

Review Article

Not Quite the Last Post: The Problems of Theory and History

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THOMAS DOCHERTY'S *After Theory*¹ is not a book for those hoping that the terror of contemporary theory has finally subsided, and that now, at last, we can simply return to our critical quarters and get down to some good old plain speaking. On the contrary, Docherty's book is a serious and sometimes productive attempt at reorganizing the contemporary debate on the postmodern in terms that would resituate theory in closer proximity to time and history. In one sense, Docherty's book is not located at the *after* of theory, so much as it is an attempt to "write [the] wake" (1) of a certain kind of critical—and what he would call "modernist"—theoretical project of enlightenment. Moreover, to the degree that Marxist social and literary practice has aligned itself with the idea of enlightenment, it is also to be given a theoretical wake in Docherty's attempt to construct, within the definition of the postmodern, a new and at times compelling sense of reconciliation between the aesthetic and the political. It is here in Docherty's articulation of the postmodern as the intersection between art and politics, and between art and history, that *After Theory* makes some of its most interesting moves. If the territory is not exactly new in terms of postmodern thought, Docherty's approach is not without its own (sometimes problematic) uniqueness.² While I do not believe that Docherty's book is the radical solution to the contemporary crisis of knowledge that he would wish, I do think that his attempt to resist the domination of theory as knowledge, especially in its synchronic aspect, is worthy of a reader's attention. Unfortunately, Docherty is not above committing some of the sins he accuses others of making, and doing so in an often unself-conscious manner.

One of the aims of Docherty's project, as he states it in his Introduction, is to outline and eventually redefine the place of the intellectual within the contemporary world. The intellectual's habitat so far, according to Docherty, has been the place of "theory," or what Habermas calls the incomplete project of "Enlightened modernity." Habermas is the principal theorist against whose version of modernity Docherty attempts to work out his own notion of the postmodern. According to Docherty, Habermas's idea of modernity leads away from deconstruction toward "the validation of marxism as a guarantor of a reasonable or rational epistemological ground. . . . [E]nlightenment rationality goes hand in hand with universal history and the drive toward emancipation from despotism and towards the democratic rights of historical self-determination" (2). Within the bounds of modernism so defined, Docherty sees the traditional place of the intellectual as being that of an "avant-garde legislator" (3), or one who has had a "point to [his or her] intellection; [he or she] had some purpose, direction or programme in the service of which their intellectual activity operated" (3). And the "point" of the avant-garde legislator has been the goal of "knowledge-formation" as the basis for "the exercise of a democratically-willed rationality" (3).

Docherty seems to be giving the traditional position of the intellectual a good deal more political and social influence than the facts might be able to bear. (Who are these avant-garde intellectual legislators? And where have they been hiding?) No doubt, much intellectual energy has gone into "knowledge-formation," but to conceive of the intellectual's place as being that of the "legislator" is perhaps to give such creatures a status far above their actual position. What Docherty seems to be aiming at is the place of the intellectual as "Grand" theorist, as one engaged in the production of knowledge with a view to theoretical totalization. Interestingly, among those whom he will criticize as being, to greater or lesser degrees, "Grand" theorists, are critics and thinkers as varied as Derrida, de Man, Jameson, and Rorty. In Docherty's view, the modernist intellectual is one who proposes an enlightened demystification of dominant ideological and critical positions, but with the prospect of displacing

them and then assuming the vacant position of cultural and political preeminence. The "theory" of which Docherty speaks is precisely this kind of grand demystification which, in the name of "knowledge-formation" inadvertently (or not) tries to acquire a position of "truth."

Contra the modernist legislator, Docherty positions the postmodern "interpreter" (3), a being whom he adopts from Lyotard, and whose position is supposed to have "no special political responsibilities" (4); thus, the postmodern interpreter is one whose only responsibility is to such questions as "What is painting?", "What is music?", "What is thought?" (4). We are, I think, justified if we remain suspicious about the chances of this kind of disinterestedness in the postmodern interpreter. In a certain way, Docherty here is giving his interpreter the mantel of freedom recently stripped from the nineteenth- or twentieth-century Artist. But, though the position of the interpreter-intellectual may be a dubious one, Docherty is striving through this figure to make a more important point.

It is Docherty's belief that marxism (and, in a different way, deconstruction) has lost its radical credibility. The main problem, according to Docherty, lies in the tendency of marxist critiques to lean too far toward "banal" demystifications. He wants to resist not merely vulgar marxist tendencies, but any program that leads to reductive oversimplifications. In a brief and sometimes turgid discussion of Althusser's distinction between the Repressive State Apparatus ("which functions primarily by force and violence" [4]), and the Ideological State Apparatus (or "institutions . . . which we [experience] as 'private' in the first instance . . ." [4] and only later as ideologically informed), Docherty points out that it is possible for the theorist to conflate too quickly the level of the RSA (or "political" [4] in Docherty's parlance) with the ISA (or "social" [4]), thereby obliterating the "category of the free willed agency of the Subject, the very Subject so necessary to enlightenment modernity" (4). If the distinction between the RSA and the ISA is lost, then the possibility for change, the possibility of the "social as social" (4) is eradicated, and the heterogeneous "functions of the intellectual are elided" (5). Similarly, deconstructive analysis, insofar

as it adds only an epistemological dimension to intellectual pursuit, simply reveals that “the norm was always already displaced” (6), and thus becomes but one more kind of “enlightened demystification” (6).

Docherty’s critique of Althusser is not new, though it may bear repeating.³ But whether or not we agree with Docherty’s *own* demystifications of marxism and deconstruction (his attack on deconstruction, as I will show later on, is generally less convincing), it can be admitted that perhaps any kind of theoretical practice as *practice* may run the risk of becoming part of a “totalizing political” (6) theorization. Docherty’s own argument does, however, use a good deal of deconstructive technique, primarily in his efforts to resist the terrorism of totalizing theory, and in his attempts to forge a postmodernity based on an “anachronistic” analysis.

“Anachronism” in Docherty’s definition is crucial to his idea of the postmodern, especially as it relates to history. The anachronistic critical approach is meant to mark the provisionality of postmodern thought, its attempt to be always “out of historical step” (9). Modernity in Docherty’s view is “based upon timely correspondence” (9), “action provoking reaction at the appropriate moment for the construction of a situational nexus in which power is formulated or articulated in terms of oppression or control” (9). The aesthetic manifestation of this is the “realization of an essential object (the work of art) which is in timely correspondence with its social formation” (9). To be postmodern is to escape this timeliness of stimulus and response, “to counter this with the release of historicity in the form of an untimeliness or unpreparedness” (8). Thus, to be postmodern is to be an “avant-garde” (9) interpreter, one who is involved in untimely critique: “She or he is not in the right moment, not in the correct time; they are ‘unprepared’ for the work they do . . .” (9). Such a position is meant to go beyond “merely ‘oppositional’ critique” (10), to take on the heterogeneity of history without the predeterminations of theory (10).

The notion of critical unpreparedness is intriguing since it is clearly intended as a means of moving interpretation outside the parameters of doctrinal or institutional imposition. But to

achieve this Docherty may again be risking the historicity that he wishes to maintain. In his attempt to remove the postmodern interpreter from the usual oppositional routines of theoretical stimulus-response, Docherty seems to have placed that interpreter in a zone which *itself* remains somehow outside the bounds of history. To merely reinvent the "avant-garde," as Docherty does, for the purposes of postmodernity is to suppress the long and varied (one could say "heterogeneous") history of that term. As Susan Rubin Suleiman puts it, "it is clear that there is no such thing as *the* avant-garde; there are only specific avant-garde movements, situated in a particular time and place" (18). Suleiman makes clear in her own discussion that the place of women, for example, in the history of the European avant-garde is variously one of exploitation *and* possibility (16-18). Such heterogeneity is also apparent on different political levels in such movements as Futurism, Vorticism, or Surrealism. Simply to equate postmodernism with the avant-garde is to ignore the *historicity* of the latter term, to reduce its complex and varied manifestations and, in effect, give it precisely the kind of theoretical privilege which Docherty is supposed to be arguing against. One can sympathize to a certain extent with his critique of theory and its propensity toward totalization, but Docherty's own position seems merely to replace modernist totalization with an unexamined postmodernism which, in its efforts to work outside of theoretical predeterminations, simply reinstates them under the sign of de-totalization.

The bulk of Docherty's text is an elaboration of postmodernity intended to continue his deflation of modernist theorizing. The first of five sections defines the postmodern, which in Docherty's version contains some familiar and some surprising elements. Here he outlines four categories of the postmodern around which the rest of the book (four other sections containing eight more chapters) will revolve. These elements are seduction, transgression, aurality, and flight. The notion of "seduction" refers to the idea that the postmodern work is not "produced as product or object" (15), but rather organizes "itself around a trope of *seduction*" (15). "Seduction" seems to mean a resistance in the work to completion, or self-identity. As examples he mentions,

among others, the work of choreographer Christopher Bruce and sculptor Antony Caro, whose pieces, in different ways, defy stability and work toward “deterritorialization, [and] immaterialization” (21). “Transgression” entails the idea that the postmodern work “transgresses all sorts of institutional or conventional bounds or boundaries, and works against totality” (16). Like seduction, transgression requires an emphasis on process, as opposed to product. “Aurality” involves a refusal of epistemological paradigms of the specular, or of speculation, in order to attend to the labyrinthine and “lost sense of hearing” (16). “Flight” refers to the postmodern tendency to flee culture and its ostensibly totalizing theories in the hope of remaining at all times deterritorialized or unrooted to any absolute aesthetic or critical paradigm.

The following four sections pick up and elaborate these themes in various ways. In chapter 2, there is an interesting discussion of the notion of a postmodern hermeneutic based not on the violence of “truthful” disclosure (58), but rather on the construction of “a secrecy in some sense” (59), or a refusal to “enlighten us as to the ‘name of the father’” (58). The presence of “truth” (or the truthfulness of presence), as it might be revealed in Habermasian demystifications, or even in Rorty’s New Pragmatist positions, where a “frank ethnocentrism” (53) becomes, as Docherty points out, “axiomatically correct” (53), is disparaged in favour of an approach to hermeneutics which attempts to “hear the unheard” (61) in culture, so that “the social becomes obscure, unknown, quite simply so that it may in time be heard—and heard in time” (62). In other words, any epistemological assumption must not be allowed to solidify its synchronic position, thereby fixing and enforcing any totalizing claim on truth—social, political, or aesthetic.

Docherty aims to maintain interpretation as provisional, as held within the temporal or diachronic dimension. This he defines as a “chrono-political” method of criticism which he opposes to the timelessness of traditional (*modern*) hermeneutic, or “geo-political” approaches. The “geo-political” is a “tragic hermeneutic” which “aims to reveal the *polis*, the city of light, as a non-historical, non-secular *space*” (38). The chrono-political, on

the other hand, is "constituted by change, self-difference or narrativity" (38), and thus "lacks the possibility of an absolute knowing and an absolute consciousness" (38). This resistance to completion, to the self-presence of truth by paradigm, largely defines Docherty's postmodernity, and insofar as this attempt to allow a sense of temporality into critical and rhetorical practices is successful (and it is not entirely so), this remains Docherty's most significant contribution to the postmodern debate.

Thus, photography (chapter 3) becomes, *à la* Barthes, Docherty's exemplary postmodern art since the "very reproducibility which is the condition of photography constitutes an attack on the notion of an 'origin' which 'grounds' representation . . ." (76), and thus, "focusses not on the reality of a presence but rather . . . on what is absent, what is *not* there" (76). He then extends this photographic hermeneutic into a wide-ranging analysis of early twentieth-century attempts by writers such as Roger Fry, Lawrence, Conrad, and Woolf to reconfigure the hermeneutics of light and dark, east and west. Throughout the chapter, Docherty is at pains to link the development of photographic technology (puns intended), and Western technology in general, with the whole issue of imperialism, and to demonstrate that an enlightened condition of plainly accessible knowledge does not correspond to such technological "progress." Rather, with the "photographic gesture" (92), both "subject and object," Self and potentially foreign Other are "immaterialize[d] or deterritorialize[d]" (92). Photography, as postmodern art, "generates a continual re-mapping of . . . history, producing or reproducing a material history in an immaterialized and deterritorialized form . . ." (92). While the chapter is one of Docherty's best, it is somewhat strange that he should choose the ocular art of photography as his exemplary postmodern art, especially since "aurality" is supposed to be one of the major attributes of postmodernity as he defines it.

The next two chapters take up the issue of representation proper and contain Docherty's attempt to outline a model which will maintain a necessary historicity of representation. In chapter 4, Docherty means to outline a version of representation which will supersede the problems left by deconstruction. He claims,

and I think he is wrong here, that Derrida's "displacement of presence onto representation fails to resolve the issue of the relations obtaining between representation and something more 'archaic' (or 'arche-ic') which must remain as a something elsewhere, but a something which grounds or guarantees the status of representation as literally a repetition of sorts . . ." (99). Docherty seems to miss the mark here. The concept of "différance," as Derrida describes it in more than one place, completely problematizes the relations "between representation and something more 'archaic.'" The issue is "unresolved" precisely *because* the "elsewhere" of the thing-in-itself is not, and cannot be, "guaranteed." Moreover, Docherty goes on to read the issue of Derridian displacement in representation as predominantly a spatial issue (99). To make such a statement, however, Docherty must simply dismiss Derrida's struggle to keep at play the temporal and spatial, the diachronic and synchronic dimensions of "différance."⁴ A dismissal of the kind that Docherty makes here is more than a little misleading. Here, as elsewhere, Docherty seems to read those he criticizes reductively, and the results of his unself-conscious misprisions are rarely productive. Docherty wants to emphasize the complex temporality of representation as it might be constructed in his version of the postmodern; and, at times, he does make an interesting case, though it may not be quite the revolutionary development he seems to be hoping for.

Pointing to the etymology of the word "representation," Docherty suggests that it implies the "status of a 'being before' (*prae-sens*) and hence *anteriority*" (99), as well as a "belated *posteriority*, for it is in one way a 'being after' (re-)" (99). This "'being before' or a 'being after'" (99) marks representation "in temporal terms . . . [as] the being-to-come or coming-into-being of something whose very status is that of the not-yet-realized, always about to be ('being before')" (99). This definition of representation Docherty, using Lyotard, takes as resembling the postmodern condition as such: as a process of forming the rules of the "work" only by producing the work itself. Docherty concludes that "[r]epresentation . . . can only be representation if it is always already misrepresentation; like metaphor, it depends upon a *dissimilarity* between itself and its implied referent"

(100). While such a position leads necessarily to an ironic view of representation, and therefore almost inevitably to Paul de Man, it is precisely *against* de Man and his readings of representation and irony that Docherty takes somewhat dubious aim.

Docherty claims that de Man fails to take up the issue of representation in sufficiently historical terms; and while it is true that de Man's position on history and literary history may not be enough in a contemporary climate seeking to reestablish the interface between the historical and the textual, Docherty's own representation of de Man (especially of his "Rhetoric of Temporality") suffers too greatly from misreading and "misrepresentation." Docherty claims, for instance, that in de Man's version of irony, an escalating self-consciousness produces "subsequent representations of representations without any single such representation ever being able to claim the status of full self-presence" (104). The result is that "de Man sees the ever-spiralling self-consciousness in existentialist terms, never coinciding with itself, but also never touching on empirical or historical selfhood" (104). Docherty wishes to counter de Man's spiralling and self-enclosed position with his own notion of representation as misrepresentation which necessarily "involves the historical *enactment* of the self" (104). The turn away from the existential underpinnings of de Man's argument could be compelling, but Docherty really sounds more de Manian than he might like. For one thing, de Man *does* make clear that there is an "empirical or historical selfhood" which language, in a sense, reveals. In "The Rhetoric of Temporality," de Man points out that "[l]anguage . . . divides the subject into an empirical self, immersed in the world, and a self that becomes like a sign in its attempt at differentiation and self-definition" (213). Here, the temporality of the self as sign and as involved in empirical vicissitude seems very well described in what Docherty would call its "alterity" (105). So when Docherty suggests that "history is nothing other than representations, a series of enactments or *mimesis*" (110), or that "[r]epresentation is better understood as that historical 'moment' or time wherein consciousness of self and of alterity is produced . . ." (111), it is difficult not to hear de Man's existential tones somewhere in the background. The shift toward seeing

representation as an historical act is perhaps a worthy *extension* of de Man, but it is not the radical departure Docherty seems to think.

Nor perhaps is his conclusion to this chapter, in which he suggests that parody may be a correct postmodern response to ideas of representation that “reinstates a ground or presence which ‘fixes’ the representation as self-identical . . .” (118). Docherty might be able to do something more with his idea (borrowed from Baudrillard) that parody “subverts any claim to reality at all” (118) and therefore “opens the question of a genuine politics, for what is at stake here is a struggle between simulations, none of which have any *a priori* claims to an absolute or totalizing truth . . .” (118). It is odd that there is no extended discussion of parody here. Docherty’s position sounds similar to Linda Hutcheon’s idea that “[i]rony and parody [can] become the major means of creating new levels of meaning—and illusion” (*Parody* 30), yet there is no discussion of Hutcheon’s complex treatment of the issue. One would think that if parody were so important, so full of potential for showing the way to “the beginning of prolepsis, a writing of the poetry of the future” (119) which escapes mere aestheticism and “reinstat[e] history” (119), Docherty would dedicate a good deal of space to it. But he does not. The issue of reality as simulation may indeed have a place within a “genuine politics,” and so might a version of parody which is able to take on the many difficulties and possibilities of such a Baudrillardian landscape. But Docherty takes on none of this, and in order to make the proleptic potential of parody credible he *must* do this, and more, or else it becomes difficult to believe that parody is really all that important to his position.

Chapter 5 is an attempt to draw out some of the implications of a truly historical representation, but Docherty does not continue with his notion of parody. Instead, he turns to the confessional poetry of Robert Lowell. Docherty sees Lowell, especially in *For the Union Dead*, as breaking away from lyric and tending toward narrative, which Docherty claims is the “privileged form in post-modernism” (125), since narrative breaks down the idea of a consciousness removed from time (as in traditional lyric) and

releases it into “the flow of historicity” (126). The “impetus of narrativity” (128) is lodged in the labyrinth of the text, the heterogeneity of its “[i]ntertextual cross-referentiality” (128) which constructs a text which is “never ‘present to itself’” (128), but always “decentred, elsewhere, an *alibi*” (128). While Docherty’s reading of Lowell is an interesting one, containing an elaborate linking of literary, historical (past and contemporaneous), political, and social texts, the possibility of a highly allusive text which decentres itself can be news to no one who has re-read the texts of modernism through the lens of recent theory. Docherty is trying to claim that the labyrinth of Lowell’s intertext has some innate historicity to it simply by virtue of being allusive. But Docherty fails to make a clear case as to how allusiveness itself becomes historical. Stating that Lowell’s confessional poetry breaks with an enclosed representation of the self and introduces the temporality of narrative does not really suffice. An *opposition* between the empirical and the textual, the very opposition in which Docherty sees de Man as removing representation “from empirical history and displacing . . . [it] onto verbal textual history” (128) still remains highly problematic in Docherty’s own reading of Lowell, and others.

The fourth section of the book, beginning with chapter 6, focusses on the issue of aurality. Here, Docherty is concerned with texts in which hearing is a problem. The difficulty of hearing is “precisely the difficulty of hearing/understanding a womanly voice from within a masculinist problematic, the modernist ideology” (149). He is attempting to take a page from Irigaray’s attack on “the ‘specularity’” of Western male thought with its emphasis on visual and totalizing paradigms of knowledge (145-46). The proposal is more than worthy, and Docherty offers an interesting reading of *The Waste Land* as a postmodern poem (since it “works without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done once the poem is written” [168]) which criticism has tried to render “a modernist poem — *understandable* — which means that its alterity, its suppressed womanly voices [those of Ophelia, the women in the pub, etc.], still remain unheard . . .” (168). Docherty points out, however, that it is Eliot himself who allows these “womanly” voices to enter the poem,

and who also cuts them off (163). Still, by introducing these discordant voices, Eliot has inadvertently allowed the problem of the masculinist tradition to appear: "Sing as nightingales, and they [women] will go unheard" (169). Docherty wants to take this problem to what he believes are greater political heights, beyond gender, or feminist politics, or the "importance of listening to women's poetry" (169) and to develop a postmodern understanding that will be able to hear "the voice of alterity without endlessly reducing that Otherness into the Same, the recognisable, the knowable, understandable, genuine" (169). This, I suppose, is a way of excusing the profound *lack* of female voices in his own chapter. There are a few cited here, Elizabeth Bishop, Christine Buci-Glucksman, and there is a reference to Irigaray. But these few unexplored citations hardly make for any real "alterity" within the argument. The focus on Eliot, as interesting as it maybe, has the effect of *once again* omitting the voices of women poets and critics from serious critical consideration. Going "beyond" feminist politics or women's poetry in Docherty's postmodernism looks strikingly like old-fashioned omission and neglect. Docherty avoids the hard work of examining how poets (to speak only of poets) like H.D., Marianne Moore, Bishop, Gwendolyn Brooks, Audre Lorde, and especially Adrienne Rich might both defy and redefine the categories of "modernism" or "postmodernism" as he and others have tried to define them. The nod to feminism through the *reading* of Eliot keeps everything on safe ground, and consequently, the call to hear the "Other" ends up sounding dull indeed.

The next chapter fares somewhat better in its examination of postmodernity in relation to culture and nationalism. Following his theme of the necessity of hearing the voice of the "Other" as "Other," Docherty gives an impressive reading of Yeats's "No Second Troy," seeing it as residing on the cusp between the modern and the postmodern. The text examines the "binarism between, on the one hand, a metaphysics of presence . . . which is radically unamenable to historicity; and, on the other, an irony which demonstrates that one's own voice can never know its own propositions fully, that one's voice depends upon a historical *hearing* in the ear of an Other . . ." (180). This "*hearing otherwise*"

he extends into a reading of Seamus Heaney's poetry which "although still crucially concerned with the politics of the land question in Ireland, does not think of that problem in easy 'rooted' or modernist terms" (189).

Such an uprooted or deterritorialized sense of hearing, one in which the Self, always "becoming different, becoming oriented towards alterity" (190), is manifested in the requirements of listening to much twentieth-century music, and it is this subject to which Docherty addresses himself in chapter 8. The new music is part of a whole trend in the arts which works to destabilize the subject position of the viewer or listener. This is achieved in the plastic arts by an emphasis on the temporal aspects of the work, through a decline in referentiality, and/or the emphasis upon the size or the movement inscribed into the line of the work (190-91). In music, a resistance to its inevitable temporality can be seen in the lack of repetition so apparent in some twentieth-century composers, or, as Docherty points out, in Rainer Wehinger's "aural score[s]" (193). Working largely through the theory of Jacques Attali, Docherty goes on to elaborate the political and epistemological dimensions of music. He finds the beginnings of postmodern music in Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, with its lack of tonal centres and loss of "explicitly linear narrative progression" (196). Avant-garde music exemplifies for Docherty postmodernity's resistance to modernism; and it does so by placing the old in "inappropriate context[s]" (199) that allow it to aid in the proleptic construction of an "imaginary" (199). Postmodernity, based on an attempt to hear the Other without reducing it to the Same, resists modernity's specularly and requires a hearing of what is not "there" (199). Docherty sees the political possibilities of such an imaginary, or proleptic hearing (201), and this becomes his concern in the final chapter of the book.

This chapter, which constitutes the whole of the last section of the book, deals with "postmarxism." Here Docherty sums up the political and interpretive themes that have run through the entire work, and in a certain way, this last chapter might be a good place for the reader to begin reading the book. Docherty suggests that marxism has lost its radical credentials by having

become a “thoroughly institutionalized and ‘comprehended’ form” (206). He even says that in a certain sense it can be identified with the New Right since they both share “the subscription to a principle of identity, eventually recuperable as a metaphysical principle of self-presence” (209). Docherty dismisses, as well, the pragmatism of Rorty and others as but one more way to keep “efficient organization of the system of conversation (capitalist exchange)” (209) going. Docherty also resists Said’s version of “oppositional” (210) criticism, saying that by its own logic of opposition “the position demands its own rejection” (209). Docherty is again being reductive here where he should in fact be more careful, especially since he himself has largely based his own project precisely on a principle of opposition. Though Docherty does not see his version of the postmodern this way, “opposition” to modernism, or marxism, or theory, as he has defined these things, is essential to Docherty’s critical procedure. He wants his postmarxist-postmodern approach to accept “the fundamental unknowability of the world and its history” (213), and orient itself against “a *totalizing* knowledge, a knowledge which makes a claim upon Truth, based upon its theoretical efficiency or adequacy” (213). I do not think that he means to forget historical events; rather, he means to show that *theories* of history are always models of truth, synchronic models which by their nature tend to exclude the heterogeneity of experience and of history. At the very end of the book, Docherty makes it clear that the postmodernist and postmarxist (non) theory he has been attempting to develop must focus on this very heterogeneity. Both the postmodern and postmarxist must work, according to Docherty, by making thought outside of any particular language game possible, since they work “at the interface of ideologies” (219). In this way one can resist dominant ideologies or models of truth through a kind of critical “irresponsibility” (218). Thus: “It is only in the refusal to be answerable to a governing theory that thought, and above all theoretical thought, becomes possible at all” (219).

But how does one *know* when one is working outside of a particular language game? Is it at all possible to know what such a work might look like? Indeed, perhaps the only way to stage such

a removal from language games is to remove one's self *from* history, but this, as Docherty has maintained all along, is precisely the problem with theory as it is usually practised. As we have seen in Docherty's own attempt to "work at the interface" of feminism, there is no guarantee that such "postmodern" labour, as Docherty defines it, may not involve as much silencing, omission, or unawareness of the issues involved in a particular critical/political matrix as any "modernist" theorizing. Moreover, as Docherty's own oppositional and often reductive readings demonstrate, the will to a self-conscious removal from language games may not necessarily produce the desired result. Though the book does have its moments of insight, the rehabilitation of the intellectual's position, at least in Docherty's version of postmodernity, seems still a good distance away.

NOTES

- 1 Thomas Docherty, *After Theory: Postmodernism/postmarxism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. pp. 248. \$66.00.
- 2 Postmodern theorists have for some time, and with varying emphases, been pointing out (usually at modernism's expense) the complex interrelationships among postmodernity, history, and politics. See, for example, Ihab Hassan, "Toward a Concept of Postmodernism," *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture*, 84-96; Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, see especially chapter 6; Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*.
- 3 Paul Smith, in his *Discerning the Subject* (1988), points out that critics have long disparaged Althusser because his work "leaves little room for an elaboration of a theory of human agency" (17). See Smith, 14-18.
- 4 The issue pervades many of Derrida's texts but is most explicitly discussed in "Différance," in *Speech and Phenomena*, 129-60, especially 136-37. Another version of this essay appears as "Différance" in *Margins of Philosophy*, 3-27.

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