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Introduction

A journal issue titled "Vicissitudes of Theory" derives its saliency from the course taken by theory in recent years. The institutionalization of literary and cultural theory in the last three decades or so can be viewed as a movement through a series of phases and developments.

Speaking very generally, the initial crystallization of critical and cultural theory in the area of literary studies took the form of a 1960s and 1970s reception of several movements, the most prominent being structuralism and poststructuralism (whose provenance was mainly French), hermeneutics (German in inspiration), psychoanalytic criticism, feminist theory, Marxist theory, black studies, cultural studies (primarily British in origin), and certain strands of continental European philosophy (the work of the Frankfurt school and phenomenology being perhaps the most prominent).

In the 1980s a second phase of this institutionalization saw five significant developments. First, there were transformations within the abovementioned movements, as black studies became African American studies, cultural studies took on a more recognizably North American cast,

The *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101:1, Winter 2002.

and so on. Second, these movements were augmented (in some cases, at any rate); thus a reworked American pragmatism became a feature of the philosophical landscape in relation to literary studies, cultural studies engaged with the writings of historians from the Indian subaltern studies group, and so forth. Third, there were fusions and overlaps between movements and paradigms, as theoretical rapprochements were brought about between, for example, feminism and psychoanalytic theory, poststructuralism and American pragmatism, African American studies and poststructuralism, and Marxism and feminist theory. Fourth, new subfields emerged within critical and cultural theory to join their already established counterparts, postcolonial theory and queer theory being perhaps the most notable of these. Fifth, there was an appropriation of work in some of these subfields by practitioners belonging to other disciplines For instance, cultural anthropologists began to engage with cultural studies; historians, with poststructuralism; economists, with rhetorical studies; and theologians, with feminist theory.

The 1990s saw yet other developments. With the availability of a substantial body of commentary and interpretive studies built up over two or more decades, the reception of these paradigms and movements itself could now become an object of study. Thus it was possible to study not just the writings of Jacques Lacan, Walter Benjamin, Frantz Fanon, and Simone de Beauvoir, say, but also the explication and elaboration of their work by later generations of scholars. Hand in hand with this study of the reception of such thinkers and the traditions associated with them were attempts to use the new intellectual tools available in cultural and critical theory to understand these thinkers' formations and the conditions that made their thought possible. A new theoretically informed kind of intellectual biography was one result of this development. In addition, very new theoretical objects became the focus of attention in some subfields. Recent developments in cybernetic and information technologies have made hypertext into a new object of study for those working in cultural studies, and nearly every subfield has had to deal with the phenomenon of globalization (involving among other things reflection on the character of the state, nationalism, the persistence of collective memory, the role of women in "third world" industrial production, diaspora as the experience of massive dislocations, etc.). Another development has been the study of the constitution of intellectual fields in terms of their social and cultural conditions of possibility, as science, economics,

art history, legal theory, and historiography became objects of study by practitioners working in these fields as well as in critical and cultural theory. Finally, the 1990s saw the consolidation of a trend that had begun the decade before. With the exception of the creative arts, intellectual traffic and migration between the United States and the European countries had pretty much followed a one-way street from the latter to the former. Facilitated in part by this reception of European thinkers in the United States, a U.S. movement toward Europe became possible, as American or American-domiciled intellectuals moved to European countries (albeit in small numbers, one thinks here of such well-known figures as John Rajchman and Irving Wohlfarth) or, more commonly, American academics engaged in European-based collaborative editorial and authorial projects with their counterparts in Britain, France, and Germany. A European appropriation of U.S. thought had of course existed since the 1960s and 1970s, but this appropriation was individual and specialized—one thinks of the importance of G. H. Mead for Jürgen Habermas, C. S. Pierce for Gilles Deleuze, and Erving Goffman for Pierre Bourdieu—whereas this later instance has tended to be collaborative and more dispersed.

Also significant in the 1990s was the recognition by theorists based in the "first world" of the significance of so-called subaltern knowledges, as the writings of "third world" intellectuals were more widely discussed and reflected upon. One thinks here of the work of Ashis Nandy (India), Roberto Schwartz (Brazil), Enrique Dussel (Mexico), C. L. R. James (Trinidad, though he subsequently moved to the United States and the United Kingdom), and Samir Amin (Egypt). This development is not entirely new and could perhaps be viewed as a resumption or intensification (with modifications, of course) of a pattern that emerged in the 1960s (when, e.g., Fanon, Ivan Illich, and Paolo Freire were noted and read assiduously in some circles) but that fell somewhat into abeyance in the 1970s and 1980s.

It is understandable that the kinds of intellectual production associated with a phase that is still in the process of being consolidated will differ in important ways from those that prevail in more established academic fields. Approaches here will tend to be more eclectic; publication will be less in terms of the book-monograph written by a single author (in any case, the book-monograph is a form that is being bypassed in more than one area of the humanities and social sciences); criteria of what constitutes professional merit and excellence are less likely to be settled; and the boundaries

between academic work and other kinds of cultural production have become much more porous. The most up-to-date work in such areas of scholarship is just as likely to be found in journals and collections of essays generated by semiformal editorial collectives as in the output of a traditional editorial board officially set up by a university press, and this work is often designed to appeal not just to an academic constituency but also more generally to informed opinion in the wider and more public domains of media and other popular cultures. The intellectual field in the 1990s and 2000s has become more fragmented, but its components are also much more complexly intertwined. The range of the essays in this issue reflects the variety and complexity indicated in the above conspectus.

Houston Baker, one of this country's leading African American scholars, uses his essay "Blue Men, Black Writing, and Southern Revisions" to provide an autobiographical evocation of the conditions in which the writing of black men emerged as a form of collective subjectivity. Slavoj Žižek, who has analyzed numerous facets of contemporary culture from a broadly Lacanian perspective, conducts in "Cultural Studies versus the 'Third Culture'" an intervention in the so-called culture wars that takes sides with neither alternative but instead examines the complicity of both these forms of knowledge with the current constitution of the Western academy. Cultural anthropologist Ralph Litzinger's "Theorizing Postsocialism: Reflections on the Politics of Marginality in Contemporary China" examines how the various centers of power and their associated forms of knowledge have been realigned in postsocialist China. Walter Mignolo, a literary and cultural theorist, identifies in his "The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference" an intellectual principle he calls "the colonial difference," which affects the constitution of (Western) epistemology in ways that epistemology cannot acknowledge. Alberto Moreiras, a practitioner of deconstruction in the realm of culture, reflects on the theoretical and practical implications of the work of Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek in his "A Thinking Relationship: The End of Subalternity." Rey Chow, writing as a critical theorist in her "The Interruption of Referentiality," makes a case for using the notion of referentiality to provide a basis for cultural critique; she deems this notion to be a more efficacious instrument of critique than more typical appeals to notions of an exteriority to this or that position. Barbara Herrnstein Smith, a theorist of the cultures of science, conducts an exchange with analytic philosopher Paul Boghossian on the challenges

posed to classical epistemology by new intellectual fields, including feminist epistemology and the constructivist wing of the history and sociology of science. Finally, Kenneth Surin, writing as an analytic philosopher interested in the philosophy of art, discusses Robert Morris's use of the writings of Donald Davidson in Morris's *Blind Time Drawings*.

The standpoints from which the articles in this issue of *SAQ* are written and the subjects they address all convey the clear sense that there is no normativity of standpoint and no essential circumscription of subject matter where contemporary theory is concerned. If this is troubling for some, it also represents a great opportunity and a powerful incentive for new conceptualization and formulation.