I. Discourse Patterns in “Traveling Theory”: A Case Study

Said’s life bore the traces of his Traveling Theory, and in organizing his ideas the theorist asserts the following:

First, there is a point of origin, or what seems like one, a set of initial circumstances in which the idea came to birth or entered discourse. Second, there is a distance transversed, a passage through the pressure of various contexts as the idea moved from an earlier point to another time and place, where it will come into a new prominence. Third, there is a set of conditions—call them conditions of acceptance or, as an inevitable part of acceptance, resistances—which then confronts the transplanted theory or idea, making possible its introduction or toleration, however alien it might appear to be. Fourth, the now full (or partly) accommodated (or incorporated) idea is to some extent transformed by its new uses, its new position in a new time and place. (Said, 226-27)

This discussion of the details of theory changing into methodology is interesting because it concerns the problem of how the imagination (functioning on abstract levels) finds expression in more concretizing contexts. Said prefigures how ideas dynamically morph from old to new, establishing a conversation around processes in which he assesses those conditions and factors and forces which cause discourses to mutate and power/knowledge to materialize in original new modes and tropes. To speculate on how ideas shift into concrete conditions, Said equips himself with theories from three writers in particular, and adopts and appropriates ideas from Georg Lukács (1885-1971) and his *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein*, Lucien Goldmann (1913-70) and his *Le Dieu caché*, and Raymond Henry Williams (1921-88) and his *Culture and Society 1780-1950*. The trace of Lukács-Goldmann-Williams is interesting here,
in that each of these theorists is inscribed with a Marxist stance; each is famous for his critique of (i) bourgeois life and, thereafter, (ii) cultural products and the mechanisms of production. These theorists can be said to demonstrate one thread of historical progress in Western contexts.

Traveling Theory finds its locus in the responses these theorists make to each others work and, as Said notes, Goldmann’s indebtedness to Lukács is clear:

What in Lukács is an ironic discrepancy between theoretical consciousness and reality is transformed and localized by Goldmann into a tragic correspondence between world vision and the unfortunate class situation of the nobles in robe in late seventeenth-century France . . . The fact nevertheless is that Goldmann’s adaption of Lukács removes from theory its insurrectionary role. (235)

For Said, these sorts of turns (interruptions, extensions, appropriations) are the evidence that compels his Traveling Theory into existence, and his third stop is Williams, who enacts a prototypical (if as yet critically unframed) version of Said’s theory:

For borrow we certainly must if we are to elude the constraints of our immediate intellectual environment. Theory we certainly need, for all sorts of reasons that would be too tedious to rehearse here. What we also need over and above theory, however, is the critical recognition that there is no theory capable of covering, closing off, predicting all the institutions in which it might be useful . . . Williams therefore has the critical recognition, and uses it consciously to qualify, shape, and refine his borrowings from Lukács and Goldmann, although we should hasten to add that it does not make him infallible or any less liable to exaggeration and error for having it. (Said 241)

Lukács-Goldmann-Williams establish an intellectual relationship which is inherently and generationally continuous and contributes to social change based on theoretical developments which at least partly demonstrate Said’s theoretical framework.

But the traveling process is transformative and accepts newness successively and subjectively; further theoretical considerations are taken into account by Said, who asserts how we “have become so accustomed to hearing that all borrowings, readings, and interpretations are misreadings and misinterpretations” (241). Said would instead have us under-