narrative and literary theory.

As Cassar points out, Slavoj Žižek, for instance, draws attention to the objections of two prominent contemporary scientists at what they saw as literary theory's "hijacking" of the term 'theory' and

their attempt to reclaim the term for science (Žižek 2002: 19). Žižek perceives the ensuing debates as having given rise to a 'third culture' made up of "the cognitivist popularizers of 'hard' sciences" – by which he means theorists of evolution, cognitive scientists and neurologists as well as physicists dealing with quantum mechanics and chaos theory (Žižek 2002: 20). Cassar's contribution examines the third culture's representation of science as the last meta-narrative and assesses its desire to pursue vast generalized issues such as the origins and nature of consciousness in relation to what Žižek has described as the old scientific dream of a global theory of everything that is grounded in exact scientific insights (*ibid.*). Cassar's essay pays special attention to the supposed implications of these representations for narrative and, literary theory as outlined by, for example, Joseph Carroll and Brian Boyd, whose hostility to current literary theory stems from their acceptance of the precepts of evolutionary psychology and whose vision of post-theory involves approaching literary studies from what they call an evolutionary perspective (see e.g. Boyd 1998: 1-30). The issues and debates resulting from these and other implications of a 'scientific' post-theory are then explored in relation to *Subscript*, a text by the novelist and literary theorist Christine Brooke-Rose. This text engages with scientific concepts of evolution and genetics and their implications in a manner that is at once considered, meaningful and playful.

*Subscript's* (mis-)appropriations of discourses about evolution plucked from currently discredited alternative quasi-scientific theories and literary theory as well as from neo-Darwinism could be dismissed as merely fiction, denounced as a dazzling linguistic display whose purpose is to promote epistemic relativism, and/or held up as an example of the incommensurability of the two different language games of science and narrative. *Subscript's* literary representation of an evolutionary view of human nature draws attention to the plural discourses that have been and are being generated by evolution. As a literary representation, it is attuned to the metaphoric possibilities suggested by what are after all necessarily linguistic expressions of scientific and non-scientific theories. This, however, does not mean that *Subscript* chooses to evade or ignore the precepts of the dominant neo-Darwinian theory of evolution. Indeed, it represents these alongside its alternatives, functioning as a truly interdisciplinary text where dominant scientific theories exist alongside both their defeated scientific rivals and their as-yet-undefeated post-structuralist ones. By so doing, it arguably contests the construction of Science as the only

theory worth having post-Theory, positing instead a post-theory that resists attempts to silence those without formal scientific training from pronouncing on, exploring, embellishing or resurrecting alternatives to dominant scientific theories. It also functions as an ironic answer to those who would cast post-theory in an entirely scientific mode and whose idea of literary criticism would involve asking such questions as: “Out of what behaviours in the past, with what advantages in the Pleistocene environment, could literature have evolved?” (Boyd 1998: 11).

Fred Botting’s “Culture, Litterature [*sic*], Information”, following a similar diagnosis as Docherty’s essay, argues that the signifier ‘culture’ proliferates virally in academic cultural theory. Its circulation rapidly replaces terms like ‘society’ (as in ‘information society’, or ‘consumer society’) or ‘discourse’, to signal not only the absence of society as an imaginarily unified whole, but the post or hyper-modernisation of a-cultural flows. Culture, with a capital ‘C’, has been evacuated, it seems, in this blanket bombardment by cultures, its constitutive space saturated and overextended by a new, ‘postmodern’ form of capital, akin to the general economy in Georges Bataille’s work. The proliferation, of course, exposes a failed attempt at grand narrativisation and leaves only a general homogenisation. It is curious, after literary theory’s deconstructive critique of ‘Culture’ in its high, bourgeois sense, that the term still exerts effects. Interestingly, though, it is not literary theorists who write of culture or the imagination, but social scientists identifying the absence of ‘Culture’ and filling it with little ‘cultures’ who mark it out as a space still charged with desire, nostalgia, and intellectual investment opportunities.

Botting explores the role literature – or ‘litterature’, as culture’s ‘noise’ (or ‘litter’) – could have for ‘Nike culture’. ‘Litterature’ defines the founding ambivalence of modern literary production in a context of cultural transition and Cultural formation: it articulates the heterogeneous location of aesthetic production as both imagination, poetry, art – all creations of immeasurable cultural value – and the wasteful excesses, the litter, of worthless popular consumption. The sentiment literature provokes, in its simultaneous disavowal and endorsement of consumer culture, has a doubleness that sends irony into a Schlegelian spin or a Baudrillardian nosedive, its vulgar declaration of transgressive defiance no more than a marketing ploy signalling difference only to incorporate it, announcing

rebelliousness just to sell it, encouraging heterogeneous expenditure in order to homogenise it.

Hence 'Nike culture', in a-cultured (or 'post-cultural') times, in which the disavowal and promotion of the virally proliferating term, indicates not only a change in reception and valorisation but manifests wider transformations. It seems that 'Culture' – a hinge in the movement from modernity to post- or hypermodernity – has an 'extimacy', a tain of negativity, blotting the enlightened image of modernity, and discloses instead a space of reinscription and reinvestment of subjective energies and cathexis. Culture no longer functions paternally – in the mode of Lacan's symbolic prohibition – but commands expression in the spread of cultures associated with postmodernism, a virulent return of all that was contained by production, rationality and morality: consumption, waste, luxury, sensation and the prevalence of desiring and performative, liminal and plural identities. Culture, then, moves from a position of the Other, articulating subjective and symbolic relationships, to that of an other, a variegated mirror of narcissistic reflection.

None of the above would have been thinkable or capable of articulation without 'theory'. What Fred Botting's contribution shows, therefore, is how the time of 'Nike culture' is both enabled by and forms a challenge to theory's passing, to its moving on: the specific (post-theoretical) dilemma Botting provocatively describes in a 'Postscript' of or to theory is the question whether theory now merely describes the operations of contemporary capitalism? Does it take its bearings from its insistence on an already economised difference? Is it simply a resource to be exploited or appropriated by the purveyors of symbolic capital or does it serve as the legitimisation rather than the analysis of contemporary economy? Botting goes on to suggest a step from theory to 'heterology', a step beyond theory's 'policing the borders of sameness' towards a different relation to otherness, one that is better suited for the new (posthuman) order of (self)organising complexity announced by current (information) technological developments which simply can no longer be captured within theory's "past metaphors".

Finally, post-theory is also often understood as 'post-deconstruction' (Rapaport 2001). It is in this context that Ivan Callus in his contribution attempts to read Derrida 'post-theoretically'. The reception of Jacques Derrida's texts has consistently been at the centre of theory's most contentious scenes. This has been especially the case because of the somewhat bemusing tendency to regard

Derrida's work as synonymous with theory itself – a tendency demonstrable both in deconstruction's defenders and deconstruction's detractors. It is therefore at least arguable that to consider the future of theory is also to speculate on future receptions of Derrida, and even to say, not too fancifully, that post-theory might equate to post-Derrida.

"Reading Derrida Post-Theoretically" evaluates the justifiability of that position. It reviews briefly the shifts in reception to Derrida's work over the last forty years and evaluates the extent to which current discussions of post-theory, as exemplified in studies by Valentine Cunningham (2001) or Jean-Michel Rabaté (2002), might shape the future impact on the humanities of deconstruction. The question of this impact has itself been the subject of a number of studies recently, thereby allowing Callus's essay to bring together considerations from diverse critical contexts as it dwells on these issues: the nature of reading and rereading; reading 'after' theory (or 'after' deconstruction); post-theory (or post-deconstruction); the unsuspected pasts of theory (or of deconstruction).

These issues are addressed in the specific context of a reading of *Archive Fever* (Derrida 1997), a work which is not one of Derrida's most extensively commented texts and which therefore presents distinctive opportunities for any attempt to reread theory. Callus shows how the question of a 'general archiviology', as broached by Derrida in that book, can be brought to bear on a consideration of what the stakes of rereading Derrida – and indeed theory more generally – might involve.

So no apocalypse to theory, not now, not in this volume. That does not mean that theory does not have to be wary of the sclerosis of a certain orthodoxy that comes with institutionalisation. On the contrary, as Paul de Man (1986) irresistibly foresaw, theory cannot be resisted as long as it speaks the language of resistance itself. In order to make sure that this resistance continues to be a blessing, theory needs to keep on practising critically upon itself and upon new (but also old) territories. Accumulating a tradition, a body of knowledge, is inevitable for any discourse, including theory. The contributions to this volume make sure that this tradition is inherited critically.

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