

Beyond Bipolarity: Doing Theology of Difference

DELFO CORTINA CANCERAN, O.P.

I have come to believe that theologians, in their attempt to talk to and about religious communities, ought to give readers some sense of their autobiographies. This can help an audience discern what leads the theologian to do the kind of theology she does.¹

Delores S. Williams

My purpose in this study is to sketch the contour or landscape of what I call 'triadic hermeneutics'. This triadic hermeneutics explicates the intertwinement of the different worlds, namely: the 'social world', the 'textual world', and the 'subject-positional world' that are agglutinated in the production or generation of knowledge. Traditionally, hermeneutics pays attention to the dialectics between the social world and the textual world and glosses over the role of the knowing subject. This prevailing binary couple restricts hermeneutics within the dialectics between the social world (context) and the textual world (language) which notoriously eschews the role of the knowing subject in the production of knowledge. Thus, this triadic hermeneutics is proffered in order to sweep away this restrictive dialectics and to bring out the role of the subject. This triad is based on the

¹ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), p. ix.

assumption that to offset the inadequacy of the binary relationship, we need to rescue the role of the subject in the production of knowledge. This hermeneutics underlines the place of the subject. In effect, the subject cannot claim an autonomous role in the production of knowledge and cannot assume a universal status of knowledge because s/he hinges on a network of knowledge. In short, the subject is ineluctably implicated in the web of the production of knowledge.

However, at the outset, we need to make a caveat. These three worlds are not meant to rigidly separate them but only to illustratively offer a convenient tool in understanding the nature of mediation. Indeed, the boundaries of these worlds are permeable and fluid in that network. I call this tool as hermeneutics because it deals with a 'methodology' of interpretation as a means of accessing and constituting the world. We normally think of hermeneutics in terms of textual interpretation and deflect the role of the subject in the process of interpretation. Thus, I would highlight the role of the subject because it is inseparable from the production of knowledge.² Knowledge requires the subject who produces it and, at the same time, constituted by it.³ Thus, both subject and knowledge are mutually implicated.

In addition, we shall also deal with the nature of mediation. In traditional epistemology, mediation implicates only the instrument or tools in the production of knowledge. Fundamentally, mediation is viewed in a teleological sense in which the relationship between the means and the ends is emphasized. This teleological

² Sandra Harding defines 'methodology' as "a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed; it includes accounts of how "the general structure of theory finds its implication in particular scientific discipline," while method is the "techniques (of proceeding) in gathering evidence." Sandra Harding, "Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method," in *Feminism and Methodology*, Sandra Harding, ed. (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 3 and 2.

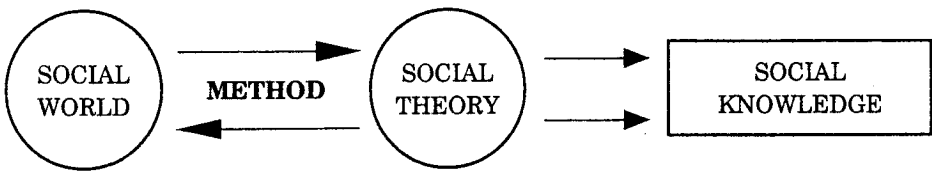
³ A good example of the politics of the production of knowledge can be shown in a laboratory experiment. B. Latour says: "If by politics you mean to be the spokesman of the forces you mould society with and of which you are the only credible and legitimate authority, then Pasteur is fully a political man." Bruno Latour, "Give me a Laboratory and I will raise the World," in *The Science Studies Reader*, Mario Biagioli, ed. (New York & London: Routledge, 1999), p. 268.

view only eschews the role of the subject in the production of knowledge. In our alternative reconceptualization, I would expand the relationship which involves the subject. Simply, I define the oft-repeated (ab)use of 'mediation' as that which stands in between two poles, in our case, between the social world and the textual world. That which stands in between which relates the two worlds – the social and the textual – is the third term which is the subject. This reconceptualized mediation implicates the mediator that constructs through knowledge production the relationship between the two poles. In this sense, we thematize the mediator in the network of mediation which is crucial in the production of knowledge. Thus, I shall argue that the researcher as a knowing subject acts as the mediator. By making this point, we can already anticipate the argument that we have advanced: the mediation is itself mediated. As such, this mediation which is itself mediated by the mediator should be inquired if we want to understand the nature of knowledge. In fact, the mediation is site of contentions by various scholars or researchers in the marketplace of knowledge. In this paper, I shall examine the problematic nature of mediation in the field of contemporary theology, which employs social theory as its mediatory instrument in aiding a theologian's continuing reflection on praxis. The use of the social sciences in theology is a case in point in the problematization of mediation.

Double Hermeneutics in Social Theory

At the outset, I want to propose a schema taken from social theory which shows the dynamics of social research. However, we shall focus on 'applied' social research. By characterizing it as 'applied', I do not mean to suggest that it is devoid of any theoretical import (which is the case when the label 'applied' is opposed to 'pure' social research; in fact, the term 'applied', by virtue of its being applied, already implies a theory-in-use). Thus, I shall limit myself within the domain of applied research that is situated in the field of social world. I choose the area of applied social research due to its immediate relevance on pastoral theology in our ministry to people. Theologians are not just an ivory tower or arm chair scholars, but are primarily pastors who faithfully attend to the pressing needs of the people whom they minister. Thus, I shall begin the discussion with the model of double hermeneutics

in social theory which has a repercussion on doing theology. However, this double hermeneutics is only a point of departure and not as a determination of interpretation. Thus, I do not suggest that we limit our possible interpretation on the dynamics of social research into this double hermeneutics. In fact, as we shall demonstrate, we need to scrutinize this interpretative enterprise so that we can bring out the complexity of hermeneutics in our critical analysis of the production of knowledge.



In a social research, motivated by a prodding interest on some pertinent questions, a social researcher is confronted with a social world which s/he tries to unravel in her/his attempt to come to terms with it. Equipped with some methodological tools, a social researcher employs some relevant methods (using for instance, the qualitative or quantitative methods, the triangulation or mixed method, as the case may be) in understanding and explaining a particular world.⁴ This process does not mean, however, that, at the inception of the research, the social researcher is bereft of a particular theoretical framework in her/his mind. In fact, even in the process of research design, s/he already lays down her/his preferred theoretical framework that espouses some hypotheses about the social world that s/he would verify at the end of the process of research. The researcher seems to be neutral or innocent, but s/he already has some hatches or hints to the answers to

⁴ There are two possibilities here. First, research is a means to an end which is a theory construction. This means that it is assumed that there is no theory yet and thus the researcher is exploring a way of understanding or explaining a certain social phenomenon. Through this research, the researcher is expected to produce a theory at the end of the research. Second, theory guides research. This means that there exists a theory already and the researcher only applies it to a particular social phenomenon in the research. The research may confirm, modify or falsify the existing theory. See Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 3-23.

her/his question. The findings of the research cumulate into a compendium of social knowledge of the social world.

Here, we can already anticipate a methodological problem involved. On the one hand, the social researcher employs a methodological tool conceptualized and operationalized according to her/his preferred reading of the social world informed by her/his chosen theoretical framework. For instance, if the researcher uses a quantitative analysis, the social world is framed or filtered into a mathematical scheme which employs statistical analysis in interpreting the social world. This quantitative method is assumed to generate a knowledge which is considered an objective representation of the social world. On the other hand, the social world is experienced and interpreted by the people of the community who possess their own semantic scheme or symbolic language in living and intuiting the meaning of their social world. Since it is based on a taken-for-granted meaning of the community, this knowledge of the social world is considered a mere subjective representation of the world by the adherents of objectivist representation of knowledge. Since it is subjective compared to the objective scheme, it is discredited in the objectivist scientific community.⁵ Due to the binary scheme that decouples the objective and subjective representation of the social world, the two methods are in tension or even conflict. Of course, there will always be a gap generated by the method which would foil any totalizing theory that fully accounts the dark holes or the gray area of knowledge even if methodologically there are devices that remedy them. Thus, there exists a gap generated by an epistemological unknown. Due to this gap, there emerges an inevitable problem of accessing and capturing the totality of the real social world out there. In this sense, we cannot readily mirror the world as such for our mind does not just innocently reflect reality out there. Since what the

⁵ The debate between the two opposing school of thought in poverty is dubbed as objectivist economic Model and the subjectivist self-rated poverty Model. The objectivist model relies on indicators provided by the literature and analyzed by statistical presentation, while the subjectivist model depends on the perception of the people who experience poverty based on survey questionnaires that ask the people to answer. Both models have their own merits and demerits. See Arsenio M. Balisacan, et. al., *Perspectives on Philippine Poverty* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1993).

social researcher can gather from the social world is a mere reading of the situation by the people which the social researcher, in turn, interprets according to her/his preferred and specialized scheme of knowledge, the social world comes to us in the form of a finished product. This is the sense of double hermeneutics: The social researcher interprets the social world according to the perception of the people.⁶ However, we have to note that the world as represented by the social researcher is couched in a language that does not necessarily conform to the world of the people or inhabitants. Thus, discourse produced by the researcher always involves rhetoric of construction of the world of a mysterious other that is represented in her/his theorization.

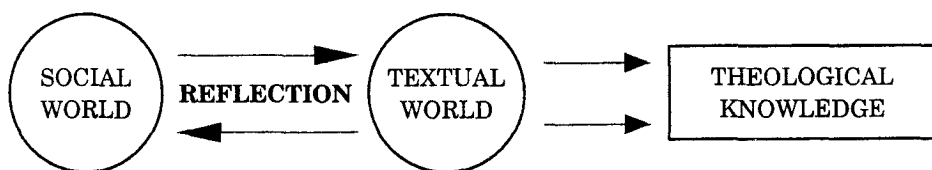
In this scheme, the focus is pegged on the method of acquiring knowledge of the social world. This scheme inadvertently or obliquely reinstates the pervasive binary couple between the subject as a knower and the object as the known. In this relationship, the subject occupies the privileged place of knowledge since the truth of the world hinges on her/his knowledge. The world becomes visible and known to us through her/his word. Moreover, to be faithful to the mirror of nature, the subject is purged from any bias so that s/he can only represent the object as such in her/his pure mind. Thus, the object is grasped or absorbed by the subject. In this sense, the subject and the object are not different but identical by virtue of the reflecting or mirroring mind of the subject as a knower. In effect, the subject is objective. This mirror epistemology has a far-reaching repercussion on the standard of knowledge of the social world. The standard in gauging the scientificity of knowledge of the social world is based on the alleged objectivity of the mind stated in statistical measurement made

⁶ Anthony Giddens asserts that the "[s]ocial life... is produced by its component actors precisely in terms of their active constitution and reconstitution of frames of meaning whereby they organize their experience. The conceptual schemes of the social sciences therefore express a double hermeneutic, relating both to entering and grasping the frames of meaning involved in the production of social life by lay actors, and reconstituting these within the new frames of meaning involved in technical conceptual schemes." Anthony Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method: A Positive Critique of Interpretive Sociologies* (New York: Basic Books, Inc. Publishers, 1976), p. 79.

by the expertise of the social researcher. In effect, the knowledge derived from the subjective experience on the social world of the people is discredited and disallowed as part of a deposit of knowledge. In this objectivist proclivity, there is the persistence of the question on the validity and reliability in the measurement or instrument used in social researches about the social world. However, the question totally ignores the role of the researcher in the whole process of the production of knowledge of the social world.

Hermeneutic Circle in Liberation Theology

In liberation theology, a theologian relies on the analyses or findings supplied by social sciences made by certain social researcher/s and applies or incorporates them on her/his own theological enterprise that reckons the social world. When we say that a theologian is engaged into a critical reflection on praxis, we are saying that s/he is employing social sciences in reading the world. With this reliance, a theologian also inherits the problem embedded in the mirror epistemology. Neither her/his mind nor the world s/he confronts is exempted from the contamination of language or discourse. Thus, the question that we have posed on the elision of the subject can also be asked in liberation theology with regard to the place of a theologian in the production of knowledge. In liberation theology, a theologian is presented as though s/he is unaffected by preexisting language or discourse that enables her/him to produce knowledge. S/he is presented as though s/he occupies a virgin territory which is not preceded and constituted by language or discourse. In this way, the place of a theologian is deflected in the production of theological knowledge. To understand this deflection, we have to note that liberation theology employs the so-called hermeneutic circle which relates the social world of poverty and the textual world of the bible using history as a locus of theologizing. In this hermeneutics, the circle seems to be a loop that



circumscribes an interpretative landscape of the social world. Although some liberation theologians would argue that this circle is not a loop that only circulates in the same place but a coil that spirals in a horizon. However, even if this is the case, the spiral motion still suggests, if not a repetition, a continuity of the motion without a break in that linear direction. In this case, the spiral motion is teleologically oriented and directed toward a certain given goal or end. In this cycle, reflection can generate theological knowledge.

In a hermeneutic circle, the starting point is the social world marked by the inhumanity and violence of poverty experienced by the poor people who are made victims of the oppressive system of capitalism.⁷ In class analysis, which is indebted on the theory of Marxism, the social world is split into two dominant warring classes: the proletariat, on the one hand, and the bourgeois, on the other hand. Through intensified and continuing class struggle, the social division of the classes will eventually be overcome because the causes of their miseries such as private property and alienation of labor which perpetuate the immiserization and peripheralization of the proletarians by the system that favors the bourgeoisie will eventually be rectified and abolished. The abolition is effected by a class struggle that is led by the party of the proletariats. The party will govern the society under the regime of genuine equality and substantial justice. In the end, the poor are deemed truly liberated from the abject poverty that dehumanizes them. This state will be the realization of the utopian (classless) society of communism.

After reading a class-based analysis of the social world, a theologian continues to engage into theological reflection through a correlation between the social world and the textual world. Through this process of correlation, the social world is juxtaposed with the relevant biblical texts, usually taken from the book of exodus, the prophetic books and the synoptic gospels. A theologian

⁷ San Luis Segundo describes hermeneutic circle in this way: "it is the continuing change in our interpretation of the Bible which is dictated by the continuing changes in our present-day reality, both individual and societal." San Luis Segundo, SJ, "The Hermeneutic Circle," in *The Liberation of Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1976), p. 8.

relates the social world marked by poverty with the liberating message of the biblical texts. A theologian finds a contrast between the poverty-stricken plight of poor people and the liberating message of the biblical texts. In this contrasting gesture, a 'contradiction' is discerned between the society marked by poverty and the redeeming texts of the bible. This contradiction needs to be addressed head-on by the committed or engaged theologian. The onslaught of poverty found in the social world should be opposed and eradicated since it contravenes the message of the reign of God and the will of a just God. Liberation theology anchors their struggles from the themes of the historical Jesus who embodied and proclaimed the Reign of God. A theologian takes the side of the poor through her/his solidarity with them. Through praxis, a theologian participates in the liberation of the poor from the bondage or slavery of poverty.

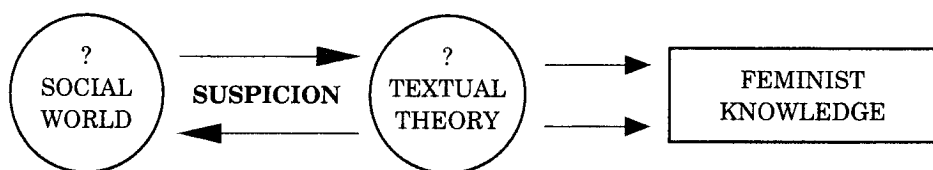
Although liberation theology is a historically-grounded class analysis of poverty caused by the exploitative or oppressive capitalist system, it excludes within its analysis the place of a theologian in its analytic framework. In this scheme, a theologian recedes from history in order to objectify the world. Since s/he objectifies history, a theologian can oversee the unfolding of historical reality of the world. In this sense, a theologian is given a privileged position that enables her/him to judge the social actors by splitting them into two opposing camps, namely: the oppressed poor and brazen oppressors. A theologian takes the privileged position of God having an omniscient view of the world. The deflection of a theologian does not mean a detachment from the world, but after receding from history, s/he can know the truth of the world through her/his taking the omniscient position of God. Having the better judgment of the world, a theologian takes the side of the oppressed people who are made non-humans at the underside of history by consciously engaging and struggling for the liberation of the oppressed and in manifesting her/his solidarity and commitment with their causes and struggles. In effect, in liberation theology, the place of a theologian is given a role, not in the question of her/his place in the production of knowledge, but in the advocacy or solidarity with the poor. However, there is an oblique and unwitting presumption in liberation theology that a theologian is outside the structure of the capitalist system, which privileges him/her to be

the outspoken and rightful critic of oppression and to arrogate the role of a ventriloquist of the poor people. However, a theologian rarely realizes that s/he is inside history and therefore s/he can connive in complicity with the system. Being inside history, s/he is implicated in a network of power that can position her/him both an oppressed and oppressor at different time and place. A theologian is caught into a power relation and thrown into an oppressive system. Thus, a theologian cannot completely sever herself/himself from this network that can free her/him from any complicity. Due to that network, s/he can shuttle in shifting position as an oppressed and oppressor her/himself in different situations.

Moreover, though the poor people are supposed to be the subjects in designing and realizing their history, a theologian is behind in the attainment of that dream since s/he is elevated into a privileged position of an intellectual that knows the unfolding and working of historical process. After receding from the world and retreating into her/his historical analysis, a theologian re-enters into history, no longer detached or suspended, but involved and engaged into a historical process. A theologian makes a universal claim by homogenizing the experiences of the poor that efface their material and internal differences. By that gesture, the universal claim lumps the poor into a category of the victim of the system. By categorizing them into the status of a victim, the role of a theologian is legitimized by installing herself/himself into their liberator or savior from the slavery or bondage perpetuated by the system. In this analysis, a theologian precipitates the irruption of the historical process of liberation of the poor. Thus, a theologian stays behind the scene that prods the historical process of liberation. The poor people hinge on the expertise of a theologian in the correct analysis of their situation of poverty. In a subtle way, fortuitously or not, a theologian knows the correct reading on the situation of poverty and prescribes the solution for their eventual liberation from the exploitative and oppressive capitalist system. By virtue of that privileged position, the liberation theologian is authorized to be the ventriloquist of the poor. Feminist theologians have interrupted this hermeneutic circle that marginalizes or excludes their difference. They refuse to graft their own experiences on the masculine analytic framework without reference to their particular embodiment.

Hermeneutics of Suspicion in Feminist Theology

The version of hermeneutics of suspicion of feminist liberation theology is a further development of the hermeneutic circle in liberation theology. Both hermeneutic methods belong to the methodological discourse of liberation theology which is geared towards enlightenment from the cause of exploitation or oppression and emancipation from this bondage or slavery. The difference, however, is that feminist liberation theology explicitly foregrounds in its resolute critique on the perceived and felt androcentric bias inscribed in the taken-for-granted normativity of masculine experience and the patriarchal biblical texts that reckons the feminine experience as trivial compared to the alleged universality of men. The experiences of women are merely derivative from the normativity of men by analogizing their particular experience to them. In both cases, women's experiences are effaced or trivialized in the theoretical framework. Feminists relate these two worlds – the social world and the textual world – in their persistent critique of patriarchal texts that undermine their place and experience in the society. Though these two worlds are in a continuing dialogue with each other, the experience of women remains to be normative in either affirming the liberating potentials of the biblical texts or rejecting any text that perpetuates and exacerbates their subordination in society. In this way, feminists capitalize on the liberating and redeeming texts that affirm their identity and legitimize and anchor their struggle.⁸



⁸ Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has defended her hermeneutics of suspicion: "The task of biblical scholarship is therefore not only historical scientific research but also scholarly validation or rejection of the questions raised by the communities of faith that respond to the historical biblical text always on the basis of their own Christian experience." Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "For the Sake of Our Salvation....," in *Bread, Not Stone: The Challenge of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), pp. 38-9.

In the hermeneutics of suspicion, the two worlds are put under suspicion. This suspicion acts in a twofold way: negative and positive direction. In a negative way, feminist suspicion is premised on the belief that the biblical texts are couched in a patriarchal discourse. This suspicion is exacerbated due to the persistent invisibility or, if they are ever visible, the evident subordination of women in these two worlds. They believe that historically these texts embed and entrench patriarchy that needs to be reckoned with so that the dignity of women will be preserved and affirmed. However, as long as patriarchy remains its sway, the struggle of women will always be pursued until they are able to shake its foundation. Moreover, in the positive way, this suspicion is also a rhetorical strategy in the interpretation of the biblical texts that tries to highlight the redeeming potentials of feminist practices of solidarity and the biblical texts that can still be salvaged in their attempt to correct the malestream tendencies of interpretation by inserting their experiences into their interpretation so that they can eventually transform its dominant landscape. Feminists believe that the texts can still have a positive bearing on the struggle of women for the equality of the sexes. These redeeming texts spur feminists to resolutely continue their struggle so that their goal will not be in vain. Thus, feminists question the rhetorical interests of the scholars/researchers that impute their interpretation of or acquiescence on the texts which justifies the privilege of the masculine hegemony. Thus, feminist theologians employ the hermeneutics of suspicion in questioning the androcentric proclivity accorded to men, while consigning women to a subordinate or subservient status in the society. In short, the hermeneutics of suspicion is anchored on the prophetic mission of the church based on denunciation of sin and proclamation of grace in the world. The strategy of hermeneutic of suspicion can generate feminist knowledge that legitimizes their political struggles for equality.⁹

⁹ Luce Irigaray questions the position of E. Schüssler Fiorenza who espouses the equality of the sexes. In her article, she asks the rhetorical question: Equal to Whom? There is the difference between two positions. S. Fiorenza opts for the equality of humanity across cultures, while L. Irigaray insists on the differences that mark human beings. See Luce Irigaray, "Equal To Whom?," Robert L. Mazzola, trans., in *The Essential Difference*, Naomi Schor & Elizabeth Weed, eds. (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994).

In liberation theology, the buzzword 'context' is employed to describe the situation of the poor which is assumed to be unproblematic. There appears to be a simple correspondence between the context invoked in the discourse and the meaning given to it. However, we have to understand that context is not a self-evident or self-explanatory variable. It needs to be analyzed through the prisms of different theoretical perspectives which is subject to various conflicting interpretations. Thus, in the final analysis, context is a contested zone because it is non-innocent. Context can generate infinite readings. As deconstructionist puts it: meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless. The reading of context never arrives at its definitive and final closure. It is always open to various readings by different interest groups. Thus, context cannot be exhausted or saturated once and for all. The question of context in this particular sense is that the situation of the people is lumped together without nuancing its different signification of the situation of the people. We have to consider the reader in the determination of the signification of the situation. Gender/sexuality is one among these differences that mark the reader which account for the different readings they make.

Though the place of a theologian surfaces in its questioning of interpretation, it is not adequately problematized or thematized since it is overridden by sex or gender that impinges on the interpretative enterprise of a theologian. What is openly questioned is only the interpretation of the interpreter, but not the position of the interpreter. The interrogation of the position of the interpreter emerges especially when black women critique the presupposition and assumption of white feminists that arrogate to themselves the right to speak in behalf of other colored women of the third world. By virtue of their privileged position, white feminists unwittingly assume the central discourse that controls other women. White feminists have inherited the western hegemony of white masculine supremacy in their theologizing by having the privilege to represent other women within their own category obliterating their embodied and localized differences. Thus, even among women, there remain some internal and material differences that exist among them.

Radical Interpretation of Triadic Hermeneutics

The main point being raised in this paper is the subject-positional world that a theologian occupies in a discursive enterprise.¹⁰ The position situates a theologian in a network of relationships. This network of relationships is not a neutral or innocent but a heavily charged ground that locates one in that relationship. Discourse is offered to a theologian like entering into a library where there are different books and journals awaiting her/him. Since s/he cannot read them all at once, a theologian only chooses among these reading materials. From her/his exposure to different ideas in her/his reading, a theologian picks up among them and, out of that choice, takes up a position. The position taken up does not only orient that theologian, but s/he is being positioned by discourse.¹¹ A theologian views the world according

¹⁰ The concept of subject-position is derived from the understanding of language and discourse in post-structuralism (J. Lacan, M. Foucault and J. Derrida). In Lacanian 'language', the subject is divided against itself in the mirror stage and constructed in its entrance into the Symbolic. The place that the subject occupies is precarious and unstable. Moreover, the Foucauldian 'discourse', the subject is not defined in terms of its speaking consciousness making itself the sole author, but a position that is situated in the breach of discontinuous discourses that engenders new discourses in the process. Finally, in the Derridean 'deconstruction', the double bind of reading brings out the act of deranging the binary opposition in western worldview. A double bind creates an 'undecidable' moment for the possibility of alterity to come in the act of reading. I am indebted from M. Foucault's concept of 'genealogy' and Derrida's deconstruction in a 'double bind'. M. Foucault states: "Let us give the term genealogy to the union of erudite knowledge and local memories which allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today." Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings (1972-1977)*, Colin Gordon, ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), p. 83. J. Derrida argues: "To 'deconstruct' philosophy, thus, would be to think – in the most faithful, interior way – the structured genealogy of philosophy's concepts, but at the same time to determine – from a certain exterior that is unqualifiable or unnameable by philosophy – what this history has been able to dissimulate or forbid, making itself into a history by means of this somewhere motivated repression." Jacques Derrida, *Position*, Allan Bass, trans. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 6.

¹¹ An example of this subject-position is the act of reading a text. A person who reads a text brings along her/his previous knowledge in the act of reading, and as s/he reads the text, the text, in turns, constructs a new subject-position.

to the prism of that chosen position. In this sense, a theologian is both active and passive in discourse. When a theologian takes up a position, /she becomes active; but the position taken up turns her/him passive by discourse. There is then an intertwining between an active action when s/he takes up a position and a passive action when s/he is positioned by discourse. The assumption of a particular position in discourse provides her/him with a standpoint that situates her/him in a web of discursive relations. This position of a theologian frames the generation and production of theological knowledge.

If traditionally the subject-position of a theologian has been elided or eschewed in methodological reckoning, the radical hermeneutics, faithful to its name, penetrates to the crux of the question of the subject. Thus, radical hermeneutics includes in its methodological component the position of the subject in discourse because it recognizes the critical place of a theologian in the production and generation of theological knowledge. Discursively, theological knowledge does not emanate from her/his self-originating and self-authenticating consciousness of a theologian, but the consciousness of a theologian is always already preceded by discourse that constitutes her/him. In short, discourse precedes the attendance and consciousness of a theologian. I take discourse in its broad sense to include language in general such as framework and theory which is embedded in various institutions that sanction and authorize discourse. Thus, a theologian is a functional author that is constituted by a discursive formation learned from ecclesiastical institutions which allows and prohibits certain discourse to be disseminated in the public. A theologian does not begin from a zero-degree consciousness since, as we have argued, her/his consciousness is always already marked by discourse. Her/his consciousness is always already vitiated or contaminated by the traces of her/

In the act of reading, the reader's position is never fixed or essentialized, but rather it is always mobile and fluid. This shifting position is due to a constant negotiation of various positions that the subject occupies. I owe this example of the act of reading from the discussion of D. Fuss' subject-position. D. Fuss argues that the "points suggest that if we read from multiple subject-positions, the very act of reading becomes a force for dislocating our belief in stable subjects and essential meanings." Dianna Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference* (New York & London: Routledge, 1989), p. 35.

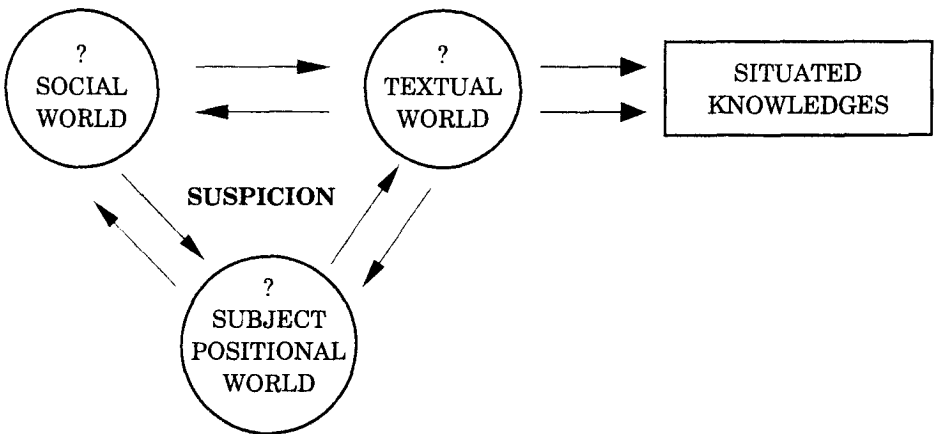
his cultural practices. If this is the case, then we are justified in claiming that the radical hermeneutics should follow a double gesture that, first, affirms the role of a theologian in the production of knowledge and, second, critiques this knowledge due to its normative and exclusionary possibility.

The critique of the position of a theologian does not only acknowledge the limitation of the extent of knowledge, but opens the arena for a space of democratization of the production of knowledge. A theologian cannot claim an omniscient view of the world since her/his position in discourse already limits her/his knowledge of the world. The subject-position is inseparably linked with a discourse based on our situated knowledges of the world. Our knowledge is always partial and fragmentary. Although we want to attain a holistic or whole knowledge of reality, we can never arrive at it because of the kaleidoscopic nature of reality that cannot be put to rest and be pinned down once and for all. These knowledges are marked by differential position of people.¹² These marks limit the knowledge of the subject that can only claim a partial and tentative truth. These marks specify the experiences of the subject that would make her/him self-visibly embodied. In the triadic hermeneutics, we include the subject-positional world in order to account for these different marks of a theologian or researcher. These marks can generate different 'situated knowledges'.

Since a theologian is constituted by discourse, her/his production of knowledge should be inquired as to the framework which authorizes her/him to speak and claim such knowledge. Moreover, position is a particular stance taken up by a theologian interwoven in a network of discourse. We weave into that web of relationship where we cannot just jump out and break away from it. In effect,

¹² We may reflect on these questions: Do the religion, ethnicity, class and sex of the researcher contribute to the production of knowledge? Do Muslim and Christian researchers look at the social world of Mindanao in an identical way? Do the indigenous people and westernized researcher understand the situation of development in the same light? Do rich and poor researchers understand poverty in the same way? Do male and female researchers conceptualize rape in the same way? These questions highlight the differences of the researchers marked by their religion, ethnicity, class and sex in the production of knowledge.

a theologian who takes up a position cannot arrogate to itself a universal view of the world which privileges her/him to oversee and adjudicate different positions. Her/his position comes from a framework that permits her/him to speak that way. S/he cannot extricate herself/himself from discourse so that s/he can claim a privileged position that can arbitrate these discourses. Her/his position is always situated within that network of discourse. There is always the likelihood of a conflict of interpretation or incompatibility of narrative among different positions. To overcome these different positions, we are often tempted to harmonize these incongruent positions by invoking the Hegelian synthesis as a higher order of discursive formation. However, whether we like it or not, there is always an excess of this attempt at a synthesis which can never be assimilated or accommodated within this totalizing view. The tendency is to exclude this excess that only disconfirm our position and concentrate on the converging positions that can still be wrapped up as a consensus by foreclosing the anomalous positions. However, we do violence to the excess because we marginalize or exclude it from public circulation. However, the excess always haunts the synthesis because it keeps on resisting any containment or accommodation. If the excess can never be enclosed, it can always stand to interrogate the assurance and certitude of the synthesis. In short, the identity of the synthesis is an effect of some marginalization or exclusion of discourses. As theologians of the people, we are called to witness to the exclusion of the excess. Our witnessing to the excess calls us to a responsibility or accountability to keep us on testifying to the unrepresent-



ability of the excluded other discourses. The excess should turn a theologian into a 'methodological humility' which recognizes the limit of knowledge. This acceptance of our limitation opens up a space for others marked by difference. This methodological humility provides a channel of communication which makes a theologian learn from other positions.

In the triadic hermeneutics, we insistently bring out the place of theologian in the process of interpretation. Aside from a suspicion of the social world and the textual world, we need to interrogate the subject-position of a theologian that constitutes her/him and enables her/him to generate knowledge of the world. Having arrogated a privileged position, a theologian can legitimately claim an Archimedean view of the world. In short, s/he arrogates the mirror epistemology that only reflects the world. The elision of the subject-position of a theologian only perpetuates and reinforces her/his self-invisibility in the production of knowledge. Since a theologian is invisible, s/he can assume a privileged position which claims a universalizing and totalizing status of knowledge. Without the inclusion of the subject-position of a theologian, our theologizing may claim an infinite vision of reality that reverts back to the perniciousness of the god's trick of an all-knowing theologian. We have to embrace our marks that inflect or filter our knowledge of reality and show the self-visibility of our difference. We cannot purge or expunge our marks because we are always already marked. The marks make a theologian self-visible. Indeed, a theologian occupies a particular standpoint in a network of discourses.¹³ Thus, we can contend that subject-position is marked by difference. Without these marks, theological reflection becomes a projection of an illusion of an all-knowing theologian who takes the god's trick of omniscience. To avoid this tendency, a theologian must accept the limit of her/his rationality and allow the inter-

¹³ Moreover, the individual is replete with a binary opposition between the I as opposed to the not-I. The I is defined in terms of its belonging to the bourgeois class that constructs a distinct identity that differentiates itself from others who are excluded from its circle. The I in a modernist garb can represent and rub out others as an affirmation of its power to subjugate others. Such as the fate of the colonies and slaves who were (mis)represented in a dehumanizing way during the colonization of the so-called New World and who were silenced or muted cringing to their colonial masters.

ruption of others in her/his knowledge of reality. In this sense, others have a space to contribute in the production or generation of knowledge.

Conclusion: Mediated Mediation

We often think of the starting point of knowledge from the self-consciousness of the knowing subject. In this starting point, a theologian possesses a self-originating and self-authenticating consciousness that produces knowledge of the world. When we say that a knowing subject possesses a self-originating and self-authenticating consciousness, we mean that this consciousness is autonomous from discourse or language. In effect, the subject is not preceded by anything else except her/his pure consciousness. Thus, the subject is an unmediated agent of knowledge. This subject has reigned in modern discourses of consciousness that justifies the legitimacy of individual autonomy and liberty. In our discussion, we have dethroned this pernicious sovereign subject by decentering her/him and enthroned the more originary language or discourse that precedes the subject in the production of knowledge. In short, language or discourse marks the subject. If language or discourse precedes the subject, then the subject is always already contaminated by language and implicated in a network of discursive relationship. Thus, a crucial aspect in this hermeneutics is a critical investigation into the subject whose knowledge is framed by a discourse which authorizes her/him to speak that language or discourse.

The subject cannot claim that s/he merely uses the mediation of language or discourse as a tool. We have to note that language is not merely a tool that can be employed and then detached from the user, but it is a system that produces or constitutes the user. Thus, the user is affected by language. Affected by language, the subject cannot assume an innocent standpoint that merely reflects the world and mirrors truth. If the subject cannot arrogate to herself/himself a neutral or universal standpoint, then her/his knowledge is always partial and fragmentary. Since we are made to believe that we can think in a neutral and universal way because that knowledge is the most officially acceptable and allowable way to be scientific, we delude or deceive ourselves. We only produce

partial and fragmentary ways of knowing. The discourse that we take up and which positions us is always a perspectival knowledge. This perspectival knowledge should not be taken as a liability that we need to shun away or get rid off, but it should open up ourselves into seeking for a more democratic way of knowledge. This democratic way of knowledge should maximize the participation of differently situated people in different contexts and locations. Knowledge does not reside in the privacy of our solipsistic and cannibalistic mind, but in the communal participation in an open search for knowledge. The democratic notion of knowledge production should interrogate any attempt at an imposition of the authority of the subject. Thus, the authority of a theologian should always be interrogated because of its normative consequentiality which can marginalize or exclude others in the process of knowledge production.

The triadic hermeneutics is an alternative methodology that opens up a way out to the impasse of the prevailing self-invisibility of a theologian. Through her/his self-invisibility, a theologian gains a privilege being elevated into a universal status that installs herself/himself as the ventriloquist of the rest. By making herself/himself visible, a theologian embodies her/his vulnerability. The function of self-visibility of a theologian is threefold: 1) the acceptance of the limitation of the extent of our knowledge production; 2) the possibility of the critique of the perniciousness of reason; and 3) the democratization of the sources of production of knowledge. There is always the temptation to rely on our self-enclosed reason which can be detrimental to others. The recognition of the role of the subject in the production of knowledge and the affirmation of the particularity of our knowledge enable us to open the line of communication and to affirm different perspectives of reality. The self-enclosed subject is pernicious to others who are silenced and muted in the production of knowledge. The oppressed groups have always been the victims of this marginalization and exclusion from the production of knowledge. In this lopsided privilege of a theologian, the knowledge of the exploited or oppressed groups should surface and occupy an epistemic privilege for the politics of liberation. The triadic hermeneutics can open up the possibility of a political forging of coalition and affinity of different groups of people who advance the cause and struggle of the marginalized and excluded people in our society □