

WHAT DOES IT IMPLY TO OPERATE ON THE BASIS OF DIFFERENCE INSTEAD  
OF IDENTITY?  
TOWARDS A POST-ONTOLOGICAL THEORY OF SOCIETY<sup>1</sup>

### **The intellectual space of difference**

Dealing with a plurality of difference theories, with post-ontological ways of theorising and performative 'différance'-thinking can lead very easily to confusion. That is why it is necessary to define and circumscribe one's own site of observation of these avenues of thought. Preliminary questions have to be put: is such an observation a descriptive one, attempting to work out entries into a new praxis of thinking which is not intuitive, goes against the spontaneous impulses of world perception and ordering, deconstruct whole aspects of world givenness und open perspectives which rather blur the sight than clarify it? Is such an observation immanent to one or the other of these new modes of thought and does it try, from its own site, to gain a view on all others? While doing this, would it be possible to exclude an effect of structural inadequacy – between the elusive sites of observation which difference theories are? Would such an exploration of the intellectual space in which such theories are assembled be merely classificatory in the sense that, using descriptions which I have been characterising as immanent, it would construct, identify, compare and classify various figures of thought having in common their rupture with the traditional categories of the ontology, that is with identity, stability, unity, firmness of the observed under changing modes of observation. This would presuppose the possibility of an encompassing space in which such theories become commensurable, comparable and classifiable.

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<sup>1</sup> As a preliminary remark I would like to precise the "genre" of my contribution. It is not meant to substantiate results by showing how they emerge from the study, synthesis and advancement of existing research. The paths I am treading are somewhat solitary. This is due to the lack of an interdisciplinary effort and a correlative community of researchers dealing with the theoretical, epistemological and philosophical implications of major changes in theory building in the human and social sciences. If my concepts and my terminology seem to be in a way idiosyncratic, this is because I had no other choice than to go ahead with my reflections without waiting for the emergence of such an effort and the constitution of its conceptual space. I shall consequently limit myself in the apparatus of my present contribution to very few references. I suppose the bulk of luhmannian system theory and cultural science studies as known. I do not take pains to refer to the extensive literature existing in those fields. I shall however indicate, when indispensable, preceding works of mine on ground of which I am building here my new conceptualisations.

It is important to articulate precisely the difficulty which is encountered in such an approach. I would formulate it in the following way: De-ontologising figures of thought are in themselves "unthinkable". We should not cultivate any illusion on our capacities to think along de-ontologised lines of thought. In the process of such thinking we are, in fact always re-ontologising most of the terms concerned. This I have shown in an extensive work on the epistemology of the social and human sciences<sup>2</sup>, concentrating in its first part on Simmel and Saussure<sup>3</sup>. Working along the lines of the relationism of Simmel and the differentialism of Saussure I tried to give an account of the intellection processes involved in the thinking of the "absolute relation" of the first and the purely differential entity of the latter. The relapsing effect from relationist and differential projections of thought to intuitive ones showing intrinsic solidarities with the extensivity and transitivity of usual thought schemes is structural. It is a quite painful undertaking to analyse the thought procedures enabling us to think difference in its self-elusivity as the mode of givenness of any world entity. Such an analysis shows how restricted the access to such forms of thinking and how elusive they themselves are. There are only critical moments in such a thinking in which difference orientation can be practiced on a specific segment of thought, beyond which it cannot be maintained in its full potencies.

A second difficulty is related to the fact that the space of post-ontological thought is a very chaotic one. Theoretical propositions are numerous and highly heterogeneous, ranging from Derrida to Luhmann, passing by Rorty and Deleuze<sup>4</sup>. The question is then: does it make sense to bring light, order, clarity, analyticity in this space? Since any difference in this space engulfs itself and all others in a manner that makes impossible any disentanglement and any reordering of such differences, is the thrust towards a differentiation of difference theories and their ordering, i.e. the thrust towards understanding, comprehension, intelligibility a post-ontologically justifiable one?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Sciences du sens. Perspectives théoriques*, Strasbourg Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg 2006.

<sup>3</sup> At stakes are fundamentally Simmel's *Philosophie des Geldes* and Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale*.

<sup>4</sup> See the contribution of Niels Lehmann in *Cybernetics & Human Knowing*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> This is the endeavour of Lehmann in the above quoted contribution.

My answer would be: yes, for two reasons: first, because the figures of classical paradox, i.e. the standard figures of self-entanglement, self-contradiction, regressus to the infinite,... are not effective in the space of post-ontological thought itself, which then is not challenged nor impugned by such figures; second, because post-ontological theory is a process of events (of differentiation) taking place as events of intellection, lighting a coming to pass of difference which makes a difference (that is: which matters) and has thereby an incidence on the interests of those handling such an difference intellectually. Going straight to my central thesis I would say that the central concept of any post-ontological theory will have to be that of intellection<sup>6</sup>.

My intention in this paper is to present a possible introduction of such a concept into the space of thought whose accesses I am trying to delineate here. My claim is that the concept of intellection is the only one enabling us to maintain a substantial negociability between the principal unthinkability of post-ontological thought and its actual, eventual continuation.

### **The social correlation of difference**

My argument has at this juncture to introduce a term which has not yet been evoked. My preliminary presentation did the economy of the term unintentionally, but by hindsight, quite significantly. It seems in effect possible to speak of post-ontological theories, ways of observation and ways of world perception and experience without referring to this term, namely society. Such an apparent superfluity is a crucial delusion. One would be inclined to think that society is a legitimate term that should be taken into consideration whenever theories are at stake which thematise society, communication, the individual, etc. Grossly, whenever we are considering theories belonging to the social and human sciences. Society, the social in general would represent object matters of a disciplined theoretical observation. Where they are not explicitly observed, they would have no relevance.

One has to stress very strongly the fact that society is a term implied pervasively by any difference orientation and that it is structurally immanent to any post-ontological setting. The working of difference within any field of observation is equivalent to that

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<sup>6</sup> On the meaning and structure of post-ontological theory, see the last study ("Was ist noch Theorie?") of my *Kontingenz, Paradox, Nur-Vollzug. Grundprobleme einer Theorie der Gesellschaft*, Konstanz UVK (Universitätsverlag Konstanz) 2004.

of a thorough contingenciation of all settings and the therein posited terms and entities. Fixed necessities maintain entities in their identitarian mould, within intrinsically determined firm limits and enhance continuous unequivocal identifications and re-identifications. When observation is oriented on necessity, construct it, instruct it systematically into world sequences, than contingency is maintained at bay and difference cannot make its irruption into the space of observation. Difference orientation is always linked to the introduction in theoretical (and practical) observation of points of view which have contingenciating effects on the observed and the observer.

Ultimately it is the introduction, in western culture and science, of functionalist modes of observation which began to shake off the domination of substantialist ones. They led to nominalist modes of thought, de-realising a great number of mundane and intelligible entities<sup>7</sup>. From this station onward, it was the system concept which filled more consistently and efficiently the place of the function concept and set the stage for a potentialised de-substantialisation of theory and praxis. A marked transition was that accomplished by Niklas Luhmann from functionalism to what I term "equifunctionalism", designating a sort of reflexive and potentialised functionalism breaking with the last vestiges of identitarian, ontological settings within theoretical observations<sup>8</sup>. It lead to the ripening of a sort of perfect form of post-ontological theory articulated around the concept of systemic autopoiesis.

Pervasive contingenciation of the whole of theoretical observation, that means of all areas of scientific inquiry, has been obtained through the breaking of the divide between subject and object. This has been achieved with the introduction of the idea of observation by which the object reveals itself to be the observer himself with the whole density of its constructive biases. The observer on his part ceased to be thought of as a subject and has been understood as the observation itself being a texture of social processes of communication in which the observed as well as the

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<sup>7</sup> Classical works reconstructing this evolution are: Rombach, Heinrich, *Substanz, System, Struktur*, Freiburg Alber 1965, and Cassirer, Ernst, *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff*, Darmstadt 1976 Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.

<sup>8</sup> The "equifunctionalism" of Luhmann is a major avenue of de-ontologisation. It has been quite neglected in comparison with the concept of autopoiesis. The whole luhmannian critique of ontological categories of thought within the sciences of the social takes its cue from a thorough destruction of the concept of goal (Zweck) which is the key concept giving human action unity and transitivity. See Luhmann, Niklas, *Zweckbegriff und Systemrationalität*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp 1973.

observer came to constitution – or condensation, to use a term of Spencer Brown *Logic of form*. This is the place at which the term society enters the space of difference and difference orientation: every observation, be it that of social interaction or of mathematical equations, is effectuated within social communication processes and what is observed in it is nothing else than the striation of the space in which the object is projected by these processes themselves.

This is the way we have to conceive of the link between theory and society. Both terms, theory and society are infinite denominators of any term which is put above them, that means that they accomplish a self- and alien-engulfing of any term put in relation to them. The more so when they themselves are put into relation to each other. I propose now to turn to the problematics of such a setting into relation of theory and society in order to explore the potential of differentiation, contingenciation, de-ontologisation and intellection born by such a relationship.

### **Theory and society**

There seems to be a problem with a science of society under the post-ontological premises we introduced. In effect, the theoretical observation of social communication cannot take place anymore within the disciplinary, methodological and epistemological framework of *sociology*. The new assumptions call for the renewal of almost all problem positions within the science of the social which takes from now on the form of a *theory of society*<sup>9</sup> with both terms engulfing each other and leading to a form of inquiry which could be described with Luhmann as the design of a supertheory.

Both society and theory have undergone in the last decades structural changes. We will have to look at these changes in order to see if they can be put in relation to each other.

### **Theory**

Theory or science is not aware, in its making within its disciplinary frames, of what is taking place in it. The change in science structure is only partly reflected within

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<sup>9</sup> The topic of the replacement of sociology through a theory of society gains decisive momentum in Luhmann's work from *Soziale Systeme* (1984) onward. Sociology is presented in the inaugural chapter of this work as a repetition of the classics (of sociology) and a reappropriation of their theoretical designs.

science. Chaos, indeterminacy, locality, dissipativity in the realm of experimental and exact science; indeterminacy or "différance" of the signifier in the sciences of meaning, do urge the argument for an epistemological revision, but do not bring such a revision forth in full shape. One will have to theorise the change in the construction of science itself, in the design of its theories to initiate such a revision. Systems theory and the logic of form are powerful theoretical devices that can be fused into a decisive (radical) constructivist scheme reflecting upon the process of science making. The privileged field of such a constructivist approach is a theory of society which reflects the changes of both terms constituting it.

Science is understood within the framework of such a theory as the first term of a self-engulfing relationship of theoretical observation on the one side and the social communication processes in which it takes place on the other. It is then a specific form of observation giving to apprehension aspects of the world by drawing distinctions on its surface. These distinction structure the catenation of all concrete, particular acts of scientific observation. Such a radical constructivist approach is then able to explain the growth to the extreme of the capacity of object resolution of scientific theorising as an effect of the contingency and ephemerality of scientific observation itself. It enhances the consciousness of the contingency, paradigm relativity, falsifiability, provisionality of scientific knowledge and its theorematical formulations.

The enhancement of the object resolution capacity of science<sup>10</sup> does not only mean a improvement of the capacity to approach the object to the limits of its (microscopic) enlargement possibilities – by breaking it into last infinitesimal elements and holes or nothingnesses of discrete non analysable emptiness correlating with the granularity of the "elemental" object. The constitution of the object is no more external, physical, material; but mental: it is a construction of the object from a variety of scientific, mostly incongruent points of observation. The possibility of variation (contingency) of scientific observation within the range of the discipline concerned and the relevant research programme is that which breaks the firmness of the object and dilutes it, resolves it like a graphic structure with ever widening resolution capacities.

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<sup>10</sup> The idea of an object resolution capacity of science and of its growth I borrow from Luhmann (especially in his *Die Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft* Frankfurt Suhrkamp 1990) and try to systematise it. It seems to me to be one of the most interesting motives of a post-ontological epistemology.

More precisely, the enhancement of object resolution within scientific observation is an effect of a general widening of the discrepancies between scientific perspectives themselves, a growth of the incongruence of those perspectives. The crossing (cross breeding) of incongruent perspectives is the most productive device of science today. It is, one could say, the unique form of heuresis that we can use in our knowledge situation today. Incongruence however is a very counter-intuitive fact and scientists are mostly not aware of it, taking their cue from older scientific ideals of maximal consistency and closure of any theoretical form of knowledge.

### **Society**

If we understand – with Luhmann - society as communication, that means as a meaning system – or the other meaning system beside consciousness – then society is nothing else then an intersubjective meaning poiesis (Sinnpoiese). Ultimately society is, when one radicalises the luhmannian position we are referring to, the one and only meaning poiesis. Consciousness as the other system is not one in which meaning poiesis can be operated autonomously within a closure separating it from communication. Closed conscious meaning poiesis would be radically autistic: a verbal, asemantical, substantiated only by perception and Stimmung with no semantic articulation. Society would then have to be understood as the only productive emissory processor of meaning – consciousness would be the receptive system, the digesting one, the one in which communication is consummated in the form of lived experience (Erlebnis)<sup>11</sup>.

As a meaning poiesis society processes self distancing forms of observation, that is of operations whose effectuation mediates the givenness of any object or segment of the world. In contrast, life is a different basic poiesis<sup>12</sup> processing metabolic,

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<sup>11</sup> On the problem of the coupling of communication and consciousness and the autistic structure of the latter, see the creative thesis of Peter Fuchs in his *Die Umschrift: Zwei kommunikationstheoretische Studien: "japanische Kommunikation" und "Autismus"*, Frankfurt Suhrkamp 1995.

<sup>12</sup> I introduced a differentiation between basic and derivative autopoiesis in my "The Specific Autopoiesis of Law: between Derivative Autonomy and Generalised Paradox", in Priban, Jiri, Nelken, David, (edd.), *Law's New Boundaries: The Consequences of Legal Autopoiesis*, Aldershot 2001 Ashgate Publishers, p. 45-79.

convulsive forms of observation<sup>13</sup> based on a specific non distancing form of "knowledge" operated within actual syntheses by which the environment is immediately represented within the biological system, irritating it and urging it to reproduce its elements in cyclical catenations of operations. While life has a scope of operation restricted to the immediate representation of its environments in itself, the boundaries of the social meaning poiesis are never encountered. There is no outside of the social poiesis of meaning as the unbounded whole of intersubjective meaning production. The world is the only engulfing horizon of such a poiesis, the world being the limit of all distinctions and being itself none. That means that society as the whole of communication is the whole of meaning and the whole of meaningful observation. Such a whole is not a totality. All systemic wholes are localities, more precisely self-engulfing localities. Society encounters the whole of the observable as its correlate, the whole of the observable being a local multiplicity of spaces opened by projected distinctions.

Observation and its observable cannot happen, come to pass, take place, have event, if the difference with which they correlate or out of which they are generated does not make a difference. To make a difference is not to be indifferent for a being capable of interest – to use a heideggerian phrase: "dem es in ihm selbst um etwas geht". An existential interest, that means a capacity to be concerned – "angegangen" – by the introduction in the world or the drawing on its surface of differences is a structural correlate to observation and the observable. Society is thus a body vibrating with the incidence on its interest-surface, on its world sensibility, of distinctions, differences to which it cannot remain indifferent. This builds the matrix for a structure of self-sensibility which protracts the meaning poiesis indefinitely.

Production of information (that is of any cognitive or affective surprise, improbability or non-redundancy) is indefinitely self-regenerating since the incidence of a

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<sup>13</sup> I have in different contributions explained my understanding of the concept of observation and the necessity to guarantee it maximal inclusiveness in a manner that would make him include operations of biological poiesis and not only cognitive nor specific knowledge operations. I thus go along with Maturana's contention that life also is cognition, reverting however the terms and considering cognition as well as life as operations of distinction discriminating changes in the environment of the system. Observation is thus coextensive with system actuality as such or the mere capacity of a system to posit itself in a continued and enhanced difference to an environment, this being a constitutive property of merely physical systems. A detailed discussion of the question can be found in my "Probleme der Kopplung von Nur-Operationen. Kopplung, Verwerfung, Verdünnung", in *Soziale Systeme*, 7 / 2001-2 / p. 222- 240.

difference resonates on itself: by falling within society a difference (a non-indifference) transforms society and reacts thus to itself. The incidence of information is not only the incidence of the new which is registered by social communication as such. It is the incidence of the incidence on the subject which is here crucial. Society is thus always resonating with its own differences in a process of self-sensibility which makes of it a generator of new reactions to the incidence of the new. Every new brings society into vibration: novelty as the incidence of the new itself generates an apperception and a perception of this incidence itself.

Society's sensible body resonates with novelty as society / social communication becomes the spectacle of itself. Novelty is a mechanism immanent to social communication, erasing any distinction or limit between the world whole in its actuality and the local whole of social communication. Communication becomes thus its own and only object and theme. It is the "difference" (in the sense of the non-indifference) to its own differences: it differs with each of them, the incidence of each of them on it generating the observation of this incidence itself. Communication lives then from its own spectacle<sup>14</sup>.

Contents as such do not count for much. Events – the event of a difference in its incidence and the event of a new difference through this incidence – are the substance of society in the sense of a process of resonating and of a self-sensibility actuated by novelty as incidence of information or non-redundancy.

This leads to the very modern phenomenon of societalisation of all that happens in the world – which is then the world of society. Society gains thus a sort of total responsibility for all that occurs – all that is observed by it, or simply all the observed: all that is constructed within communication seems to fall into the domain of that which can be regulated by communication. Society accomplishes thus a sort of total ascription to itself of all causality – even something like nature (as a antithesis to society), and here especially wild nature, is ultimately a construct of communication as its is operating its meaning poiesis. Equipped with a very dense network of continuously operating mass media, society appears to itself as the resonating, self-sensible, all encompassing, self-engulfing imago of local totality.

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<sup>14</sup> On self-sensibility of certain media, see my theoretical developments throughout *Sciences du sens. Perspectives théoriques*, Strasbourg Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg 2006.

### ***A theory of society***

Under these circumstances a theory of society is the product of an operating subsystem of society itself, the scientific subsystem, and within this subsystem of a particular discipline or complex of disciplines: the social sciences. Such a scientific observation of society is constituted by a bundle of networked communication strings, organised in adequacy to the standards of the type of scientific communication within the social sciences. Within this segment of communication the whole of communication is observed as such. Such a whole being the whole of observation as all encompassing meaning poiesis as such, its reflection within a segment of it that cannot by principle nor by a precise criterion be distinguished from it entails a structure of paradoxical entangling.

*There exists no meta-language that is able to disentangle the segment from the whole and conversely<sup>15</sup>. If contents / objects can bear an index of order indicating a structural level of reflexivity, events cannot. There is no possibility and no criterion to distinguish incidences of differences and to differentiate novities as such. There is no difference of plane between social meaning poiesis and scientific meaning poiesis<sup>16</sup>.*

To put science and society in relation to any other term brings this term into a "goedelising" or paradoxical entanglement with the former. The more so, when science and society are put into relation to each other. Society and science are terms engulfing themselves and everything that enters in a ratio with them. This is what recent science studies have shown. In the perspective of science studies – as well as of a systems theoretical sociology of science -, there can be no site of observation of science from which science could be observed before its entanglement with society or from which such an entanglement could be neutralised or its effects reversed or discounted. The engulfment of science by society reveals science to be a contingent effect of processes of social communication which cannot cease to operate in any operation of observation, especially not that operation by which the relationship of science to those processes themselves is observed. Insofar, there is no site beyond

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<sup>15</sup> A theory of types is quite inadequate for such a purpose, because it can only mark contents and not events.

<sup>16</sup> Lacan's thesis of the non existence of a meta-language (capable to oversee the language of the unconscious in us) can be linked to mine in a very pregnant way. I prefer not to develop here the transition to Lacan because the position of the latter should be worked out in order to show the consistency of the link. This would lead us away from our present concerns.

these processes where a theory of the entanglement of science and society could establish itself. The observation of the entanglement itself is entangled in it.

In a theoretical and cultural setting determined by an irresistible recognition of the overwhelming power of paradoxising or goedelising figures engulfing all orders of meaning there is no possibility to distinguish, in the iterated reversals of sameness and otherness, an inside and an outside of these orders. This is a major avenue of de-ontologisation transforming as well the world of cognition as the substance and architecture of social normativities.

### **Denomination**

I would like now to reflect upon the logical structure of self-engulfing terms and their goedelising effects on one another when they are set into relation to one another. We have encountered these figures of post-ontological paradoxising in their most stringent site, that is in the entanglement of theoretical observation with social communication, of science and society. Our conclusion was that there is no metalanguage, only events, production of surprise and novelty. This entails a new structure of knowledge based on the crossing of contingent, plural and incongruent distinctions. It is this structure that I now would like to comment upon.

In traditional logic terms are conceived of as identities and unities that can be simply put or posited as such. God, man, bed, white, mortal... are such terms. They can take their place in enunciation as subjects (substantives) or as predicates (attributes).

Their entity is not touched, not influenced by co-position of other terms. When multiple terms occur in a position of thinking - while they are thought of, in a act of noein – they do not interfere as to change something in one another.

When multiple terms occur in a position in which they are thought of as belonging to the same multiplicity, than a space is imagined which is that of a set that has a number of elements. An abstract operation allows the building of a set that has no other element than one term. Still more abstract is the construction of a set that has no element at all.

This extremely short reminder of Aristotelian and set theoretical basics are intended to introduce to the making of one operation, that of putting a term at the denominator of another one.

We are proceeding with so much precaution because there are different ways to operate a de-nomination. Most generally it is to put one designed term into relation to another designed term. Such a relation can be totally external, i.e. leaving unaltered the terms entering into relation, like that of building sets mentioned above. It is then the very elementary relationship of belonging to a set.

**Commentaire [c1]** : OED denominator, histoire math: origine du mot. pourquoi nomen / denomen, pourquoi nominatio / denominatio. pourquoi en arabe al ism al maqam, asfal khatt al fasl...

Other relations can be more complex. Multiplication brings together a term designed to be multiplied and another term designed to be its multiplicator. The terms remain unaltered: they however give advent to a third term, which is their product. There are lots of mathematical operations applied to mathematical entities like numbers which give birth to third terms as a result of their bringing to operation two or more terms at the places left and right of their operators.

Most complex are operations of relationing (putting into relation) which alter the terms in a way that these lose their self-identity. They cannot anymore be supposed to "endure" as that what they are. The relation is no more external to its objects: it is immanent to them and constitutive of their dynamic identity. Such are the operations of dialectical logics where no term can be anymore supposed to exist as self-identical. Every term is immanently relational and refers to a dialectical counterpart with which it is dynamically intertwined. Terms have or are then histories into which they are bound to unfold.

Mathematical and philosophical interests brought up an evolution that desubstantified terms or positions through a broadening of the set of objectivities that could be termed or posited. So terms (substantives) could not anymore be set in opposition to relations (verbs), because relations, functions, operations etc. were put themselves as terms or arguments of higher order relations, functions, etc.

Most revolutionary were recent attempts to de-ontologise logic in a way as to make it shift from a logic of identity to a logic of difference. George Spencer Brown's Laws of form are paradigmatic of such attempts. By triggering discussions and debates in the sphere of human and social sciences it could influence modes of thinking how such a shift could be accomplished within these sciences.

The mark Spencer Brown made use of to posit an element (form) did not pass between two pre-existing terms but through a single element giving thus birth to it against the background of all that it is not. A form (a term) is thus two-sided with a designated, "indicated" and a non-indicated side. Self is a separation mark between self and non self. Since self is the separation as well as the separated, than self is always re-introduced in itself as the difference that it is. It is infinitely self-recurrent in itself.

Jacques Lacan developed a very idiosyncratic mathematics of desire build around short formulas which he called *mathèmes* ("mathemes"). Central to such a mathematics is a mark called "barre" under which denominators could be put in relation to nominator terms. The meaning of the lacanian "barre" is variable in relation to the terms that it separates. Sometimes it crosses, "bars" a single term and means its splitting.

Now I would like to introduce a particular use of the dividing mark (bringing two terms into a relation of division). This use is not dialectic. It builds on the logics of Spencer Brown and the mathemes of Jacques Lacan, in the sense that it is strictly deontologising. What is put at the bottom of the fraction<sup>17</sup> is the term that would engulf itself and the nominator in an entanglement that ruins all discontinuity and identity between the terms.

The argument of the entanglement of science and society developed above hints at such a denomination with the particularity that each term can be set at the bottom of the other. It is the setting of a term at the bottom that is decisive because it is in such a position that incalculable or "irrational" denominators reveal themselves as such. This makes it impossible to reach a "rational" product of the operation of division at stakes. They show that the sort of proportionality postulated between the terms has no determinate value, but iterates the fraction of each term through the other through their mutual entanglement.

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<sup>17</sup> "Our word *fraction* did not originally have a mathematical sense. It goes back ultimately to the Latin verb *frangere*, "to break." From the stem of the past participle *fractus* is derived Late Latin *fractiō* (stem *fractiōn-*), "a breaking" or "a breaking in pieces," as in the breaking of the Eucharistic Host. In Medieval Latin the word *fractiō* developed its mathematical sense, which was taken into Middle English along with the word. The earliest recorded sense of our word is "an aliquot part of a unit, a fraction or subdivision," found in a work by Chaucer written about 1400. One of the next recorded instances of the word recalls its origins, referring to the "brekyng or fraccioun" of a bone" (Webster's Dictionary).

However denomination has not only to do with "incalculable" terms. Even when terms are circumscribable, denomination reveals the gliding of the fraction mark through them, the relativity and contingency not only of their proportionality, but also of each term taken for himself. It deconstructs the identity, closure and firmness of any term, showing it as a simple effect of meaning, and not as a pre-given, already constituted, unitary content. It shows that any term is the product of a preceding denomination which is not visible anymore in it. In this sense, it reproduces the movement of difference accomplished typically as the emergence and articulation of meaning itself. It enacts the gliding of the signifier and gives it as the sole horizon of cognition and thought. As enactment of matters that have come to a stasis and that occult therewith the movement to their own emergence, it brings to manifestation the general incalculability of any term put at the bottom of its bar. The advent of any term to its stasis and self-identity obscures the entanglements of the fraction, of the operation and event of splitting and gliding which it is.

Denomination has to be revealed as the basic operation of any meaning projection, its main potentiality being to denominate denominators in gliding operation whose actual effectuation is a sort of absolute present that cannot be relativised. One cannot go beyond the denomination which is effectuated at present, *actu*, and project other, possible alternatives to it, nor anticipate possible subsequent denominations of it. This explains the very firmness of the operation of denomination itself, which cannot be reduced to a general syntax or algorithm producing an open multiplicity of possible intellections. The present of denomination-intellection is axial and axially saturated. It can neither be generalised nor formalised.

Denomination is then a productive intellectual operation which lives from the tension produced by the introduction of a difference between nominator and denominator and the reintroduction of this difference within the denominator as the term engulfing the other, that means the term able to reflect its difference to the nominator in itself. It is a major figure of thought in our present epistemic constitution giving rise to a form of post-ontological intellection parting from intuition and comprehension, soliciting improbable constructions with very high potentials of cognitive surprise. The exposure of a term to the effects of its fraction by another is a sort of metaphorising which inflects its original paths of signification and reshape the whole chart of its expansion.

## **The heuristic dynamics of denomination**

Science is a type of cognitive surprise which is organised around a body of operations of distinctions or more precisely around a modus of bringing forth such differences with non redundant, informative "content". This process is not metalinguistically distinguishable from what is going on in meaning poiesis at large.

If we look at how science is produced today – restricting our scope to the human and social sciences -, we can observe, considering for instance the titles of books published by university presses, that it is generated by a matrix of combination or relationing of more or less openly incongruent objects or incongruent perspectives upon objects<sup>18</sup>. This relationing I formalise as operation of denomination putting a term, which would be the inventive, heuristically more potent term below another one, which is the principal object, assumed as known by common or special (scientific) knowledge. The nominator functions like the more static term of the relation. I propose to call it the plain term of it. Some denominations relate or divide or fraction terms whose discrepancy in plainness is very small: if the denominator is almost as plain or as static as the nominator, then the denomination is redundant, poorly informative, purely reproductive in stile. It reproduces with no significant variation conventional object constructions and remains within a bulk of conform perspectives. It is only when variance as a quality of non conform perspectives is introduced that heuristic potentiality emerges.

Finally, it should be very heavily stressed that novelty and heuristic superiority of denominations do by no means imply that those denominations themselves are really and contentfully superior to others, i.e. that they are substantially more valuable and deliver a more dense "knowledge" than others. What is here indicated, differentiated or roughly measured are cognitive surprise qualities of events and not qualifications of their correlated contents. To distinguish here between event and content,

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<sup>18</sup> English titles of social and human science books tend to be, since a couple of decades, very elegant, poetic ones. They almost always make use of surprising associations, inventive word inversions, elaborate preciosity in contrasting title and sub-title – the result being mostly a disappointment by what is behind the titles, in the prosaic bulk of the book. The impression is sometimes that the whole cue of the book is the title itself as the acme of the heuristic impulse of the inquiry. The crossing of incongruent perspectives is namely most elegantly performed by the title, while the book cannot hold the promise of such a heuristic tension. It falls down from it and reverts to more conform ways of contextualisation and denomination.

privileging the content side as the substantial, semantic or theorematic result of the process, would bring us back to a theoretical level which has been especially and very consistently transcended by our conception of denomination. This conception presupposes a post-ontological setting in which there are only operations, events, the coming to pass of differences. Their substantial, final products, their stabilised, objectified and closed outcomes in semantic unities (of things, concepts, functions) have no special relevance. No site of observation can be given, no metalanguage is available which would deliver a measure of comparison of insights produced by denominations. Their validity in terms of absolute cognitive gains or increments cannot be assessed. Only their denominational intensity can be compared. The further measure of their intellectual intensity is that of their capacities of connection, catenation, condensation and confirmation within constituted bodies of experience and cognition. Ultimately they would reach a level of consistency which is that of a theory organising those denominations in a circular and productive scheme.

To give an idea of the different intensities of denomination, I propose the construction of an example illustrating the different levels of heuristic potential. I put in the nominator position, that of the plain term, the nominal historic entity 'Peloponnesian war'. A case of reproductive denomination would put below this plain term that of 'political transformations' bringing the first term in historical, causal, motivational, circumstantial etc. relation with the second (the introduced denominator). This would announce a study of the consequences of the war on the political regimes, institutions, settings, power relations within and between the Greek cities taking part in it. In the denomination both objects are more or less static, their crossing does not bear any significant divergence from the bulk of constituted knowledge. In contrast, denominating or breaking (fracting, diffracting) the Peloponnesian war through a term like gender, (ecological) environment or ethnicity would enhance the informative potential through its own improbability or novelty. Traditional historiography (Thucydides), classical history (until Rollin), scientific historical inquiry (of the 19<sup>th</sup> and part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) could not push their thematics to a point where gender, ecology and ethnicity as such could be set in a relevant, significant relationship to such an object as the Peloponnesian war<sup>19</sup>. The improbability or the novelty of the

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<sup>19</sup> Scientific (historical) inquiry of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century occasionally pointed out the "modernity" of Thucydides as a historian or that of the Greek man emerging from the long strife between the cities.

relating would reach very high levels with the introduction under the same plain term of denominators like information distribution, decision praxis, computational skills of actors etc. Beyond this peak of heuristic tension a bifurcation would then occur, leading on the one side to crossings which would be felt as so bizarre that they would succumb to irrelevance; and on the other to a particularly tense irritation of the receptivity to the inventive potential of meaning projections in the vicinity of the theme defined by the nominator.

Another example would be the denomination of museum through money. We all go to museums, know museums as mostly public institutions, supported by public funds. Museums exhibit art works which are thought of as disinterested works, occupying a privileged and highly valued space which is severed from the profit logics of the economy. At some moment, a business school student has the idea to write a dissertation on the profitability / cost-effectiveness of museums. Doing so, she denominates 'museum' with money and tries to think a museum in terms of transaction costs and reconstruct the evolution towards the musealisation of art works in that perspective. Proceeding this way, she dares to open an unfamiliar perspective crossing the self-evidence and obviousness of the being there of museums and their being decoupled from economy, with an incongruent relationship to money... Similar approaches of law and even sex<sup>20</sup> in terms of rational and economic choice belong to the same vein. The rational choice approach of law in particular inaugurated the genre of such denominations of self-evidently autonomous social fields by the rationality of choice understood as always oriented upon costs-benefits assessments. The repetition of such a denomination densify its lines of fraction and bring about a sort of matrix of observation of fields of social action through the prisms of economic transaction costs. Ultimately the repetition will erode the heuristic intensity of the denomination and provoke a fatigue, a wearing out of its intellectual momentum. The denomination loses its inaugural effect, i.e. that of being effectuated for the first time, or of being applied first hand to a new material field. It is then perceived as just one new application of a scheme which has, through its repeated applications themselves, already lost its novelty or more precisely its novelty

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<sup>20</sup> Like in Richard Posner's *Sex and Reason*, Cambridge Mass. Harvard University Press 1992.

effectiveness as an opening of intellectual potential<sup>21</sup>. Novelty is thus a structural moment of the event of intellection itself.

I bring some more examples of denomination in order to show the direction taken by cognitive projections under the pressure of this novelty moment – i.e. the pressure born from the necessity of its production, in high intensities, in any intellectual endeavour. Denominating water through war (water / war) would at first sight bring into relation water observed as a scarce resource with war, because such a vital and scarce resource has been fought for at numerous junctures in history. Now, denomination gain in heuristic intensity by being introduced in very light contexts, I mean contexts which are very poorly determining. The tendency of contemporary intellection is thus to minimise context circumstanciation and determination, ultimately setting the denomination *per se* with very few additional instantiations.

Deconstructing or neutralising contexts is a device of re-opening potentials of novelty for a denomination of terms which would otherwise glide into conventional ways of thematic association. It lets a denomination stand for itself on a vast floor of potential, but non determined, non fostered, non probabilised intellections. Conform spontaneous context building which would shift continuation and further connections of the denomination into preferential directions, probabilised by the sole inertia of already 'loaded', 'condensed' intellection patterns. The alighting of context and the *per se* position of a denomination denudes it from pre-structuring and prevailing substantiations. When nudity is reached, even the plain term loses its stasis. The denomination enters, in its both terms, into a space of estrangement. It loses any self-evidence and tends to become reversible.

Out of such a context suspension (epochè) emerges at first a sort of nearly compulsive reversion of the denomination. It is the first event that tends to take place on the new, denuded floor of intellection. What is 'done' is an inversion of the fraction, with the plain term coming in the position of the denominator. Both terms gain a sort of equal strangeness from the suspension of contextual conformity. They are equally "unstatic", improbable, versatile, invention oriented, and they show it by exchanging

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<sup>21</sup> If you look at the gender discussion today, the tension of the denomination politics / women has reached some high degree of fatigue within certain audiences. The literary "primeur" of the denomination could be enjoyed by a work like *The Bostonians*. Contemporary works with a comparable thematic have to exploit other, secondary, e.g. psychoanalytic perspectives, thus untying its strict bonds to the standard political debate.

their places. When a denomination is "suspended" (so to say: in the air), it generates internal tension, with the propensity to groundless reversals of its terms. Its fraction itself becomes unstable, mobile, turning upside down. Both terms enter in a movement of recession leading them back to the extreme nudity of a signifier. They are stripped from their plain denotations and regress to the status of uncertain, merely relational or differential entities, existing or emerging to effectiveness through the condensation of some of their associational potentials. These happen to overlap in a way as to give shape to an actual relationing, exerting its tension and cohesive power as long as the operations in which it is effectuated sustain themselves as part of a living intellectual process, event, happening.

This dynamics delivers the reversed denomination war / water and the perspective of a relationing bringing to stand a transience of war through water. Jacques Derrida would have seen no objection to speak, quite extensively, about a sort of watering war. Water and war are separated or denominated, as signifiers, graphically by the difference and interplay of two letters, phonetically by a quasi-syllable. They are thus held in a proximity which furthers all sorts of reversals of their relationing. The originary denomination water / war has been dynamised by the suspension of both terms and their relationship in a nakedness they acquire when they recess to an ultimate signifier status. The new dynamic is purely associational and pertains to a sort of intellectual poetics<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> One would have to experiment or "play" with whole series of examples in order to precise the outlook on such a theory of denomination / intellection. It is always important to begin with intuitive denominations and to let them progressively drift away or back to the planes of their signifier-terms. A denomination capital (city) / war for instance would at first exert an intuitive inventivity, showing how wars "fabricate" capitals (from ancient times onward, capitals being ceremonial centres where gods can be worshipped, where people can bring their offerings and let them be handled like capital deposits, where states emerge with centres of decision and command). The reversed denomination would show how capitals fabricate wars, being the centres of radiation of power as cohesive power. Transitional toward signifier associations would be the understanding of capital as an economic regime having at its core a capitalist one (although there may exist non capitalist capitals); also transitional the exploration of war as capital, something which can be placed, invested, can fructify and deliver added power value along the principles of a polemic economy. On the plane of the signifier, one of numerous, indefinite associations would be that of war and waste (gastina) as the reversal of the figure itself of a capital.

## Corpus and transience

I would like to introduce at this juncture some terminological conventions designed to facilitate the further inspection of the dynamics of denomination-intellection. I call *corpus* the plain term or the nominator of a cognitive relationing. I call *transient* the denominator which (dif)fracts the corpus<sup>23</sup>. The use of such a metaphoric of corporeity and transience, of corporeal cohesion and fracting legitimates itself because of a structural movement occurring within every denomination and leading to the corporisation of fractions or denominations themselves taken as wholes and their renewed fraction through new transients.

The process by which a denomination wears out and fatigues its inventivity leads to a tendency which fosters the emergence of a new corpus constituted by the old corpus and the old transient of the original denomination. This reflects the process of familiarisation and habitualisation of every perspective of observation: it ages, is eroded, loses its information and surprise momentum. With increasing erosion of this momentum, the relation between the nominator and denominator cannot be distinguished anymore from that of signifier and signified within the unity of the sign, as Saussure understands it. Such a sign is, in Saussure's theory, a double faced entity, whose faces (signifier and signified) are not split in a manner that would enable them to exist apart from each other. The sign is, like a sheet of paper, the double-faced unity of a dichotomous entity. At its origin however a sign is a venture, an invention, an special, progressively pronouncing articulation, a inaugurally daring association of a signifier with a signified – of a sound with a meaning, in verbal language. This original and inventive moment of the sign structure is that which first recedes into latency. What remains is a wholly habitualised combination of both terms, yielding a firm unity that cannot be imagined split without. Repetition, habitualisation and redundancy however elicit a decline in signification or semiological vividness which has an effect on the sign. So, if the spontaneous tendency of the sign is to rigidify and occult the combination of signifier and signified out of which it is born, on the other hand however such a tendency cannot be

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<sup>23</sup> I have been working out these concepts for some time and was stunned when I came across a text of Teilhard de Chardin where not only the - truly unusual - concept of transience but also that - not less unusual - of corpus (corps) are successively introduced. I would have liked to bring homage to Teilhard – a writer I most deeply admire - for the prime authorship of this conceptuality. However the meaning I endow both concepts with is actually quite remote from that adopted by Teilhard for them. Teilhard's text is *Le phénomène humain*, Paris Seuil 1959, p. 49 sq.

indefinitely effective. The movement is thus double: unification and rigidification – we shall call it corporisation in the following - on the one side; re-splitting and re-combination on the other. The second movement is that of the metaphorisation of all significance by which a sign is able to signify. Signs can never be univocal, because they have always already mobilised a stream of associative significance transient under their seemingly substantial and semantically bounded unities. The transience of a crossed metaphorical signification is that which metaphorises signification and maintains the whole of it in mobility and inventivity.

The new transient would then split the corporised whole of the old denomination along lines – you can call them distinctions, differences, signi-fications – of its own. The new splitting constitutes the emergence of a new denomination, with the actual vividness of its effectuation as a relationing of nominator and denominator in a association with heuristic tension. Such a process is constantly on going and represents the regeneration of the medium of meaning threatened by erosion and fatigue through conformity and redundancy of the distinction praxis of the discourse at stake. However, the advent of such a denomination must be probabilised by something which accounts for the necessity to distinguish along this distinction. As we have seen, there is no possible grounding of such distinctions in necessity. A denomination is, at high levels of heuristic intensity, mostly inaugural of its own fertility, vividness of insight, plausibility of confirmed contents. A denomination is not a proposition, nor a judgment, nor theorem. It is an intellectual event producing a potential of vivid cognitive experience.

### **Intellection and theory**

We could now try to situate the concept of theory as a formalised intellection within the framework we have been working out. Theory has to be understood as a modus of denomination which itself has to be constituted as a macro-corpus requiring very high consistency and delivering an attractor for all heuresis, for all processes of invention taking place in its vicinity. A theory stands on the ground of a number of denominations with very high cohesive force as well as very high heuristic tension. In these denominations nominators are attached very strictly to their denominators and

determine a series of further denominations connected to them in a self-inclusive, cyclical and circular manner, delivering the axiomatical or doctrinal or evidential foundations of the theory. The principal denominations upon which the theory rests as well as their firm connection with one another undergo a process of (macro-)corporisation by which they tend to build a perfected whole. The lines of fracture of the fundamental denominations are not visible anymore. These build constituted unities of significance and do not let themselves be split anymore along their division mark. The connection of those denominations to a whole of principles (*principia, initia*, Anfangsgründe, maxims, postulates, doctrinal sentences, Lehrsätze, *lemmata*...) is a sort of multiple denomination of denominations. Within the macro-denomination corporation is at work and leads, through a process of erasure of denominational fraction lines, to the consolidation, crystallisation, unification, closure of a macro-corpus building the core of a theory which unfolds with the transience of all possible objects through the corpus.

Like any entity, theory can be observed, within a theory-theoretical framework, as a constituted body of distinctions which are maintained in operation by the transience through them of more or less conform terms or objects. Thus, theory is nothing else than an organising body of corpus-transience operations of relationing. Every theory crystallises for itself a specific mode of transience - or a small numbers of transience modi – which is maintained in operation as long as the theory is able to produce intellection. That means as long as cognitive acts with high intensities of innovative surprise can be enacted within the domain of its operation. Thus a theory tends, with its corporised body of leading or basic distinctions and their circular connections, to constitute a thinking machine, producing intellection on a current basis. A theory is a matrix of intellective operations exerting an attraction on any relationing of terms taking place within a perimeter to which its potency to function as a model or assimilator for diverse types of meaning projections stretches.

When theory reaches a very high consistency and organises itself systematically with its own architectonics and its own relations of doctrinal programme und implementation<sup>24</sup> it acquires a puzzling autonomy and the self-standing status of a mundane entity. It can gain a sort of unchallengeability for instance (in the case of

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<sup>24</sup> It is what German idealism conceptualised at the beginning of the 19th century as the dichotomy of *Darstellung und Ausführung*.

the thinking paradigms of Hegel, Darwin and Freud) or high attractiveness<sup>25</sup> building a constraint to think within its categories and along its distinctions, applying its forms to the intellectual space which it opens and explores. It structures and organises it in a manner that restricts its access to modi of transience of its own.

Gunther Teubner speaking on one occasion of Latourian hybrids<sup>26</sup> went so far as to cite theories among the objects belonging to such a set of beings. A theory is a hybrid in the sense that it is a body of deixis taking form in scriptural formulations reflecting originary intellections offered to be appropriated by a multiplicity of intellects organising their intellectual operations in a manner specific for the theory. The existence of a theory enables a community of such intellects to indicate the world along the same lines of denomination. Theory offers a redundant way to denominate "things" through transient others<sup>27</sup>. A theory is then the organisation of transience modi which structures the place of a "thing" at the confluence of all its uses as the paths to it.

While reaching extremely high levels of coherence, explanation power and closure, a theory is able to constitute a sort of totally self-sustaining, self-centred otherness and to swallow, like the eye of a whirlpool, the whole (local) universe surrounding it. Its potency can be uncanny, giving it a sort of existence outside of the intelligent operator operating it, centred in its own corpus (of fundamental distinctions and their circular organisation) as the almost monadological focus of its whole world projection. Theory can thus be seen as a centre of reflection, specular convergence and vision outside of the intelligent operator, having subsistence independently from him. It is like an eye which subsists beyond him, actually looks at him with the full firmness and sharpness of intellectual actual autarchy. The landscape appears as still more threatening when one considers not only one single theory, but a multiplicity of such, each presenting the observer with a similar central focalisation or ocularisation so to say of intellection. The vision of a heterotopia emerges then which fragments the

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<sup>25</sup> Luhmann's theory is a case of high – almost irresistible – attractiveness. It is not a constraining thinking machine, but a matrix of knowledge production by all means.

<sup>26</sup> At the Conference 'Normativities: Law, Science and "Society"', org. A. Bora, A. Pottage, Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Forschung (Zif) Bielefeld, 7-9 July 2005. His contribution is forthcoming in a special issue of the *Zeitschrift für Rechtssoziologie* 2006.

<sup>27</sup> There are no "things" as such. It is the operative, redundant use of things, of their names, definitions, differences to other things within operations of denomination that constitutes "things" for a theoretical observation.

world in a series of local universes which cannot be unified nor organised in a functional, organic, hierarchical nor formal manner.