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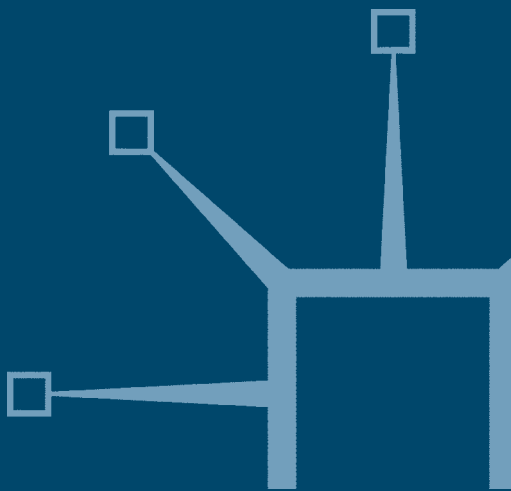
Fredric Jameson

A Critical Reader

Edited by
Sean Homer and Douglas Kellner



Fredric Jameson

Also by Sean Homer

FREDRIC JAMESON: Marxism, Hermeneutics, Postmodernism

Also by Douglas Kellner

CRITICAL THEORY, MARXISM AND MODERNITY

JEAN BAUDRILLARD: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond

POSTMODERN THEORY: Critical Interrogations (*with Steven Best*)

Fredric Jameson: A Critical Reader

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Introduction

Sean Homer and Douglas Kellner

In *The Origins of Postmodernity* Anderson (1998) restates an assessment of Western Marxism that he first advanced almost three decades ago (see Anderson, 1976). Western Marxism, he argued, was born of political defeat and the crushing of proletarian insurgencies of the 1920s; separated from the classical corpus of historical materialism Western Marxism marked a sharp decline in political strategy and economic analysis, as its center of gravity shifted toward philosophy. A second generation of thinkers such as Adorno, Horkheimer, Sartre, Lefebvre, and Marcuse:

> [C]onstructed a remarkable field of critical theory, not in isolation from surrounding currents of non-Marxist thought, but typically in creative tension with them. This was a tradition deeply concerned with questions of method – the epistemology of a critical understanding of society – on which classical Marxism had left few pointers. But its philosophical scope was not merely procedural: it had one central focus of substantive concern, which formed the common horizon of this line as a whole. Western Marxism was above all a set of theoretical investigations of the culture of developed capitalism. (1998, p. 69)

The broad strokes of Anderson's presentation today remain true to his earlier assessment except in one important respect. In 1976 Anderson saw the conditions that had produced Western Marxism as past and the line that ran from Lukács through to Sartre and Marcuse as essentially exhausted. At that time Fredric Jameson was a footnote in Anderson's considerations, offering the only serious overview of the tradition as a whole but, like Western Marxism itself, limited by its focus on aesthetics. In 1998 *Marxism and Form* remained for Anderson the first work to afford a complete overview of the Western Marxist repertoire but contrary to his earlier assessment it no longer marks the end of that tradition. In the intervening years Jameson's work has been elevated from a footnote in the history of Western Marxism to its "grandiose finale" and at the same time a body of work that significantly exceeds it (1998, p. 74). Our *Critical Reader* tracks that extraordinary achievement as Jameson, against the grain of much contemporary cultural theory and the "demarxification" of the academy, has acquired the status of the most important cultural critic writing today, the world's major exponent of Critical Theory and *the* theorist of postmodernity.

Jameson's published work now spans four decades and here we bring together critical interventions that engage with all of Jameson's major published works. His early work, *Marxism and Form* (1971) and *The Prison-House of Language* (1972) introduced to an English-speaking readership the traditions of Western Marxism, dialectical criticism, Russian formalism and French structuralism. With the publication of *The Political Unconscious* (1981) Jameson was recognized as one of the major Marxist cultural theorists of his era. His 1984 essay on postmodernism and the subsequent book, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) gained Jameson a global reputation and readership. Throughout his career Jameson has also produced a series of highly provocative and original single author studies: Sartre (1961), Wyndham Lewis (1979), Adorno (1990), and Brecht (1998). He has produced two volumes of film criticism: *Signatures of the Visible* (1990) and *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992), as well as a recent book *A Singular Modernity* (2002) that reengages with debates over the postmodern through a critical analysis of modernity and modernism.

Trajectory of a theorist

In his first published book, Jameson analyzed the literary theory and production of Jean-Paul Sartre. Written as a doctoral dissertation at Yale University, *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* (1961) was influenced by Jameson's teacher Erich Auerbach and by the Stylistics associated with Leo Spitzer, focusing on Sartre's style, narrative structures, values, and vision of the world. The book is devoid of the Marxian categories and political readings characteristic of Jameson's later work, but read in the context of the stifling conformism and banal business society of the 1950s, Jameson's subject matter (Sartre) and his intricate literary-theoretical writing style (already the notorious Jamesonian sentences appear full-blown) can be seen as revealing an attempt to create himself as a critical intellectual against the conformist currents of the epoch. One also sees him already turning against the literary establishment, against the dominant modes of literary criticism. All Jameson's works constitute critical interventions against the hegemonic forms of literary criticism and modes of thought regnant in the Anglo-American world, and attempt to construct more critical and oppositional social, cultural, and political discourses.

Interestingly, like Sartre, Jameson's own work would combine aesthetic, philosophical, political, and historical analysis and engage artifacts ranging from the banal objects of everyday life to the major political events of the era. After intense study of Marxian literary theory in the 1960s, Jameson published *Marxism and Form* (1971), which introduced a tradition of dialectical Marxist literary theory to the English-speaking world. Whereas in the heated debates over the postmodern, French and German positions would often be diametrically opposed, Jameson from the beginning mediated positions in

the German theories of Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Herbert Marcuse, T. W. Adorno, and others with French theorists. For Jameson, one of the dimensions of dialectics was overcoming one-sided positions and moving to a higher theoretical synthesis, a mode of thinking characteristic of his work from the early 1970s to the present.

Returning to French theory in *The Prison-House of Language* (1972), Jameson engaged French structuralist and Russian formalist approaches to language and textuality. This project illuminated key ideas and positions in the emerging poststructuralist thought, while demonstrating the use-value and provocations of a wide range of Russian formalist theorists and French thinkers including Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and A. J. Greimas. Jameson would continue to use many of the concepts of literary and cultural theory explicated in these texts, though he would move from the prison-house of language to the slaughterhouse of history, using Marxian theory to contextualize the texts engaged in his hermeneutic project.

After these influential and impressive introductions to German and French critical theories, Jameson has concentrated on developing his own literary and cultural theory in works from *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (1979) to *A Singular Modernity*. No early/late dichotomy in Jameson's publications presents itself as a viable hermeneutical device for interpreting his works as a whole, other than the obvious distinction between his pre-Marxian text *Sartre* and his later writings. Rather, what is striking are the remarkable continuities in Jameson's works. One can pick up his articles or books from the early 1970s through the late 1980s and discover strong similarities in their concerns, style, and politics. Indeed, one gets the feeling in reading Jameson's two-volume collection of essays *The Ideologies of Theory* that they could have all been written yesterday, or in the recent past. Yet, as Jameson notes in the introduction to these essays, there is a fundamental shift of emphasis in his works that he describes as:

> a shift from the vertical to the horizontal: from an interest in the multiple dimensions and levels of a text to the multiple interweavings of an only fitfully readable (or writable) narrative; from problems of interpretation to problems of historiography; from the attempt to talk about the sentence to the (equally impossible) attempt to talk about modes of production.
>
> (1988a, p. xxix)

In other words, Jameson's focus has shifted from a vertical emphasis on the many dimensions of a text – its ideological, psychoanalytic, formal, mythic-symbolical levels – which require a sophisticated and multivalent practice of reading, to a horizontal emphasis on the ways texts are inserted into historical sequences and on how history enters and helps constitute texts. Yet this shift in emphasis also points to continuities in Jameson's

work, for from the late 1960s to the 1990s he has privileged the historical dimension of texts and political readings, bringing his critical practice into the vicissitudes of history, moving critical discourse from the ivory tower of academia and the prison-house of language to the vicissitudes and contingencies of that field for which the term "history" serves as marker.

One therefore reads Jameson as a (still open) totality, as a relatively unified theoretical project in which the various texts provide parts of a whole. Jameson has characteristically appropriated into his theory a wide range of positions, from structuralism to poststructuralism and from psychoanalysis to postmodernism, producing a highly eclectic and original brand of Marxian literary and cultural theory. Marxism remains the master narrative of Jameson's corpus, a theoretical apparatus that utilizes a dual hermeneutic of ideology and utopia to criticize the ideological components of cultural texts, while setting forth their utopian dimension, and that helps produce criticism of existing society and visions of a better world. Influenced by Marxist theorist Ernst Bloch, Jameson thus has developed a hermeneutical and utopian version of Marxian cultural theory.

From *Marxism and Form* onwards Jameson makes clear his attraction both to Lukácsian literary theory and to his version of Hegelian Marxism, an allegiance that remains with Jameson in his later works. In particular Lukács's work on realism and on the historical novel strongly influenced Jameson's way of seeing and situating literature. While Jameson never accepted Lukács's polemics against modernism, he appropriated key Lukácsian categories, such as reification, to describe the fate of culture in contemporary capitalism. The Hegelian markers of Jameson's work include the contextualizing of cultural texts in history, the broad historical periodizing, and the use of Hegelian categories. Dialectical criticism involves the attempt to synthesize competing positions and methods into a more comprehensive theory. Dialectical criticism for Jameson also involves thinking that reflexively analyzes categories and methods, while carrying out concrete analyses and inquiries. Categories articulate historical content and thus must be read in terms of the specific environment out of which they emerge. For Jameson, dialectical criticism thus involves thinking that reflects on categories and procedures, while engaging in specific concrete studies; relational and historical thinking, which contextualizes the object of study in its concrete socio-political situation; utopian thinking, which compares the existing reality with possible alternatives and finds utopian hope in literature, philosophy, and other cultural texts; and totalizing, synthesizing thinking, which provides a systematic framework for cultural studies and a theory of history within which dialectical criticism can operate. All these aspects are operative throughout Jameson's work, the totalizing element coming more prominently (and controversially) to the fore as his work evolved.

From the 1970s to the present, Jameson has published an increasingly diverse and complex series of theoretical inquiries and cultural studies. One

begins to encounter the characteristic range of interests and depth of penetration in his studies of science fiction, film, magical narratives, painting, and both realist and modernist literature. One also encounters articles concerning Marxian cultural politics, imperialism, Palestinian liberation, Marxian teaching methods, and the revitalization of the Left. Many of the key essays have been collected in *The Ideologies of Theory*, which provide the laboratory for the theoretical project worked out in *Fables of Aggression*, *The Political Unconscious* and subsequent texts. These studies should be read together as inseparable parts of a multilevel theory of the interconnections between the history of literary form, modes of subjectivity, and stages of capitalism.

Jameson's theoretical synthesis is presented most systematically in *The Political Unconscious*. The text contains an articulation of Jameson's literary method, a systematic inventory of the history of literary forms, and a hidden history of the forms and modes of subjectivity itself, as it traverses through the field of culture and experience. Jameson boldly attempts to establish Marxian criticism as the most all-inclusive and comprehensive theoretical framework as he incorporates a disparate set of competing approaches into his model. He provides an overview of the history of the development of cultural forms and concludes with articulation of a "double hermeneutic" of ideology and utopia – which critiques ideology while preserving utopian moments – as the properly Marxian method of interpretation. Jameson employs a Lukács-inspired historical narrative to tell how cultural texts contain a "political unconscious," buried narratives and social experiences, which require sophisticated literary hermeneutics in order to be deciphered. One particular narrative of *The Political Unconscious* concerns, in Jameson's striking phrase, "the construction of the bourgeois subject in emergent capitalism and its schizophrenic disintegration in our own time" (1981a, p. 9). Key stages in the odyssey of the disintegrating bourgeois subjectivity are articulated in George Gissing, Joseph Conrad, and Wyndham Lewis, a story that will find its culmination in Jameson's account of postmodernism.

Indeed, Jameson's studies on postmodernism are a logical consequence of his theoretical project. He presented his first analysis of the defining features of postmodern culture in a 1982 lecture 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society.' Eventually, he synthesized and elaborated his emerging analysis in the article 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,' which more systematically interprets postmodernism in terms of the Marxian theory of capitalism and as a new "cultural dominant" (see 1991a, Chapter 1). Within his analysis, Jameson situates postmodern culture in the framework of a theory of stages of society – based on a Marxian model of stages of capitalist development – and argues that postmodernism is part of a new stage of capitalism. Every theory of postmodernism, he claims, contains an implicit periodization of history and "an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today" (1991a, p. 3).

Following Ernest Mandel's periodization in his book *Late Capitalism* (1975), Jameson claims that "there have been three fundamental moments in capitalism, each one marking a dialectical expansion over the previous stage. These are market capitalism, the monopoly stage or the stage of imperialism, and our own, wrongly called postindustrial, but what might better be termed multinational, capital" (1991a, p. 35). To these forms of society correspond the cultural forms realism, modernism, and postmodernism.

Jameson has subsequently refined this periodisation in 'The Existence of Italy' (1990b) and a series of studies in *The Cultural Turn* where he turns to new economic models to flesh out the cultural logic thesis, especially Arrighi's (1994) *The Long Twentieth Century*. For Jameson, Arrighi's elaboration of the nature and operation of finance capital serves to crystallize all the problems and questions that have arisen from the early 1980s around the relationship between economics and culture. In *A Singular Modernity* (2002) Jameson notes the somewhat surprising "return of the modern" in a variety of fields in recent years and attempts to delineate the construction of various concepts of modernity and the modern in rhetorical and narrative contexts.

The title "a singular modernity" is partly ironic since one of Jameson's strongest arguments is that there is no singular modernity, but a variety of narratives of modernity, modernism, and the modern that serve varied ideological purposes. Likewise, Jameson analyzes discourses of modernism in the arts as ideological discourses that legitimate certain artistic in various national and now global culture. According to Jameson, the ideology of modernism responds to an incomplete modernization and the conflicts between the country and the city, the urban and the pastoral, a premodern communal and social life and the shock of the new, essentially technology and the constant innovations of capitalist modernity, which find their registers in art. The prime rhetorical gesture and defining feature of the ideology of modernism is, for Jameson, the belief in the autonomy of art.

Jameson is critical of the ideology of modernism that provides aestheticist and antipolitical concepts of art, but believes that these ideologies can also be highly revealing. For Jameson, ideology is not just mystification and false consciousness, but is the theory of a practice which he designates "late modern" aesthetic practice, exemplified in the works of Nabokov and Beckett. In Jameson's reading, both create absolute worlds out of language, both employ language as exiles, thus creating a certain detachment and estrangement, both avoid politics and specific content (though no doubt both can be read politically and allegorically as Jameson tends to do). They signal that in late modernism the ideology of modernism has been appropriated into the work itself, that the art works and even sentences stand alone as self-sufficient aesthetic worlds and are marked by a highly self-conscious and reflexive aesthetic practice.

In short, Jameson argues that the ideology of modernism helps us grasp the structure of modernity and the modern as attempts to produce the new,

as ruptures and breaks that produce constant innovation, but without collective projects to fundamentally change the system. Rather than a theory of modernity or the modern, Jameson concludes, we need an ontology of the present that grasps the past and future in the present. More specifically "what we really need is a wholesale displacement of the thematics of modernity by the desire called utopia" (2002, p. 215). Hence, for Jameson, past, present, and future coexist in a problematic that systematically grapples with the past as it attempts to understand the present and move toward a better future.

Jameson emerges as a synthetic and eclectic Marxian cultural theorist who attempts to preserve and develop the Marxian theory, while analyzing the politics and utopian moments of a stunning diversity of cultural texts. His work expands literary analysis to include popular culture, architecture, theory, and other texts and thus can be seen as part of the movement toward cultural studies as a replacement for canonical literary studies. Yet cultural studies for Jameson is part of a broader project of developing interdisciplinary theory, an enterprise central to the studies that constitute this Reader.

A Critical Reader

The studies collected here assess Jameson's contribution across a wide range of academic disciplines from literature and film studies to political economy, social theory, and cultural politics. The text covers the breadth of Jameson's oeuvre from his first published work on Sartre to his recent book on modernity, and provides a rigorous, systematic, and critical engagement with the full range of Jameson's work including: literary analysis, film studies, architecture, critical theory, third world literature, Jameson's reception in Latin American and China, Marxism, postmodernism, globalization, spatial theory, political economy, and agency. The studies illustrate the richness and productivity of Jameson's thought and its usefulness to critically engage and cognitively map contemporary culture and society, as well as the ways in which Jameson himself provides a range of studies that illuminate the contemporary moment. Jameson's oeuvre is a work in progress and it continues to fascinate a large number of individuals in different disciplines and around the world, thus we imagine that our book will contribute to continued debates over Jameson's work and to help provide theories, methods, and analyses to provide critical theories of the present model and tools and visions for its transformation.

The book opens with Sean Homer's study of Jameson and Sartre, detailing how Jameson's initial appropriation of Sartre helped shape his engagement with Marxism, the influence of the New Left, and his subsequent work. Homer's chapter focuses on the historical context of the Sartre study and in particular on the politics of the New Left. Contrary to the usual critical response of simply bypassing this early text Homer insists that we can find

there not only many of the central themes of Jameson's later critical project but also, symptomatically, indications of his political development. The politics of the New Left – its rejection of orthodox Marxist analysis, the desire to create a new politics appropriate to the demands of advanced consumer capitalism, its utopianism and its "cultural turn" – can all be seen to have impacted on Jameson's understanding of Marxism. Chris Pawling's contribution extends the historical excavation of Jameson's work with a chapter on one of the most significant figures in his oeuvre, Georg Lukács. As indicated above Jameson took from Lukács both an understanding of the Marxian conception of totality as an open system and the idea of reification as the central mediator within capitalism. However, Jameson is usually seen to be unsympathetic to Lukács' "content" based literary criticism and his reliance upon a reflection theory of representation. By focusing on questions of narrative and through a meticulous reading of Lukács' essay on Thomas Mann Pawling reveals how Jameson's reading strategies from *The Political Unconscious* to the analysis of conspiracy films in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* remain fundamentally indebted to a Lukácsean understanding of the historical novel and narration.

From the Sartre study in 1961 to the analysis of postmodern fragmentation and schizoid temporality in the 1980s and 1990s the central role of narrative in our existential sense of time as well as a broader understanding of history has been an overriding concern for Jameson. His insistence, in *The Political Unconscious*, on history as a singular narrative of class struggle to wrest the realm of freedom from the realm of necessity immediately brought forth criticism from both liberal and poststructuralist theorists focusing upon the unreconstructed nature of Marxism as it imposed identity and unity upon the difference and heterogeneity of historical process. Similarly, Jameson's reflections on the waning of history and narrative in postmodern culture tends to bring forth charges of old fashioned Marxist nostalgia and dogmatism in the face of postmodern pluralism and hybridity. Nowhere, however, has Jameson's reflections on narrative caused more critical vitriol than in a 1986 essay on narrative and "Third World" literature. In this essay Jameson proposed a reading of "Third World" literature as "national allegories" and almost overnight, as Neil Lazarus points out, Jameson's name became an anathema in literature departments and the conference circuit across the US. In particular a rejoinder to Jameson's essay by the Marxist critic Aijaz Ahmad quickly achieved the status as the final word in demolishing the imperialism of Marxist criticism by postcolonial critics. In a careful and subtle reading of the encounter between Ahmad and Jameson, Lazarus unravels the way in which Ahmad's critique was taken up by postcolonial critics to legitimate certain critical positions as well as a more wide-ranging critique of Marxism than Ahmad himself had ever intended. Through a close reading of the rhetoric of Ahmad's article Lazarus shows how Ahmad deployed his own position within the academy, as a "Third World" academic, to trump

Jameson's article and consequently, however unintentionally, this served to legitimate the subsequent postcolonial appropriations. Lazarus concludes with a defense of Jameson's reading of "Third World" literature, not on the basis of Ahmad's critique but on the basis of what Jameson himself wrote in a much more "qualified" and reflexive piece of writing than most critics acknowledge.

We then present three chapters that reconsider Jameson's extraordinarily influential analysis of postmodernism. As Christian Gregory notes, it may be late in the day to advance a critique, even a friendly one, of Jameson's conception of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism as the notion is now firmly embedded within the academy and invariably it is associated with Jameson's name. The chapters presented here, however, tackle the question of postmodernity from a perspective rather different to the standard academic critique, that is to say, that the cultural logic thesis is inherently totalizing and eradicates cultural difference. Clint Burnham and Maria Elisa Cevasco consider Jameson's contribution not in terms of its unquestionable theoretical sophistication and insight but from the perspective of a renewed political activism that now sweeps the globe. In an iconoclastic, *noir* inflected, reading of Jameson on architecture, Burnham recuperates postmodern theory for community politics in downtown Vancouver as residents resist the gentrification of their district. Through the photographs of Arni Haraldsson, Burnham presents an alternative view of the postmodern city to that of the Bonaventure Hotel and Frank Gehry's house but one still informed by Jameson's notion of postmodern spatiality. With Cevasco we move from the local to the global in an exercise that deploys Jameson's work on postmodernism and globalization to "cognitively map" the contours of the nascent anti-capitalist movement. Through the poetry of Francisco Alvim and the emergence of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, Cevasco maps the new "structure of feeling" that gives the lie to the false promises of globalization and reminds us that "another world is possible." Finally, Gregory tackles head-on the frequent criticism of Jameson's cultural logic thesis that it operates at too high a level of abstraction and lacks any firm basis in empirical economic analysis. Drawing on Davis' (1985) early critique of Jameson's utilization of Ernest Mandel's theory of late capitalism to underwrite his periodization of postmodernity, Gregory proceeds to a reconsideration of Jameson's economic analysis in relation to the turbulence of the global markets in the 1990s and the crash of the dot-com bubble. Gregory's critique undercuts much of the hyperbole that surrounds an unthinking celebration of postmodernity and globalization from the perspective of rigorously grounded Marxist political economy.

We then present two chapters on a frequently neglected area of Jameson's work, film. Although Jameson has now published two collections of essays on film, *Signatures of the Visible* and *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, consisting of characteristically astute readings of individual films as well as major state-

ments on contemporary film theory, 'The Existence of Italy' and 'Totality as Conspiracy,' his work remains outside the mainstream of contemporary film studies. Slavoj Žižek, a figure who has himself written extensively about film but remains intransigently outside of any mainstream critical position, takes up Jameson's presentation at a conference on Krzysztof Kieślowski (also included in this book) to present, in his own inimitable style, his reflections on Jameson, Kieślowski, Lars von Trier, and revolutionary politics. In a different register Michael Chanan interviews Jameson on film. In this wide-ranging interview Jameson reflects upon Cuban and Latin-American cinema, the politics of *Screen* in the 1970s, documentary film-making, and the role of music in film. In particular, Chanan and Jameson explore the crucial role music and sound play in our sense of temporality in film and how this connects to the familiar Jamesonian concerns of narrative, realism, and form.

The final cluster of chapters engage with Jameson's most recent work on dialectical method, modernity, and revolutionary politics. In an encyclopaedic grasp of the totality of Jameson's work John O'Kane traces the fate of his dialectic from *Marxism and Form* to *Late Marxism*. Situating Jameson's work in relation to the major statements on Marxist method in the canon of Western Marxism, Sartre's *Search for a Method*, Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, and Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, O'Kane details the subtle shifts in register from his early formulation of dialectical criticism to what O'Kane calls the postmodern negative dialectics of "late" Marxism. Xudong Zhang similarly addresses questions of method as he incisively dissects the controversy amongst Chinese intellectuals aroused by the recent publication of *A Singular Modernity*. Since the mid-1980s when Jameson taught in Beijing his name has become synonymous with the idea of "theory" in general and postmodernism in particular in China. This influence has always been something of a paradoxical affair, with Jameson's name aligned with contemporary continental European theorists and the general celebration of all things North American rather than as one of the foremost critics of both. Zhang traces the development of Jameson's influence within the Chinese academy to the present critique of his most recent work for what some postmodernist academics call his "retreat from postmodernity." Esther Leslie then provides an eloquent reading of Jameson's book on Brecht and method. Taking as her starting point Jameson's reflections on the impossibility of the critical intellectual, in a Benjaminian or Brechtian mode, today Leslie considers Jameson's return to Brecht and modernism after two decades of work on postmodernism. As with Adorno in 1991, Jameson is not concerned with retrieving Brecht for the postmodern, as for Jameson he never went away in the first place, but rather with the "usefulness" of Brecht today. We live in a historical moment that is perhaps more hospitable to Brechtian didacticism than at any point in the previous thirty years and thus he opens up the possibility for a new political aesthetic. Jameson also reads Brecht against an extraordinary book that remained unpublished in his lifetime, *Me-ti; Book of*

Transformations or *Book of Changes*; it is this Brecht, the Brecht of twists and turns, contradictions and dialectic that is useful to us today. It is surely no accident, as Leslie points out, that Jameson's work should return at this precise historical conjuncture to the revolutionary possibilities of Benjamin, Brecht, and Lenin, as class struggle once again reasserts itself and a global anti-capitalist movement is on the rise. At a time of twists and turns, imperial conflicts and breathtaking contradictions the dialectic is once again the order of the day and with the possibilities for revolutionary change it is surely an appropriate moment to pause and take stock of Jameson's trajectory, contributions, and the debates in which his work has been central.

Finally, with a chapter that provides the other side of an exchange with Žižek on Kieślowski's films, we conclude the volume with a piece by Jameson himself on Kieślowski's *Dekalog*. Cutting through the myriad of religious and ethical criticism that surrounds Kieślowski, Jameson focuses on the formal and narrative questions raised by the *Dekalog*. There are particular affinities between the episodic structure of the *Dekalog* and the form of the short story and in this respect Jameson highlights the neglected work on narrative forms by André Jolles, especially the *casus* or trial. Stressing parallels with Boccaccio's *Decameron*, he presents the *Dekalog* as an epic tour de force that interrogates life in socialist Poland to illuminate existential choices in human life and presenting, as Jameson concludes, "a critique of morality by ethics itself."

Whereas many previous studies of Jameson focused on specific themes such as his engagement with postmodernism (Kellner, 1989; Anderson, 1998) or his literary criticism (Roberts, 2000; Helmling, 2001), the texts collected here grasp the full spectrum of Jameson's work. Jameson is undoubtedly one of the most far-reaching and multisided theorists of our time and we hope that our *Reader* will encourage debate of his protean work and its multiple effects.

1
Sartrean Origins

Sean Homer

> The productive use of earlier radicalisms . . . lies not in their triumphant reassemblage as a radical precursor tradition but in their tragic failure to constitute such a tradition in the first place. History progresses by failure rather than success . . . and it would be better to think of Lenin or Brecht (to pick a few illustrious names at random) as failures – that is, as actors and agents constrained by their own ideological limits and those of their moment of history – than as triumphant examples and models in some hagiographic or celebratory sense. (Jameson, 1991a, p. 209)

Fredric Jameson's first published work *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* (1984 [1961]) is a text that is often passed over by critics with only the briefest acknowledgement, as they focus on the later explicitly Marxist works, from *Marxism and Form* (1971) and *The Prison-House of Language* (1972) onwards. This tends to downplay the significance of Sartre in Jameson's later theoretical project – where Sartre is seen to have been superseded by the more properly Marxist precursors of Lukács, Adorno and Althusser – and more importantly, I think, dehistoricises his Marxism. Jameson's politics are frequently criticised for being narrowly North American in outlook, a criticism that is more often than not shorthand for a rejection of Marxism's totalising perspective *per se* (see Young, 1990, for just one such example). Given Jameson's unquestionable commitment to the continuation and extension of the radical agenda of Western – which is often taken to be synonymous with Western 'European' – Marxism, this is a somewhat misplaced criticism. In this chapter, therefore, I want to situate Jameson's early work within the context and politics of the New Left, as it emerged in Western Europe and North America in the 1950s and early 1960s. Jameson's study and adoption of Sartre as a role model of the politically engaged intellectual was part of the wider 'generational' radicalisation during this period. It was precisely *through* the encounter with Sartre and the limitations of existential phenomenology that Jameson came to Marxism rather than through any break with Sartrean ideas as such.

Jameson has described his 'conversion' to Sartreanism as 'rather different from more conventional modernist conversions of either the aesthetic or the philosophical type'. Unlike Kantianism, Heideggerianism or even more recently the deconstruction of Derrida, a commitment to Sartreanism was 'more a matter of a general problematic than of agreement with Sartre's own positions' (1985a, p. v). The questions finally raised by that problematic, of the relationship between culture and politics, the role of the intellectual to the party or mass movements, and, above all, the dialectical interaction between individual subjects and historical change, could only be satisfactorily resolved for Jameson by embracing a fully Marxist historical perspective. Sartre, then, must be considered something of a failure in the sense that Jameson describes Lenin and Brecht above, just as fully as Jameson's study is constrained by the historical and ideological limitations of existential phenomenology and its own historical moment. Thus, I will consider Sartre's relationship to Marxism, and in particular to the orthodoxy of the French Communist Party (PCF). Finally, I will situate Jameson's work in relation to the emergent North American New Left of the 1950s and 1960s, insofar as this inflected his reading of Marx and his political strategy.

Sartrean legacies

The figure of Sartre, along with Lukács and Adorno, remains one of the central reference points of Jameson's theoretical project. The chapter on Sartre and history in *Marxism and Form* is by far the most extended analysis of any single theorist in the book. Sartre's influence is clearly present in the existential analysis of Conrad's *Lord Jim* in *The Political Unconscious*, and in *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* we encounter a defence of Sartre's concept of totalization as a means to retain a non-reductive conception of totality. In the later works on postmodernism such as 'Transformations of the Image' (1998c) the Foucauldian and Lacanian conceptions of the gaze are dialectically presented through Sartre's notion of the 'look'. This dialectical triumvirate of Sartre – Foucault – Lacan serves to remind us of the extent to which Jameson consistently foregrounds the position of Sartre's thought as either the dialectical anti-thesis or the origin of much post-structuralist thinking. Against the established structuralist and post-structuralist doxa, that Sartre is an outmoded essentialist and foundationalist, Jameson argues that Sartrean existentialism provides the vanishing mediator or 'missing link' behind discourses such as social constructionism and queer thory (1995a). Sartre's work can also be seen to inform a number of Jameson's most important theoretical formulations. Philip Wood has drawn attention to the striking similarity between Jameson's conception of three concentric horizons of interpretation in *The Political Unconscious* and Sartre's 'hierarchy of significations' (1985, p. 23). Moreover, the proposition that history provides the absolute horizon of all reading and interpretation

exhibits more than a mere echo of *Search for a Method*, where Sartre argued that Marxism represents the one philosophy of our time that one cannot go beyond, as history forms the matrix and horizon of theory (Poster, 1982, p. 17). Finally, Jameson's continuing commitment to an analysis of 'lived experience' and the central role he accords to consciousness, in such notions as cognitive mapping, attests to the continuing presence of the central themes and concerns of classical existential phenomenology in his thinking.

There is another sense, though, in which Sartre is crucial for Jameson and more specifically for his political formation, that is, as the most prominent representative of an emergent post-Second World War New Left. In the 'Preface' to *Marxism and Form* Jameson describes the historical context in which his text was written as one devoid of an indigenous Marxist culture and influence. Readers are left with the impression that the 'discursive subject' Fredric Jameson, to borrow James Kavanagh's description (1984), emerged *sui generis* to reintroduce Marxism into the academy in 1971. As I will discuss below, there is a grain of truth in this, as the New Left suffered from what commentators and historians of the Left have called 'collective amnesia' with regard to their radical precursors (Aronowitz, 1984; Buhle, 1991; Denning, 1998), but my interest here lies with the historical conditions that allowed this particular discursive subject to emerge at that time.

The politics of criticism

The *Sartre* book was written originally as Jameson's doctoral thesis in the mid-1950s at the height of the hegemony of New Criticism (Lentricchia, 1983). From the end of the 1950s to the structuralist controversies of the late 1960s and early 1970s the radical alternative to New Criticism's conservative agenda was represented by the phenomenologically informed criticism of George Poulet and J. Hillis Miller. Jameson's study, therefore, was part of a wider attempt within the academy to break with the dominant critical paradigm of New Criticism. The choice of Sartre, though, rather than the phenomenology of Husserl or Merleau-Ponty, is significant in one important respect. As Frank Lentricchia has observed, the impact of Sartre on literary criticism in the US at the time was very slight and he was by no means an obvious choice to turn to for a phenomenologically informed critical practice (1983, pp. 44–5). By the mid-1950s Sartre was emerging as the most radical of the existential phenomenologists. As early as 1952 Merleau-Ponty had begun to distance himself from Marxism and with the publication of the *Adventures of the Dialectic* (1955) his renunciation was complete. Sartre, on the other hand, only seriously began to engage with Marxism in the mid- to late 1950s, once he had theoretically separated Marxism from the orthodoxy of the PCF. The choice of Sartre, therefore, would suggest a more overtly political intent than an initial reading of *The Origins of a Style* might suggest.

In a personal account of his own existential moment and its relationship to his later understanding of Marxism, Jameson has described Sartre as a role model of the politically engaged intellectual:

> for a whole generation of French intellectuals, but also for other Europeans, most notably the younger British left, as well as for Americans like myself, Sartre represented the model of the political intellectual, one of the few role models we had, but a sufficient one. (1982a, p. 122)

Sartre was, as Douglas Kellner has pointed out, Jameson's 'original choice', that is, the initial gesture or unjustifiable decision that, in existential terms, inaugurates one's 'project'. Kellner goes on to observe that in the fifties Sartre was received in the United States as an exemplary figure of the 'individualist radical intellectual' and a 'rebel against convention of all sorts' (1989, p. 8). In adopting Sartre as a role model, Jameson was signalling his own radical, nonconformist aspirations, while at the same time identifying with someone who to the end of his life remained staunchly individualistic. Sartre, more than any other figure on the Left, came to symbolise the figure of the *intellectual engagé*, the committed intellectual who sought to intervene politically but from outside of any mass political organisation or traditional party structure. In this respect Sartre embodies many of the strengths and weaknesses of the New Left, that is, its rejection of orthodox solutions and an openness to new forms of strategy and politics, coupled with a debilitating rejection of organisation and structure *per se*. Sartre attempted to retrieve Marxism from the dogmatism of the PCF and reassert its relevance as a radical philosophy of praxis but by remaining outside of traditional party structures he always risked the political isolation and marginalisation to which he was finally subjected. What remains most scandalous about Sartre, Jameson has recently written, is his insistence on associating politics with art and for any seriously Left critical practice it is just such an association that is most admirable about him (1995a, p. 6). One might also want to add here that it is precisely the persistent linking of politics, *economics* and art that remains scandalous about Jameson and at the same time most admirable, but to reach this point he had first to work through the failure of Sartreanism.

Philosophy at the limit

Jameson's study is organised around the central Sartrean premise of an opposition between subject and object, between consciousness and the material world. If we begin to see a rather symmetrical opposition between things and consciousness emerging from Sartre's work, notes Jameson, it is not because 'all works ought in some way to have something to do with things and something to do with consciousness but because this particular work turns out to depend constantly and insistently on such an opposition'

(1984 [1961], p. x). *The Origins of a Style* consequently returns to this subject/object opposition as it is restaged, in different terms, in Sartre's dramatic and fictional texts. For Sartre, consciousness marked the starting point for all philosophical speculation, and he maintained a lifelong commitment to the *cogito*, the individual, isolated consciousness. According to Sartre we can never have direct or immediate experience of the 'thing-in-itself'; our experience of the world is always mediated by perception. The 'thing-in-itself', which is always beyond our reach, Sartre designates as 'facticity', that is, the brute materiality of being which is irreducible to thought. The 'thing-in-itself' must be transformed, through our senses, into a 'thing-for-us'. Thus, writes Jameson, 'we necessarily humanize, we "assume" everything we come into contact with, and the basic facticity of the things around us and of our own bodies is felt only as a limit, the most stubbornly inhuman becomes human through the fact of our awareness of it' (1984 [1961], p. 13). The particularly privileged position accorded to Sartre's dramatic and literary texts in Jameson's study derives from their ability to foreground this separation of consciousness and world and enact this fundamental 'assumption' of the world around us. As soon as we put something into language or enact it, however, it is immediately alienated from the subject, it no longer 'belongs' to them but is outside of them and past. A subject can only ever anticipate a moment or act but never experience it immediately, for as soon as an act has taken place it is in the past and one can only 'assume' that it has taken place. What is important here is that one is never free to *not* have an attitude towards the past, as the past 'never really happens objectively', the subject must take up a position in relation to it (1984 [1961], p. 17). Sartre's theatrical aesthetics foregrounds this opposition between the 'facticity' of the past and the individual subject's assumption of it through its own structural play of the visual and verbal aspects of drama, or as Jameson puts it, through 'brute visual facts, the moments of pure happening; and its area of assumption: the speeches in which these events are taken up into language' (1984 [1961], p. 17). In particular, the naturalistic staging of the plays serves to both estrange their philosophical content and situate the dialogues.

Sartre's literary works consistently revolve around the necessity to 'act', not simply to accept the past and the brute materiality of the world but to take a stance in relation to it, to make a choice. In the novels the formal opposition between the verbal and visual elements disappears and the separation between consciousness and facticity must be registered through language alone, that is, through the structure of individual sentences and the overall form of the text. Thus, the primary opposition between consciousness and facticity is embodied in the very syntax and language of the text. Sartre attempted to subvert traditional narrative forms in order to register the experience of the new temporal rhythms of modernity, especially in *The Reprieve,* the second volume of the *Roads to Freedom* trilogy. By disrupting the continuity of the sentences themselves, through his use of the colon

and full stop, Sartre formally inscribes a new theory of temporality, that is, the 'conflict between the unity of time, its continuity, and the divisibility and multiplicity of the individual moments' (1984 [1961], p. 45). The notion of time concerns the way we live the world and through Sartre's punctuation we re-experience that sense of lived time. Sartre's texts, in other words, are performative and what Jameson focuses upon is not the abstract philosophical ideas as such but their effect. From this early text, therefore, we see the hallmark of all Jameson's subsequent criticism, a primary attention to form rather than content. Although it is important to register that Jameson is no mere formalist and his persistent articulation of the dialectic of ideology and utopia through cultural texts always engages form *and* content (see Homer, 1998, pp. 93–7).

The conception of a tension or contradiction between an inherited form and a modern style functioning as a figure for a wider crisis in the history of writing prefigures Jameson's later notion, in *Marxism and Form*, of the 'historical trope'. It is symptomatic of this early text, however, that Jameson fails to locate this crisis within the broader context of history, restricting his analysis to the formal and intellectual crisis as it is articulated within this particular author's philosophy and literary production. In his 1984 'Afterword' Jameson observes that the basic proposition behind the study revolved around the question of narrative and narrative closure. In Sartre's texts we find an antagonism or tension between 'the modernist tradition and Sartrean narrative or stylistic procedures' (1984 [1961], p. 205). With hindsight, notes Jameson, what is presupposed throughout the book but is never adequately addressed is the crisis of modernism, as both 'a social crisis of narratable experience, and a semiotic crisis of narrative paradigms' (1984 [1961], p. 211). Jameson will return to address this crisis throughout his career, from *Marxism and Form* (1971) to *A Singular Modernity* (2002), including studies on Wyndham Lewis (1979) and Brecht (1998), but it finds its fullest articulation in *The Political Unconscious* (1981). What each of these subsequent texts foreground, however, is an understanding of that formal, stylistic, crisis as a symptom of a wider historical crisis.

There is more than a perceived circularity to *Origins of a Style*; as Jameson himself acknowledges, Sartrean existentialism is both the object of study and the analytical method utilised. The categories Jameson employs in his analysis are the very categories of Sartre's philosophy that are under scrutiny: the 'instant', the 'act', the 'event', the 'look', the 'situation' and so on. In short, Jameson offers us a Sartrean reading of Sartre, interpreting the fictional and dramatic texts as the formal representation of Sartre's foundational philosophical opposition between subject and object. Jameson himself vigorously defends the distinction between the philosophical and the literary and dramatic texts, insisting that Sartre's plays can only be thought of as 'idea-plays' if we accept 'the "ideas" of this philosopher's play[s] are wholly different in quality from the thoughts developed in the philosophical works'

(1984 [1961], p. 3). However, there appears to be no clear distinction in his text between the different formal, stylistic and categorical requirements of philosophical and literary discourse. Jameson simply shifts register from the fictional texts to the philosophical works in order to validate his interpretation with very little attention to the distinction between the quality of ideas involved. In his analysis of temporality in *The Reprieve*, for example, Jameson observes that this reading will be 'familiar to readers of Sartre's philosophic works', where it can also be found 'unashamed and unconcealed' (1984 [1961], p. 61). When this is coupled with the overall valorization of language within the study, to the detriment of other formal considerations – in his analysis of *No Exit* Jameson writes: 'the theatre is a kind of mixture of language on the one hand and the *merely* seen sets and gestures on the other' (1984 [1961], p. 17; my italics) – one is left with the impression that Adorno's criticism of Sartre's work as merely 'thesis plays' and 'philosophical novels' is well founded. According to Adorno, however sublime ideas may be, thoughts can never be more than one of the elements of art, and in the final analysis 'Sartre's plays are vehicles for the author's ideas, which have been left behind in the race of aesthetic forms' (1977, p. 182). Peter Osborne (1992) has noted a similarly problematic shift of register in Jameson's book on Adorno (1990), where he displaces philosophical argument with rhetorical analysis in order to deflect attention from the non-Marxian aspects of Adorno's thought. This has the tendency to break off the internal investigation of Adorno's thought at the very point that his thinking approaches difficult philosophical issues and tries to resolve intrinsic contradictions through comparative references to other philosophical traditions and discourses. This is clearly not the case with the Sartre book as, unlike all subsequent works, Marxism is not at issue here and the text exhibits a remarkable self-referentiality. For readers familiar with Jameson's comprehensive grasp of contemporary philosophy and theory, not to mention literature, film, art and architecture, *Origins of a Style* is a radically different kind of text. He weaves through Sartre's literary production and the philosophical works for confirmation of his readings and interpretative strategies, but never beyond the Sartrean corpus itself. Kellner interprets the lack of citations and references to other critics in Jameson's text as a manifestation of the phenomenological desire for the 'thing-in-itself', eschewing other methodological approaches and approaching the object of study without preconceptions (1989, pp. 8–9). The hermetic nature of this particular study can also be seen to point to some of the limitations of Sartre's philosophy and Jameson's own historical location.

What is clearly missing from the Sartre book is any attempt to ground the textual analysis in history. Paradoxically, for a philosophy founded on the situatedness of consciousness and action Jameson's analysis is completely ahistorical, remaining strictly within the parameters of Sartre's thought and work. This failure to account for the conditions of possibility of Sartre's text is not simply a methodological failing on Jameson's part but one of the

limitations of existentialism. Retrospectively, we can see that the biographical frame was not only Sartre's preferred form but also 'some ultimate limit in Sartre's thought' (Jameson, 1982a, p. 118) and it is this limit that defines the horizon of Jameson's own study. As Jameson observes, most of Sartre's work stops short just at the point where 'the problem of the individual life can no longer be isolated from the society in which it is to be lived, and is suddenly subordinated to history and social change' (1984 [1961], p. 7). The necessity of moving beyond this limit has been the central focus and major achievement of Jameson's subsequent career, but it was through the work of Sartre that he first encountered it and, moreover, through that body of work that he discerned the route beyond it. In this sense the failure of the Sartre book and its very self-referentiality can be seen to inscribe the historical determinates for its own production, to which I will now turn.

Sartre and Marxism

Sartre's relationship to Marxism was always a complex and contradictory affair. In the early 1950s Sartre was not only defending Marxism but also giving his full support to the PCF. After the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 he publicly spoke out against the invasion and emerged as a formidable opponent of both the PCF and Stalinism in general. For Sartre, there were three principal obstacles to be overcome before he could fully embrace Marxism. First, there was the question of the Soviet Union, which had been seen as the embodiment of 'actually existing socialism' but was now irredeemably tainted by the show trials of the 1930s, the legacy of Stalinism and the invasion of Hungary. Second, there was the contradictory situation of the PCF, which simultaneously represented the largest organisation of the French working class and at the same time 'slavishly followed the dictates of the Soviet Union instead of developing Marxist theory into a viable path of socialism in France' (Poster, 1982, p. 11). Finally, there was the problematic status of Marxist theory itself, which, in the hands of Stalinists, had degenerated into the rigid dogma of economism rather than developed as a critical and revolutionary theory. Sartre's search for a viable form of Marxism, both politically and theoretically relevant to contemporary capitalism and divorced from the dogmatism of the Communist Party and the Soviet Union, was to be particularly influential on the generation of activists who came of age in the 1950s and 1960s. In *Marxism and Form* Jameson would argue that Marxism is not a rigid system one applies to a given state of affairs but a situated discourse, that is, an open and flexible body of thought that develops according to the specific historical circumstances. It is perfectly consistent, he writes, 'with the spirit of Marxism – with the principle that thought reflects its concrete social situation – that there should exist several different Marxisms in the world today, each answering the specific needs and problems of its own socio-economic system' (1971a, p. xviii).

As with Sartre, therefore, the task was to develop a viable form of Marxism appropriate to the needs of contemporary North American society and the unique questions raised by monopoly capitalism in the West. One aspect of Sartre's legacy that remains problematic for Marxists, however, is his individualism and the question of how one reconciles the collective project of Marxism with the existential valorization of individual freedom.

Sartre vigorously defended the independence and integrity of the intellectual and their right to free expression and free thought. As we will see below, the existential preoccupation with individual freedom and personal authenticity was to have a strong impact on the New Left. From Sartre's perspective this involved the reassertion of the role of human agency in the historical process in contradistinction to the economic reductionism of vulgar Marxism. In the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* he attempted to resolve the tension between the existential concern with individual lived experience and freedom, and Marxism's understanding of the determining role of social and historical forces. He sought to develop a 'politics which acknowledged the role of the situation – social forces, the economy, political alliances – in the play of individual freedom' through the notion of the 'group in fusion' (Poster, 1982, pp. 13–14). However, he effectively abandoned the notion of social class, developing an elaborate theory of the 'group' as the primary site of struggle and individual intervention. In line with much New Left thinking Sartre saw social class and the pivotal role accorded to it by classical Marxism as largely irrelevant to advanced capitalist states and proposed the theory of the group as an alternative conception of historical agency. Jameson retains this fundamental problematic of grasping both poles of history and articulating the dialectic of individual praxis and historical forces, of agent and structure – indeed, this aspect of his work is frequently criticised for its residual 'humanism' (see Goldstein, 1989; Horne, 1989) – but he sees the notion of the group as an insufficient mediation between the two. Hence, in *Marxism and Form* Jameson will return to the question of freedom, but now, mediated by the work of Friedrich Schiller and Herbert Marcuse, the whole notion of freedom transcends the individual and figures forth a utopian desire for a radically alternative society. The idea of freedom, writes Jameson, takes the temporal form of 'a sudden perception of an intolerable present which is at the same time, but implicitly and however dimly articulated, the glimpse of another state in the name of which the first is judged' (1971a, p. 85). In this sense, the concept of freedom transcends the individual subject and functions as the privileged tool of a political hermeneutics. It is the very idea of freedom that keeps alive the revolutionary hopes of the past in the barren times of the present, against which the present is judged. The concept of freedom signals an 'awakening of dissatisfaction in the midst of all that is–at one . . . with the birth of the negative itself' and 'an ontological impatience in which the constraining situation . . . is for the first

time perceived' (pp. 84–5). I will return to the question of freedom and the political hermeneutics of Schiller and Marcuse below.

Sartre's rectification of orthodox Marxism was necessary but ultimately flawed, as he tilted the balance of history too far in favour of individual agents. Sartre overestimated the role of individual actors and their historical consciousness in the progress of history and fell prey to voluntarism. For Jameson, Marxism has not one but two languages, or codes, with which it can speak: it can articulate the processes of history objectively in terms of the development of economic modes of production (as in *Capital*) or subjectively as the history of class struggle (as in *The Communist Manifesto*). Sartre took the second of these routes, while simply assuming the first. Social class provides the essential mediation between individual historical agents and those larger objective forces of history, and without the notion of social class Sartre was ultimately unable to link individual experience to historical process. Class affiliation in Marxist terms is never defined ahistorically, but always as 'a particular relationship to a particular, determinate mode of production' (Jameson, 1971a, p. 283). Unlike Sartre's *Critique*, then, Marxism's two codes are dialectically related and mediated by social class, and neither can be privileged at the expense of the other. Jameson's critique of Sartre in *Marxism and Form* highlights the necessity of moving beyond the limits of philosophy as well as his earlier study, and grounding Sartre's literary and political project in history. In this respect Jameson's political trajectory must also be located within a much broader process of political radicalization, that is to say, the politics of the New left.

The New Left

Jameson's formative political experience was marked by two interrelated events, the aftermath of McCarthyism and the emergence of the New Left. The New Left developed out of a complex historical conjuncture of international events (Kruschev's 'secret' speech to the twentieth party congress in the Soviet Union and the attempted destalinization of Soviet communism, the 1956 invasion of Hungary and the haemorrhaging of communist party membership that followed, the cultural revolution in China and the successful Cuban revolution, the Korean and later the Vietnam War as well as wars of national liberation throughout Africa) and national political movements (the civil rights movement of the 1950s, the student and new social movements of the 1960s). The New Left was vociferously internationalist in perspective but did not represent a unified political programme or position, and it is not my aim here to outline the politics of the New Left but rather to draw out certain strands of New Left thinking and strategy insofar as they impact on Jameson's own formation (see Jameson, 1984; Kavanagh and Jameson, 1984b for his own periodization and institutional account of this conjuncture).

For socialists and Marxists in post-Second World War US one of the most pernicious and pervasive after-effects of McCarthyism, as many historians of the North American Left have pointed out, is the sense of 'collective amnesia' that it left behind. As radical intellectuals from the 1930s and 1940s were 'jailed, lost jobs, were deported or went into exile, were unable to publish, reedited their earlier work and downplayed their earlier affiliations, or, in some cases, killed themselves' (Denning, 1998, p. 425), the new generation of radicals coming of age in the 1950s was left without a strong sense of its own political past. Paul Buhle suggests that one of the distinguishing characteristics of this younger generation of radicals – with the exception of the children of the Old Left, the 'red diaper babies' – was that they 'grew up almost completely ignorant of the struggles that had passed by' (1991, p. 226). He continues: 'the feeling of starting over began here for the simple reason that the existing organisations and ideas seemed so obviously inadequate to the civil rights revolution or to the problem of nuclear disarmament. Perhaps not since the turn of the century had the sense of virginal beginnings been so absolute' (p. 227). The aspirant Marxists of the New Left 'felt instinctively that the weakness of this generation was its lack of firm training in the critical traditions of thought which Europeans seemed to understand so well' (p. 239). The Frankfurt School seemed to anticipate the problematic of the American New Left and provide it with a model of critical practice, but their pessimistic analysis of American popular culture distanced them from the spirit of the New Left; 'the Frankfurters, in their peculiarly European despair, were unable to feel the real pulse of resistance in American popular life' (p. 229). It is this historical context that Jameson delineates in the Preface to *Marxism and Form*, the sense of lacking a viable Marxist intellectual tradition and the pervasive pragmatism and positivism of US culture and intellectual life. Indeed, *Marxism and Form*, along with Bartell Ollman's *Alienation*, represents a key text in the second-generation recovery of the vitality and richness of the Marxist tradition, a richness and vitality that had stagnated and disappeared through the Cold War and McCarthyism (Denning, 1998, p. 433).

The idea of the New Left spontaneously inventing itself in the 1950s and 1960s is a nice romantic myth but not exactly accurate. The New Left was far from ignorant of its radical heritage and there were many links between the Old and New Left. In his study of the 1930s, *The Cultural Front*, Michael Denning traces the history of North America's radical past and its rediscovery by the New Left. The New Left's prioritization of feminism, race and ethnicity were all prefigured by debates within the popular front of the 1930s and figures such as Herbert Marcuse and C. Wright Mills were key intellectuals in the transition from the Old to the New Left. Miller (1994) also suggests that it is misleading to see the early New Left as 'innocent of ideology' and politically naïve. The Students who met at Port Huron in 1962 were widely read and relatively astute, although their political outlook was scarcely orthodox.

Indeed, Denning argues that there is a strong link between the League of Professional's 1932 pamphlet *Culture and the Crisis*, a central document of the cultural front, and the *Port Huron Statement* three decades later. Jameson's own political collaborator of many years, Stanley Aronowitz, has also written of the links between the Old and New Left. Drawing on his own background in 1950s unionism and labour politics, Aronowitz (1984) observes that the sixties really began for him in 1962 when he – like other figures of the Old Left, as well as organisations such as the League for Industrial Democracy and the Reform Democrats – became involved with the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). If the Students rejected both the electoral aspirations of the reform Democrats and the labourism of the old union organisations, the Old Left could still act as advisors and facilitators to the SDS and other student bodies.

On a practical and organisational level therefore co-operation existed between the Old and New Left, but at the same time there was a *perception* by the young radicals that the New Left marked a break with the past and was part of a new historical conjuncture. There was a strong 'generational' element to the politics of the 1960s that manifested itself through suspicion and mistrust. While a number of the older radicals 'qualified as aides, or as mentors for specific occasions', Buhle observes, the new generation felt 'no cause to trust anyone over thirty in matters of political guidance' (1991, p. 228). The New Left attempted to erase its radical heritage and forge a completely new beginning. Aronowitz describes this as a specifically American phenomenon in two senses: first, it tried to invent a new past that served the present rather than the 'truth' of the past, and second, in a kind of Nietzschean way, the New Left 'proclaimed the triumph of the will, the limitless capacity to shape the future in its own image' (1984, p. 25). The sense of collective amnesia and starting anew was not entirely a North American experience though and was equally shared by the British New Left (see Thompson, 1978). If the New Left was not exactly self-creating, there was certainly a *perception* that the historical situation had radically changed and a *feeling* that things must start over anew. Denning has usefully characterized this shift in perception through Raymond Williams' concept of 'structure of feeling'; while there was a great deal of continuity between the Old and New Left they can be seen to represent different structures of feeling.

The New Left as a *structure of feeling*

The New Left marked a distinct break from the politics of the Old Left in two key respects: first, it prioritised issues of culture rather than economics, and second, it insisted on the need to reformulate the concept of historical agency. The Old Left was seen to be constrained by an economic rationality that disproportionately emphasised the determining role of the economy and the importance of industrial struggles. The New Left challenged the

priority accorded to what C. Wright Mills was to call the 'labour metaphysic' (1969), as simply a legacy of nineteenth century Marxism, that was no longer relevant to the conditions of an affluent consumer society. While previous generations of political activists saw the labour movement as the vanguard of social change, the newly emerging social movements of the 1960s define themselves in opposition to this labour metaphysic. Contrary to orthodox Marxist analysis, the New Left emerged during a period of economic growth and consumer affluence and without the two basic historical conditions thought to be central to mass radicalism, that is to say, an economic crisis and working-class militancy (Buhle, 1991, p. 222). For the students of the 1960s the absence of these two central prerequisites of Marxism's historical narrative appeared to finally and irrevocably discredit its teleology. The two most pressing dilemmas faced by the New Left therefore were, one, the need to reformulate the concept of revolutionary agency, and two, the necessity to develop a coherent theory and politics 'equal to the ambition of naming, and overcoming, a system for which the available analyses had fallen short' (p. 222).

For the New Left the question of agency and social change in advanced capitalist countries was seen to be more ambiguous and less clear cut than traditional Marxism portrayed it. The Marxian conception of the working class as *the* agent of historical and social change was no longer felt to be tenable; the working class was still regarded by the New Left as *one* form of historical agency, but by no means the only form or, necessarily, the most advanced revolutionary form. New historical agents were asserting themselves through the civil rights movement, feminism, black consciousness, the anti-war and peace movements and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Moreover, many of these movements were seen to propose more radical agendas than the traditional labour unions. In *The Political Unconscious* Jameson's sympathy for the new social movements finds expression in a long footnote wherein he argues for an *alliance politics* as the 'privileged form' of renewed Left politics in the US (1981a, p. 54, n. 31). At the time Jameson was criticised by many on the Left for an incipient liberal pluralism. Eagleton (1986a,b), for instance, argued that Jameson's strategy defused 'the less comfortable political realities of Marxism itself – realities of which one is likely to be kept constantly mindful only in a society with a more militant working-class movement' (1986b, p. 81). With hindsight, however, Eagleton was writing at the tale-end of a period of working-class militancy in the UK that stalled in the early to mid-1980s with the defeat of the 1984 Miners strike as well as the local authority workers of the metropolitan councils and the Greater London Council (GLC). When the British Left once again re-emerged with anything approaching the militancy of the 1970s and 1980s it would do so precisely under the banner of the Socialist *Alliance*. From a more global perspective the notion of networking and alliance politics is also central to political formation of the anti-capitalist movement and the

various continent wide and world social forums. Two decades later it would appear that Jameson's diagnosis of the North American Left may be more pertinent to a European and, indeed, global context than when it was first written.

New Left politics can also be seen to have inflected Jameson's Marxism in another key respect. The New Left was intricately tied to the enormous expansion of what Mills identified in the 1950s as the 'cultural apparatus' (1963), that is to say, those institutions involved in the production, distribution and consumption of art, entertainment, information and knowledge, from the media industries through the universities to the corporate research institutes. From the 1920s to the 1950s there was an unprecedented expansion of the cultural apparatus in the US (see Denning, 1998, p. 49) and by the late 1950s the student body saw itself as a historical agent in its own right and the universities as a key site of political struggle. As the signatories of the *Port Huron Statement* put it:

> In a time of supposed prosperity, moral complacency, and political manipulation, a new left cannot rely on only aching stomachs to be the engine force of social reform. The case for change, for alternatives that will involve uncomfortable personal efforts, must be argued as never before. The university is a relevant place for such activities.
>
> (quoted in Miller, 1994, p. 14)

The *Port Huron Statement* was formulated in June 1962 as the manifesto of the SDS and, arguably, represents one 'of the pivotal documents in post-war American history' (Miller, 1994, p. 13). The North American New Left was largely a student led movement and this was both its strength and its weakness. It was a strength in the sense that the New Left was not encumbered with many of the doctrinaire and bureaucratic ideas of the Old Left, and was, therefore, able to break with traditional forms of struggle and develop new forms of organisation and practices of participatory democracy. It was also a weakness in that the refusal to adopt conventional forms of political organisation tended towards a rejection of organisation *per se*, and within a few short years the New Left was to collapse in disarray and factional infighting. The emphasis this new generation was to place on personal integrity and authenticity, with its strong Sartrean overtones, also defines one of the limits of New Left politics. The New Left rejected conventional politics and, as Miller observes, the *Port Huron Statement* is remarkable precisely for the 'freshness of its vision, the candour of its sentiments, the fervour of its moral tone' (1994, p. 14), which owed little to either mainstream liberalism or orthodox Marxism. Not since the 1930s had there been such an attempt to invent an indigenous radical discourse, a discourse which explicitly refused the rhetoric of socialism, worker's control and above all Marxism (Aronowitz, 1984). The New Left sought a new discourse to authenticate

their own social and personal experience. For Christopher Lasch there was a strong Oedipal tenor to the New Left, whereby the 'search for personal integrity could lead only to a politics in which "authenticity" was equated with the degree of one's alienation, the degree of one's willingness to undertake existential acts of defiance' (1973, p. 168). The New Left, therefore, tended to vacillate between moments of existential despair and vastly inflated ideas of its own potential.

The New Left rejected the Old Left analysis of the state as the principal vehicle of social transition and industry as the primary site of struggle on the grounds that the historical development of capitalism had already outpaced the traditional role assigned to the working class. Furthermore, the New Left saw the state and the whole apparatus of corporate liberalism as itself part of the problem and not as a lever of social change. What distinguished the New Left, therefore, was not simply a rejection of 'vulgar' or 'economic' Marxism but also the whole rhetoric of liberalism and the corporate state. As Staughton Lynd puts it, 'the celebrated New Left revolt against authority [was] especially a revolt against paternalistic, indirect authority which hides the hand of power in the glove of verbal idealism'. The white New Left, he continues, 'discovered corporate liberalism not only in the oppression of American blacks and Vietnamese guerrillas, but in their own lives as well. Educational institutions at all levels were perceived as part of the system' (1969, p. 9). Academic establishments were seen not as enlightened institutions of liberal humanism but as intrinsic parts of an oppressive system and crucial sites of struggle in their own right. An acute contradiction was perceived between the universities' espoused purpose as the embodiment of humane values and their function as 'knowledge factories' integral to a repressive state and cultural apparatus. The *Port Huron Statement* succinctly captured this contradiction:

> Our professors and administrators sacrifice controversy to public relations; their curriculums change more slowly than the living events of the world; their skills and silence are purchased by investors in the arms race; passion is called unscholastic. (Hayden, 1971, p. 391)

For the signatories of the *Port Huron Statement*, the university could be seen to occupy a privileged position in relation to other institutions of social change in four key respects. First, it was located in a permanent position of social influence through its role of forming social attitudes. Second, in an increasingly complex world the university is the central institution through which knowledge is accumulated, evaluated and transmitted. Third, the university is a key component in the military-industrial complex, particularly through the Defence Departments' funding of research. Finally, the university was seen to be the only mainstream institution open to the participation of a variety of ideological perspectives and viewpoints. These four aspects of

the university, that is, social relevance, the accessibility of knowledge, its structural contradictions and internal openness, made it a primary force in any movement for social change and a potential launch pad for more widespread social activism.

In an article with James Kavanagh (1984), Jameson has himself reflected on this situation of campus radicalism and the relationship of Marxism to the more esoteric concerns of literary studies. In language reminiscent of the *Port Huron Statement*, Jameson and Kavanagh describe the potential for literary studies to break through the complacency of bourgeois educational and cultural institutions by challenging the views of students, at precisely those points that their ideological defences are at their most relaxed, and thus providing the basis for more significant political interventions. While the universities, and literary studies in particular, may seem an unusual site for the resurgence of Marxism, being somewhat detached from the fray of political and economic strife, the authors argue, to the contrary 'it is perhaps in the "weakest links" of bourgeois ideological domination – those areas where political and economic structures are less directly at stake – that Marxism can find the opportunity for its most daring advances' (Kavanagh and Jameson, 1984, p. 1). Cultural politics were no longer seen by the New Left as merely suprastructural epiphenomenon but as a crucial component for the development of socialist politics in general:

> The analysis of literary and cultural texts and the tasks of "cultural revolution" in general, then, increasingly appear as central, not secondary, to socialist political strategies – necessary conditions for transforming the patterns of ideological closure and political passivity that are enforced in societies like ours less by fear of the police than by fascination with the page or screen. (1984, p. 3)

As individual and group identities are no longer defined first and foremost in relation to work, in the sense of a classical Marxian proletariat, but through cultural and institutional practices, the cultural apparatus became increasingly central for Left political strategy. In short, the New Left marks a 'cultural turn' in left-wing theory and practice. *Marxism and Form* is prime example of this cultural turn and, while it provides a comprehensive assessment of Marxist theories of literature, there is an absence from the text of any sustained consideration of Marxian political theory. As Perry Anderson writes in his reflections on the trajectory of Western Marxism and in particular on the gulf that opened up between Western Marxism's philosophical sophistication and its lack of political and economic analysis, '[i]t is significant that the only work of real quality ranging widely over Western Marxism as a whole, should be an aesthetic study: Fredric Jameson's *Marxism and Form*' (1976, p. 78, n. 14).

Aesthetics as politics

What is important to keep in mind here is that aesthetics do not function for Jameson as a diversion from politics but always as a figure for a more fundamental political struggle. As we saw above with the concept of freedom, its value resides not as an expression of individual desire but as an ontological impatience with the constraints of the present. Similarly, for Jameson, the value of Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* (1794) is not that it offers us aesthetics as a diversion or substitute for politics but that, on the contrary, it aims at preserving the protopolitical character of the aesthetic for a world wearied by politics. Jameson reads Schiller's aesthetics as one of the earliest meditations on cultural revolution (see Homer, 1998, pp. 46–7, for a discussion of cultural revolution), as it is only after revolutionary change that 'the new man' and a post-acquisitive human nature emerge. As Jameson writes:

> In art, consciousness prepares itself for change in the world itself and at the same time learns to make demands on the real world which hasten change: for the experience of the imaginary offers (in an imaginary mode) that total satisfaction of the personality and of Being in the light of which the real world stands condemned, in the light of which the Utopian idea, the revolutionary blueprint may be conceived.
>
> (1971a, p. 90)

Insofar as art awakens our discontent with the present and desire for a radically alternative future, it functions as a figure for freedom in general. The problem with Schiller's hermeneutic system, however, is that it is diagnostic rather than prophetic. Schiller places his utopian idyll against which the present is judged in the past (in classical Greece) rather than in the future, as a desire to which we can aspire. Thus, in Ernst Bloch's terminology, Schiller's system maps a compensatory and ultimately conservative utopia rather than an anticipatory one. Schiller provides Jameson with a hermeneutic model that facilitates the retrieval of what he will later designate as the political unconscious of texts. This model, however, was developed to address a rather different situation than that of post-Second World War North America and a significantly different cultural context. In order to address this specific context Jameson turned to the work of another key theorist of the New Left, Herbert Marcuse.

Marcuse's work aimed at a rethinking of earlier systems of Schiller, Hegel, Marx and Freud in light of the new socio-economic climate of post-Second World War capitalism. He was a central figure in the New Left of the 1960s, sharing the critique of Marxism's traditional class-based analysis of historical agency and, unlike his former associates in the Frankfurt School, Adorno and

Horkheimer, was sympathetic to the new social and student movements. The dilemma within advanced capitalism, argued Marcuse, was that the working class had been assimilated into the values and politics of the middle class. As Jameson puts it, 'his analysis raises precisely the problem of happiness, and forces us to ask whether people can know what is good for them, whether the social good can be judged in terms of a subjective feeling of contentment, in a world in which brainwashing and manipulation exist as everyday mechanisms' (1971a, p. 108). Marcuse's work is clearly open to the traditional critique of its philosophical and cultural elitism, but Jameson sees its value in another direction, that of the nature of negation itself. What has been lost in consumer society and its over abundance is any sense of the negative, and it is only through the process of negation that a genuinely human existence can be achieved. As Adorno was to formulate a theory of the negative in relation to philosophy and aesthetics, Marcuse sought to elaborate a theory of negation in the psychological and socio-economic spheres. In *Eros and Civilization*, for example, he was to argue that libidinal repression no longer operated in the classical Freudian sense. With the widespread collapse of traditional family structures and the general liberalization of sexual values both the Oedipus complex and the superego had been significantly weakened. But rather than freeing the individual in some kind of Reichian sexual utopia, this in-effect denied the subject genuine psychic individuation that is achieved through the revolt against the father. Thus, in consumer society we are faced not with the classical problems of repression and sublimation but with the paradoxical situation of 'repressive desublimation'. In other words, the very notion of tolerance in our society can be said to be repressive. At a political level this is recapitulated with the impossibility of effectively negating the system in general, as every attempt at cancelling the system is simply recuperated into the system itself. For Marcuse the idea of negation can only be retrieved through the utopian impulse, but, unlike Schiller's positive alternative to the present, this impulse itself has to undergo a dialectical reversal:

> The utopian idea . . . keeps alive the possibility of a world qualitatively distinct from this one and takes the form of the stubborn negation of all that is. (p. 111)

The utopian impulse, in other words, replaces the function of art in Schiller and embodies the latest form of a hermeneutics of freedom, a hermeneutics of freedom fully appropriate to meet the demands of over-abundance in consumer society. As with the New Left in general, Jameson has always maintained a strong utopian aspect in his thinking. Unlike those elements of the New Left I criticised earlier, however, for overestimating the potential for realising their own desires, for Jameson the utopian impulse is always provisional. It is never an end in itself but rather a dress rehearsal for the

real thing, social revolution. Any hermeneutics of freedom is necessarily limited, unless it comes to stand as a figure for freedom in general and the negation of the present. Jameson, therefore, transcends the individualism of Sartre and the politics of authenticity of the New Left by emphasising the negativity of human desire and happiness:

> [I]t is only when individual happiness, subjective contentment, is not positive . . . but rather negative, as a symbolic refusal of everything which that society has to offer, that happiness can recover its right to be thought of as a measure and an enlargement of human possibilities. (p. 112)

There is another important factor that came into play with the cultural politics of the New Left and which I can only briefly mention here, that is, the transformation of the sphere of culture itself. The New Left of the 1950s represented the first generation of activists born into the world of the cultural industries, the era of television, mass communication and a ubiquitous mass culture. Unlike its forebears, the émigré Marxists of the 1930s and 1940s, the New Left did not share an unreserved reverence for European high culture and the printed word, but turned its attention towards genre fiction, popular music and the cinema (Buhle, 1991; Denning, 1998). In contrast to the critique of Communist Party intellectuals and the exiles from Frankfurt, the New Left embraced 'mass' culture as a potentially radical and democraticing force (see Denning, pp. 454–62). Jameson's *oeuvre* might seem to differentiate him from this general trend of New Left academics, as his main published works up to the mid-1980s all centred on the canon of literary modernism – Balzac, Flaubert, Conrad and Joyce, for example, as well as Sartre, Gissing and Wyndham Lewis. At the same time, however, he has directed equally serious attention to such popular forms as crime thrillers, science-fiction and the Hollywood blockbuster, and since the mid-1980s Jameson's work has paid less attention to the canonical works of European realism and modernism, as his work has expanded beyond the limits of literary studies to the broader field of cultural studies.

Conclusion: Marxism and the New Left

The relationship between the New Left and Marxism was ambivalent in the sense that the New Left sought to define itself against the authoritarian Marxism of the Soviet Union and what it saw as the 'scholasticism' of the Old Left. While the Old Left did not 'like to admit relations with any other ideology', it preferred to remain 'virginal and lonely', the New Left actively sought alliances with other political and philosophical traditions (Zinn, 1969, p. 59). New Left politics displayed an openness and pluralism which

stemmed, on the one hand, from a rejection of the sectarian legacy of the past, and on the other, from the perceived lack of a strong theoretical and political foundation, as the indigenous traditions of Marxism and socialism no longer seemed adequate to the task at hand. As Aronowitz suggests, it was not simply the Cold War and McCarthyism that caused the students of the SDS to reject Marxism, but also 'the passion for a fundamental break with the radical past, with the sectarian debates, foreign subcultures and sterile programs' (1984, p. 41). The communist and socialist heritage of the US seemed simply irrelevant to many of those involved in the developing struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. The New Left, therefore, looked elsewhere, and in particular to Europe, to the existential-Marxism of Sartre and the critical theory of Herbert Marcuse and the Frankfurt School. What distinguished the resurgent Marxism of the late 1960s and early 1970s from the previous generation of Marxist activists was that it had absorbed many of the lessons of the New Left. Most crucially Marxism was seen as an open discourse that needed to engage with other ideologies and currents of thought. Indeed, for Jameson, it is one of the defining characteristics of Marxism that for whatever reason it does not appear to 'exclude the adherence to some other kind of philosophy' (1971a, p. 207), a practice to which his own career amply testifies, as he has consistently been (mis)labelled a 'structuralist' Marxist, a 'post-structuralist' Marxist and most recently a 'postmodern' Marxist.

Distanced from their own national traditions and resources American intellectuals looked to Western Europe for role models, and for Jameson this meant initially the figure of Jean-Paul Sartre and later the Frankfurt School. Jameson would retain Sartre's commitment to the situational and lived experience, but the whole paraphernalia of authenticity and individual freedom would be reformulated through the political hermeneutics of Schiller and Marcuse. From the Frankfurt School Jameson would derive the central function of negation in aesthetics, the psyche and the socio-economic sphere, as the critical concept for any contemporary hermeneutics of freedom and utopian desire. In this respect Jameson's path to Marxism was part of a generational shift, a generation 'whose members moved to the most radical alternatives within contemporary politics and theory' (Kellner, 1989, p. 9). On the one hand, the turn to Western Europe signalled the 'isolation of the radical intelligentsia in the McCarthyist era and its aftermath, which lacked a tradition at hand which could be brought to bear on its cultural concerns or which could politically mobilise it or offer models of radical self-identification', and on the other, it signified a search for new theoretical resources appropriate to the given historical moment. For Jameson, then, the path through Sartre and the New Left to Marxism was not simply a case of following the trajectory of Sartre's own political thought. On the contrary, Jameson's 'conversion' to Marxism was more a consequence of his encounter with a particular problematic at the limits of existential

phenomenology, a problematic at the limits of human agency and social change, of the isolated cultural artefact and its place in history. This problematic could only be successfully articulated and resolved if Sartre's own discourse could be reinserted into history, and for this Jameson required a more fully dialectical view of agency and history.

2

The American Lukács? Fredric Jameson and Dialectical Thought

Christopher Pawling

> reality can only be understood and penetrated as a totality, and only a subject which is itself a totality is capable of this penetration. (Lukács)

> it is ultimately always of the social totality itself that it is a question in representation, and never more so than in the present age of a multinational global corporate network. (Jameson)[1]

In March 1992 Fredric Jameson was interviewed for a book on the legacy of the Hungarian Marxist Georg Lukács after the fall of Communism. For those interested in the early development of Jameson's ideas the interview offers some fascinating, if brief, recollections of a young American student in the 1950s, encountering the work of Lukács for the first time. In his conversation with the interviewer, Eva Corredor, Jameson recalls studying in Berlin in 1956, in the period before the Berlin Wall was erected. He remembers the excitement of going across to the East to fetch back 'those big blue volumes of Lukács' literary and philosophical essays, without having any idea of the kind of debates that were to rage around them in the German Democratic Republic in those days, and without, of course, the benefit of *History and Class Consciousness*, which remained unpublished in English and even more legendary until much later' (Corredor, 1997, pp. 75–6).

These, then, were the early days of post-War Marxism, when the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* (1971, [1922]) was still waiting to be rediscovered by the New Left and those currents of Marxist thought developing in opposition to Stalinist Communism. As Slavoj Žižek has noted, Lukács' book 'led a kind of underground spectral existence of an "undead" entity, circulating in pirated editions among the German students in the 1960s, available in some rare translations (like the legendary French one from 1959)' (Žižek, 2000, p. 151). If one came across Lukács at all, especially in translation, it was likely to be what one might term the 'middle period' Lukács of the thirties, forties and fifties, the author of essays which focused

on realism and the historical novel.[2] The young Jameson was luckier than most of his compatriots, as he hints in the interview, as his fluency in German gave him access to a broader corpus of Lukács' works than the average Anglo-American scholar. Nevertheless, he was still unaware of the potentially 'unorthodox' nature of Lukács' early philosophical writings and the more interactive, dialectical Marxism of 'underground' texts such as *History and Class Consciousness* or Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* (1970).

Prior to the late 1960s, most students of literature in the West were introduced to Lukács as a Marxist critic who offered provocative readings of canonic European authors such as Dickens, Tolstoy, Zola and Mann. (My own introduction to Lukács was very much in keeping with this development, with *The Historical Novel* being recommended as a key text on a first-year introductory course on the novel taught by the novelist and critic David Lodge at the University of Birmingham.) Jameson recalls that in the 1950s and early 1960s Lukács was seen a maverick figure, clearly beyond the pale for the orthodox Anglo-American criticism of the time, and that this lent a certain forbidden attraction to his work, even that of the middle-period proponent of 'critical realism':

> I read somewhere about what was described as a preposterous piece of Marxist criticism in which Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* was interpreted as an allegory of the breakdown of Prussia and of the authoritarian Junker personality. I found that a strange but fascinating idea and later on came to associate the name of Lukács with it.
>
> (Corredor, 1997, p. 75)

Jameson's remarks here will undoubtedly strike a chord with those who can recall the apolitical, formalistic nature of literary studies at this time. The 'shock of the new', as represented by Lukácsian criticism, can be seen in the way it provoked a violent, contradictory response in its Western academic readership: for those in authority his analysis of *Death in Venice* was openly 'preposterous' and yet for the young Jameson, searching for a more dialectical and historically grounded approach to literary analysis, it was clearly provocative in a much more creative and stimulating manner. Of course, texts such as *The Historical Novel* and *Studies in European Realism* were, to a certain extent, the products of Stalinism but to fledgling radical students, such as the young Jameson, they offered a way of connecting the study of literature with the realm of political struggle and historical change.

Jameson does not mention which of Lukács' essays on Mann caught his eye (the phrase 'I read somewhere . . . ' suggests that he picked up the reference at second-hand, perhaps through a review), but the analysis of *Death in Venice* which he recalls seems close to that of the 1945 essay, 'In Search of Bourgeois Man' (translated in the 1964 collection, *Essays on Thomas Mann*). Here Lukács argues that Mann is 'an extreme type of the writer whose greatness lies in being a "mirror of the world" ' (Lukács, 1964, p. 16) – in his

case the world of the German bourgeoisie at the turn of the century. At the same time, Mann's fictional writings do not simply register the ideology of the middle class and Junkerdom in an uncritical, one-sided fashion. As Lukács comments, 'Mann's stories never reflect the day-to-day moods of the German middle-class. Rather the reverse: as he matured, the more firmly did he oppose the prevailing reactionary trends' (Lukács, 1964, p. 15).

So, for Lukács the story *Death in Venice* revolves around an unresolved dilemma which lies at the heart of *fin de siècle* German culture: namely, whether to embrace discipline and 'composure' or 'emotional anarchy'. At a public, ideological level the Mann of pre-First World War Wilhelminian Germany maintains a certain Prussian aloofness from the potentially anarchic, 'decadent' side of bourgeois culture. Yet, his narratives cannot help but reveal the underlying contradiction in his Weltanschauung, allegorising 'the breakdown of Prussia and the authoritarian Junker personality', as Jameson observes. Hence the writer-hero of *Death in Venice*, Gustav Aschenbach, who has 'earned his fame by writing an epic on Frederick the Great' (Lukács, 1964, pp. 25–6), and who represents the code of Prussian 'composure' par excellence, falls prey to doubts and uncertainties which come flooding through in what Jameson will subsequently term the 'political unconscious' of the narrative. As Lukács explains:

> He [Gustav Aschenbach] creates a perfectly formed life and an impressive body of work on the basis of the 'composure' ethic. Both life and work rise above the vulgar everyday with a stern pride, above both its small-minded philistinism and its equally small-minded anarchist bohemianism. But it takes only a little conflict, provoked by scarcely anything tangible, and a dream within this conflict, for the 'composure' to break hopelessly, irresistibly down as if it had never been the product of a sincere, self-denying, hard-won life. 'That night he had a fearful dream – if dream be the right word for a mental and physical experience which did indeed befall him in deep sleep, a thing quite apart and real to his senses, yet without seeing himself as present in it. Rather its theatre seemed to be his own soul, and the events burst from outside, violently overcoming the proud resistance of his spirit; passed through him and left him, left the whole cultural superstructure of a lifetime trampled on, ravaged and destroyed.' (Lukács, 1964, p. 24)

In *Marxism and Form* Jameson refers to Lukács' reading of *Death in Venice* as 'one of the most famous of all Marxist analyses' (Jameson, 1971a, p. 400) and I would argue that it holds a key to Jameson's own work, particularly his concept of the 'political unconscious'. It is well known that Lukács sees Mann as an important example of a Critical Realism which attempts to totalise the experience of bourgeois existence in the midst of increasing fragmentation. Unlike Lukács' *bête noires*, the Expressionists, whose work he sees as accentuating social and cultural breakdown, Realists such as

Mann supposedly defend the values of a humanist culture in the face of political crisis and an emerging fascism. Yet it is possible to argue that there is more to the analysis of *Death in Venice* than a simple search for philosophical and aesthetic coherence. The final sentence of the quoted passage highlights a process of disintegration which completely undermines the 'proud resistance' of Aschenbach's spirit, leaving him 'ravaged and destroyed'. Moreover, this is not simply a personal trauma, as Mann points out, since it leaves 'the whole *cultural structure* of a lifetime trampled on'. On the eve of the First World War, the search for coherence and totality seems to be more of a chimera than an achievable goal. As Lukács observes, Aschenbach's gloomy 'self-judgement' effectively 'forms the balance sheet of Mann's pre-war work', drawing a line under the Prussian 'philosophy of composure' and highlighting his 'deeply pessimistic irony' at this time (Lukács, 1964, p. 24).

The more one examines Lukács' mode of analysis of *Death in Venice*, the more one sees that, in some ways, it prefigures Jameson's own critical protocol in *The Political Unconscious*, where he states that his aim is to combine 'the methodological imperative implicit in the concept of totality or totalization, and the quite different attention of a "symptomal" analysis to discontinuities, rifts, actions at distance, within a merely apparently unified cultural text' (Jameson, 1981a, p. 57). In 'The Idealism of American Criticism' Terry Eagleton chides Jameson for 'a certain native pragmaticism' in attempting to unite a Machereyan hermeneutic of textual slippages and discontinuities with a Lukácsian emphasis on totality, implying that the two approaches are ultimately irreconcilable (Eagleton, 1986a, p. 61) However, it is questionable whether these admittedly different analytical procedures are so hermetically sealed and antipathetic that they are incapable of a meaningful dialogue. Certainly, if one considers Lukács' own critical practice, the analysis of *Death in Venice* does uncover the textual equivalent of a geological fault which gives us access to the 'political unconscious' of Mann's discourse and which effectively undermines the ideological 'project' of Prussian discipline and 'composure'. Lukács was no great enthusiast for Freud, as his autobiographical reflections demonstrate, and one would not want to claim that he was the forerunner of a psychoanalytic or deconstructive approach to Marxist criticism. Nevertheless, his reading of *Death in Venice* highlights the way in which the textual drive for philosophical and aesthetic harmony falls prey to a 'political unconscious' of discontinuity and uncertainty, so that, as Jameson observes, 'the appearance of formal unification is unmasked as a failure or an ideological mirage' (Jameson, 1981a, p. 56).

In *Marxism and Form* Jameson argues that 'the most essential feature of Marxism as a mental operation' is its ability to produce 'the shock of a genuine enlargement or regrounding' of our cultural perceptions in a 'brutal passage from some "inner truth of existence" to the external world of history' (Jameson, 1971a, p. 400). Hence the best Marxist criticism marks itself out from its rivals by decentring the text from a bourgeois characterology, based

on individual existence and trauma, to a more collective 'unconscious' of political motivation. For Jameson, this paradigmatic shift is perfectly exemplified in Lukács' analysis of *Death in Venice*:

> So it is that when, in one of the most famous of all Marxist analyses, Lukács interprets the story of *Death in Venice* in political terms, he seems to have reversed the very inner logic of the work itself, whose subject is indeed the breakthrough of the unconscious itself, with its characteristic welling up of the repressed and of the symbolically invested into Aschenbach's conscious mind. The shock involved in the notion that the fate of the biographer of Frederick the Great [i.e. Aschenbach] is emblematic of the disintegration of Prussia itself, with its mixture of the repressive-authoritarian and the decadent – an interpretation which won the endorsement of Thomas Mann himself – is an essential structural component of Marxist analysis, and is designed to turn the reader, as well as the work, inside out. (1971a, p. 400)

Hence, in the course of revealing the 'political unconscious' of *Death in Venice*, Lukács' analysis has the effect of 'making strange' Mann's narrative for the reader, in an almost Formalist manoeuvre. As Jameson points out, the 'shock' of this interpretation derives from a reversal of the protocols of a liberal, existential/psychoanalytic reading of the text, which sees the individual subject – either in a unified or internally conflicted sense – as the ultimate source of meaning. Thus we come to an understanding of the text by wrenching it from its seemingly secure moorings in the harbour of a depoliticised criticism and relocating it in relation to the socio-cultural context of its inception and its ideological 'conditions of existence'.

This is the critical manoeuvre which is also characteristic of Jameson's own procedure in *The Political Unconscious*, where, for example, the analysis of *Wuthering Heights* undercuts normative readings of Heathcliff as a 'Byronic' figure by insisting on the class politics of the novel and its relationship to a collective, rather than an individual subject. In Jameson's reading of Bronte's novel, Heathcliff is no longer a 'romantic hero' or 'tyrannical villain', but a 'donor', 'something like a mediator or catalyst, designed to restore the fortunes and to rejuvenate the anemic temperament of the two families' (1981a, p. 127). The central line of the narrative is rewritten, 'not as the story of "individuals", nor even as the chronicle of generations and their destinies, but rather as an impersonal process' so that Heathcliff's incursion into the narrative is seen as supplying a missing *socio-economic* ingredient in the diegetic universe of the 'Heights':

> Heathcliff is the locus of *history* in this romance: his mysterious fortune marks him as a protocapitalist, in some other place, absent from the narrative, which then re-codes the new economic energies as sexual passion. The aging of Heathcliff then constitutes the narrative mechanism

> whereby the alien dynamism of capitalism is reconciled with the immemorial (and cyclical) time of the agricultural life of a country squiredom . . . (1981a, p. 128)

Ultimately, then, it is the role of Heathcliff to act as a Proppian 'donor' within the framework of a broader socio-economic context of changing class relations in nineteenth-century Britain. On one level he functions as a revitaliser of 'passion' within the narrative but, more importantly, he also aids in the regeneration of landed capital of the Heights by restoring the families' fortunes. Like the Aschenbach of Lukács' analysis, the name 'Heathcliff' is the signifier of a class dynamic, rather than the representative of an individual 'existential' characterology.

I have taken this example from *The Political Unconscious* because it is an extension of Lukács' approach to the analysis of *Death in Venice*, even though it is written in what might be seen as Jameson's most Althusserian and, hence, one would logically assume, his least Lukácsian phase.[3] It seems to me that Jameson's interpretation of *Wuthering Heights* does not represent an 'epistemological break' from the earlier *Marxism and Form*, which is obviously heavily indebted to Lukács, but rather an attempt to unite a more Formalist textual hermeneutics with a historically informed, Lukácsian version of Marxist criticism. If the function of Jameson's analysis of Heathcliff as 'donor' is to 'make strange' the devices of the text, then this methodology is, paradoxically, already present in the supposedly anti-Formalist Lukács, as Jameson so perceptively observes. Despite all the simplistic interpretations of Lukács as an 'essentialist' critic, it is clear that his interpretations of character are written against the grain of a liberal humanist criticism and it is arguably this 'trans-individual' approach to the concept of the 'subject' as Lucien Goldmann would later term it (1975, pp. 1–17) which makes him a continuing presence in Jameson's work, even at the moment when the latter is most under the influence of Althusser.

At the same time, it has to be acknowledged that Jameson's encounter with Lukács has not always been a smooth or uncritical one. The tensions are most discernible in Jameson's reaction to the politically prescriptive side of Lukács' aesthetics, especially his theory of 'critical realism'. In the interview with Corredor, Jameson argues that it is the 'greatness' of Lukács in his early writings to insist that 'problems of narrative are always related to limits in social experience'. However, from the late 1920s onwards, Lukács tends to posit an ideal of realism which is, for Jameson, 'voluntaristic' and ahistorical and this drive towards a prescriptive, abstract aesthetic doctrine tends to undermine the otherwise sophisticated close reading of authors such as Mann in essays like 'In Search of Bourgeois Man':

> Lukács uses Thomas Mann as an example of a fellow traveler who has made much of the modernist culture without surrendering to what Lukács

> thought was modernist reification, and suggests then, that this is a new form of critical realism, and that it is available to other artists by way of an essentially ethical decision. It is at that point that the genuinely historical is turned off . . . So when he then looks out on the modern world, the Weimar [*sic*] and the 1920s, the bourgeois Europe of the 1930s, and suggests to writers that it is an option of theirs to return to a realist form of writing simply by adopting the proper political attitude, whether that means joining the Communist Party as such or finding it in themselves to have the kind of sympathy that Thomas Mann from time to time had for the left, then I think we have passed the line in the boundary over into some sort of voluntarism in which it is no longer the social situation that sets the boundaries and exerts a certain determination over the writer's formal practice. That is what I mean by Lukács's 'ethical moment', and one finds it when he comes to deal with contemporary writing, something which he is notoriously not able to do. (Corredor, 1997, p. 86)

Thus, whilst Jameson applauds the sophistication of Lukács' analysis of Thomas Mann, he is rightly critical of the latter's 'ethical' advocacy of critical realism as a formal model for aspiring, 'progressive' writers in the eras of the Popular Front and the Cold War. For Jameson, the question 'Franz Kafka or Thomas Mann?', which Lukács poses in *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, is an unproductive one, as it is governed by an ahistorical and undialectical problematic. It is one thing to show how Mann's writing highlights the socio-cultural contradictions of his age and entirely another to suggest that one might adopt his version of realism as a *universal* answer to the 'decadence' and 'fragmentation' of capitalist culture. This is to ignore the dialectical movement of society and key changes in the 'content' of social experience. Clearly the historical 'moment' of *Death in Venice* is somewhat different from that of Kafka's stories or expressionism in the interwar period. The formal devices of critical realism, which still aspire to aesthetic totality as a way of transcending cultural fragmentation, may not offer an adequate response to the historical experience of a developing fascist cultural offensive in the same way as expressionist montage or Brecht's 'estrangement effect'. And, perhaps even more to the point, if one moves further forward in time it is obvious that narrative formulae derived from nineteenth-century 'classic realism' are, as Jameson points out, 'pretty clearly . . . not suitable for postcontemporary conditions' (Corredor, 1997, p. 82).

Yet, despite these reservations about certain aspects of Lukács' aesthetics, it is clear that Jameson's own theoretical agenda continues to be set by key concepts in his forebear's work. Above all, one can see Jameson's writings as a continuing meditation on the relevance of the *early* Lukács, most notably the author of *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács' treatise on Marxist philosophy makes important appearances in books such as *Marxism and Form*, *The Political Unconscious*, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, *Signatures of the Visible*, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* and the recent

work, *Brecht and Method*. It is also the subject of a lengthy essay published in 1988, entitled '*History and Class Consciousness* as an "unfinished project"'. Two Lukácsian terms in particular – 'totality' and 'reification' – are central to Jameson's critical vocabulary and it would be impossible to understand his analysis of contemporary culture without them. But it is also the more general theoretical orientation of *History and Class Consciousness* which is crucial for an understanding of Jameson's Marxism and I want to explore this dimension first, before going on to see how he applies the concept of 'totality' in concrete analysis.

In *Brecht and Method*, Jameson notes the way in which Lukács 'scandalously' suggests in *History and Class Consciousness* that the term 'Orthodox Marxism . . . refers exclusively to method' (Jameson, 1998b, p. 24). For Jameson one of the attractive features of the early Lukács is that he is opposed to the idea of Marxism as a dogma. Marxism at its most creative (and, of course, at its most 'scandalous' from a Stalinist point of view) implies a critical, self-reflective approach, which positions Marxist theory and practice historically and in which, as Maynard Solomon has observed, 'the genesis and doctrines of Marxism itself must be subjected to Marxist analysis' (Solomon, 1979, pp. 384–5). Hence, Lukács redefines Marxism as a reflexive methodology, rather than a positivistic 'science' of history. Moreover, it is a mode of analysis which is not reducible to 'economistic' thinking:

> It is not the primacy of economic motives in historical explanation that constitutes the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought, but the point of view of the totality. The category of totality, the all-pervasive supremacy of the whole over the parts is the essence of the method which Marx took over from Hegel and brilliantly transformed into the foundations of a wholly new science. (Lukács, 1971, p. 27)

For Lukács and Jameson, Marxism is a *dialectical* account of the relationship between economic 'base' and ideational 'superstructure', in which the latter does not simply 'reflect' the former in a one-to-one fashion. As Lukács comments in *History and Class Consciousness*, 'thought and existence are not identical in the sense that they "correspond" to each other or "reflect" each other, that they "run parallel" to each other or "coincide" with each other (all expressions that conceal a rigid duality). Their identity is that they are aspects of one and the same historical and dialectical process' (Lukács, 1971, p. 204). Hence, Marxism is not a method which starts out by identifying causal changes in the economic realm of society and then traces the 'effects' of those developments on the cultural/ideological spheres. Rather, it searches for the dialectical *principle of articulation* which governs the relationship between these different spheres and the way in which they interact to construct a totality which is more than the sum of its parts.

In principle, then, it is possible for the relationship between the economic, political and cultural spheres to be articulated in different ways in particular

historical 'conjunctures'. As Lukács argues in his recently discovered essay from the mid-twenties, 'A Defence of *History and Class Consciousness*: Tailism and the Dialectic', the relationship between the economic and other realms of the social totality is not fixed for all time. Just as there are historical changes in the content of both 'base' and 'superstructure', so also 'the *structure of the interconnection* changes as a result of the the changes of real materials' (Lukács, 2000, p. 108; my emphasis). Although the separate levels of the social totality are bound together in what Marx terms a 'mode of production', which is governed, 'in the last instance', by particular socio-economic laws of development, the 'lonely moment of the last instance' may not arrive in pure unadulterated form, as Althusser (1969) pointed out in his famous essay, 'Contradiction and Overdetermination'. The mode of production may shape the genesis and overall development of the economic infrastructure, but this is not to argue that economic conditions will determine every key moment of historical development in the social totality.

Thus, to follow Althusser, it is possible to argue that the Russian Revolution of 1917 is initiated and 'overdetermined' by a set of *combined* contradictions, which occur simultaneously, in both the political and economic spheres, and it is the *totality* of these contradictions/crises which leads to a historical rupture. Moreover, as Jameson points out in the 'Afterword' to *Postmodernism/Jameson/Critique*, at any given time the social totality may include a number of different modes of production, articulated in relationships of dominance and subordination. Hence, for example, Enlightenment Scotland in the eighteenth century can be characterised as a society in which there is a 'coexistence of radically different zones of production and culture' – 'the archaic economy of the Highlanders and their clan system, the new agricultural exploitation of the Lowlands, the commercial vigor of the English "partner" over the border, on the eve of its industrial "takeoff"' (Jameson, 1989a, p. 379). This 'combined and uneven development' of the social totality can provide a springboard for new thought of a more critical, historical nature in which, as in the case with Enlightenment Scotland, the intelligentsia of a relatively 'undeveloped' country may outstrip that of its more 'developed' neighbour. As Jameson observes, the 'brilliance of Edinburgh' at this time is 'not a matter of Gaelic genetic material', but the product of a situation in which different modes of production coexist in a starkly vivid contrast with one another. This 'peculiar conjuncture' allows Scottish thinkers to gain a 'strategic distance' from the new reality of industrial capitalism, 'which tends to overwhelm those immersed in it' (i.e. their English counterparts at this time) and to 'think' the new mode of production in a historically informed way.

Hence Jameson utilises concepts such as 'social totality' and 'mode of production' to develop a sophisticated mode of analysis, which refuses a simple one-to-one relationship between 'base and superstructure'. This is very much in the spirit of the Lukács of 'In Defence of *History and Class Consciousness*', who cites the way in which Marx' *Grundrisse* repeatedly

asserts the 'unequal development' of material production and that of art (Lukács, 2000, p. 108). However, if the social totality for Lukács and Jameson has an 'uneven' as well as a 'combined' development,[4] it is, nevertheless, a *totality* of relations and here it is interesting to note that Jameson is concerned to pinpoint the creation of what might be termed 'alternative totalities' as the starting point for change. Lukács' 'Totalitatsintention' (the drive towards totality) is a key concept in his analysis of those narratives and allegories which offer new ways of conceptualising social relations and which challenge the reification at the heart of late capitalist culture. Of course, on the political level it is clear that capitalism has altered considerably since the moment of *History and Class Consciousness*, and it would be hard to defend Lukács' assumption that the industrial proletariat could still constitute the *exclusive* agent for change, particularly in a country like the United States. Nevertheless, Jameson has consistently argued that if there is to be a new political 'subject' based on a broader coalition of interests, along the lines of Jesse Jackson's 'Rainbow Coalition' of the 1980s, then it must still refer to class experience as a nodal point in the creation of an alternative 'reality'. As he comments in the 'Afterword' to Kellner's Reader:

> Jackson's force and appeal has always consisted in a mediatory opposition which some might even think of as a kind of totalization. I have indeed never heard a Jackson speech which did not seek to unite its 'multiple subject-positions' and constituencies by way of the common situation they share as working-class people. (1989a, p. 386)

This emphasis on class position and experience as the basis for a new kind of 'totalization' would suggest that Jameson has never fully abandoned the attempt to theorise the experience of late capitalism through the conceptual framework of *History and Class Consciousness*, even if the social composition of the radical political subject has altered considerably. Moreover, even when he has developed new concepts such as 'cognitive mapping' to capture the qualitatively different form of consciousness which emerges in postmodernity – as a result of the transformation of spatiality, time/space compression and so on – it could be argued that he has still been working within a modified Lukácsian framework. As he points out so succinctly in the 'Afterword', '"cognitive mapping" was in reality nothing but a code-word for "class consciousness"' (1989a, p. 387).

Jameson acknowledges that class consciousness or the cognitive mapping of the dynamics of late capitalism is rarely visible in a fully realised form, particularly when the forces of radical change are on the retreat. Hence, like Lukács, he is concerned to 'impute' or project a 'Totalitatsintention' on the basis of what must, of necessity, be partially conscious, or even 'unconscious' reactions to the 'dehumanising' processes of contemporary experience. However, whereas his mentor privileges the realm of critical bourgeois culture as the source of resistance to reification and 'fragmentation', particularly in

the crisis of the thirties, Jameson focuses more on the allegories of mass culture as oblique critiques of late capitalist society. Hence, in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, for example, he applies the concept of totality to a fascinating analysis of 'conspiratorial' films such as Pakula's *The Parallax View* and *All the President's Men*. Here Jameson argues that the 'conspiratorial text', which emerged in the United States in the 1970s, constitutes 'an unconscious, collective effort to figure out where we are and what landscapes and forces confront us in a late twentieth century whose abominations are heightened by their concealment and their bureaucratic impersonality' (Jameson, 1992a, p. 3). Hence, films such as *All the President's Men* are not just narratives of particular, isolated conspiracies (in this case, Watergate, of course), but they also form part of a broader reflection on global politics as a *totality*: 'For it is ultimately always of the social totality itself that it is a question in representation, and never more so than in the present age of a multinational global corporate network' (1992a, p. 4).

At the same time, these conspiratorial narratives do not function as simple, 'realistic' accounts of American politics and corporate power 'behind closed doors'. Rather, they are 'allegories' or 'figurations' of ways in which we might begin to *think* late capitalism as a totality: 'a system so vast that it cannot be encompassed by the natural and historically developed categories of perception with which human beings normally orient themselves' (1992a, p. 2). Thus, Jameson argues that in the conspiratorial film it is the 'intent and gesture' which counts, rather than the 'definitive verisimilitude of this or that conspiratorial hypothesis': 'in the *intent* to hypothesize, in the *desire* called cognitive mapping – therein lies the beginning of wisdom' (1992a, p. 3; my emphasis).

So, for example, in *All the President's Men* the point of climax is the scene where Woodward and Bernstein are checking through reading slips in the Library of Congress, in that this moment in the narrative allegorises both the totality of socio-political relations which constitute the America of Nixon's conspiracy and the 'intent to hypothesise' that totality. As Jameson argues so persuasively, this seemingly low- key scene becomes the allegorical key to the meaning of the film, rather than any of the more obviously dramatic moments of tension and exposure, such as the meeting with 'Deep Throat' in the underground garage. At this point Pakula takes the camera upwards from a ground-level shot of the investigating heroes to the ceiling of the dome of the library, as viewed from below. The effect of this shot is to rise 'from the very small (the reading room call slips) to the social totality itself' (1992a, p. 78), culminating in the celebration of the 'traditional, religious, or metaphysical architecture of the Reading Room' and enlightenment values (1992a, p. 79). At the same time, this moment of epiphany cannot be an allegory for America itself, as a fully realised democratic and free political totality:

> For it is the impossible vision of totality – here recovered in the moment in which the possibility of conspiracy confirms the possibility of the very

> unity of the social order itself – that is celebrated in the well-nigh paradisal moment. This is then the link between the phenomenal and the noumenal, or the ideological and the Utopian. This mounting image, underscored by the audible emergence, for the first time in the film, of the solemn music that so remarkably confirms the investigation's and the film's *telos*, in which the map of conspiracy itself, with its streets now radiating out through Washington from this ultimate center, unexpectedly suggests the possibility of cognitive mapping as a whole and stands as its substitute and yet its allegory all at once. The mounting camera shot, which diminishes the fevered researches of the two investigators as it rises to disclose the frozen cosmology of the reading room's circular balconies, confirms the momentary coincidence between knowledge as such and the architectural order of the astronomical totality itself, and yields a brief glimpse of the providential, as what organizes history but is un-representable within it. (1992a, p. 79)

As Jameson points out, it is an 'impossible' vision of totality which is being allegorised here because it is only the 'possibility of conspiracy' which confirms 'the possibility of the very unity of the social order itself' in our cognitive mapping of America today – a bitter irony, indeed! However, Jameson's elegiac prose celebrates a 'well-nigh paradisal moment' in the narrative, in which there is a 'momentary coincidence' between the critical journey of the *Washington Post* reporters for 'knowledge as such' and the 'architectural order of the astronomical totality itself', which is embodied in the dome as a 'virtually spherical vision of the nature of the universe' (1992a, p. 78). Of course, at this moment in history, when the contingent and the conspiratorial sit side by side, any vision of the 'providential' as the force which 'organizes history' must seem something of a chimera. Yet, as Jameson observes, in its 'brief glimpse' of the 'providential' this allegorical moment of Pakula's film holds open a utopian possibility of an alternative 'totality' based on the values of harmony and truth.

We can see, then, that Jameson does not view the drive towards totalisation and a 'cognitive mapping' of social reality in a simple light. If the Lukácsian project is still alive in any shape or form in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, then it is one which has to proceed in an opaque, conspiracy-ridden world, where a full cognition of the social world seems to be increasingly difficult. Moreover, the project of providing a cognitive map of the social totality at a global level has become more problematic since 1991, as the possibility of a political alternative to capitalism has temporarily receded. Hence, for example, in an 'Afterword' to an essay on Sidney Lumet's film *Dog Day Afternoon* Jameson argues that we face 'a situation in which the truth of our social life as a whole – in Lukács's terms, as a totality – is increasingly irreconcilable with the possibilities of aesthetic expression available to us' (Jameson, 1990b, p. 54). This pessimism is echoed and deepened in more recent pronouncements which tend to erect the 'impossibility of totalisation' into a philosophical

universal and a sine qua non of epistemology. Thus, in a recent interview with Xudong Zhang in *New Literary History* he has questioned our ability to capture the 'deeper realities' of social reality *at all*:

> The reason why allegory is important is that even though we talk about holding to the situation in its historical changeability, trying to break through old narratives of change and seeing fresh ones and perceiving contradictions, none of these targets were really objects to begin with. Therefore, there is the . . . problem of how you would describe those phenomena, how you model your consciousness of them, if they are not really things. That is where allegory comes in. Because it reminds us that even if we believe in the situation, the situation is not a realistic thing for us to make a simple representation of even if we believe in narrative, that also is not so easy. Saying that the world has a narrative structure does not mean that you can tell a simple story about it, or that there are representational techniques existing for doing that. Insisting on contradictions does not mean that anybody ever saw one, or it would be easy to paint a picture of whatever it is. So the insistence on allegory is the insistence on the difficulty, or even impossibility, of representation of these deeper realities. I hesitate to say impossibility, not because it is not so – I do not think it is possible to represent these things – but because the minute you say that, then you feed into some other ideologies about silence, ultimate unknowability, the chaos of the world, unrepresentability, indeterminacy, and so forth. I do not think that it is desirable. Allegory happens when you know you cannot represent something, but you also cannot not do it.
>
> (Jameson, 1998d, repr. in Hardt and Weeks (eds) 2000, pp. 160–1)

This passage seems to suggest that the later Jameson is in danger of allowing himself to be suspended on the horns of a philosophical dilemma. If critical thought is unable to penetrate to the 'deeper realities' of the social totality beyond textual discourse, then it is left with allegories of the contemporary world which are ultimately unmotivated by any reality beyond them, except insofar as we *hope* and *believe* that they *might* be. Yet Jameson cannot take the final step of plumping for the 'ideologies about silence', and the whole gamut of contemporary neo-Kantian thought, since he recognises the 'undesirability' of this idealist position. To accept the full import of this conclusion would be to contemplate a universe in which objective reality or Kant's 'Ding an Sich' is ultimately unknowable and Jameson is unable to embrace all the 'chaos' that this would imply. Later in the interview, he rebuts the description of him as a 'red Kant', politely but firmly, arguing that a Kantian mode of aesthetics is 'something that obviously ought to be resisted' (Jameson, 1998d, repr. in Hardt and Weeks (eds), 2000, p. 162). It seems, then, that he is caught between a rock and a hard place, in a realm of the allegorical, which 'happens

when you know you cannot represent something, but you also cannot not do it'. Like Samuel Beckett's hero, his watchword seems to be, 'I can't go on, I must go on'!

Yet, arguably the answer to this philosophical conundrum was already provided by Jameson himself in the 'Afterword' to Kellner's Reader, and this essay offers an exemplary defence of dialectical, totalising thought which is still worth revisiting. Jameson points out that the construction of conceptual models has always been necessary for understanding the complex social reality in which we are embedded, especially a sophisticated socio-cultural mode such as postmodernism:

> It has not escaped anyone's attention that my approach to postmodernism is a totalizing one. The interesting question today is then not why I adopt this perspective, but why so many people are scandalized (or have learned to be scandalized) by it. In the old days, abstraction was surely one of the strategic ways in which phenomena, particularly historical phenomena, could be estranged and defamiliarized; when one is immersed in the immediate – the year by year experience of cultural and informational messages, of successive events, of urgent priorities – the abrupt distance afforded by an abstract concept, a more global characterization of the secret affinities between those apparently autonomous and unrelated domains, and of the rhythms and hidden sequences of things we normally remember only in isolation and one by one, is a unique resource, particularly since the history of the preceding few years is always what is least accessible to us. Historical reconstruction, then, the positing of global characterizations and hypotheses, the abstraction from the 'blooming, buzzing confusion' of immediacy, was always a radical intervention in the here-and-now and the promise of resistance to its blind fatalities. (Jameson, 1989a, pp. 371–2)

One might feel that this restatement of a classic Weberian/Lukácsian approach to the role of models in social scientific thought would be sufficient of itself, but Jameson goes on to acknowledge that there is a 'representational problem' and that we must 'separate it out from the other motives at work in the "war on totality"':

> If historical abstraction – the notions of a mode of production, or of capitalism, fully as much as of postmodernism – is something not given in immediate experience, then it is pertinent to worry about the potential confusion of this concept with the thing itself, and about taking its abstract 'representation' for 'reality', of 'believing' in the substantive existence of abstract entities such as Society or class... In the long run there is probably no way of marking a representation so securely *as* representation that such optical illusions are permanently forestalled, any more than there is any way to ensure the resistance of a materialistic

> thought to idealistic recuperations, or to ward off the reading of a deconstructive formulation in metaphysical terms. Permanent revolution in intellectual life and culture means that impossibility, and the necessity for a constant reinvention of precautions against what my tradition calls conceptual reification. (1989a, p. 372)

This is a different order of reservation about the possibilities of abstract thought than the one voiced in the *New Literary History* interview. Here Jameson is not questioning the possibility of representing the concrete reality of class or society *per se*, but sounding a warning about 'conceptual reification' – the danger of thinking that because we have a fully elaborated concept of these entities, the concept is inviolable and the 'thing itself' must always be measured against this concept and not vice versa. As he notes, we must not make the mistake of taking the abstract 'representation' *for* 'reality' and if society alters historically then the concept must be adapted accordingly. But the 'impossibility' of 'marking a representation . . . securely *as* representation', and hence warding off conceptual reification completely, is entirely different from the impossibility of representing 'Society or class' at all. Of course, as intellectuals, playing the intellectual's 'game' of abstraction, we are always in danger of forgetting that the concept is a discursive construct, but this is not to refuse the possibility of *knowing* society, as a 'thing in itself'.

There is one more objection to a 'realist' theory of knowledge and representation which Jameson also explores in the 'Afterword'. He concedes that there is a particular logic to capitalism which seems to make it something of a 'mystery' and, therefore, not amenable to conceptual representation. Unlike pre-capitalist modes of production, which 'achieved their capacity to reproduce themselves through various forms of solidarity or collective cohesion', the logic of capital is, on the contrary, 'a dispersive and atomistic, "individualistic" one, an anti-society, rather than a society' (Jameson, 1989a, p. 374). Hence, it is a system, whose essence is to be anti-systemic, so that it is seemingly unrepresentable because it is 'a contradiction in terms'. However, as Jameson points out, there is an answer to this 'conundrum' and it lies in the contradictions of that historical entity which we know as 'the market'. The paradox of capitalism is its very 'originality' as an ontological entity and 'the verbally contradictory formulas we necessarily encounter in defining it point beyond the words to *the thing itself* (and also give rise to that peculiar new invention, the dialectic)' (1989a, p. 374).

In other words, the antinomies and 'verbally contradictory formulas' of contemporary theory are not the product of a free-floating discourse, whose origin is a 'mystery', but are related to late capitalism, the 'thing itself', in all its complexity. It is capitalism, as a contradictory phenomenon, which produces both reification and the forces which form the basis for its supercession, including 'that new invention, the dialectic' and its incarnation in key critical analyses of capitalist culture, such as Lukács' *History and*

Class Consciousness or Jameson's *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

Jameson's analysis of the relationship between the contradictions of theory and the structure of late capitalism is clearly indebted to Lukács' claim that commodity production is 'the model for all the objective forms of bourgeois society, together with all the subjective forms corresponding to them' (1971, p. 170). It is interesting to see Jameson returning to this theme in his latest work, *A Singular Modernity*, where he draws on Lukács' discussion of reification and 'the loss of any ability to totalize' under capitalism. As Jameson observes, for Lukács reification is 'a global process which can leave no one untouched', limiting the ability of bourgeois philosophy to 'theorize and confront reality', that is, capitalism as such (2002, p. 85). For Jameson, the great merit of Lukács' analysis of philosophy is that the limitations of post-Hegelian thought are not simply related to an autonomous 'history of ideas', but are seen as manifestations of the 'objective forms of bourgeois society'. In a similar movement Jameson highlights the impact of reification on postmodernist thought and its inability to think the social formation as a concrete totality by penetrating beyond the phenomenal forms of late capitalist culture to its underlying structure.

Of course, the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* moves beyond the critique of bourgeois consciousness to a positive evaluation of the proletarian consciousness which emerges as the commodity's Hegelian moment of *aufhebung*, or dialectical transcendence. The structural position of the industrial proletariat in the social totality, and its need to develop forms of co-operation and mutuality simply to survive, force it to act as the representative of a universal human subjectivity and the negation of all reification. As Terry Eagleton has noted in his recent study of 'the idea of the tragic', for the Marxist Benjamin and his philosophical mentor the early Lukács, the more the proletariat is 'degraded to an object' by capitalism, the more it is forced to come to an 'emancipatory awareness of itself'. In this process of 'dialectical reversal', the 'sickness of history thus becomes, homeopathically, its own cure' (2002, p. 291). The seeming hopelessness and immiseration of the proletariat turn it into an agent of tragic 'redemption', to use Eagleton's term, or what Lukács more positively describes as the 'identical subject-object of the historical process' (1971, p. 199).

However, it has to be acknowledged that if the contemporary Jameson of *A Singular Modernity* is still inspired by Lukács' critique of reification and bourgeois philosophy, he is rather less positive about what might be seen as the spontaneous, *oeuvrierist* tendencies of *History and Class Consciousness* and the idea that a revolutionary class consciousness is the *inevitable* outcome of proletarian immiseration. Jameson questions whether the process of immiseration is, of itself, sufficient to create a Marxist political consciousness which will form the basis for a broad alliance of interests opposed to the ravages of corporate capitalism. A more dialectical view of history, he seems to be suggesting, would see it as more of a 'two steps forward, one step back'

process. Hence the by-product of economic 'downsizing' during a recession might be a temporary loss of 'productive knowledge' which would not necessarily contribute to the radicalisation of the working-class. Indeed, those who have witnessed the demise of highly skilled industries (such as steel in my own city of Sheffield) could testify to the devastating effects of this development on political organisation and the production of 'organic' intellectuals from within the working class.

Nevertheless, while one sympathizes with Jameson's reservations about the more simplistic, 'workerist' side of *History and Class Consciousness* and the idea that the proletariat *automatically* turns into the 'self-consciousness of capitalism', one should not ignore Jameson's continuing indebtedness to Lukács' analysis of the relationship between the structures of thought and the reifying effects of commodity production under capitalism. Indeed, as we have already seen, much of Jameson's own analysis of late-capitalist culture, not least his pathbreaking critique of postmodernism, can be seen as a rewriting of *History and Class Consciousness* for a contemporary age.

Conclusion

Even the most fervent champion of Jameson would be forced to admit that there is a tension in his work, between an overall commitment to Marxism on the one hand and a periodic tendency to cede too much territory to idealist currents of thought on the other. This conflict has become increasingly evident in recent years, but it is also present in his earlier writings. So, for example, in *Marxism and Form* we find him arguing that Lukács' conversion to Marxism during the First World War was a theoretical answer to the problems he faced as a literary critic, rather than a response to the pressing *political* realities of the time:

> I would be tempted to reverse the causal relationship as it is generally conceived, and to claim that if Lukács became a Communist, it was precisely because the problems of narration raised in the *Theory of the Novel* required a Marxist frame-work to be thought through to their logical conclusion. (Jameson, 1971a, p. 182)

As Maynard Solomon has commented, the 'apparent idealism' of this explanation does not stand up to a scrutiny of Lukács' biography, nor does it account for the content of *History and Class Consciousness*, which is not a meditation on narratology, but an attempt to theorise the political role of the industrial proletariat as the universal subject/object of history (whatever one's thoughts about the continuing viability of this concept) (Solomon, 1979, p. 385).

However, as I have tried to demonstrate, in the commitment to concepts such as 'totality' and 'mode of production' there is a core element of Jameson's

work which refuses to break with the fundamental tenets of a Lukácsian 'Western Marxism'. So, for example, in a recent review of 'A Defence of *History and Class Consciousness*, Jameson argues that even if the notion of the proletariat as a universal subject of history, which 'dominated the theoretical debates of the 1960s', may seem somewhat problematic today, the *epistemological* claims of Lukácsian 'standpoint theory' and the notion of 'imputed consciousness' still have an important part to play in our thinking. Hence, the 'aspiration to totality' in *History and Class Consciousness* 'dramatizes the overcoming of two kinds of fragmentation: that of the academic disciplines (in which what counts as scientific knowledge is divided up into a multitude of specializations); and that of social experience, in which the various classes and class fractions or social groups are systematically roped off from one another, in a reciprocal ignorance scarcely relieved by media stereotypes' (2001a, p. 39). Moreover, for Jameson, the dialectical approach to political consciousness in *History and Class Consciousness* inevitably takes us beyond the rather limited theorisations of contemporary 'identity politics', which represent *localized* responses to the experience of commodification and fragmentation under capitalism. As Jameson notes, 'beyond "identiy politics" . . . lies something else, for which hybridity and queer theory are not altogether satisfactory designations' (2001a, p. 39). Ultimately this implies a critique of the limitations of 'single issue' politics through a consideration of the *structural* determinants of collective experience under capitalism and what different oppressed groupings have in common.

Thus we can see that there is a strong thread of Lukácsian Western Marxism running through Jameson's work up to the present. This is discernible in an essay such as 'Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity' (1998c), where he mounts a corruscating attack on the 'stereotyping' of history in the contemporary 'nostalgia film', which is couched in classic Lukácsian language:

> since it is necessarily based on the recognition by the viewer of pre-existing historical stereotypes, including the various styles of the period, it [i.e. the nostalgia film] is thereby reduced to the mere narrative confirmation of those same stereotypes. It can do little more than offer the most predictable testimony about their features learned from history manuals and pre-existing collective attitudes and references; it cannot contradict the stereotypes of the period without falling into gratuitous and purely individual singularity. It does not, in other words, know that rich dialectic of the unique and the iterative, the typical and the individual, that made up the older historical art, as Lukács and others have characterized it for us. (Jameson, 1998c, p. 130)

We can also see Jameson's continuing concern with a Lukácsean approach to social and cultural change in essays such as 'Notes on Globalization as

a Philosophical Issue' (1998a) and the more recent reworking of this piece in *New Left Review* entitled 'Taking on Globalization' (2000a). Here it is noticeable that he has not abandoned his commitment to a 'utopian' politics of radical, collective action, as evidenced in the recent anti-capitalist mobilisations of trade unions and other non-governmental organisations in Seattle and elsewhere. As he concludes in the *New Left Review* article,

> *Combination*, the old word for labour organization, offers an excellent symbolic designation for what is at issue on this ultimate, social level; and the history of the labour movement everywhere gives innumerable examples of the forging of new forms of solidarity in active political work. Nor are such collectivities always at the mercy of new technologies; on the contrary, the electronic exchange of information seems to have been central wherever new forms of political resistance to globalization (the demonstrations against the WTO, for example) have begun to appear. For the moment, we can use the word 'utopian' to designate whatever programmes and representations express, in however distorted or unconscious a fashion, the demands of a collective life to come, and identify social collectivity as the crucial centre of any truly progressive and innovative political response to globalization. (Jameson, 2000a, p. 68)[5]

At the same time, it would be naive for a contemporary writer such as Jameson to attempt to revisit the Marxism of the early twentieth-century era in a simple reprise of the philosophical and aesthetic positions on offer in a text like *History and Class Consciousness*. As he was already at pains to point out in the early seventies, it would be impossible to replicate the older class politics of the interwar period and the Popular Front, not least because in a country like the United States, 'the development of postindustrial monopoly capitalism has brought with it an increasing occultation of the class structure through techniques of mystification practiced by the media and particularly by advertising in its enormous expansion since the onset of the Cold War' (Jameson, 1971a, p. xvii). Thus, Jameson's subsequent analysis of postmodernism has demonstrated the existence of a new stage in the mode of production in which the cultural and the economic are intertwined in a qualitatively different manner and in which the older verities of the base/superstructure model need rethinking. However, as I have attempted to show, the theoretical basis for Jameson's rethinking of Marxism was already present in *History and Class Consciousness*, with its emphasis on 'totality' rather than the simple 'primacy of economic motives' and it has been his genius to apply this dialectical model to the analysis of contemporary culture. As he points out so eloquently in *Marxism and Form*, in a world of seeming fragmentation, where we 'inhabit a dream world of artificial stimuli and televised experience'; where, in 'existential terms' our 'experience is no longer whole'; – in such a world, 'the great themes of Hegel's philosophy – the relationship of part to whole, the opposition between concrete and

abstract, the dialectic of appearance and essence, the interaction between subject and object – are once again the order of the day' (Jameson, 1971a, pp. xvii–xix).[6]

Notes

1. This essay is dedicated to the memory of Adrian Mellor, brilliant interpreter of Lucien Goldmann, champion of totalising thought and much missed friend.
2. There is, inevitably, an artificiality in divisions of this kind, but in Lukács' case there does seem to be a justification for arguing that his career divides into different 'periods'. Most commentators would see his early Marxist phase as starting at the end of the First World War, with essays such as 'What is Orthodox Marxism?' (first published in March 1919 and reprinted in *History and Class Consciousness*) and continuing to 1929, when his proposals for an alliance with progressive bourgeois politicians (the so-called 'Blum Theses') are attacked by the Soviet leadership. The second phase (the 'Middle Period') sees a retreat from politics and what one might term an 'internal emigration', where he concentrates on developing an analysis of the historical novel and realism. The final period coincides with the Cold War when he sides with the Hungarian revolution and when most of his energies as a theoretician are devoted to composing the massive tomes on aesthetics and ontology. (For a useful summary, see Sim, 1994.)
3. Robert Young makes a similar point in *White Mythologies* about the indebtedness of *The Political Unconscious* to both Lukács and Althusser, albeit from the standpoint of a post-structuralist critique of the Jamesonian enterprise:

> what he attempts to bring about is something which from the perspective of European Marxism is truly scandalous, namely, a rapprochement between the two antithetical traditions of Sartre and Althusser, incorporated within a larger Lukacsian totality. For reasons which should by now be clear, to assimilate such different theorists is an extraordinary project of Hegelian proportions and daring.
>
> (Young, 1990, p. 92)

4. For further discussion of the concept of 'combined and uneven development', see Michael Lowy, 1981.
5. For the role of the new technology in the anti-capitalist organisations, see Armand Mattelart's recent article in *Media, Culture and Society*, where he comments on the way in which 'in 1998 the concerted action of 600 organizations in some 70 countries, linked together by the Internet . . . succeeded in interrupting the MAI (Multilateral Agreement on Investment) negotiations on the deregulation of unbridled investment'. Mattelart goes on to point out that, for the three years prior to this action, 'one example of using the Internet to lodge protests was in the back of everyone's mind: the "information guerilla" action in Mexico's Chiapas region by the neo-Zapatistas and Sub-Commander Marcos. Downstream, this emblematic experiment gave food for thought about social movements to theorists of the global network society.' [e.g. thinkers such as Castells] (Mattelart, 2002, p. 608).
6. I would like to acknowledge the help of Ros Brunt and Steve Neale, whose comments and criticisms have been much appreciated.

3

Fredric Jameson on 'Third-World Literature': A Qualified Defence

Neil Lazarus

I

In 1986, Fredric Jameson published an essay entitled 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism' in *Social Text*, a left-identified, New York-based journal of cultural politics. In retrospect, I am sure he wishes that he had not. For the essay has brought him nothing but brickbats.

Jameson's work has always been marked by both its magisterial erudition and its eminent contestability. I do not mean by the term 'contestability' that what Jameson has written has been controversial, exactly. I mean rather that his work has demonstrated a rather remarkable ability to provoke its readers to take issue with its premises and arguments, its terms and conclusions. Jameson has always attracted a lot of readers, most of whom, from the beginning, have liked to disagree with him, in whole or in part. My sense is that this is because while he has characteristically worked with material – ideas, concepts, theories, bodies of work, modes and styles of cultural practice – that possesses, or is beginning to possess, wide academic currency, his own approach to this material has invariably been off-centre: heterodox and distinctly underivative, while remaining deeply systematic and never, I think, lapsing into mere idiosyncracy. Not only has Jameson tended to get to this material first, as it were, to think about it significantly in advance of most other scholars, he has also tended to think about it in a significantly different way from most other scholars. The precedence – so consistent a feature of his scholarly production as to amount almost to a prescience – is what has brought the wide readership (or is at least *part* of what has brought the wide readership); the off-centredness – most of the time (let us not beat about the bush) a function and effect of Jameson's Marxist commitments – is what has ensured that his own interpretation of a particular phenomenon or text or tendency, while being duly and dutifully referenced in the subsequent scholarly literature, has never quite emerged as the representative one, the institutional standard.

Take, for instance, the 1971 study, *Marxism and Form*. Even though Jameson's audacious and illuminating engagement with twentieth-century Marxist aesthetics predated by a good four or five years the burgeoning of interest in this body of work within wider literary critical circles in the Anglophone world, his decisive emphasis on its political and dialectical aspects found symptomatically little purchase when such writers as Lukács, Adorno, Bloch and especially Benjamin started to become conspicuous by their *presence* on the bookshelves of American and British academics in literary and cultural studies, and to be configured in radically decontextualised and depoliticised form in their scholarship. (By 1981 Terry Eagleton would feel the need, in introducing his own book on Benjamin, to protest that his subject was 'in imminent danger of being appropriated by a critical establishment that regards his Marxism as a contingent peccadillo or tolerable eccentricity' (p. xii). Clearly Jameson's reading of Benjamin, for all its remarkable insight, had cut no lasting ice with critics in the 'establishment', although *Marxism and Form* was regularly cited in the academic literature.)

A similar story could be told about *The Prison-House of Language*, which, as early as 1972, had offered a brilliant – indeed, to this date unsurpassed – critique of the genealogy and epistemology of poststructuralist thought at the very moment of its entry (as 'Theory' – with a capital 'T') into Anglo-American academic circuits. As so often, Jameson had done the reading – in English, French, German, Spanish, Italian and Russian, to judge by his footnotes! – before most of his colleagues: indeed, before most of his colleagues had done the reading, he had already formulated his comprehensive critique. Typically, however, when these colleagues did come to do the reading in the years that followed, they would do so, not without reference, but without *deference*, to Jameson's critique.

The pattern does not change even in the case of the celebrated work on postmodernism. Perry Anderson is, I think, wrong to argue for the hegemonic effect of Jameson's theory of postmodernism, which he sees as coming to 'command the field' and as 'setting the terms of theoretical opposition in the most striking imaginable way'. As Anderson presents it, the effect of Jameson's writing on postmodernism has been to take 'a concept whose visionary origins [had been] . . . all but completely effaced in usages complicit with the established order' and to

> wrest . . . [it] away by a prodigious display of theoretical intelligence and energy for the cause of a revolutionary Left. This has been a discursive victory gained against all the political odds, in a period of neo-liberal hegemony when every familiar landmark of the Left appeared to sink beneath the waves of a tidal reaction. It was won, undoubtedly, because the cognitive mapping of the contemporary world it offered caught so unforgettably – at once lyrically and caustically – the imaginative structures and lived experience of the time, and their boundary conditions. (1998, p. 66)

The problem with this formulation rests in its idealism. Rather in the manner to which we might suppose an intellectual historian to be objectively disposed by virtue of his disciplinary formation, Anderson in this instance confuses intellectual reach or cogency or rhetorical power with institutional effect.[1] That Jameson's theory of postmodernism is rich and resourceful – perhaps even without equal in these respects – need not be disputed. But this has not, *contra* Anderson, been sufficient to win for Jameson 'command [of] the field'. For the fact is that, institutionally speaking – that is, among other things, at the level of routine practice in the interlocking academic fields of culture studies – almost everybody who reads Jameson's famous essay on 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' (1984), for instance, tends to register both that they find it suggestive *and* that it seems to them profoundly deficient or misguided in key respects or instances. The vast bulk of the scholarly work produced on postmodernism tips its hat to Jameson, to be sure, even makes use of such concepts of his as 'cognitive mapping'; but it is no more Jamesonian in general tendency than it is Marxist. Anderson supposes that, as a result of Jameson's daring, insight and ingenuity, the concept of 'postmodernism' has come to wear his colours in the academy. My own view is that it would be truer to say just the opposite – that in the circuits of actually existing culture studies, Jameson is typically read as himself a postmodernist, in the overarching context of a politically indifferent conception of 'postmodernity'.

I have been sketching what I have called the contestability of Jameson's work, the fact that engagement with his arguments has typically taken the form of disagreement with them. In the case of his 'Third-World Literature' essay, however, a quite different explanatory schema is required. For in this case, and in the specific context of the then still emergent field of postcolonial studies, there was no contestation or disputation of Jameson's arguments, only a blanket and largely *a priori* dismissal of them. Both the pervasiveness and the ferocity of this response were remarkable. It was as though, for postcolonialists, Jameson had suddenly fallen foul of the standards not only of intellectual credibility but of *decency*. Anyone teaching postcolonial studies in the Anglo-American academy during the late 1980s or early 1990s would, I think, be able to attest to this development. There was a distinctly moralistic tinge to the discussions of Jameson's essay. I myself was teaching at Brown University in the United States at the time and I recall that, almost overnight, 'Jameson' seemed to have become a dirty word to my students, both undergraduate and postgraduate. And I discovered the same reaction among my fellow academics when I duly encountered them at postcolonial conferences.

Everybody objected to, took offence at, the same passage in Jameson's essay. Even today, when the polemics have long since echoed themselves to silence, I am sure that postcolonialists will know which passage I am referring to, even before I cite it. It is of course that in which, having made a

couple of what he terms 'initial distinctions' (we will return to these in due course), Jameson moves to advance a 'sweeping hypothesis': '[L]et me now', he writes,

> try to say what all third-world cultural productions seem to have in common and what distinguishes them radically from analogous cultural forms in the first world. All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel. (1986, p. 69)

Acknowledging the dangers of simplification, Jameson nevertheless adds, in an attempt at clarification, that while in 'capitalist culture' there is 'a radical split between what we have come to think of as the domain of sexuality and the unconscious and that of the public world of classes, of the economic, and of secular political power', in 'third-world culture' the relations between the 'subjective' and the 'public or political' are 'wholly different':

> Third-world texts, even those which are seemingly private and invested with a properly libidinal dynamic, necessarily project a political dimension in the form of a national allegory: the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society. (1986, p. 69)

II

To understand why this passage, and Jameson's essay as a whole, should have come to be viewed as so profoundly objectionable, it is necessary to introduce Aijaz Ahmad into the equation. For without Ahmad's forceful and damaging rejoinder to Jameson, which initially appeared in a subsequent issue of *Social Text*, the postcolonialist disparagement of Jameson would never have proceeded as it did.[2] Whether or not Ahmad's rebuttal represented the first discussion in print of Jameson's essay – and I have not been able to find an earlier discussion – it quickly emerged as paradigmatic. It was Ahmad who identified Jameson's postulation of the 'national allegory' hypothesis as *colonialist* in character and tendency. This is what he wrote:

> There is doubtless a personal, somewhat existential side to my encounter with this text, which is best clarified at the outset. I have been reading Jameson's work now for roughly fifteen years, and at least some of what I know about the literatures and cultures of Western Europe and the USA comes from him; and because I am a Marxist, I had always thought of us, Jameson and myself, as birds of the same feather, even though we never

> quite flocked together. But then, when I was on the fifth page of this text (specifically, on the sentence starting with "All third-world texts are necessarily . . . " etc.) I realized that what was being theorized was, among many other things, myself. Now, I was born in India and I write poetry in Urdu, a language not commonly understood among US intellectuals. So I said to myself: "*All*? . . . *necessarily*?" It felt odd. Matters became much more curious, however. For the further I read, the more I realized, with no little chagrin, that the man whom I had for so long, so affectionately, albeit from a physical distance, taken as a comrade was, in his own opinion, my civilizational Other. It was not a good feeling. (1992, p. 96)

I want to consider the rhetorical dimensions of this passage; for it seems to me that what is *actually said* is powerfully supplemented by what is assumed and suggested but *not actually said*, by what is said in *not being said*, by the forms of identification and of dis-identification that Ahmad mobilises and instantiates. The passage opens, thus, with his protestation of longstanding respect for Jameson. He has been reading him for a long time, he says, and has learned a lot from him – or, at least, a lot about 'the literatures and cultures of Western Europe and the USA'. The inference is going to be that Jameson has not repaid this compliment in kind; he has not been similarly respectful – at least, not where literatures and cultures from *outside* Western Europe and the USA are concerned. The respect that Ahmad attests that he used to feel for Jameson is of a specific kind: not that of a student for a teacher, nor of a reader for a writer, but of one Marxist intellectual for another, of a *comrade* for another comrade. But even before the publication of the 'Third-World Literature' essay, it seems, this was a virtual rather than an actual comradeship. A silent but not unexpressed reprimand – of Jameson's aloofness, perhaps even of the fact that the circles in which he travels as a superstar in the American academic firmament are not those in which 'Marxists' and 'comrades' ought to travel – is contained in Ahmad's witticism that 'I had always thought of us, Jameson and myself, as birds of the same feather, even though we never quite flocked together'. Be this as it may, Ahmad reiterates that the 'affection' in which he had held Jameson 'for so long' had had to be conducted 'from a physical distance'. And he now realises – the realisation has been forced upon him – that what separates him from Jameson is more than mere physical distance: it is *ideological* distance, too – specifically, the 'distance' or, better, the yawning divide, between incompatible optics deriving ultimately from the colonial encounter. Marxist intellectual though Jameson might be (or might profess himself to be), he continues – this is how Ahmad sees it – to replicate the essential gesture of colonialist thought in conceiving of the 'non-West' in terms of its otherness from the normative 'West'. Hence Ahmad's resort to the trope of 'civilisation': Jameson, he says, supposes himself to be 'my civilizational Other'.

Substantively, Ahmad's words home in on the categorical universalism of Jameson's hypothesis: 'All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*'. Ahmad questions Jameson's elementary competence to formulate such a hypothesis: 'I was born in India and I write poetry in Urdu, a language not commonly understood among US intellectuals', he writes, drawing attention to the fact that, for all Jameson's polyglottism, nearly all of the languages implicated by the term 'third world' remain unavailable to him. On what authority, therefore – by what mandate – could his hypothesis possibly justify its universalism? Propositionally, its generalism seems to Ahmad unwarranted – indeed, absurd: he insists that 'one knows of so many texts from one's own part of the world which do not fit the description of "national allegory"' (1992, p. 107). And what then adds ideological insult to propositional injury, drawing his particular ire and indignation, is the fact that Jameson – who has, after all, taken the time and the trouble to learn a lot about the cultures and societies of the 'non-West' (Ahmad acknowledges that Jameson's interpretation of the Chinese writer Lu Xun and the Senegalese writer, Ousmane Sembene in his essay is 'marvellously erudite' [1992, p. 95]); and who, precisely for this reason, might hopefully have been relied upon to know how much he had *still* to discover – does not hesitate to put forward a categorical global hypothesis, in the language of 'all' and 'necessarily'. The gesture strikes Ahmad as frankly colonialist.[3] As he puts it:

> The mere fact . . . that languages of the metropolitan countries have not been adopted by the vast majority of the producers of literature in Asia and Africa means that the vast majority of literary texts from those continents are unavailable in the metropolises, so that a literary theorist who sets out to formulate "a theory of the cognitive aesthetics of third-world literature" will be constructing ideal-types, in the Weberian manner, duplicating all the basic procedures which Orientalist scholars have historically deployed in presenting their own readings of a certain tradition of "high" textuality as *the* knowledge of a supposedly unitary object which they call "the Islamic civilization". (1992, p. 97)

Now I want to register in passing my view that Ahmad overstates his case here. He seems to have 'forgotten', in the passage just cited, that the literatures of South America and the Caribbean, which are unquestionably constitutive of the Jamesonian category of the 'third-world', *are* overwhelmingly produced in languages of the metropolitan countries, to which Jameson does have direct access, and over which he has long demonstrated an impressively broad academic command. The 'Third-World Literature' essay is full of references to the literatures and cultures of the Hispanophone New World – particularly to Cuba, in which (not least for political reasons, of course), Jameson has

held a longstanding interest. (Witness, for instance – among many other publications that could be cited in this respect – the Foreword that he would write in 1989 to a translation into English of Roberto Fernández Retamar's classic text, *Caliban*.) Moreover, as elsewhere in his writings, Ahmad's statement also betrays the fact that he knows comparatively little about Africa, or sub-Saharan Africa, at least: for in that sub-continent, unlike in the Indian subcontinent, and for historical reasons that would repay close examination, the languages of the metropolitan countries *have* in fact been adopted by the majority of the producers of literature. In fact, well over half of the literary works produced in sub-Saharan Africa are composed in the metropolitan languages, chiefly of French, English and Portuguese.

Still, the main thrust of Ahmad's argument against Jameson is not that the universalism of his hypothesis concerning 'third-world' literature is unwarranted or even that his method is latently Orientalist. Rather, it is that his foundational category of the 'third-world' – hence also the binary opposition which structures his essay, between 'first-world' and 'third-world' cultures – is untenable. Ahmad is quite unambiguous on this point. The notion of the 'third-world', he tells us, is 'even in its most telling deployments, a polemical one, with no theoretical status whatsoever' (1992, p. 96). Because of this, it is impossible to elaborate a theory – any theory – of 'third-world literature':

> there is no such thing as a "Third World Literature" which can be constructed as an internally coherent object of theoretical knowledge. There are fundamental issues – of periodization, social and linguistic formations, political and ideological struggles within the field of literary production, and so on – which simply cannot be resolved at this level of generality without an altogether positivist reductionism. (1992, pp. 96–7)

Jameson's mobilisation of the category of the 'third-world' is specious, according to Ahmad, on two separate accounts. First, while he defines the 'first-world' and the 'second-world' in terms of their modes of production (capitalism and socialism, respectively), he defines the 'third-world' in terms of its 'experience of colonialism and imperialism' (Jameson, 1986, p. 67; Ahmad, 1992, p. 98). This means, as Ahmad puts it, that '[t]hat which is constitutive of human history itself is present in the first two cases, absent in the third case. Ideologically, this classification divides the world between those who make history and those who are mere objects of it' (1992, p. 100). Second, Jameson's binary opposition between 'first-world' and 'third-world' formations – and which, to repeat, Ahmad sees as being 'empirically ungrounded in any facts' (1992, p. 101) – has the effect of flattening out the divisions *within* each of these (non-) formations in the interest of accentuating the opposition *between* them. Where a Marxist analysis ought to have emphasised class struggle, Jameson's 'third-worldist' analysis emphasises instead the struggle for national liberation, the struggle of colonial societies to emerge

into nationhood in a world of nation-states. Inasmuch as Jameson proceeds from the ground of 'third-worldism', Ahmad argues, he is more or less *bound* to valorise nationalism as the overarching political value, such that the 'national allegory' hypothesis emerges as something in the nature of a truism or tautology, constructed internally and immanently in accordance with the terms of his theory rather than being addressed to, and shedding light on, a tendency or reality outside itself:

> If [the] "Third World" is *constituted* by the singular "experience of colonialism and imperialism", and if the only possible response is a nationalist one, then what else is there that is more urgent to narrate than this "experience"? In fact, there is *nothing else* to narrate. For if societies here are defined not by relations of production but by relations of intra-national domination; if they are forever suspended outside the sphere of conflict between capitalism (First World) and socialism (Second World); if the motivating force for history here is neither class formation and class struggle nor the multiplicities of intersecting conflicts based upon class, gender, nation, race, region, and so on, but the unitary "experience" of national oppression (if one is merely the *object* of history, the Hegelian slave) then what else *can* one narrate but that national oppression? Politically, we are Calibans all. (1992, p. 102)

III

Ahmad's critique of Jameson was published in 1987 and, as I have already intimated, quickly became paradigmatic. It still serves as the point of departure for any sustained discussion of the merits of the 'national allegory' hypothesis – as even my own procedure in this chapter must be taken to confirm. Especially remarkable, in my view, is the fact that the critique is typically construed as unanswerable, so that it serves in effect as the accepted means of focalising Jameson's text, which comes before us as readers in the field of postcolonial studies, therefore, as to a significant degree pre-digested, already read. There are, to be sure, some splendid exceptions to this rule, commentaries which address the debate between the two theorists but contrive to read Jameson's article with fresh eyes: Neil Larsen's brief statements in his book, *Determinations* (2001), constitute one such exception, Madhava Prasad's essay in a 1992 issue of *Social Text* another. More generally, however, the authority of Ahmad's reading tends quite simply to be taken for granted. Thus Frederick Buell repeats point-for-point the terms of Ahmad's critique, in fact identifying his own views so seamlessly with Ahmad's that he moves in closing to claim Ahmad for his own globalization theory standpoint. Ahmad, he tells us, 'invok[es] a profound recent change in modes of world organization' (1994, p. 286). (In fact, Ahmad invokes no such thing, but Buell himself certainly does.) Sara Suleri, similarly, praises the 'eloquence'

of Ahmad's critique of Jameson's 'third-worldist' discourse – a discourse which for her 'bespeaks a theoretical fear that has still to reconcile the uneasy distance between alterity and the problematic of national specificities' (1992, p. 13). It is true that Suleri qualifies her appreciation of Ahmad somewhat – he is 'perhaps too heavily invested in a reading of the "real" to provide an adequate theoretical alternative to the potentially alteritist allegory of Jameson's argument'. But this is very much in the nature of a quibble: for her commentary is centrally predicated on Ahmad's diagnosis of a 'rhetoric of otherness' in Jameson's essay, and on his construction of this rhetoric as neo-Orientalist if not neo-colonialist. As Suleri puts it in introducing the Jameson–Ahmad debate:

> contemporary rereadings of colonial alterity too frequently wrest the rhetoric of otherness into a postmodern substitute for the very Orientalism that they seek to dismantle, thereby replicating on an interpretive level the cultural and critical fallacies that such revisionism is designed to critique . . . In contravention of the astounding specificity of each colonial encounter, alteritism enters the interpretive scene to insist on the conceptual centrality of an untouchable intransigence. Much like the category of the exotic in the colonial narratives of the prior century, contemporary critical theory names the other in order that it need not be further known; more crucially, alteritism represses the detail of cultural facticity by citing otherness as a universal trope, thereby suggesting that the discursive site of alterity is nothing other than the familiar and unresolved confrontation between the historical and the allegorical.[4]

What Ahmad calls Jameson's 'rhetoric of otherness', Suleri terms his 'alteritism'. In Rosemary Marangoly George's discussion of the debate, Jameson's 'reading practice' is construed, analogously, in the light of Johannes Fabian's critique of the colonialist logic of anthropological discourse (1996, pp. 102–13). The binary opposition between 'first-world' and 'third-world' cultures in the 'Third-World Literature' essay is read as registering not the engineered geo-political unevenness of imperialism but a *temporal* unevenness, which Fabian has termed 'allochrony'. Allochrony denies 'coevality': the scandal of anthropology, Fabian (1983) has argued, is that through its methodology and disciplinary practice it presents other people, who are in fact contemporaries of the anthropologists who write about them, as though they are living in another time, specifically in the past. The anthropologist who writes about Africans or Pacific Islanders or Amerindians positions them as 'primitive': they live in the present but are actually of the past; the anthropologist's encounter with them is therefore an encounter not merely of different social and cultural orders but of different, and of course differently *valued*, temporalities. (Christopher Miller has used this conception in a very interesting reading of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, arguing that, in Conrad's text, Marlowe's

voyage to the centre of the African continent is phrased as a voyage backwards in time, beyond the beginning of civilisation (1985, pp. 169–83).) For George, Jameson's binarisation of 'first-world' and 'third-world' cultures functions to similar effect: it situates 'third-world' cultures as backward and, more specifically, as embroiled still in tasks and projects which have already been undertaken, and completed, in the 'first-world': 'Jameson, it seems . . . would like to convince us that nationalism is the *only* authentic cultural attribute of the non-western parts of the world. And even this "fundamental" attribute has already been experienced in the past of western literature' (1996, p. 109). Exactly the same point is made by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (writing *after* both Ahmad and George but citing neither of them, incidentally) in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* when she essays to identify 'what is most problematic in Jameson's "Third World Literature". Psychoanalysis (such as it is) for us. Anthropology (as, in Jameson, nationalism), for them. As Johannes Fabian has pointed out, for the anthropologist, "[d]ispersal in space [can] reflect . . . directly . . . sequence in Time"'.[5]

In the passage from Ahmad to George and Spivak, and certainly to Buell and Suleri, a curious inversion occurs. The critique mutates from a Marxist critique of 'third-worldism' into a 'third-worldist' critique of Marxism. Ahmad himself was the first to recognise this mutation, although he failed, I think (for understandable reasons), to grasp fully the role that he had played in bringing it about. Already by 1992, when he republished 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness' as a chapter in his book, *In Theory*, it had become clear to him that an ideologically consequential gap had opened up between his strategic intentions in criticising Jameson and the conclusions that postcolonialist readers were increasingly drawing from that critique. As Ahmad wrote in the introductory chapter of *In Theory*, 'Literature among the Signs of Our Time':

> It has been a matter of considerable personal irritation for me that my essay appeared at a time when Jameson was very much under attack precisely for being an unrepentant Marxist. There remain at least some circles where almost anything that was so fundamentally critical of him was welcome, so that my article has been pressed into that sort of service, even though my own disagreement had been registered on the opposite grounds – namely, that I had found that particular essay of his not rigorous enough in its Marxism. Meanwhile, my disagreement with Jameson on Third-Worldist nationalism has also been assimilated far too often into the sort of thing which we hear nowadays from the fashionable poststructuralists in their unbridled diatribes against nationalism as such.
>
> (1992, pp. 10–11)

Ahmad is right to argue that his readers have ridden on his coat-tails in order, not to challenge Jameson's Marxism for its lack of 'rigour', but to repudiate

Jameson precisely *for his Marxism*. In postcolonial studies, the Jameson–Ahmad debate has been mobilised very centrally as a way of routing Marxism, of pointing to its alleged complicities with Orientalism, cultural supremacism, colonialism and the like. The internal links in this argumentative chain proceed something like this: (1) Jameson's binarisation of 'first-world' and 'third-world' formations bespeaks a cultural essentialism; (2) This cultural essentialism is readable as a latter-day Orientalism; (3) Jameson's methodology is emblematically Marxist; (4) Therefore, Marxism is culturally essentialist and Orientalist.

Ahmad deplores this postcolonialist appropriation of his critique of Jameson, finding it at one and the same time 'irritating' and culturally symptomatic. He deplores it, but he argues that it has nothing to do with him. It is an effect, rather, of the ideological tendencies prevailing in postcolonial studies in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This latter proposition is certainly true, or at least it is true to a degree. Ahmad clearly cannot be identified and isolated as the *fons et origo*, or even as the exclusive agent, of the curious process through which his intended Marxist critique of Jameson's 'third-worldism' came to be taken up as a 'third-worldist' critique of Jameson's Marxism and of Marxism as such, and in terms of which, in its crudest and most programmatic form, the fact that he, Ahmad, is an Asian and Jameson a white American, contributed significantly to his readership's preference for his views (even misunderstood) over those of his American Marxist interlocutor.

I think this is an important point. We need a materialist and institutionally grounded reading of this process – a reading that would situate both Ahmad's initial critique of Jameson and the subsequent taking up of this critique as *overdetermined*. As position-takings in a field already structured by previously taken positions (including Jameson's), both the critique and the appropriation of it were in a sense objectively mandated. Such a reading would enable us to make sense to those many readers of Jameson's essay who would otherwise complain, and perfectly truthfully, that they had come to the 'Third-World Literature' essay without having read Ahmad's critique first – indeed, without previously ever having *heard* of Aijaz Ahmad. A significant number of these readers – particularly, I think, those who were reading Jameson's essay in the late 1980s and early 1990s – responded to it in much the same way as Ahmad had, with disquiet or even outrage. (If and when these readers then went on to read Ahmad's critique, they often identified with him, felt that he had articulated at least some of their criticisms of Jameson's essay.) What needs to be emphasised then is that although Ahmad's formulation was obviously his and his alone, the content of what he wrote was, so to speak, 'there to be written'; it was 'in the air', which is why these other readers are able to report having responded to the essay in the same way as Ahmad had.

But I wonder, even so, whether we should allow Ahmad to wash his hands quite so easily of any involvement, any implication, in the way his readers came to take up his critique of Jameson? He was writing, within the United

States, in an academic (and wider cultural) climate of fervid identity politics (even though he was himself an opponent of such politics). This was a climate in which the strategic production of the race card was becoming a formidable weapon in the competition for symbolic capital, within the academy as well as in the wider circuits of culture and society; in which a mobile, radically contingent and hierarchically organised lexicon of 'oppressions' was beginning to displace more foundationalist schemas of domination and exploitation (whether Marxist or bourgeois-progressivist). Within the university sectors of the arts, humanities and social sciences, the uneven combination of post-Marxist and anti-nationalist philosophical discourse, identity politics, postmodernism, and multiculturalism (the whole ensemble sometimes leavened by poststructuralist epistemology) resulted in the distinctive emphases that Ahmad sought to analyse in *In Theory* under the rubric of 'third-worldism', and that were also notably addressed at much the same time, in their different ways, by Arif Dirlik (1994) and Kwame Anthony Appiah (1991). The dispositions of the field were so tilted that even as principled an opponent of identity politics as Gayatri Spivak was led, on occasion, to resort to them as a rhetorical means – as when, for instance, she sought to bat away Benita Parry's fierce, class-based argument that in much postcolonialist writing in its poststructuralist aspect, there was a paradoxical tendency to silence 'native' speech, by responding that:

> When Benita Parry takes us to task for not being able to listen to the natives, or to let the natives speak, she forgets that the three of us [Parry had criticised Homi Bhabha and Abdul JanMohamed in addition to Spivak], postcolonials, are "natives" too. We talk like Defoe's Friday, only much better. Three hundred years have passed, and territorial imperialism has changed to neo-colonialism. The resistant post-colonial has become a scandal.[6]

In such an intellectual climate, Ahmad could not have been unaware, I think – or, at least, he *ought not* to have been unaware – of the rhetorical effect that his *language* in his Jameson article would be likely to engender. I say 'language' rather than 'argument'. In fact, I do not believe that Ahmad was unaware of this. The invocation in his essay of a 'rhetoric of otherness' in Jameson; the suggestion that Jameson's 'first-world'/'third-world' binary had had the effect of 'otherising' him (Ahmad) along an axis of 'civilisation'; the classification of Jameson's reading practice as Orientalist – this is not the lexicon of a *Marxist* critique. If Ahmad was not *consciously* smuggling 'third-worldist' rhetoric into his own Marxist critique of Jameson's 'third-worldism', the incorporation of such rhetoric into the critique is nevertheless indisputable. One need not doubt that Ahmad intended to criticise Jameson from the standpoint of a more 'rigorous' Marxism. But when, in strict accordance with the prevailing temper of the field, his postcolonialist readers duly appropriated

him for their 'third-worldist' critique of Jameson's Marxism, this appropriation did not need to be cut from whole cloth.

IV

The irony of this is considerable, but it is doubled by the fact that it is also quite possible to defend Jameson *on Marxist grounds* from the charge of 'third-worldism', at least as Ahmad lays that charge. Let us return briefly to the opening pages of the 'Third-World Literature' essay and undertake a close reading of them, by way of exploring the problematic out of which Jameson writes.

The essay opens with a statement about the radical discrepancy obtaining between contemporary discussions of the nation and nationness among 'third-world' and 'American' intellectuals. In the discourse of the former, 'the name of the country . . . returns again and again like a gong'; there is 'a collective attention to "us" and what we have to do and how we do it', a collective attention to 'us' as a 'people' or imagined community (1986, p. 65). (Jameson refers explicitly to Benedict Anderson's (1983) influential text, which had then only recently been published.) There is no similar discussion in the American context: indeed, Jameson speculates that from the standpoint of the 'American intellectual', 'one might feel' that the topic under discussion by 'third-world' intellectuals 'is nothing but that old thing called "nationalism," long liquidated here and rightly so'. We can immediately note that although Jameson is himself an American, he is not spoken for in the discourse of 'American intellectuals' as he represents it. The American ideology is evidently not the ideology of all Americans, but a particular, restricted view of the world, issuing from a particular standpoint.

Having introduced the idea that 'America' arises not as a geographical entity but as an ideological construct – the object of the discourse of 'American intellectuals' – Jameson then moves on directly to offer a typological representation of 'American' or, indeed, 'first-world' thought. The 'first-world wisdom' would have it that nationalism has been put to bed on *this* side of the imperial divide ('we' have outlived 'our' nationalist pasts), and had better not be mentioned in the context of the *other* side, since it only ever emerges there as a blood-drenched, politically regressive atavism. Jameson explicitly disavows this 'first-world wisdom': 'The predictable reminders of Kampuchea and of Iraq and Iran do not really seem to me to settle anything or suggest by what these nationalisms might be replaced except perhaps some global American postmodernist culture' (1986, p. 65). Ahmad contrives to misread Jameson spectacularly here, claiming that he stipulates that 'the only choice for the "Third World" is . . . between its "nationalisms" and a "global American postmodernist culture"' (1992, p. 101). But what Jameson has actually written is that this is the way that things *seem* from the standpoint of the 'first-world' ('American') intellectual – who is precisely *unable* to imagine the possibility

either of socialism or even of progressive forms of nationalism, and who therefore envisages the only 'choice' confronting 'third-world' societies as being between Americanism and barbarism.

It is worth reminding ourselves here of the occasion for which the 'Third-World Literature' essay was originally written: a memorial lecture at the University of California, San Diego honouring Jameson's academic colleague and friend, Robert C. Elliott, author of books on satire and utopia (1986, p. 86, n. 3). Jameson is writing in the first instance to and for students and scholars of literature, people, in the main, whose exposure to 'third-world' or 'post-colonial' writings will have been very limited. With respect to these readers, he believes, there is a particular problem where 'third-world' writings are concerned. This problem takes the form of a schooled inability to grapple with cultural difference. Again using the foil of the typological 'American intellectual', Jameson argues that while such an intellectual has been trained to imagine herself or himself receptive to literary value wherever it might arise, s/he has also been trained to recognise it only in the restricted 'Western canon'. On the one hand, thus, s/he celebrates what s/he finds in canonical texts as the epitome of literary value; on the other hand, s/he holds literary value to be locatable only in canonical texts. To which Jameson responds that '[i]f the purpose of the canon is to restrict our aesthetic sympathies, to develop a range of rich and subtle perceptions which can be exercised only on the occasion of a small but choice body of texts, to discourage us from reading anything else or from reading those things in different ways, then it is humanly impoverishing' (1986, p. 66).

Jameson suspects that 'third-world' texts tend to be apprehended by 'first-world' readers in one of two equally unsatisfactory ways (and sometimes in both of these ways at the same time): either as aesthetically inferior, or as derivative: 'The third-world novel will not offer the satisfactions of Proust or Joyce; what is more damaging than that, perhaps, is its tendency to remind us of outmoded stages of our own first-world cultural development and to cause us to conclude that "they are still writing novels like Dreiser or Sherwood Anderson"' (1986, p. 65). Jameson is again ventriloquising his putative 'first-world' reader here. Those postcolonialists who have taken offense at his formulation, believing that he is smugly consigning 'third-world literature' to third-class status, have misread him. It is not in the least that 'third-world literature' is not, in his eyes, 'as good as' ('Western') canonical literature. It is rather that the ('Western') canon serves in 'first-world' thought as a false universal, preventing any concrete engagement with 'third-world' (or culturally different) texts. The 'first-world' reader of 'third-world' texts who hopes to find the 'Tolstoy of Africa' or the 'Dickens of India' is inevitably disappointed, of course. But instead of recognising the parochialism of this hope – premised as it is on the assumption that only those who write like Tolstoy or Dickens can be considered great writers – our ideal-typical reader construes the 'gap' between Tolstoy or Dickens and, say, Pramoedya or

Tayeb Salih or Lamming, as signalling the deficiency of the latter writers, not the reader's own failure of competence. Because what is encountered is only referred back, unreflexively, to the ('Western') canon, it cannot be brought to life, deciphered in its actuality, its adequacy in its own particular context(s). Derealised, it is found wanting. Ultimately, the failure to engage with cultural difference prevents the 'first-world' reader from having to contemplate the contingency of what is presented to him/her, ideologically, as uncontingent, universally true:

> We sense, between ourselves and this alien text, the presence of another reader, of the Other reader, for whom a narrative, which strikes us as conventional or naïve, has a freshness of information and a social interest that we cannot share. The fear and the resistance I'm evoking has to do, then, with the sense of our own non-coincidence with the Other reader, that Other "ideal reader" – that is to say, to read this text adequately – we could have to give up a great deal that is individually precious to us and acknowledge an existence and a situation unfamiliar and therefore frightening – one that we do not know and prefer *not* to know. (1986, p. 66)

It is at precisely this juncture that Jameson moves to comment on his use of the term 'third-world':

> I take the point of criticisms of this expression, particularly those which stress the way in which it obliterates profound differences between a whole range of non-western countries and situations . . . I don't, however, see any comparable expression that articulates, as this one does, the fundamental breaks between the capitalist first world, the socialist bloc of the second world, and a range of other countries which have suffered the experience of colonialism and imperialism . . . I am using the term "third world" in an essentially descriptive sense, and objections to it do not strike me as especially relevant to the argument I am making. (1986, p. 67)

Ahmad finds this rationalisation deeply unconvincing, as we have seen. It is obvious that Jameson concedes the danger of reductionism in utilising a term like 'third-world', which tends to emphasise the conflict between 'worlds' rather than class conflict within given social formations. But he retains the term in the absence of any other capable of registering the structurality of the contemporary world order. Ahmad suggests that in analytically decoupling the 'third-world' from the 'capitalist first world' and the 'socialist bloc of the second world', Jameson effectively defines it as outside of human history: lacking a mode of production (it is neither 'capitalist' nor 'socialist'), it comes into being only on the basis of its '"experience" of externally inserted phenomena' (1992, pp. 99–100).

It seems to me, however, that to speak of social formations as having 'suffered the experience of colonialism and imperialism' is scarcely to define them as being divorced from human history, or even the history of capitalism. What does Ahmad suppose *imperialism* is, for goodness sake? According to him, Jameson's classification 'leaves the so-called Third World in limbo; if only the First world is capitalist and the Second World socialist, how does one understand the Third World?' (1992, p. 100). But this critique fails signally to reckon with Jameson's clear awareness that some 'third-world' societies are socialist and others are not – as when he speaks of a trip to Cuba, on which he 'had occasion to visit a remarkable college-preparatory school on the outskirts of Havana. It is a matter of some shame for an American to witness the cultural curriculum in a socialist setting which also very much identifies itself with the third world' (1986, pp. 74–75). To speak of 'third-world' societies as having suffered the experience of colonialism and imperialism is, as I understand it, to speak of their having been forced into the capitalist world system, of their having been yoked, on the basis of conquest and political domination, into a global order predicated on inequality and exploitation. 'Combined and uneven', as the Marxist slogan has it. Hence Jameson's observation that

> none of these cultures can be conceived as anthropologically independent or autonomous, rather, they are all in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism – a cultural struggle that is itself a reflexion of the economic situation of such areas in their penetration by various stages of capital, or as it is sometimes euphemistically called, modernization. (1986, p. 68)

The banner of the 'third-world' was raised at a specific moment in the history of anti-imperialist struggle in the twentieth century. I take it that in Jameson's essay it functions more as the name of a political desire (as in: Cuba 'very much identifies itself with the third world') than as the descriptor of any place or region. Thus while there is indisputably an 'India' (though even this truth is not quite as self-evident as it appears), there is no 'third-world' in the same political-ontological sense. 'Third-worldness', as a regulative ideal, is born of anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist struggle. It gestures towards a world in which autonomy and popular self-determination will be politically meaningful concepts, in which 'independence' will not correspond merely to 'flag independence'. In a world of colonies and nation-states, such an aspiration can only be predicated in and through nationalism – not that nationalism is necessarily a terminus (indeed, Marxists must hope it is not), but that it is unforgoable as a site of liberation struggle. Ahmad himself has written most eloquently about this, arguing that '[f]or human collectivities in the backward zones of capital . . . all relationships with imperialism pass through their own nation-states, and there is simply no way of breaking out

of that imperial dominance without struggling for different kinds of national projects and for a revolutionary restructuring of one's own nation-state' (1992, p. 11).

In these terms, it seems plausible to propose that literature which rises to the challenge of 'third-worldness' will of necessity allegorise the nation. And the same would then be true of literature which has 'third-worldness' thrust upon it, as a condition of its existence. 'The potential for error', as Neil Larsen has written,

> lies in the *a priori* reduction of every individual instance of "third world literature" to . . . national allegory. But it seems to me correct to regard this allegorizing process as a *structural tendency* in the narrative forms of "peripheral" modernities – a tendency that may, in many instances, never amount to *more* than an abstract possibility. If it can be allowed that the third world nation itself exists, on one plane at least, only as an abstract possibility . . . then it follows that attempts to represent this nation, to portray it in a narrative or symbolic medium, will reflect this abstraction within the formal elements of the medium itself. (2001, p. 19)

There are problems with Jameson's formulation of the 'national allegory' hypothesis, to be sure, and I have no wish to pretend that there are not, or to rationalise them away. But my sense is that if this hypothesis had not been postulated, we would have had to invent it. This is not primarily for theoretical reasons (though these are not trivial), but in order to keep pace with, to be accountable to, modern and contemporary writings from the 'postcolonial' world, the 'third-world', the 'backward zones of capital' – whatever term one chooses to apply here. For these writings seem to *require* such a hypothesis.

It is not only that so many literary texts, across the full range of the literature – not only fiction, incidentally, but also poetry and drama – put themselves forward explicitly and self-consciously as the vehicles of a national consciousness (if not *only* of national consciousness – there is no need for us to suppose that nationalism cannot co-exist alongside other forms of political identification and commitment, progressive and reactionary). Think for instance, of the fiction of Rohinton Mistry, Saadat Hasan Manto, Etel Adnan, Ghassan Kanafani, Assia Djebar, Manuel Rui and Isabel Allende (to say nothing of Salman Rushdie); or the poetry of Martin Carter, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Fadwa Tuqan, Kofi Awoonor and Dennis Brutus. It is also that so many other texts, which do not necessarily assume this burden, nevertheless situate themselves in terms of the nation's experience. Think here, for instance, of Gabriela Mistral's poetry; of the 'magic realist' stories of the contemporary South African writers, Ivan Vladislavic (who writes in English) and Etienne van Heerden (who writes in Afrikaans); of the work of the Mozambican fabulist, Mia Couto; of Anita Desai's careful examination of

the relationship between private and public aspirations, private and public memories (deriving from 1947; the late 1960s, the novel's 'present'; and implicitly the early 1980s, when the novel is written) in postcolonial India in *Clear Light of Day*.

The cumulative weight of all these works makes it necessary to re-open the file on the 'Third-World Literature' essay – in order to reclaim some of its authentically enabling insights concerning the purchase and significance of 'nation-ness' in this body of writing. When, early in *A Fine Balance*, for example, Dina Dalal finds a lodger to share the costs of renting her flat with her, Mistry writes: 'No need now to visit her brother and beg for next month's rent. She took a deep breath. Once again, her fragile independence was preserved' (1997, p. 11). The word 'independence' is radically overdetermined in this context, of course. It is impossible for us *not* to read Dina's story as the story of postcolonial India – just as it is impossible for us *not* to read Sonali's story in Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* in the light of the narrative of India as a postcolonial nation-state. And the troping of the nation is equally explicit and self-conscious in the case of Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*. This is not only a matter of detail – though the text has been exhaustively researched in its sociological and historical referentiality – but of *conception*: a text written and published in the 1990s, but set in 1951, four years after the achievement of independence in India, *A Suitable Boy* is centrally concerned to pose the question of what those forty years have meant *to the nation*, to notions of *nation-ness*, to *national consciousness*.

One can, in closing, allow these lines from the Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish's 'Poem of the Land' (1992, p. 146) to speak for the nationalitarian element in all this literature:

I name the soil I call it
  an extension of my soul
I name my hands I call them
  the pavement of wounds
I name the pebbles
  wings
I name the birds
  almonds and figs
I name my ribs
  trees
Gently I pull a branch
  from the fig tree of my breast
I throw it like a stone
  to blow up the conqueror's tank.

Jameson's conceptualisation of the relationship between such literature and nationalism is neither definitive nor the end of the discussion. But it seems

to raise massively consequential questions and to go at least some way towards answering them. Scholars in postcolonial studies should seize the opportunity today to reread it, as though for the first time.

Notes

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1. This line of criticism is of course indebted to Pierre Bourdieu. See, for instance, 'The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed' in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, trans. Richard Nice, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993): 29–73.
2. Aijaz Ahmad, 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory"'. *Social Text* 17 (1987): 3–26. Reprinted in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London and New York: Verso, 1992): 95–122. Further references to this essay will be drawn from *In Theory*.
3. The *locus classicus* of colonialist discourse in this respect is probably the text that has come to be known as 'Macauley's Minute' – Thomas Babington Macauley's 1835 contribution to the debate then raging over the goals and content of colonial education in India. Macauley wrote: 'I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed, both here and at home, with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the oriental learning at the valuation of their orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia'. In Philip D. Curtin, ed., *Imperialism* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, 1971): 182.
4. Suleri, *Rhetoric*: 12–13. Compare Buell: 'Jameson sought to transport the concept of radical difference out of Orientalism and into political economy, and to make it a reflection of power relations rather than primordial cultures.' Criticising him for his cultural essentialism, Buell adds that Jameson 'discern[s] in heterogeneous evidence a single, buried pattern . . . making it representative of a whole culture, thereby valorizing the notion of cultural wholes' (*National Culture*: 279).
5. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1999): 109–10. In a recent interview, Spivak claims never to have read Ahmad's *In Theory*. She is 'intellectually sensitive', she says: 'sometimes I keep myself from reading things that I have heard a good deal of, seen a lot of quotation from and so I say to myself "put this in the background for now. There is a lot of stuff to look at. You should carry on so that you don't get into a defensive modex"'. 'Mapping the Present: Interview with Gayatri Spivak', conducted by Meyda Yegenoglu and Mahmut Mutman, *New Formations* 45 (2001–02): 17–18. In *A Critique of Postcolonial*

Reason, however – published *before* this interview – she twice cites *In Theory*, not generally but in detail (41n, 273n). We must assume that the subsequent claim not to have read *In Theory* is meant as a provocation.

6. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's *Foe* Reading Defoe's *Crusoe/Roxana*'. In Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson, eds, *Consequences of Theory* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990): 172. Spivak rehearses this argument in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993): 60–61.

4

Postmodernism is the Theory, Gentrification is the Practice: Jameson, Haraldsson, Architecture, and Vancouver

Clint Burnham

> For the *Community Banner Project*, banners will be designed to carry a theme that reflects the recent history (1960s, 70s, 80s) of street life, retail activity and use of public space in the Downtown Eastside. As a working class retail street, it was not too long ago that retail activity along Hastings Street was far more vibrant than it is today. The banners are an attempt to remind us of this recent history and encourage us to think positively about the future.
>
> (*Newsletter of the Carnegie Community Action Project*, 2001, p. 1)

He goes, so do you really think there's something redeeming about gentrification?

Yeah sure, I say. In the dialectical sense that there's a formal similarity between the good kind of social housing we all believe in and trendy warehouse conversions. And also in the political sense that this becomes a way to talk about what can and is actually being done. Any agitator worth her salt must talk about positive measures. Whether they exist or not. In this case, here in Vancouver, they do exist.

& this has to do with Jameson?

Yeah well, he writes about architecture, right, but finds the spirit of postmodernism in corporate malls and hotels or boutique branded guys like Eisenman or Koolhaas. The trick is to find examples or articulations of what's most revolutionary about Jameson's pronouncements on pomo in *building practices – so, if pomo is contra modernism, if it entails borderblur between high culture and pop culture, if it means textuality and quoting and the death of the subject and the rise of theory and – most importantly, if these essentially formal conceits are themselves determined by their relation with the economic via periodization (i.e. late capitalism), well, then surely we can think about architecture not simply to get dizzy in the Eaton Centre or to rescue the Rockefeller Centre from the hands of vulgar modernists.*

Yeah sure but I think you're protesting too much, dude. In that 'Brick and Balloon' essay, remember he ends up contextualizing architecture – the building – via Manfredo Tafuri's credo that (in Jameson's words) "an individual building will always stand in contradiction with its urban context and also with its social function" (Jameson, 1998e, p. 177).

Un-hunh, so, you're saying that this *fictive exposition, "us" talking here right now, uses the dialogic oral to turn from a consideration of how to do an end-run around Jameson, an end-run that tries to be more Jamesonian-than-Jameson (i.e. to find his architectural theory realized not in his writings on architecture, not so literally, but in his programmatic statements on pomo), to turn to a dialectical reminder that what I'm saying about Vancouver's architecture is already there*?

Exactly. Jameson goes on to say that the "interesting buildings are those which try to resolve those contradictions through more or less ingenious formal and stylistic innovations" (1998e, p. 177). *So first of all, the urban context and social functions of buildings in the DES*[1] *are multiple: the context, as conveyed by Arni Haraldsson's photography, is variegated and trans-historical, with new and old jostling; the function, in the case of social housing, is more monolithic. This contradiction between the monolithic social function and the dialogic urban fabric, then, is "resolved" (think Lévi-Strauss) in one of two ways, depending on whether the building is a renewed/renovated SRO etc. – in which case the dialogic context is reinscribed in the building's retro feel that also beckons to the degraded pomo vernacular of hegemonic gentrification; or if the building is new – designed by well-known West Coast Canadian architects the likes of Arthur Erickson or Richard Henriquez – the resolution is more insidious, as modern building methods are heroically saved for social purposes.*

Downtown East In the first "establishing shot" of Vancouver's slum, with the corporate highrises of the "proper" downtown in the background, we get a sense of the architectural eclecticism of the DES – a mixture that embodies postmodern architecture's dogma of ahistoricism but in a social and collective context ("the hood") as opposed to the heroicism of pomo – where the building itself, whether quoting ancient temples or international corporate signage, accomplishes the quasi-modernist feat of standing in for a fallen context – the context now being not simply the neighborhood (ignored by the modern) but the history of architecture itself. Here, *pace* Naomi Klein, we see few corporate signifiers – the rebus-like Canada Trust and BC Hydro logos notwithstanding – but rather the letters of an older capital, the West Hotel and Pub of an old logger's residence, and the W of the closed department store.

Vancouver photographer Arni Haraldsson and I are in the elevator of the Regal Place Hotel.[2] The elevator is very small. I am carrying his tripod in a nylon zip-up bag. He is carrying a medium format camera. Later, I am surprised to realize that Haraldsson does not shoot off a roll or two for each image. I remember a sports photographer who would use tons of film for a basketball game. But ballplayers move faster than buildings. Supposedly. In Haraldsson's work, photography is inadequate. He uses texts to provide history – realizing and foregrounding its own discursivity. Haraldsson's pictures refuse to rely on the noble mission of photography – its glossy magazine versions especially, even as he uses a critical photographic practice to deconstruct the authority of the building.

the Haraldsson photographs
of the Downtown Eastside
are heavily fragmented
disjointed
buildings don't stand on their own
but bump into each other
as crowd
as mob
their ages as disparate
as chickenhawks
at an Eminem show
it's this historical dislocation
of this location
the way condos
named after
19th century railway bureaucrats

gated communities
of yuppie cowards
sit near old hotels and pubs
and women's housing
or the renovated Sunrise Hotel
with laundromat, dental clinic, cafe, co-op radio station and artist collective
sharing space

We climb the stairs of another building, also in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. In this case, it's the parkade for a closed department store, which will, in a year or two, be turned into social and cooperative housing. A security guard stops us and looks at the sniper rifle case I'm carrying. Al pulls his fist back very quickly and knocks the minimum-wage guy out. We get into position on the 7th level. The prime minister's motorcade is due in half an hour. We settle in to wait.

My partner goes, so do you really think there's something redeeming about gentrification?

Yeah sure, I say. In the dialectical sense that there's a formal similarity between the good kind of social housing we all believe in and trendy warehouse conversions. And also in the political sense that this becomes a way to talk about what can and is actually being done. Any agitator worth his or her salt has to be able to talk about positive measures. Whether they exist or not. In this case, here in Vancouver, they do exist.

Yeah yeah, he says. Go for it, what are you, some publicity flack for Mayor Philip Owen?[3]

You're right, it is weird the sudden convergence between City Hall and the radical Left on issues like health services for drug addicts. But this, too, is historically overdetermined. That is, just because George Soros funds, through the Lindesmith Center Drug Policy Foundation, policy discourse around drug decriminalization, does not mean that such measures "on the ground" in Vancouver or Frankfurt or Liverpool are simply neo-liberal market forces.

We were in the narrow elevator of a hotel that had a social democratic cyber Raymond Chandler panoptical feel to it. The punk rocker working in the office downstairs, the omnipresent cameras, the stack of trays from an AIDS outreach agency, and the corner apartment of the fellow we were going to see: these were all as if William Gibson actually wrote about Vancouver instead of just lived in it. The guy we were visiting, "Bob", lived in a corner suite with views in three different directions. The mouth of the Downtown Eastside was open for us, and it was a glorious assemblage of new, old, missing, gold, and rotting teeth, from power company towers and an urban mall to decaying row upon row of circa 1930s four-story buildings and hotels.

On the street a woman stopped us and asked what we were doing. I said taking some pictures. "Not of poor people, I hope." "No, just buildings." "Oh there's some great buildings," she says. And she proceeds to tell us of some of her favourite. Another guy, Syd, mentions the Empress hotel. We take some pictures of it from the Bruce Erickson Place behind it, between a bank and a police station.

On the Woodward's building, graffiti records the ebb and flow of sexual, political, and aesthetic inscriptions. "Postmodernism is the theory, gentrification is the practice" is next to racist allegations about the owners of the department store. Note: the owners are Anglo-Canadian but the writer of the graffiti assumes they are Chinese or Jewish.

Downtown East and China town As the camera turns north, we see the core of the DES with a scrim of snow-capped mountains behind. Now, Haraldsson's method of robbing architecture of its space not only flattens the buildings but fragments them – or reveals their fragmentation in a post-Heideggerian trope of found juxtaposition. This fragmentation is historical of course: derived as it is from the colonial building practices in early 20th-century Vancouver, the DES with its many archetypal buildings constitutes a reserve.[4]

Jameson's theorizing of architecture both do and do not fit well in this scenario. On the one hand, his notion of a connection between the decentered slickness of postmodern culture and late capitalism, is perhaps the signal statement of the era – one which draws the definitive line between the economic and the cultural, even as it warns against simple determinism

or aestheticizing privilege of the cultural. But much of Jameson's architectural theory has found the despatialized individual in glossy hotels like the Portman in L.A. or urban sicko malls like Toronto's Eaton Centre.

And there is an important difference between corporate pomo and social housing pomo: when you enter a renovated Single Resident Occupancy (SRO) building the de-individuation is historical, caused by the spatial. This relation of the individual to the spatial and the temporal is the basis for much of Jameson's theorizing of postmodernism and architecture: that while modernism was concerned with time, postmodernism is with space. And while that formulation is objectively true, so too – dialectically, is its opposite, or that modernism of a derivative form as found in Vancouver was essentially spatial in its colonizing logic and that postmodernism as found here ends up being temporal in its simulation of the past.

Two examples of the vertiginous retro feeling I am talking about here: the Vancouver Public Library, by Canadian ideological architect par excellence Moshe Safide (it imitates the Roman coliseum in a bravura form of populist fascist architecture), and a mural in the Downtown Eastside which, depicting a 1930s/1940s street scene (trams, men in fedoras, etc.) has current residents painted into the windows.

I had a feeling someone'd shot at a motorcade before. The buildings were movie sets, and someone'd done the take yesterday, someone else'd do it tomorrow.

There is this recent artwork that problematizes the hegemonic view of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside as the zone of the criminal, the oriental, the junkie. Reid Shier's "Eastside Pride" is a video that juxtaposes shots from Jackie Chan's movie *Rumble in the Bronx* – which was filmed in Vancouver – with counter-shots of a fight sequence's location in the DES. Shier references global culture – the Chan film; a simulacra of the DES "Real"; the social geography of Vancouver (which, like many cities, stigmatizes its working and ugly east end); and quasi-nativist neighborhood politics.[5]

There is a strong architectural sensibility to this local politics – one in which a community group working out of the Carnegie Community Centre, longtime residents' activist Jim Green, and social housing projects run by the Portland Hotel figure strongly. Green, who has organized residents for over a quarter century, has been part of a force that has forced the city to retain, instead of demolishing, local SRO hotels – over 100 still serve the indigent population in the DES. In buildings that Green has helped renovate or build, award-winning architectural projects (the province's most prestigious architectural prize, the Lt Governor's award, for Richard Henriquez's Bruce Erickson Place building), stunning Foucauldean archival buildings that retain their masculine 1930s beauty, and participation and capacity building on the part of residents make this form of social housing one of the most innovative

today. Pair this with the Portland hotel's schemes of either buying and updating other SROs and designing an entirely new building for multiply-diagnosed residents with old school West Coast modernist Arthur Erickson (architect for the Canadian embassy in Washington, Simon Fraser University, and a host of other major, governmental projects in Canada and abroad, most featuring raw concrete, set-back windows, and attempts to suck in as much light as possible). Add the work of local architect Arthur Allen in teaching low-income students about the legacy of pre-modernist colonial temple architecture in Vancouver's downtown, and the eager way in which students and other DES residents display their adept readings of their built environment.

when Haraldsson photographs
he leans over the edges of parapets
and parking lot ledges
out community center windows
through SRO apartments
his tan jacket and belt
simultaneously
worker-safety-like
grab the belt
and sexual
& it is the *entry*
of his body
into space
that
authorizes
the practice

the assassins drove downtown in one of two directions: *from the west side*, *over the Burrard street bridge*, *or from the east side*, *along Kingsway*.

how do we know this?

cellphone scanners picked up suspicious conversations on both those routes.

You ever see In the Line of Fire?

Uh, *I don't know*, *who's that*? *Bruce Willis?*

No, *no*, *Clint Eastwood*, *you know*, *Malkovich sticks his gun in Clint's mouth*.

Oh yeah, *yeah*. *It's got a great scene*, *I really like that scene at the end*.

Yeah in that weird hotel.

Yeah it was like they had the glass elevators, so you can see everyone and be seen and shoot and get shot.

You had it both ways.

Yeah, yeah. Yeah that's cool when they do that, eh? Like in what's that Hong Kong flick, the one where the Uncle sets up his own gang but he calls it a security company?[6]

Um, yeah, yeah.

Yeah I like it when they do that cause that's what it's like, right, when you've got him in your rear sight, you know, it's like they're looking right back at you.[7]

Hitting a bullet with a bullet.[8]

Hitting a bullet with a bullet is exactly fucking right.

In his essay on L.A. architectural photographer Julius Shulman, Haraldsson (2001) draws attention to Shulman's pragmatic description of the importance of garden shears – for mobile foliage the better to frame a dramatic shot. The social framing of the image is here the edit/cut as phallic anxiety.[9]

the radical juxtaposition of Vancouver's built environment
the faded elegance amidst crack addict activists
then is trumped dialectically when
nature enters the scene
& commodified mountains
in the background of the slum
– commented on at least since Malcolm Lowry[10]
– which
totalized by Haraldsson's practice
now *all are all social*
slum, mountain, image
a formal overdetermination

If, as Jameson opines in the preface to *Marxism and Form*, the theoretical project of his making is more suited to the graduate seminar than night school, then, what of Jameson in night school – or, to be even more difficult, how to teach schizophrenic theory to those afflicted (or mis-diagnosed) with mental illnesses as well as poverty, the effects of violence, criminality? This works out in a number of different trajectories: multiple diagnoses as a form of overdetermination; language poetry as a form of found mental illness; and the "destabilizing" effects of postmodern architecture on those "always already" decentered, destabilized, deconstructed.

Regal Place Hotel The third photograph depicts for us the Regal Place Hotel, a building now run by the Portland Housing Society: social housing using the infrastructure of the neighborhood. Eight stories tall, the Regal Place offers up little to the eye of the photographer – as residents will, on the street, avoid the gaze of the drug dealers or cops or social workers. The verdigris-ish moss on the rooftops, the maggot-like swelling of a sports stadium in the background, the semi-heroic stature of the hotel itself: these details then become invisible in the final shot, taken *from* the Regal.

In one way, anti-poverty activist's and caregiver's formulation of themselves/clients as multiply diagnosed entails a realization that effects on the subject cannot be rationalized or compartmentalized into (only one of) the disciplinary/social categories of mental illness, drug abuse, poverty, racism/sexism/homophobia. That is to say, an individual's afflictions are overdetermined not simply because they are caused by a number of determinants – class, violence, prejudice – but because those number of determinants themselves cannot be separated from each other – even as they are by the abject disciplinary structures of the academy, social welfare, and late capitalist granting and housing efforts.

Then, Jameson's use of post-Lacanian theories of schizophrenia to analyze Bob Perelman's poem 'China' raises the (not ethical, but) formal question of such writing's relation with mental illness, not least because the syntactical disconnection (*aka* disjunction) in LangPo bears a strong resemblance to

patients' writing. But there are better genealogies to trace: Ron Silliman, for instance, once edited a newsletter for Mission denizens in San Francisco. So it is not as if we can posit an unbreachable gulf between "difficult" poetry and "difficult" people. I also know that in my own work, the fragmentation and disjunction is in the service of a practice (notebooks; the street, texts, and academy/theory as sources) and a formal praxis that theorizes its own method.

And so what of the Jameson-effect of postmodern architecture, particularly the glassy corporate variety? Certainly it is easy to overlook the supposed pomo sublime when dealing with vacuous capitalist buildings that exclude poor locals. But that exclusion can be beneficial, no? Jameson hardly makes Portman's Bonaventure hotel sound like a building you would want to go into – it is more like a Baudrillardean prison for the upper classes. A Vancouver example would be Tinsel Town (and yes, it is actually called that), a mall that has been open since late 1999, but with less than a quarter occupancy. So semi-high-end Asian leather stores and a remorselessly international food court share space with great swathes of concrete floor, edgy steel studs, and edgier male-model-looking security guards. And the top floor houses a nine screen cinema that ranges from Hollywood blockbusters to the various demographic aesthetic niches – gay film, Tsui Hark, and indie Canadian and American. That the obviously homeless are sometimes kept out by security guards, then, is bittersweet.

Okay, so what's your point? I don't see any, like Frank Gehry houses down here, and even if you've got yer boutique architects doing some pro bono *work, it's –*

No, no, you really don't see, do you? You can't look at buildings individually – it's the total effect, first the Downtown Eastside as a neighbourhood, then within Vancouver and on up to the global. But you've still gotta start with the specific. Remember how in his essay on architecture in Postmodernism, *Jameson describes a Gehry house in terms of its materials and how they*

> *annul the projected syntheses of matter and form of the great modern buildings, and . . . also inscribe what are clearly economic or infrastructural themes in his work, reminding us of the cost of housing and building and, by extension, of the speculation in land values: that constitutive seam between the economic organization of society and the aesthetic production of its (spatial) art, which architecture must live more dramatically than any of the other fine arts.*[11]
>
> (1991a, p. 113)

This could be a description of the current urban fabric: the violent juxtaposition of a conflict between the comprador forces of globalization – in all their confused glory, when capital both supports and *opposes health or housing policy, when*

superfly signifiers fly around the neighbourhoods as buildings are named by committee, when a brand new soup kitchen or women's residence share streets with punk bars and condos which imitate each other. Contradictions are realized materially – for they are, after all, about material conditions, about who *gets to live* where, *where the where exists as a building or a plan or a political action. The streets are versions of Venturi's Long Island "duck", except a closer model would be the lowbrow cocktail, Long Island Iced Tea. According to local folklore, Vancouver had the most neon per capita (mile of road?) in North America, second only to Shanghai in the world. So here we get Habermas's hated "neon and trademarks" as the language of architecture, but rescued from the historical junkheap of neon sign company store-rooms. And then, too, Jameson's claims for Gehry's buildings rest on the integrity of architecture as practice: an integrity which Haraldsson's photographs violate, as they collapse buildings back to two-dimensions, and the cost/projected profit line of buildings – realized via three-dimensional* space *– are revealed to be the fiction that they are.*

So in effect?

So in effect it's not about one building –

Yeah, yeah, I get that, that's what Haraldsson's pictures show right?

Right, right, it's not about one building, it's not about an architect as a master-builder – either in Jameson's heroic sense or as some Mike Davis demon, instead it's the neighbourhood as a collective *architectural project, the conglomeration of buildings, contradicting each other aesthetically and historically and politically.*

So it's good that there's yuppie condos comin' in? If there was just, like, I don't know, worker's housing, that wouldn't work.

Large areas comprised mainly or only of worker's housing smacks of Soviet-style –

Don't give me that. Check out any suburb and you'll find boring ranges of office towers and apartment buildings.

Yes, well, that's the problem with this – my – valorization of such an urban area as Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. It's a classic slum, or skid road, and this poses a challenge for postmodern theory that wants to talk about the sub-urbs, or the loss of authentic experience. Then, this also isn't quite the area in which to see merely the "triumph" of global capitalism, Naomi Klein streets like Robson Street, full of Gap, Levi's, Armani and Starbucks. One lesson, however, of seeing an area in which social housing and drug treatment and a large stock of SROs co-exist, is to realize the role architecture plays in the mix. It's as if the neighbourhood went straight from premodernism – or perhaps a colonial "frontier" modernism (western-front buildings are not uncommon) – to social-democratic postmodernism.

Dominion Building Here, first the reversal of the gaze[12] – or the awareness of the blindness of the gaze, of the blindness of the buildings' windows-as-eyes – even as this neighborhood, like so many others, is invaded not only by the photographer and the media-film industry but also by the surveillance cameras of the police.

In his essay 'The Brick and the Balloon' (1998e, pp. 162–89), Jameson presents us with a Tafuri-derived view of architecture as the attempt to resolve social contradictions aesthetically. That practice, as any good student of Adorno knows only too well, has led to aesthetic indulgence and irrelevance – what punk rock calls "selling out". See the current hype over Frank Gehry and the felt need of large cities to collect signature buildings, like their galleries once collected modern art. That is to say, much current postmodern and deconstructivist architecture betrays a globalized financial late capitalism of binary logic coupled to fuzzy chaos, multicultural decentredness for demographic marketing and a Darwinian treatment of workers at all levels. You are out of work but you can stroll the logo-lit streets of your favourite shopping strip-*cum*-city centre like an Irvine Welsh anti-hero.

And yet. If architecture is just a complicated and bedevilled way of telling us something we should already know – what is going down with capitalism – can it also help us in fighting such a system? This is where Jameson's notion of politics as a coordination of the individual and the systemic is so important: this figure-ground model of subjectivity, already elaborated upon in his work on *film noir* and Chandler, helps enormously for those of us making

our way through urban politics. Jameson's theorem shows us that aesthetics is a contingent and semi-autonomous field (I am stressing the Bourdieu side of Jameson's thought here, in memory). But what if we are concerned with an architectural practice – community groups engaged in social housing – that, on the contrary, resolves *aesthetic* contradictions via the *social*? This is to understand social housing struggles and anti-gentrification activism in Vancouver not merely as "in the last instance" a working of the social via aesthetics, but instead as a working through of *aesthetic* problems via *social* housing. Seemingly intractable local aesthetic dead-ends – famously, the "west coast late modernism" that has privileged the "city of glass" (to use a Douglas Coupland phrase) – then are "resolved" in an imaginary sense when the forms of capitalism are used against itself. For if buildings are located in history as surely as in an urban space, then aesthetic choices are the trace of that history, a proposition that surely refutes apolitical formalism as it does Stalinist determinism.

And then what Arni Haraldsson's photographs bring to us, more than a way of thinking about buildings, is a scavenging through the detritus of modernism that owes as much to Chandler and Brecht's tragic urbanism as it does to the "otho-tecture" of Le Corbusier or his pomo (porno?) progeny. The dreamy noir landscape of Vancouver's inner city, then, peopled by crack addict activists and punk rock front-line workers, is also the world of pulp novelist James Ellroy or Scottish artist Douglas Gordon, of Phillip K. Dick and William Gibson. Where begrimed brick rubs shoulders with surveillance cameras and raw concrete, where the brick pricks the balloon as surely as a discarded syringe.

Such a turn from aesthetics telling us something about the social, to the social telling us something about aesthetics, means that instead of trying to find in Jameson's architectural theory a handbook for activism, we should try to find in the struggle I have detailed here a way of thinking about Jameson's theories. This too-cute-by-half formulation or reversal might just be a way of saying that we can find theory in practice.

Notes

1. Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (DES) is an urban neighborhood that, for most of the 20th century, was both a working-class retail district and the city's "skid row". This latter term evolved from "skid roads", or pathways down which logs would be skidded to the waterfront. The Downtown Eastside has been home to a high number of single resident occupancy hotels (SROs) and drinking establishments as well as sites for the consumption of heroin and, more recently, crack cocaine. Because this neighborhood is also home to some of the city's oldest and finest architecture, in the past twenty years it has been under incredible pressure for gentrification.

2. "As an involuntary explorer of the society, Marlowe visits either those places you don't look at or those you can't look at . . . those parts of the American scene which are as impersonal and seedy as public waiting rooms: run-down office buildings, the elevator with the spittoon and the elevator man sitting on a stool beside it . . . hotel rooms and lobbies, with the characteristic potted palms and over stuffed armchairs; rooming houses with managers who work illegal lines of business on the side. All these places are characterized by belonging to the mass, collective side of our society: places occupied by faceless people who leave no stamp of their personality behind them; in short, the dimension of the interchangeable, the inauthentic" (Jameson, 1983a, p. 128). "Room 332 was at the back of the building near the door to the fire escape. The corridor which led to it had a smell of old carpet and furniture oil and the drab anonymity of a thousand shabby lives. The sand bucket under the racked fire hose was full of cigarette and cigar stubs, an accumulation of several days. A radio pounded brassy music through an open transom. Through another transom people were laughing fit to kill themselves" (Chandler, 1971, p. 52).
3. In an essay on Raymond Chandler, Jameson speaks of the North American distinction between federal and municipal politics (1983a, p. 130).
4. I mean this, "reserve", in both the colonial and Lacanian senses (as did Lacan himself, of course – see *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis*, 1981, p. 68). That is, the neighborhood functions for native and non-native inhabitants alike (and yet not identically) as a reserve that both keeps the poor in a location and deprives them of their rights to the rest of the city; the DES is also a reserve or architecture-repetoire that allows the city's inhabitants to see old buildings and repress the trauma of the city's colonial and exploitative origins.
5. "There was something very strange about seeing this movie at the Capital 6 on Granville St in downtown Vancouver, and then walking out of the theatre and past the locations that we had just seen Jackie Chan risk life and limb in. Past the demolished grocery store, which was still a pile of rubble in an old parking lot, to the street where they drove the hovercraft, to the multi-level parking complex that Jackie jumps off of, and some punks push a truck full of rubber balls off of. This was one of the very first times Rebecca and I were in Vancouver together, and the first time we got to wander around downtown and explore . . . so I'll always think of this movie with fondness if only for that reason" (*Cinema Sewer*, no. 3 "The All Hong Kong Action Issue", October 1999). In a talk at the University of British Columbia "Diversities" conference in 1998, I discussed Chan's use of his body during stunts as an attempt on the part of the multinational ethnic to ground one's indeterminacy in the bodily real ("The Replacement Ethnic in the Age of Multicultural Simulacra") A Lévi-Straussian formula for this complex interweaving (or quilting) of Reid Shier's use of Chan and Haraldsson in terms of Jameson (*in my reading*) then, in the time-honored a:b::c:d; the textual architecture is designed, evidently, to reflect the postmodern Vancouver neighborhood of the Downtown Eastside, a neighborhood elided even in such a sympathetic account as that in the *Cinema Sewer* zine.
6. Tsui Hark (dir) *Time and Tide* (Hong Kong, 2001).
7. In Haraldsson's practice in the DES, taking pictures *from* a building and then *of* the building – see Note 12 – the shift from subject to object, the intervention into a hegemonic aesthetic of representing the DES; *analogous* to Jameson's comments on the shifting hero/villain in conspiracy films in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*.
8. How Russian President Putin described George W. Bush's recycling of "Star Wars" missile defence.

9. "Shulman has always held that one of the most important tools on a photographic assignment is a pair of small garden clippers. Shulman's 'clippings', or 'portable garden', so essential to his picture-making, is today common practice in the representation of architecture *vis-à-vis* digital imaging" (Haraldsson, 2001, n. 4).
10. Christ Walks in this Infernal District Too
    Malcolm Lowry

    Beneath the Malebolge lies Hastings Street,
    The province of the pimp upon his beat,
    Where each in his little world of drugs or crime
    Moves helplessly or, hopeful, begs a dime
    Wherewith to purchase half a pint of piss –
    Although he will be cheated, even in this.
    I hope, although I doubt it, God knows
    This place where chancres blossom like the rose,
    For on each face is such a hard despair
    That nothing like a grief could enter there.
    And on this scene from all excuse exempt,
    The mountains gaze in absolute contempt,
    Yet this is also Canada, my friend,
    Yours to absolve of ruin, or make an end.

11. Of course the problem with Gehry is that he is hardly some Leninist among the architects – rather, he is more properly an artist of the Brecht mode, *sans* the organizational politics. Gehry is fun – which actually is not a bad thing.
12. But not, note, a "mirrored" gaze: rather, as some readings of Lacan suggest in terms of the reationship between the phallic/Cartesian eye and the gaze of the Other (see Jay, 1994, p. 368), the shot from the Regal does not "look" directly back at the parking lot from which the third photograph is taken. Haraldsson's Lacanian diahedron thus deconstructs the phallacy of an instrumental appropriation/critique of vision and the gaze.

5
Stranded Economies

Christian A. Gregory

It probably seems a little late in the day to suggest a critique – even a friendly one – of Fredric Jameson's work. For an entire generation of students, scholars, and writers concerned with the contemporary cultural scene, Fredric Jameson's name has been *the* name associated with the idea of the postmodern. And postmodernism has been *the* brand name of contemporary cultural production, at least in the rich, industrialized states of the North. Indeed, no writer has, over the past thirty years, developed and sustained such an ambitious project of socio-cultural analysis and critique as has Jameson; few have prompted such outrage, adulation, or just plain confusion; few have risked articulation of such difficult problems with such elan; and none can claim to have been so ardent and successful in elaborating Marxism in and for the present. It is not too much to say that Jameson's work – and his legacies – are a crucial enabling condition of critical theory and cultural studies, not to say first-world Marxism, of the present, and perhaps the future.

The relative success of this project and its deep and lasting impact on *many* kinds of discourse in the US, Europe, and Asia are no doubt due to the specifically totalizing urge of Jameson's project. With the publication in 1991 of *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson synthesized somewhat disparate observations on (mostly American or European) cultural and social objects under a rubric governed, he claimed, by the analysis of contemporary capitalism set forth in Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism*. Jameson had addressed the problem of totality in other work: his readings of Lukács and Sartre in *Marxism and Form* considered the objective and subjective force of different totalities (1971a). In *Postmodernism*, however, the particular historical effort – "to totalize" – achieved a new level of importance. That is the case not simply because Jameson is not any longer just the interlocutor for Sartre, Lukács, or Adorno, and not simply because the *Postmodernism* book claimed a fundamental, if complex, set of reciprocal causalities that girded the economic to the cultural, as he suggests in asides throughout this work. So clear was the relationship between contemporary economic and cultural life that Jameson here claimed that Mandel's term, "spätcapitalismus,"

translated as "late capitalism," was itself a translation of "postmodernism" (strangely, since the latter term appears not to have been anywhere in Mandel's lexicon) and that, in this historical moment, "[the economic and the cultural] collapse back into each other and say the same thing." The economic "base," he claimed, in the "third stage of capitalism generates its superstructures with a new kind of dynamic" (1991a, p. xxi) to the effect that the semi-autonomy of cultural life is destroyed in favor of a world where culture (and hence, the economy, we assume) is everywhere – and nowhere, at once (1991a, p. 48).

In hindsight, Jameson's particular assertion about contemporary culture seems a bit overstated: Was there ever a moment when the economic was not cultural, or the cultural economic? How would you know if culture (or the economy) were everywhere? Where would you stand to say such a thing? These questions continue to pose problems for anyone convinced of Jameson's argument about cultural periodization. However, it was the gesture to regiment different kinds of cultural objects, social habits, and forms of everyday perception under the organizing logic of capital that seemed then – as it does now – both eminently worthwhile, if not without serious problems. From one perspective, it no doubt appeared that Jameson's Hegelian version of economic *over*-determination has more or less continued the falling away after World War II of Marxist theory from its identification with revolutionary class struggle (Anderson, 1976, pp. 92–4). Indeed, although Jameson could claim to have come very far from the cultural mandarinism of his predecessor Adorno, his fixation with (and enjoyment of) popular culture has always irritated those for whom culture is but an ancillary concern for Marxist analysis. But from another perspective, closer to the surface of Anglo-American intellectual discourse, Jameson's argument just as certainly threatened to *reduce* the study of cultural and social life to their economic determinants. From this point of view, even the most qualified appeals to the notion of totality provoke visions of the cultural gulag, and Jameson's sophistication would do little to qualm such fears.

There are, indeed, some looming difficulties with Jameson's historical and conceptual schema. In particular, and despite its synoptic appeal and epistemological ambition, the totalizing vision articulated in *Postmodernism* (and since) retains some of the deep flaws that characterize other totalizing projects of a less useful variety. Strangely enough, however, these problems derive not from the overarching assertion of the primacy of economic over cultural or social reality – as the familiar charge against Marx and Marxists would have it. Nor do they stem from Jameson's inauthenticity as a Marxist. Rather, as I will argue here, they are in part a result of the mis-specification of the role of political economy as a periodizing force in contemporary cultural, social, and political life. In particular, Jameson's appeal to Mandel's category, "late capitalism," is both inconsistent and overly formal – to say nothing of the weaknesses of the term itself. Moreover, the particular

weaknesses of the term "late capitalism" are shared by in some ways by the erstwhile *mot du jour* "globalization," which Jameson has also begun to use. As I will argue, the structural weakness of such terms cannot entirely be gotten around; however, Jameson's rather uncritical use of the latter (as a substitute or correlate for "postmodernity") especially highlights the historical problems involved in this trajectory of his work.

However, as I would also like to argue here, one can also find in Jameson's work the outline of an analytical trajectory complementary to the elaboration of postmodernism – an Althuserrian double to his baroque updating of Hegel. This trajectory suggests that the weaknesses of the postmodernism hypothesis, even if they are not entirely articulated in its elaboration, nonetheless provide a framework for another kind of research and critique, as vital and important as the need *to totalize* itself. In brief, I will argue that Jameson's argument that human time and socio-economic time are fundamentally out of sync (1996a [1993], p. 16) should lead us to be skeptical of the historical claims packaged in periodizing concepts such as "the postmodern." For the purposes of cultural studies, political economy in fact matters as an experience of economic time, which cannot be accurately glossed by the analytic category of "late capitalism," any more than by the more synthetic notion of "globalization." Indeed, as I will suggest by way of the North American dotcom and debt boom, the particular economic tensions of a given moment appear in more local and contingent expressions than those terms admit. So, even if culture and the economy have collapsed back into one another (as Jameson claims), the point is rendered moot by the differences in the conditions of cultural or economic *reception* that are not reducible to analyses of "the cultural logic of late capitalism." To retain a conceptual framework that meaningfully includes economic life, I will argue, means remaining sensitive to such conditions of reception, and their sometimes disenchanting claims on our cultural and political imagination. In other words, a project committed to the *tension* between economies and culture can and should not overlook the ultimately *historical* and *enduring* reciprocity between them, rather than imagine that it as a novel marker of the contemporary experience. Only with that in mind might we undertake a project in keeping, though critically so, with the spirit and the letter of Jameson's totalizing project.

Actually existing political economy

In an early rejoinder to the initial publication of Jameson's 1984 essay "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," Mike Davis pointedly observed that Jameson's use of Ernest Mandel's *Late Capitalism* as an economic framework for his cultural periodization was problematic, to say the least. While Jameson had located a fundamental break in the cultural habitus in the late 1960s and early 1970s (1988b, 1991a), Mandel's book set out to explain the long postwar wave of growth, beginning in the 1940s. As Davis

points out, the crisis of the late 1960s and early 1970s Mandel addressed in a subsequent book-length essay, *The Second Slump*. In this later book, Mandel located the *crisis* – not the onset – of the postwar "late capitalist" boom in the global economic slowdown of 1974–75, while Jameson posed this latter date, or rather, 1967–73, as the watershed moment for the *emergence* of the postmodern. Moreover, as Davis points out, Mandel was critical of the emphasis variously given to "multinationalization," a term that Jameson is fond of using for his notion of a "third" stage of capitalism.[1] Davis trenchantly asked, "If Jameson's equation between postmodernism and Late Capitalism *tout court* gives way, then to what politico-economic trends can we correlate the change in sensibility represented by postmodernism" (1985, p. 108)?

Davis' observations and response to this question highlight a handful of problems with the Jameson's use of Mandel's analysis of "late capitalism." Among the most important, but widely overlooked, problems with this analysis is Jameson's enduring sloppiness with periodizing terms, and particularly his apparent indifference to Mandel's argument. As mentioned, in the early analyses of postmodernism, Jameson frequently referred to late capitalism as if it were a synonym for "multinational" capital, despite Mandel's pointed refusal to use that term (Jameson, 1991a, pp. 3, 5, 6, 22, 35, 37, 54). At other moments, Jameson argues that late capitalism is the successor to monopoly capitalism and imperialism (1990a, p. 71; 1991a, p. xiv; 1996a [1993], p. 25), although Mandel had defined it as "a new phase of imperialism or of monopoly capitalism" which highlighted the crisis tendencies of capital in general (1975, p. 214). Finally, Jameson claims that, at present, capital expansion has not taken the form of geographical exploration and territorial claims, but of the re-intensification of the colonization of older areas, a claim that is clearly at odds with Mandel's analysis (and would have come as a surprise to anyone living in the Latin America in the 1980s, or the contemporary former Soviet Union or China) (1996a [1993], pp. 23–5).[2]

In addition to his blasé appeal to Mandel's name while often being at odds with his argument, Jameson's appeal to economic categories is consistently – perhaps deliberately – imprecise. A favorite rhetorical tactic in this regard has been to refer to terms of apparently distinct cognitive range with an additive "or," the better, as it were, to widen the lens of analysis. For example, Jameson refers to "postmodern or late" capitalism (1991a, p. 9; 1996a [1993], p. 38), "third or postmodern" stage capitalism (1996a [1993], pp. 25, 53), capital of the "nuclear or cybernetic" age (1996a [1993], p. 24), and "postmodernism or late capitalism" themselves as if they were synonymous (1990a, p. 231). These assertions of epistemic equivalence come at the expense of argumentative focus and rigor. While postmodernity as the cultural logic attendant upon "late capitalism" has its own kind of sense, the characterization of the world economy as itself postmodern begs the question that the invocation of "late capitalism" was supposed to address: namely, the *kind* of causality that links culture (or politics, social life, etc.) to economic transformation.

Put differently: if the world economy is caught in a feedback loop of its own making, that is, if it too now adheres to the *cultural* logic of late capitalism, one has to wonder what agents have secured this transformation, or whether, say, Argentina's debt default could be managed by cultural means – or if it is received as a cultural event. One might observe that Jameson has recently somewhat unconsciously foregrounded the cognitive violence involved in this additive gesture by saying that globalization, the economic concept *du jour*, is "intrinsic[ally]" associated with postmodernism, "whether we like it or not" (1998a, p. 54).

Some rejoinders

It could be argued that it is not crucial that Jameson show rigid fidelity to Mandel's argument, or that he be more precise in his use of economic coordinates. After all, Mandel is a political economist for whom such periodizing distinctions matter quite differently than for cultural theorists. Moreover, in developing the concept of the postmodern, Jameson has adopted what might be called an "anexact philology," that is, a "science" of reading that is deliberately, rigorously anexact. Or, as Althusser might put it, postmodernism as "the cultural logic of late capitalism" is the form of ideology appropriate to "the specific mode that defines [the science]" – namely, economics – that in turn produces it (Althusser and Balibar, 1970, p. 46).[3] Postmodernism as "the cultural logic of late capitalism" is not just some empirical given, but a deliberate and forcible analysis and assertion of a cultural politics. The starting point is a perhaps blurred sense of the orienting system that makes those politics necessary: contemporary capitalism.

All of this still leaves a formidable question: namely, why Mandel's model? Why this particular kind of inexactitude? Davis' question (cited above) highlights this problem: "[I]f Jameson's equation between postmodernism and Late Capitalism *tout court* gives way, then to what politico-economic trends can we correlate the change in sensibility represented by postmodernism?" His response is to explain the transformations in urban architecture by way of two other orienting facts: "the rise of new international rentier circuits in the current crisis phase of capitalism . . . [and] the definitive abandonment of urban reform as a part of the new class polarization taking place in the United States" (1985, p. 108). While the other Jameson's various defenders and critics (Anderson, 1998; Callinicos, 1990; Harvey, 1990) have either suspected the very existence of "postmodernism" or the usefulness of Mandel's analysis, Davis' response suggests a different tack and a different conclusion. Namely, Davis takes the existence of a "postmodern" sensibility as a given, and moreover does not question Mandel's analysis of "late capitalism." But, by implication, he argues that the elaboration of either does not imply their mutual relationship *or* exclusion. He insists nonetheless on a more "localized" and polemical analysis of the cultural landscape. Thus he concludes:

"[a] profoundly anti-urban impulse, inspired by unfettered financial forces and a Hausmannian logic of social control . . . constitute[s] the real *Zeitgeist* of postmodernism. At the same time, it reveals 'postmodernism' . . . as little more than a decadent trope of modernism, a synthetic correlate to Reaganism and the end of urban reform" (1985, p. 113).

The difference between Davis' and Jameson's views of postmodernism, then, do not derive from Davis' suspicion that postmodernism does not exist or that Mandel's analysis is by itself historically limited. Nor does Davis object to the gesture to join the architectural language of urban space to economic transformation. Rather, Jameson's periodizing gesture is subject to a fundamentally historicist question: to, for, or by whom? The price for Jameson's systemic objectification registers here as the inability to ascribe the history of postmodernism to anything but "capital" and its logic. Whereas even for Davis the economic coordinates of the spirit of postmodernism are fundamentally *political*, that is, subject to the depradations (in this case) of American liberalism, "late capitalism" works according to a peculiarly formal, "systemic" logic. Indeed, given Jameson's rather loose and inconsistent traffic in this term and its (for him) equivalents, I would argue that Jameson's use of the term approximates Adorno's, at least as Jameson describes it:

> The summary deictic indication in passing of late capitalism, system, exchange, totality, is not a reference to other sets of thoughts or concepts . . . which can be criticized on their own terms for their coherence or validity and their ideological quotient. It rather gestures towards an outside of thinking – whether system itself in the form of rationalization, or totality as socioeconomic mechanism of domination and exploitation . . . The function of the impure, extrinsic reference is less to interpret, then, than to rebuke interpretation as such and to include within the thought the remainder that is itself inevitably the result of a system that escapes it and which it perpetuates . . . (1990a, p. 30)

In other words, Jameson argues, "late capitalism" is exempt from the "dialectic stereoscopy" to which Adorno subjects other conceptual formations. Usually, in such a dialectic, concepts are treated in a double register: on the one hand, they are "cashed at face value," turned over and against themselves and their putative "content"; on the other, the form of the concept gets registered and "the existence of the financial and banking system thereby presupposed [by the concept] is somehow reckoned in" (1990a, p. 28). That is not the case for "late capitalism," which serves as the limit or outside of thought, rather than a concept which has been reckoned on its own terms.

The virtues and limits of "late capitalism" as a shorthand for "totality" or "system," are quite beside the point, then. By reducing the term for political economy to a figurative, if abrasive, limit concept, Jameson has more or less rendered even the "cultural" understanding of political economy moot.

In other words, it might be argued that, although he frequently observes the ways that film, music, architecture, and literature allegorically recode economic realities, he does not ever stop to look at the more mundane ways that the Federal Reserve, profit reports, IMF structural adjustment packages, wage trends, or Wall Street financiers have occupied cultural spaces. For Jameson, the reputed collapse of the economy and culture into one another actually only goes one way. It might be further argued that the subsequent conceptual reification of "late capitalism" has obstructed our understanding of the way that capitalism, by "becoming" cultural, identifies and realizes historical rhythms at odds with those of "late capitalism" or its cultural dominant. In so doing, the analysis of "the cultural logic of late capitalism" has also closed down the analysis of the newly persistent fixtures of capital in the so-called "global" age.

Stranded economies

This kind of argument is fine as far as it goes. But it still leaves us with the problem that the term "late capitalism" was supposed to solve: namely, how to characterize and understand the pace and unevenness of capitalist modernization and its attendant cultural forms. For it is undeniable that in the past thirty years the world economy has undergone a series of qualitative mutations. The explanatory narratives for geo-economic changes have themselves changed, reaching their recent apogee in the discourses of "globalization." Each of the world-analytic buzzwords since the late 1960s – from multinational, transnational, and post-industrial to globalization and the "new economy" itself – has painted a picture of the world in strategic colors. Indeed, it could be said that the contemporary idea of the "globe," in the shadow of the rhetorics and realities of "globalization," conflates geo-political capitalist aspiration (i.e. neo-liberalism) with planetary entropy, rendering the world as planet, the planet as globe, globe as economy, and economy as horizon of civilization itself. In this view, the circumnavigation of the globe by capital is tantamount to the accomplishment of "development" itself, as if backwardness were now finally a thing of the past, or a choice made by benighted or corrupt peoples.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to critically evaluate the salience and usefulness of "globalization" as an idea in and of itself, it is worth pausing over a characteristic that it shares with the notion of "late capitalism." The latter periodizing scheme is built on the idea of "long waves" of capitalist development, each roughly fifty years in length, and each comprised of an expansive and contractive phase. Late capitalism, according to Mandel, began roughly in 1940, reached its crisis phase in the early 1970s, and was due to be succeeded by another productive upturn in world economic growth beginning in the late 1980s or 1990s (1995, pp. 6, 76–96). Among the problems with this way of understanding world development are that,

first, non-industrialized nations are not counted, and second, the summary statistics used to measure upturns and downturns completely overlook the different rhythms of economic development, industrial cycles, financial euphorias, and business trends that still characterize national and regional economies.[4] For example, the World Bank's statistics about world growth in the 1990s suggest relatively brisk upward trend, but at 2.5 percent one that still lags behind the 1980s by about 25 percent (World Bank, 2001a). Even if this could be counted as the beginning of a new long wave of growth (as Mandel and long-wave theory predict), this summary number does not, for example, address the decade-long stagnation of Japan, the descent into near anarchy of the former Soviet Union, or Brazil's currency default – events at least as likely to punctuate the economic psyches of those nations' inhabitants as the promise of a new "long wave" of growth.

Much the same might be said of "globalization," a term that has, since 1998, been less and less used as a summary term for world economic transformation. Even before the term had fallen into disfavor, it was frequently put forward in such a way as to obscure the way that the "global" age has been received on the ground. For example, although the image of capital sloshing around the globe, "like water in a basin" as Jameson puts it (1996a [1993], p. 47), has become relatively popular, such an image cannot account for the particular patterns of capital movement in recent years. For instance, the World Bank reports that, although flows of long-term investment capital since 1989 have increased by about 250 percent, developing countries have seen, on average, increases of only 4 percent. This unevenness in the distribution of investment capital has been paralleled by that in world trade, as the share of trade of the world's poorest economies has remained constant over the past decade. In the longer term, their share has declined precipitously.[5] As the World Bank points out, this pattern and the disproportion of capital flows has only exacerbated the income gap between wealthy, middle income, and poor nations (World Bank, 2001b). It is hard, in this context, to resist the impression that "globalization" has primarily benefited the US, Europe, and developed Asia, to the virtual exclusion of most others. Globalization, in other words, looks more like neo-colonialism *writ large* than it does a genuinely novel economic arrangement – much less a "global" one. With that in mind, it seems fairly hard to understand "globalization" as a "communicational" concept, as Jameson has suggested (1998a, p. 55 ff.). Even if it does force various cultural and semiotic encounters between cultural "others," the terms of such encounters seem to matter more than their simple existence.

This kind of problem pertains to the term "postmodernity" as well. Jameson claims that "the only possible meaning that postmodernity can have" is that it is "the discovery that modernization is no longer possible for anyone" (1996a [1983], p. 48). He claims that the speed with which capital now circumnavigates the globe makes it unlikely that investors will allow capital the time needed for "modernization" – meaning the development of infrastructure

"that might afford a certain industrial autonomy" to underdeveloped nations (1996a [1993], p. 48). What is surely striking, however, is not the *novel* absence of capital needed for economic and social development, but the idea that, for much of the globe, modernization was *ever* possible at all, on these terms. The World Bank's confessions of the failure of "globalization" – *the* contemporary trope for capitalist modernization – indeed suggest at least as much continuity as the historical break that marks the present era. That globalization has indeed failed to live up to its beneficent promises, in other words, signals for the World Bank and other boosters of economic liberalization the *continued* failure of capitalist modernization, whose faults and obstacles were thought to be overcome in the "global" age. In this context, the idea that the world has reached "the end of modernization" might be said to trivialize the subaltern experience of modernization *and* ignore the real world development of, say, South Korea whose industrialization accelerated during the heyday of the postmodern.[6]

Economy and habitus

In short, it is not simply enough to adopt a "better" periodizing term, "globalization," instead of or as a supplement to "late capitalism." Rather, the problem here has to do with the way that we imagine the tension and ambiguity between cultural and economic worlds themselves. As I have already suggested, Jameson's sustained elaboration of the postmodernity hypothesis represents one important aspect of this tension, what he names as a disciplinary necessity of Marxist analysis: "the necessity of a cultural focus [for Marxists] to be primarily economic" (1996a [1993], p. 54). But Jameson also names another, unelaborated necessity: "[the necessity] of economic research to grasp the essentially cultural nature of late capitalism" (1996a [1993], p. 54).

If, in other words, Jameson's virtuoso forays in to the cultural flotsam and jetsam to decode the economic realities of our time represents the first of these necessities, the second remains to be addressed. Economies, from this second point of view, would *not* simply be a set of relationships that could be said to undergird social, cultural, and political relationships. While they are that certainly, they are something else besides. We might follow economist Alain Lipietz on this point, who has argued that economies can also be seen as comprised of two, dialectically related fields, the tension between which we might note is very much like the one that Jameson describes between economics and culture. The long-term macro-economic pattern of resource allocation and growth Lipietz calls a "regime of accumulation." This regime, he says, "must be materialized in the shape of norms, habits, laws, and regulating networks which ensure the unity of the process and which guarantee that agents conform more or less to the schema of reproduction in their day-to-day behavior and struggles" (1987, p. 14). He calls this second field

a "mode of regulation," a term whose cognate, he argues, is Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*. As Bourdieu explains, habitus are "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" that organize practices that are neither scripted nor wholly spontaneous: "Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, [practices] can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor" (1990, p. 53). It is in this mode of regulation, which is neither incidental nor historically unchanging, that economic relations become most historically visible. And while any given pattern of macro-economic growth or crisis is attended by a mode of regulation, the economic habitus can be out of sync with its underlying economic realities or, in fact, can shape their direction.[7]

Certainly, there is nothing in this brief description to lead us to believe that "mode of regulation" is not just a sociologically revved-up version of the idea of "culture." However, there is a clear difference in emphasis between Lipietz' elaboration and Jameson's: one of the implications of Lipietz' analysis is that the habitus is not simply expressive, in some mediated way, of the existential situation of economic life, the way that, say, architecture allegorizes the dilemmas of capital, in Jameson's view. Rather, it is also the *practical* set-up (of class distinctions, tax laws, norms of consumption, sexual mores, tastes and so on) that works to reproduce the virtuous or vicious macro-economic patterns that obtain at any given moment. In other words, it is undoubtedly true that a mode of regulation has a fundamentally cultural component. However, culture registers here precisely to the degree that it can be said to contribute to the qualitative and quantitative warp and weave of economic reality.[8]

Again, this is not to say that economic facts do not "become visible" in such media as film, architecture, literature, video games, and sports. However, the appeal to a periodizing term like "late capitalism" as an ultimate interpretant for these objects neglects the fact that there are other, competing ideological *and practical* narratives and objects that bring economic life into view. In other words, the objects of the economic habitus do not simply function as parts of a larger, more or less coherent world that sanctions some views of gender, class, race, ethnicity, money, work, sexuality, and so on. They also offer pragmatic guidelines about how to *act* in the context of both those narratives *and* the regime of accumulation. As Gilles Deleuze once commented, "the economic is the social dialectic itself – in other words, the totality of problems posed to a given society," (1994, p. 186) be they social, cultural, political, or psychological. If this is true, then the question here is not just how the economic is "translated" into film or architecture, but how these objects sanction economically meaningful action. More to the point, the question is how the economic is "translated" into "economics" so-called at the cultural level in such a way as to impact the way that real economies work.

The Culture bubble

The most obvious examples of this appearance of the economic in everyday North American culture are in the person of America's sainted central banker, Alan Greenspan, and the meteoric ascent and crash of the dotcom stock market bubble during the 1990s. While Greenspan remains a figure about whom there is still a great deal of media interest, it might be argued, as Martin Mayer has done, that the increasing cultural fascination with America's central banker is proportional to his increasing insignificance with respect to the real working of financial institutions. The gargantuan size of today's financial markets, Mayer argues, has rendered the US Federal funds rate – the only meaningful economic lever over which Greenspan has control – comically, ridiculously insignificant in any real sense (Mayer, 2001). Forty years ago, when 60 percent of all financing for commerce and industry came through the banking system, the Federal Reserve's interest and reserve ratios might have made a difference. Today, as Mayer points out, Greenspan's still considerable effectiveness in the market is due more to the totemic power granted to him by the markets' participants than any genuine influence over the financial world per se. Thus, to follow Mayer's argument, Greenspan is a perfect example of Jameson's collapse of the economic and the cultural, but from the other direction. Instead of some cultural object recoding economic trauma or unrevealed truth, here the economic recodes or reorders the (particularly American) cultural fantasy that fundamentally speculative economies work by efficient or rational means.

Greenspan's magic was matched, during much of the 1990s by that effected by the market itself. Nominally tied to the productivity miracle unleashed by computer technology, the 1990s boom did, until 1997, track a temporary resurgence in profitability For North American companies as a whole.[9] And, although profitability did not rise at nearly the pace that equity markets did, the ballooning share prices were said to be an indicator of such companies' capacity for future growth. Dotcom star Amazon had a market capitalization at its peak greater than that of Boeing, despite never having had (and until this date, still never having) shown any profits. In fact, although he had warned in 1996 that the market was characterized by "irrational exuberance," even Greenspan warmed to the idea of a "new economy" over the course of the decade. At the same time, he jockeyed for a soft market landing from the increasingly inflated equity bubble. One could be forgiven for thinking that, indeed, although worried about the asset price bubble, Greenspan was more worried about asset price "corrections" that were to follow. In December of 2000, at the end of a bear market year but before there were clear signs of a real-sector recession, Greenspan pre-emptively indicated that the Fed was "softening" its view on future rate cuts. Greenspan's action was aimed at what the Fed and its watchers call an "announcement effect" on the stock market (which it produced). At this point, it was clear that the Federal funds

rate did not so much indicate a real cost of money in any economic sense as the Fed's intention to prop up a steadily declining market – and to do so by the power of theatre, since it was more or less agreed that *that* was about all the Fed had going for it.

And yet, although Greenspan's celebrity begs to be understood as a symptom of a new age, the bubble he nurtured and tried to deflate still operated a lot like speculative excesses of old, at least as described by Keynes and Marx. Keynes once described speculative investment as a "beauty contest." He referred to the contests regularly held in British newspapers where readers (i.e. men – appropriately enough in the current context) would vote for the half dozen "prettiest" candidates out of a hundred, hoping to win a prize by picking the ones that most others picked. As Keynes pointed out, the actual object of this game was not to pick the most beautiful women, or even the ones most others thought most beautiful. Rather, Keynes argued, the beauty contest involved picking the women that most others believed most others would pick. Stock speculation, like the beauty contest, involved guessing what average opinion about average opinion would be (1964, p. 156). In the present context, Greenspan is a wild card in the beauty contest; "winning" in the market is only a matter of guessing the average opinion of the average opinion of his particular beauties on a given day.

For Marx, speculation came under the heading of what he called "fictitious capital." Fictitious capital is any capital value that is mathematically "backed out" of an income stream not tied to the production of commodities or backed by collateral – for example, government or corporate debt. Likewise, it comprises any credit money forwarded on the promises of future revenue, even if such promises are based on commodity production, or any corporate equity which is a claim on revenues not yet generated (Marx, 1981b, pp. 525–42; Harvey, 1999, pp. 266–72). For Marx, the attraction of fictitious capital is that, not tied down to a particular use in production, it might be moved from a sector with a lower to a higher profit rate. Yet, this attraction, this preservation of frantic mobility in circulation, can never, in Marx's estimation, escape the gravitational force of worldly production which always brings speculative flights of fancy crashing back to earth.

It is indeed interesting to observe that Marx's skepticism about credit money and loan capital frequently puts him in the rhetorical company of history's monetary cranks, who for the most part have always been keen to distinguish (and condemn) the heady world of financial excess in favor the brute world of production (Clark, 1987). In this sense, the Marxian lexicon of "fictitious capital" also adopts the monetary cranks' moral and ethical taxonomy, in which interest-bearing capital is fundamentally "irrational" (Marx, 1981b, pp. 470, 475, 516), "the fountainhead of all manner of insane forms" of capital accumulation (cited in Harvey, 1999, p. 269), a "mystical thing" (1981b, p. 596), a "fetish" (1981b, pp. 516, 517) associated with narcissism, incest, and/or cosmopolitanism, as when Marx calls it "self-valorizing

value, money breeding money . . . [which] no longer bears any marks of its origin" (1981b, p. 516).

By contrast, the North American bubble in the second half of the 1990s was hailed as fundamentally populist, the democratization of high finance itself. James K. Glassman and Kevin A. Hassett's (1999) triumphalist take on American stock markets, titled *Dow 36,000*, began by telling us that the equity market has trickled down to an exuberant people, ready to ignore pointy-headed wonks like Alan Greenspan: "Never before have so many people owned so much stock. They depend on their shares not just to enjoy a comfortable retirement, but also to pay tuition, to buy a house or a car, to help their children, to take a long vacation, or simply lead the good life. Today, half of America's adults are shareholders" (1999, p. 3). They discard the received wisdom of the investment community, which has, in their view, grossly overestimated the risks of equities of investments. In their view, stocks are no more risky than Treasury bills. But, they are priced as if they were – that is, they are grossly underpriced. People have started to catch on – everyday people, they suggest, people immune to the niggling doubts of finance professors, economists, and market skeptics. That explains the boom of the 1990s. But when people finally fully catch on, that is, when the returns on stocks are basically the same as Treasury bills to reflect their equal risk, the market will have risen at least fourfold. Until then, stocks are a great opportunity for everybody.

Whatever the (lack of) merits of this argument, Glassman and Hassett and other "market populists" (Frank, 2000) point to the way that "finance capital" has recently devolved onto American households in an unprecedented way. Households *have* poured money into pension funds and mutual funds over the past 20 years: in 1983, household acqusition of mutual shares was about $22 billion a year; in 2000, it was roughly $209 billion; since 1995, the value of assets in mutual fund shares owned by households has nearly tripled.[10] This trend began as a response to bank regulations that limited returns on savings accounts in the 1970s. However, it has also been encouraged by employers switching from defined-benefit to defined-contribution pension plans over the past two decades, a trend which has transferred investment risk from corporations on to individuals. The downside risks to this embrace of the stock market has recently become glaringly evident: during the bubble years in the late 1990s, households decreased savings out of income at an unprecedented rate, no doubt encouraged to believe that the increases in fund earnings were permanent and therefore spendable.[11] Probably as a result, during 1995–2000, yearly debt flows increased twice as fast as personal income. And, according to a recent study published by the Federal Reserve, such liabilities accruing to the bottom income quintiles increased at least as fast as those at the top (Maki and Palumbo, 2001, p. 24).

All of this is not to mention that, according to the same Fed study, as recently as 1998, more than 80 percent of publicly traded stock is owned by

households in the highest income quintile (Maki and Palumbo, 2001, p. 24). So much for the democratization of finance. But, tempting as it is to dismiss the stupidity, deception, gullibility, and just plain fraud that went into the construction of the dotcom bubble, its appearance has made more evident, as Peter Gowan has put it, that contemporary capitalism is a *savings* relation (1999, p. 56). That is, whatever is still true about class divisions accruing toward the division of labor, in the world of contemporary finance capital, classes are also made in their relation to the "fictitious capital" that comes from savings or its substitutes – for example, increases in the value of stocks. Certainly, on a global level, this increasing influence of "fictitious capital" could threaten economic calamity on a grand scale, just as Marx said it would. At the same time, Marx's cranky apocalypticism seems no more appropriate here than Glassman and Hassett's untempered exuberance. One of the most ironic effects of the 1990s boom has been that it most likely contributed to an increase in home ownership of low income families, once thought to be too high a credit risk to qualify for mortgage loans.[12] This increase has not been an unmitigated boon, given the terms of such "high risk" loans and the prevalence of predatory lending. Nonetheless, anti-speculative rhetoric in and of itself is likely to obscure the class divisions articulated here. And the anticipation of a crash as "proof" of Marx's theory seems a rather self-indulgent luxury, knowing what we do about who would suffer first, and most, from such an event.

Indeed, while the American public is occupied with fulsome promises of war against Iraq, it has been easy to ignore that the unraveling of the tech bubble has taken down middle-class workers and their families with a vengeance. On the one hand, the unemployment rate for white-collar, mostly service, workers in the US is running significantly higher than the overall rate. But, just as importantly, the unraveling of the tech bubble has also brought with it a looming crisis in private pensions, for which Greenspan will face no questioning (see Morris, 2003; Revell, 2003; Zaslow and White, 2003). It remains to be seen if Greenspan's aggressive interest rate reductions since 2000, which have sustained consumption spending through mortgage refinancing, will not simply push a recessionary dip into an outright debt deflation. Greenspan has, on this score, done quite a bit to stave off an even nastier recession than the US (and the EU and East Asia) has been suffering. But, whatever looms on the macro-economic front, given the cost to huge swathes of the American public, the bloom is off of that rose.

Although it is tempting, then, to harness Marx's notion of "fictitious capital" to the fraudulent accounting and delirious valuations of Enron, World Com, and the like, it would be both wrong and wrong-headed to do so. As I have already indicated, fictitious capital for Marx applies to *any* income stream or indeed monetary flow not linked to commodities or collateral. So US Treasury debt is as fictitious for Marx as were Enron's bonds, since its value is tied to nothing except the Federal government's ability to collect

taxes. Moreover, such an indictment would loose sight of the class divisions that accrue around savings and pensions more generally, no matter how trustworthy the accountancy practices involved. Although it is true that many thousands of workers lost their savings in the Enron mess, many more executives of still viable companies cashed out as the bubble burst, making the class divisions of both "information" and savings much more visible than in a few spectacular cases (Gimein *et al.*, 2002).

The dotcom boom and its indication of the importance of finance provide a good example of what Lipietz called a "mode of regulation," the elaboration of which, I am arguing, is anticipated by Jameson in the cracks of his analysis of postmodernism. As used by Lipietz, Michel Aglietta, Robert Boyer, and others, the term "regulation" does not refer to rules set down by the state to order the economy. Rather, as Lipietz explains, the French word is related to cybernetics, and, like the latter, emphasizes the role of information processing and communication in maintaining dynamic social order (1985, p. xvii). The increasing importance of finance has been both agent and effect of this more recent order – and disorder – on an increasingly international scale. The heightened mobility of financial capital in the 1970s coincided with the first waves of the transnational reorganization of global media, to which we in no small part owe the celebrity of Alan Greenspan (Herman and McChesney, 1997, pp. 10–40). At the same time, the functioning of global financial markets increasingly depends upon information technology and processing, whose correlate is the steady deluge of market "analysis" from television and the Internet. Both of these developments helped establish the regime in which North Americans' relative embrace of the stock market makes sense, not simply as blind obedience to nonsensical superstition or dogma, but pragmatic response to the changing economic and cultural conditions in which they live.

It is true, then, as Jameson once suggested, that human time is out of sync with socio-economic time. However, as the dotcom and debt bubbles in the US suggest, human time, household time *is* socio-economic time, though it is not all there is to it. That is, there is more than one rhythm to socio-economic time, which is what accounts for the cognitive distance between the dotcom bubble and "late capitalism," "globalization," or "postmodernity." As for the latter, Jameson says it would be "trivialized if it [were] understood to designate nothing more than changes in fashion and in dominant ideas and values" (1996a [1993], p. 48). So, I will refrain from speculating about whether postmodernism actually exists. But if Jameson is right, and in the absence of a coherent or empirically meaningful organizing concept – which "late capitalism" surely is not – one has to wonder whether we still live in suspense of modernity's arrival, rather than in the shadow of its eclipse. At the same time, we perhaps could anticipate that, even in its failure, the analysis of the "postmodern" has opened up further modes of inquiry into that intimate leviathan of modernization that Jameson rightly calls the

"ultimate (indeed, perhaps the only), the true ground of Being of our time," capital (1992a, p. 82).

Notes

1. Mandel emphasizes that the third-world share of world trade had dropped from 32 percent in 1950 to 17 percent in 1970, implying that "multinationalization," to the degree that it happened at all, mostly meant increased foreign direct investment between metropolitan countries (see Mandel, 1975, p. 69). This trend accelerated after 1971 in no small part because of increased currency risk after Nixon's closing the gold window.
2. If Jameson means by this that imperialist exploration-as-colonization has passed, then the point is moot, since this was true before 1967, and since for Mandel geographical expansion under a neo-colonialist guise is in principle no different than under the aegis of colonialism: both are aimed at the extraction of surplus profit. This is richly suggested by Mandel's comments on the "internal" colonization of the US South (1975, pp. 75–107).
3. As far as "anexact philology" goes, I am drawing on Waite (1996, pp. 69, 88–89).
4. On discounting non-industrialized countries, see Mandel, 1995, p. 4.
5. Michael Mann (2001) cites statistics that suggest that the concentration of trade and investment in the industrialized nations of the "North" has increased from about 70 percent (trade) and 50 percent (investment) in 1950 to about 90 percent of both today. Niall Ferguson (2001) has recently cited similar numbers: in 1913, 63 percent of foreign direct investment went to developing countries; in 1996, that proportion was only 28 percent. And it surely dropped after the Asian financial panic of 1998.
6. See Amsden (1989), who argues that, although Korea's industrializing process might be said to have been set in motion in the 1870s, it was interrupted by, among other things, Japan's imperialist ventures, and did not really take off until the 1960s, and continued at least through the 1980s.

   I use the term "subaltern" advisedly. In this context, it might be said to refer *not* to those who have been subject to capitalist modernization and rationality, but those excluded from it. As Joan Robinson (1962, p. 45) once commented, the only thing worse than being exploited by capital is *not* being exploited by it. With this comment, Robinson pointed to the misery wreaked upon those who, not officially in capital's orbit, were still subject to the pressure it exerted as a competing form of modernization. I take this description as a cognate for the position of "subalternity."
7. Lipietz argued that "an economy is in major crisis when its mode of regulation can no longer ensure the stability of its regime of accumulation. But the world still goes on, even during a crisis. . . . There is, then, nothing to prevent us from talking about a 'crisis regime' in the same way that other writers speak of 'dependent development'" (1987, p. 199, n. 14).
8. On the problems of the coherence and reproduction of economic regimes of accumulation, see Lipietz (1987, pp. 127–35).
9. This upturn has been temporary, indeed. As Robert Brenner (2003) has pointed out, the profits upturn during the 1990s was at least matched by the wave of profits re-statements after the bubble burst in 2000. In this context – one in which companies were so desperate for quarterly earnings that they did almost anything to invent them – the 1990s boom seems much more of a piece with the "long downturn" in profitability since the 1970s.

10. Financial statistics in this paragraph come from the Federal Reserve's *Flow of Funds Accounts of the United States: Annual Flows and Outstandings*, various years.
11. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis' National Income and Product Accounts, personal savings as a fraction of disposable income declined from 5.6 percent in 1995 to 1 percent in 2000.
12. Fannie Mae, the government sponsored mortgage broker, is certainly an important reason for this increase. Fannie Mae's backing by the Treasury and Federal Reserve enables it to borrow at lower interest rates, and thus to buy higher-risk loans without threatening its viability. With the budget surpluses being run by the US government until recently, it was believed that Fannie Mae's bonds would replace Treasury bills as the benchmark security once US government debt was gone. As critics have been quick to point out, this gives Fannie Mae an "unfair advantage" and threatens to become a moral hazard problem since, although Fannie Mae is a government-sponsored agency, its risks are like those of any other financial institution, rather than Treasury itself.

6

The Political Unconscious of Globalization: Notes from the Periphery

Maria Elisa Cevasco

As any other committed intellectual, Jameson, like Brecht, would, I think, 'be delighted at an argument not for his greatness or canonicity, nor even for some new and unexpected value of posterity (let alone for his 'postmodernity'), as rather for his usefulness – and that not only for some uncertain or merely possible future, but right now, in a post-Cold-War market-rhetorical situation even more anti-communist than the good old days' (Jameson, 1998b, p. 1).

I would, then, like to present this argument for Jameson's usefulness, not in general, as the artificer of grand theory that he is, but as the provider of handy tools for intervention in current debates, for the establishment of where we are, and of the determinants that constitute our concrete situation. In his own words, I would like to use Jameson as a tool for 'cognitive mapping.'

Cognitive mapping

Cognitive mapping is, of course, an expression Jameson himself put into circulation. It synthesizes the cultural model, the aesthetics and the political task called for by our current situation. One of the most characteristic features of postmodernity, the name of our period of virtually uncontested domination of capitalism throughout the globe, is its new sense of space and time. As a new phase of social organization, it occasions a transformation of the fundamental coordinates through which we organize experience. Its characteristic style in cultural production, postmodernism, gives form to the effacing of older relations with those coordinates.

Postmodern temporality is marked by an accelerated rate of transformation: we live in a constant flow in which lifestyles, fashions, and even beliefs seem to change overnight, bearing no relation to the past. This accelerated rate of change is accompanied by an equally accelerated standardization: everything

can change except the continuous flow of commodities and the system that sustains the flow. Paraphrasing Lampedusa's character in *Il Gatopardo*, everything must change in order to remain the same. The very sense of history as temporality and causality is effaced. Benjamin's dictum that 'even the dead will not be safe from the enemy' while this enemy continues to win is amply confirmed by the fact that the past itself is turned into 'little more than a set of dusty spectacles' (Jameson, 1991a, p. 18). This waning of the sense of history is given figuration, for instance, in the ahistorical juxtaposition of available styles jumbled together in the 'presence of the past' characteristic of contemporary architecture, or in the fragmentary character of contemporary narrative. As Jameson puts it: 'If, indeed, the subject has lost its capacity actively to extend its pro-tension and re-tension across the temporal manifold and to organize its past and future in coherent experience, it becomes difficult enough to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but "heaps of fragments" and in a practice of the randomly heterogeneous and fragmentary and the aleatory' (Jameson, 1991a, p. 25). In this sense, postmodern representations of time act as symptoms as well as markers of a situation such as ours in which 'time has become a perpetual present and thus spatial' (Kellner, 1989, p. 46).

But that does not in any way facilitate localization. The same sense of loss and disorientation is maximized in our relations to space. Postmodernity is marked by a new socially constructed space which seems best characterized by the phrase 'saturated depthlessness.' It is a spatiality constituted by the relentless saturation of any remaining voids and empty places to the point where the postmodern body – whether wondering through a postmodern hotel, locked into rock sound by means of headphones, or undergoing the multiple shocks of postmodern warfare – 'is now exposed to a perceptual barrage of immediacy from which all layers and intervening mediations have been removed' (Jameson, 1988c, p. 351).

In a world in which the networks of multinational capital have swept through the whole globe, colonizing all enclaves and leaving no empty spaces where it is not, the possibility of taking stock has become highly problematical. In the new space of postmodernity, 'filled and suffused' with volumes, our bodies are 'bereft of spatial coordinates and we are rendered practically (let alone theoretically) incapable of distanciation' (Jameson, 1991a, p. 48). Our perception of space has been transformed into a sense of placelessness: there is no there *there*.[1] Everything seems to be here, except of course what makes this simultaneity possible: the system that organizes the new space has reached an unprecedented extension and exceeds the capacities of individual perception. The sense of limits has also been altered – we perceive space as logically finite but experientially unbounded, as unbounded as the penetration and expansion of capital all over the globe, leaving no outside from which we could assess its limits. As with time, our spatiality is both a marker and a symptom of the current situation.

If the logic of the times seems to be conceived so as to disorient our subjective and consequently collective insertion in its orders, one reaction is to seek a counter strategy to oppose its alienating effects. This is the task reserved for 'cognitive mapping.'

In an increasingly spatialized society, Jameson aptly borrows the term from urban geography. In his *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch 'taught us that the alienated city is above all a space in which people are unable to map (in their minds) either their own positions or the urban totality in which they find themselves.' In these circumstances, disalienation necessarily involves the reconquest of a sense of place and the 'construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories' (Jameson, 1991a, p. 51).

But this, as we have seen, is precisely the task postmodern space seems specially designed to prevent. How can we, contemporary subjects, map our position, not to mention think of alternative trajectories, in a space whose uniqueness and originality lies precisely in its disorienting features? Again the difficulty of mapping a position is both a symptom and an expression of the historical peculiarity of our times, 'marked by the coexistence of discontinuous realities ranging from the still surviving spaces of bourgeois private lives to the unimaginable decentering of global capital itself' (Jameson, 1988c, p. 351).

'Unimaginable' is the key word here. Jameson of course recognizes the disparity between mapping one's position in a city and in a globalized social reality but, nonetheless, wants to retain the analogy not only because it enables him to suggest the interplay of the macro level (the general process) in the micro level of each of its particular manifestations, but also because of its emblematic value in the construction of a cultural model suitable to our times. Lynch's notion of cognitive mapping provides a spatial analogy to Althusser's formulation of ideology as 'the Imaginary representation of the subject's relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence.' This view of ideology as a necessary function of social life embodies precisely what Jameson wants to figure with his proposition of cognitive mapping as a cultural model: it stresses the gap between individual positionality and the totality of class structures in which one is situated, between individual perception and a 'reality that transcends all individual thinking or experience' (Jameson, 1988c, p. 353). Hence the political need for maps. Jameson stresses the fact that cognitive mapping is a form of contemporary cultural politics:

> And although you may not have realized it I am talking practical politics here: since the crisis of socialist internationalism, and the enormous strategic and tactical difficulties of coordinating local and grassroots or neighborhood political action with national or international ones, such

> urgent political dilemmas are all immediately functions of the enormously complex new international space I have in mind. (Jameson, 1988c, p. 351)

And, later on in the same essay:

> The conception of cognitive mapping proposed here therefore involves an extrapolation of Lynch's spatial analysis to the realm of social structure, that is to say, in our historical moment, to the totality of class relations on a global (or should I say multinational) scale . . . The incapacity to map socially is as crippling to political experience as the analogous incapacity to map spatially is for urban experience. It follows that an aesthetic of cognitive mapping in this sense is an integral part of any socialist political project. (Jameson, 1988c, p. 353)

How can those maps become 'cognitive,' what can we learn from them? The work of ideology is to try to bridge the gap between 'real' and 'lived' (which, for Althusser equals imaginary) relations by means of conscious or unconscious representation. 'In ideology men do express, not the relation between them and their conditions of existence, but the *way* they live the relation between them and their conditions of existence: this presupposes both a real relation and an "imaginary", "lived" relation' (Althusser, 1969, p. 233). It is in this sense that the examination of cultural products can provide a differential knowledge about social reality: they represent in however distorted a fashion, a tangible form of those relations (i.e. of the real ones as well as of the imaginary ones). This is how representation performs a fundamental social and political task inasmuch as it not only provides a figure to the self-consciousness available at a determined socio-historical time but also works as sign and a symptom of a possible self-consciousness. As an aesthetics, cognitive mapping proposes a 'pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual with a heightened sense of its place in the global system' (Jameson, 1991a, p. 54). Given the circumstances, this is far from an easy task. At the end of one of his exercises in cognitive mapping, the essay 'Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture,' he points out some of those difficulties:

> [cognitive mapping] presupposes a radical incompatibility between the possibilities of an older national language or culture (which is still the framework in which literature is being produced today) and the transnational, worldwide organization of the economic infrastructure of contemporary capitalism. The result of this contradiction is a situation in which the truth of our social life as a whole – in Lukács's terms, as a totality – is increasingly irreconcilable with the possibilities of aesthetic expression or articulation available to us; a situation about which it can be asserted that if we can make a work of art from our experience, if we

> can give experience the form of a story that can be told, then it is no longer true, even as individual experience; and if we can grasp the truth about our world as a totality, then we may find it some purely conceptual expression but we will no longer be able to maintain an imaginative relationship to it... This is the perspective in which it becomes a matter of more than mere intellectual curiosity to interrogate the artistic production of our own time for signs of some new, so far only dimly conceivable, collective forms which can replace the older individualistic ones (those either of conventional realism or of a now conventionalized modernism)...
>
> (Jameson, 1990b [1977], p. 54)

In the interest of this political aspect of aesthetic figuration, he wants to recuperate the didactical function of art: the cultural model he proposes 'foregrounds the cognitive and pedagogical dimensions of art and culture, dimensions stressed in very different ways both by Lukács and Brecht (for the distinct moment of realism and modernism respectively)' (Jameson, 1991a, p. 50). With this move, Jameson creates his own predecessors in the strategy of cognitive mapping: in the tradition of those two of the most engaged critics from the Western Marxist tradition, Jameson sets a task for the committed cultural critic in postmodern times.

One could argue that ours is a time in which the very logic of the system has become cultural. The relation between cultural production and the prevailing social order is one of accompaniment rather than of professed antagonism. In such a situation, can cultural production still yield useful social information? If cognitive mapping is to be of any political use, the answer must be 'yes.' Cultural products cannot but take their raw materials from actual social content – very much including the contradictions inherent in our economic organization and its political conflicts. The cultural critic can then probe cultural products both as a source of social knowledge and as figuration of the emergence of a possible oppositional stance, of a challenge to the existing social order. Following Raymond Williams's use of the Gramscian distinctions, Jameson calls our attention to the fact that no social order can be so hegemonic as to exclude residual and emergent social practices. As Williams puts it, 'no mode of production, and therefore no dominant society or order of society, in reality exhausts the full range of human practice, human energy, human intention (this range is not the inventory of some original "human nature" but, on the contrary, is that extraordinary range of variations, both practiced and imagined, of which human beings are and have shown themselves to be capable)' (Williams, 1980 [1973], p. 43). In a society whose mode of production is based on a fundamental contradiction, opposition is not only possible, but also inevitable. It is in this sense that cognitive mapping can be seen as an answer to Williams's injunction that 'it is crucial for any Marxist theory of culture that it can give an adequate explanation of the sources of those [emergent as

opposed to merely alternative] practices and meanings' (Williams, 1980 [1973], p. 42). Appropriately, Jameson's book on postmodernism ends with the equation of cognitive mapping and class consciousness:

> Cognitive mapping was in reality nothing but a code word for class consciousness – only it proposed the need for class consciousness of a new and hitherto undreamed of kind, while it also inflected the account in the direction of that new spatiality implicit in the postmodern.
>
> (Jameson, 1991a, p. 418)

Writing in 1989, Douglas Kellner draws the consequences of cognitive mapping as a political strategy:

> Jameson has yet to work out a radical cultural politics and such a project is the next logical step in his itinerary. It is to be hoped that an increased level of struggle by new social movements and general upsurge in the fortunes of the Left as we move into the 1990s will make such projects an increasingly important part of the Left's theoretical and political agenda. For the Left Turn requires a radical cultural politics as necessary supplement to its theoretical and political agendas in view of the increased importance of the role of culture and ideology in contemporary society. Thus if radical political change is to be possible, alternative cultural forms and practices, new ways of seeing and a new sensibility are indispensable parts of a resurgence of a new politics yet to be invented. (Kellner, 1989, p. 37)

From the vantage point of early twenty-first century it is not yet possible to say the Left has indeed invented a new politics though the anti-capitalist movements, one of the subjects of this chapter, seem to be a decisive first step in that direction. But Kellner was right in predicting that Jameson's next logical move would be to provide the framework for a radical cultural politics thorough the analysis of capitalism's next move. As we are all painfully aware, the new name of the old game is globalization and it is to its theorizations that Jameson turns in his 1990s essays.

The cartographer of globalization

As he had done for one of globalization's first telltale signs, postmodernism, Jameson has usefully charted the terrain for productive debates on globalization. In his recent essays, he maps the characteristic features of globalization in the different levels of the economic, the social, the political and the economic. Drawing from Arrighi's *The Long Twentieth Century*, he adds a historical dimension to the functioning of late capitalism: rather than a final stage of an ineluctable and unprecedented final victory of capitalism, ours is a stage which has been repeated in a history marked by the spiral development

of capitalism: in its different phases and locations, it has gone through succeeding periods of accumulation through trade, capitalization and the third stage, financerization, when it takes flight from saturated production and looks for profit in financial speculation. At this stage, 'Capital itself becomes free-floating. It separates itself from the concrete context of its productive geography' (Jameson, 1998c, p. 142). It goes elsewhere, becomes deterritorialized or, as contemporary slogans have it, globalized.

This description of the economic features of our times – the focus of the 1997 essay, 'Culture and Finance Capital' – has a number of consequences. One of them is to confirm Marx's enduring contribution to a critique of capitalism: those spiral stages very much follow his M-C-M' as the general formula for Capital in which money accumulation becomes capital invested in commodity production and finally interest-bearing capital, 'money which begets money' (Marx, 1976 [1867], p. 256). Another is to give the lie to the triumphalism which pervades discussions of globalization: the third stage is not the acumen of the system. On the contrary, as Braudel reminds us, ever since capitalism's first historical stage in the sixteenth-century financial expansion has been 'a sign of autumn.' Yet another consequence of this historical outlook in the mapping of the economic features of globalization is to problematize the putative irreversibility of the world system: rather than a fixture, the pervasive sense of doom that seems to hang over globalization is a sign and symptom of our 'inability to imagine an alternative, or to conceive how delinking from the world economy could possibly be a feasible political and economic project in the first place' (Jameson, 2000a, p. 56).

At a political level, globalization has meant another genealogical stage of imperialism, this time having the US as sole great power which enforces through its economic and military might the 'marvels' of neo-liberalism and the propagation of a trade policy ironically (particularly from my peripheral point of view) bandied about as the *free* market. As for the solving of international conflicts at the time of the ideological demise of the nation-state, it takes the form that, with a prescience that has been awfully confirmed and expanded by the so-called counter-attack on Afghanistan, Jameson describes as follows: 'This latest form of imperialism will involve only the US (and such utterly subordinated satellites like the UK), who will adopt the role of the world's policemen, and enforce their rule through selected interventions (mostly bombings from a great height) in various alleged war zones' (Jameson, 2000a, p. 51).

At the social level, Jameson highlights consumption as the way of life generated by late capitalist commodity production. Though only a minority can have access to a fully fledged consumer life style, its driving forces – mainly individualism and atomization – are at work throughout what used to be called the 'social fabric.' In fact those levels can only be distinguished in theory, once the peculiarity of the present stage of social life under finance capitalism is that 'dedifferentiation, that confluence between the various and

distinct levels of the economic, the cultural and the politic that characterizes postmodernity and lends a fundamental structure to globalization' (Jameson, 2000a, p. 55).

It is no coincidence that it is a cultural critic that purports to present such a totalizing view of our times. Jameson has shown, in the book on postmodernism, that the logic of the present global system is cultural. It is that insight that makes the subsequent theorization of globalization conceptually possible. In the present conjuncture, any analysis of culture is at the same time an assessment of globalization and a judgment on its effects. In the essay 'Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue,' published in 1998, we can see the difference Jameson's materialist stance makes for an enabling cognitive mapping of culture under globalization.

The first step there is to go beyond the moral level of judgments of value, that is, beyond the facile celebration, say, of the freedoms or of the exciting new possibilities of communications granted by the technological revolution or the equally facile lamentation of the loss of 'the grandeur of modernity' when there was a clearer field of 'political struggle in which the great contending ideologies still had the force and authority of the great religions in earlier times' (Jameson, 1998a, p. 55).

Jameson shows how the conflation of the cultural and the economic – the logic, as we have seen, found powering this later stage of capital – can provide a way of disentangling the positives and negatives of this new moment of capitalism. Cultural critics have, alas, been among the first to pick out the positives. From now on, or so most cultural studies analyses went, there was, in the new transnational world order, an equally new kind of space for cultural pluralism, an openness to the proliferation of new hybrid cultures, and the possibility to achieve visibility for a great number of hitherto unrecognized groups, races, genders and ethnicities – 'a falling away of those structures that condemned whole segments of the population to silence and subalternity' (Jameson, 1998a, p. 57). For one magic moment, in cultural expression, lo and behold, the subalterns could speak and their voices could be heard in a world which was finally technologically linked in such a way as to become the global village of the media dreams of the 1960s. The new key words for cultural studies seemed to have become pluralism, difference and variety.

It is hard to find a bad word to say about this trio. And yet, particularly from where I stand, in the peripheral side of the global flow, it is difficult to sustain an optimistic perspective on globalization at any of its multiple levels, very much including the cultural one. Yet, one of the axioms demonstrated by Jameson is precisely that in our times, more than ever before, the cultural level must be thought in terms of the current economic situation and not merely on cultural terms that do not have an autonomous existence.

And it so happens that if we follow the lead of thinkers like Jameson and project the economic determinants into culture the result is that we can begin to see, under the glittering surface of globalized cosmopolitanism,

how the characteristics of the economic level have determined the conversion of the positives of globalization – (the very same pluralism, difference and variety) that had so enchanted some cultural critics – into their contraries. Many would agree that on the economic level globalization has meant standardization of national economies, assimilation of all nations to the international laws of the market and forced integration to a new imposed international division of labour. So whereas the key words for postmodern culture seemed to be pluralism, difference and variety, the key words for contemporary economics would be standardization, identity and assimilation.

The projection of those structural economic features into the cultural realm shows that where, as cultural critics, some of us had discovered new and exciting ways of life, we see the targeting by corporations of those specific ways of life and their assimilation as consumers' lifestyles. Variety is translated into the general equivalence of sameness and where we celebrated pluralism we are obliged to acknowledge standardization, for example, in the worldwide turning of local cultural production into yet another version of massified sameness. In Brazil we recently had an example of how this assimilation works: a runner-up for the 1999 Oscar as best foreign film, *Central Station*, told a Brazilian story of poverty and illiteracy in the filmic language of Hollywood – the result was a version of Brazil translated into international terms and widely accepted precisely because of its use of American film conventions which have become the standard film language. The fact that in this process of forced translations aesthetic forms were severed from actual social formations and thus failed to represent their specificity and make it socially available is yet another example of the identity of difference in a world determined by a system that thrives on standardization. Viewed from the angle of its confluence with the economic order, contemporary culture offers a case study of some of the devastating effects of globalization.

Should progressive cultural critics then join the conservatives in deploring the new and think of a cultural politics based on the recovery or rehabilitation of a former state of affairs which we did not necessarily approve of in the first place? In practice, no. Beyond lamentation or celebration, a more fruitful exercise for cultural critics would be to try an exercise in cognitive mapping, seeking to establish not only a position from which to assess globalization beyond the many layers of ideology which covers current appraisals but also to discern the specific forms a resistance to this new version of the old world order may take. After all, the ability to recognize and name the emergent, thus making it socially available to others, is one of the most fundamental tasks for committed cultural critics.

An exercise in cognitive mapping

My proposition is then to examine, in the light of Jameson's cartography, what I take to be a formative anti-globalization structure of feeling in Brazil.

Structure of feeling is another of Raymond Williams's terms, which Jameson borrows when he wants to characterize postmodernism as a way of speaking that aims at coordinating new forms of practice and social and mental habits (as Williams puts it, something that 'operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity,' designated as feelings) with the new forms of economic production and organization thrown up by the modification of capitalism in recent years (something then 'as firm and definitive as a structure') (Williams, 1961, p. 48). This examination is carried out as not only as a way of describing but also of probing the present for the seeds of a future beyond the more or less sophisticated accommodations to capitalism and its necessarily imperial drives also known as globalization. But before embarking on this exercise of cognitive mapping I would better explain why I consider Brazil to be worth examining for reasons other than its proximity to my own experience.

Robertson has usefully defined one of the effects of globalization as 'the particularization of the universal and the universalization of the particular.'[2] In such a situation a particular case cannot but shed light on the universal. Before that, Roberto Schwarz – who has always linked the particular to the general, in the case of his object of study, the workings of Brazilian ideological life and its material determinants which are to be located in the general functioning of world capitalism – demonstrated how foreign ideas function as ideologies of the second degree in Brazil: once their material determinants are elsewhere, they cannot describe, not even falsely, Brazilian socio-historical reality. But their very falsehood is a true component and has a cognitive effect beyond the scope of Brazilian cultural studies. Insofar as the prestigious ideas from the centre are rendered preposterous for their evident discrepancy with the reality they propose to explain, they also fail to mislead: their malfunctioning is a clue to their pretence. As Schwarz puts it:

> To know Brazil was to know these displacements . . . for which however there was no proper name, since the improper use of names was part of its nature. (Schwarz, 1992, p. 28)

Though he was talking about nineteenth-century Brazil, I think the same can be said of globalization. In Brazil it is an improper name if there ever was one and that may make a response to it in Brazilian terms of more general significance.

My first example of what I take to be a new structure of feeling forming as a resistance to the ideology of globalization is from poetry, that most un-postmodern of forms. Francisco Alvim's (b. 1938) second book of poems, *Elephant*, published in 2000, contains 132 very short poems. Structurally they are very similar to jokes. Right from the beginning the emotional expectancy of a reader of poetry is displaced: the poet expresses no affect, but makes jokes, thus suggesting the impossibility of traditional forms of

poetry as the expression of individual thoughts and emotions in our days. Jokes have a strong potential for revelation and at the same time presuppose a certain communality of feeling as the process of the humorist poet must tally with the process of the reader for the humour to function. In the case of *Elephant*, this communality is based on a certain knowledge about Brazilian peculiarities. In a recent review of the book, Roberto Schwarz shows how Alvim's poems recap and recast some of the modernist writers' project of discovering and interpreting Brazilian social reality through the documenting of the uses of Brazilian speech turns, relations, rhythms and complicities. There is, however, a significant change: for most modernist writers the Brazilian deviancy from Western bourgeois norms functioned as hope for a truly democratic future – once we did not adjust to the world as it was we could create a better one, free of its rigidities and alienations. In our time, however, as Schwarz puts it, 'the past is not over but it does not help think of a better future' (Schwarz, 2001, p. 2). This, of course, does not preclude the effort to change the present.

Alvim's subjects are taken from daily life and their material is ordinary language, fragments of speeches that form a truly social language: the individual voice of the poet is not foregrounded, it is the voice of others that constitute the poems thus intimating the incompatibility of former individualistic modes of expression to convey postmodern experience.[3] Read together the poems map Brazilian collective experience ranging from remains of slavery to contemporary politics in the capital, Brasília. Most of the poems are very short indeed – functioning more as epigrams than as ful-fledged poetic discourse. It is as though hegemonic articulated discourse – the discourse of false consciousness which is used to mask rather than to reveal – must be displaced so as to try to figure contemporary reality. Though very short, the poems do not constitute the heaps of fragments Jameson diagnoses as symptoms of postmodern alienated and aleatory practices. Each poem is an episode in a larger unit to which it alludes and on which it depends to achieve meaning. There is an unmistakable contemporaneity about them – if we want to use an old jargon, they present 'slices of contemporary life.' True to the spirit of the age, they depend on a spatial logic to function: rather than metaphoric – that is, rather than functioning in terms of resemblances – they are metonymic, parts of a totality which they reveal by contiguity.

The poems take for granted that poet and reader share a point of view on Brazilian social life – that is what enables their epigrammatic minimalism. Taken together they structure the current version of the country's integration in the world order. As in most peripheral countries, this has been a constant theme in Brazilian cultural life. Ever since Independence, it has been marked by a sense of its inadequacy to the prestigious European and nowadays American norms. We are fully inserted in capitalist practices but they function in a way which, though peculiar to Brazil, is not alien to a world system that

determines them. As one of the poems demonstrates,[4] capitalist transactions in Brazil, less disguised by the ideological layers of laws and contracts than in central countries, achieve a revealing explicitness:

Business
We'll divvy it up latter.

The poems also show how the particular malfunctioning of the great themes of the ideology of globalization – pluralism, variety and integration – in the Brazilian situation sheds light on their pretences to general validity. Let me give a couple of examples to illustrate the feel of the poems:

A park
Yeah, that's good
But a bit too mixed

The voice here is well known: this is the Brazilian dominant class with its peculiarly distorted enlightened vision – a public improvement is a good idea, providing it does not include the mass of poor people – among other things, an apt image of the kind of inclusion on offer in globalization.

But if one then says the norm of the centre nowadays at least makes a pretence at inclusion, and very much the inclusion of the marginal, the respect for difference in, say, a multi-racial society, Alvim gives another example of the supposed suppression of racial prejudice Brazilian – but is it really only Brazilian? – style:

Look
A black man speaking,
with the utmost clarity
and human sympathy.

The permanence of prejudice in this apparent appreciation for the racial other is one of the many salutary shocks to consciously held versions of pluralist integration. 'Reciprocity of disdain,' as Schwarz puts it, rather than understanding, also marks international relations:

Hospitality
If your country is
As good as all that
Why don't you go back?

The theme of non-integration re-occurs in one of the most fulminating of the poems in the collection:

But
She is really quite clean.

As Schwarz points out in his review, the content of the poem is everything which comes before the opening adversative: the 'encyclopedia of objections that the propertied classes make to the unpropertied who are obliged to work for them, and whose only recognizable virtue is their being not as dirty as the ruling voices would expect them to be' (Schwarz, 2001, p. 2).

What sort of knowledge have we gained by this exercise? Two themes – permanence of class divisions and the consequent lie it gives to celebratory views of a pluralistic integration – seem to stand out in Alvim's figuration of Brazilian social life. The first one has to do with the alleged novelty of globalization: in the poems, the recent version of a brave new world has precious few novelties about it. It may describe the appearance of social organization in the so-called civilized world, but viewed from the periphery, it is the question of permanence that stands out: the poems depict the permanence of the social fracture that marks life under an economic mode of production that breeds inequality. If there has not been any structural change, consequently the aspirations of pluralist integration, brandied about by the ideologues of globalization as achieved reality, cannot come to pass.

The poems demonstrate the permanence in postmodernity of a nineteenth-century pervasive theme, that of the Two Nations. The existing social gap – that separates the ones who can say 'but' from the ones who are considered, notwithstanding their poverty, 'quite clean' – displaces all the celebratory terms used in current discussions of globalization. A question posed by the poems is one that seldom gets asked in current debates: which of those two nations is to be 'integrated' in a globalized world? Surely not those who have been increasingly re-marginalized by the economic effects of globalization – if they do get integrated it will be, as Robert Kurtz (1991) puts it, as 'monetary subjects without money.'

A third lesson is given by the very form of the poems: we have seen that they make use of a collective of voices. The content of those speeches – what the voices say – gives the lie to the shibboleths of pluralism and variety in current apologies of actually existing globalization. However, the fact that the poet has used a collective form in poetry, the most individualistic of literary genres, prefigures the corollary of any possible resistance to the current world order. Given its totalizing drives, any response to it can only be collective.

It is in this sense that the process of globalization may be seen as the breeding ground for a new – and hitherto not fully formed – collective sensibility. It is those feelings that seem to be structuring the coalition of social movements that constitute a new strategy for progressive politics. Up to the first sparkling moment in Seattle in 1999, social groups used to appear on the political scene only in order to fight for their private, localized demands, in a sort of 'group individualism.' This 'militant particularism'[5] is precisely

what seems to have been surpassed in my next example of the formation of a specifically anti-capitalist structure of feeling in Brazil.

My example, this time is an anti-postmodernist social formation in that it was not based on a single issue but on the collaborative congregation of political parties, unions, peasant movements, NGOs, guerrilla fighters, intellectuals, activists and even ethical entrepreneurs and drag queens. The venue was the First World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre on days deliberately coincident with the World Economic Forum which has congregated politicians, CEOs, finance wizards, also known as bankers, and a number of so-called intellectuals, in Davos, an exclusive ski resort in exclusive Switzerland. Since 1971, Davos has been issuing guidelines on how to improve present-day corporate domination. Virtually uncovered by the media for several years, it reached the spotlight when the Clinton administration chose it as one for the showcases for his benevolent imperialism, or, to repeat what Tarik Ali said in Porto Alegre, of his 'imperialism with human rights,' as though that was possible. The newest euphemism was introduced by Tony Blair in his speech at Davos in January 2000: compassionate globalization. A blunter and more descriptive translation would be charity only for the deserving poor, in order to refrain claims for equality.

Latin America and more specifically Porto Alegre were also deliberately chosen: Latin America representing of course the South, the new name for poor countries, where so much suffering has been inflicted by the economic impositions of neo-liberalism. Porto Alegre the capital city of Rio Grande do Sul state, was chosen because this city of one and a half million inhabitants has been electing mayors from the Workers's Party for the last twelve years. Both the State administration – the current governor is also from the Workers's Party – and the city administrations provided the logistical support for the Forum, which was promoted by eight different international organizations, including the Brazilian Association of NGOs, the Movement of the Landless People in Brazil which brought along the other peasant movements gathered in Via Campesina, and Attac, the movement for the adoption of the Tobin Tax on financial capital, whose president, Bernard Cassen, is also the director of *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

The Forum announced itself as a result of the worldwide mobilizations that showed the first signs that a new kind of opposition was forming to challenge the hegemony of capitalism: European demonstrations against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment in 1998, the Seattle demonstrations against the WTO in 1999 and the Washington demonstrations against the IMF and the World Bank were acknowledged as honourable predecessors and sources of inspiration in the official program. Yet one decisive feature distinguished Porto Alegre and this helps justify my choosing it as an object of this primitive exercise in cognitive mapping: the other movements were all protests against what Michael Denning calls the 'the global enclosures of the commons,'[6] they targeted globalization forces and institutions, and as

such were the victims of repression, whereas in Porto Alegre all, very much including the police, were united in an attempt to figure an alternative to actually existing globalization. For five days, and in spite of unfavourable coverage in the national media, in Porto Alegre we were living the exciting possibilities of another kind of globalization.

Like most of the new social movements, the forum took strategic advantage of current technological facilities thus employing the age-old wisdom of using your enemy's strength for your own advantage. The Internet and e-mail were powerful organizational tools. The mobility facilitated by globalization was also paramount in making possible the presence of delegates from 122 different nations. The organizers were quick to convert to their advantage the visibility gains of media society: when a journalist, Patrice Barrat, proposed a teleconference with four Davos delegates, they mounted a colourful panel of representatives from different ethnicities who conversed with their counterparts in Davos: four white men in dark suits. On television, they stood for standardized globalization whereas Porto Alegre presented the figuration of a pluralist federation, precisely what globalization offers as an illusion. This provided a powerful illustration of the motto of the Forum: 'Another World Is Possible.'

More consistently, the structuring of the discussion at the Forum was also a consequence of perceptions facilitated by globalization. One of the things its changes have brought about is an increased awareness of the fact that each particular claim is located within a totalizing system and depends on systemic changes for its fulfilment. Thus the forum privileged in its plenary sessions economic and political determinants: production of wealth and social reproduction, access to wealth and sustainability, the affirmation of civil society, and political power and ethics in a new society. The 400 workshops – proposed and directed by a myriad of organizations – focused on more specific issues. In a sense the Forum itself was engaged in a vast exercise in cognitive mapping, assessing the real determinants of the collective experience of living in what the ideologues claim to be one world.

Of course I could not follow the vast majority of workshops but impressions and analyses published by other participants seem to converge: a new social sensibility is being formed and it involves coalitions rather than specific claims. Like the poet Francisco Alvim, leaders of social movements seemed no longer prepared to bet on integration on globalist terms. The discussions showed an increased awareness of the need for a larger articulation of the particular – say the fight for equal rights for homosexuals or for clean water in slums – with the general, say, the need to change a system that decides that only some people need a healthy environment or only some identities will be incorporated in a world ruled by the market. Regardless of their differences, the disparate groups all seemed aware of the need to establish new forms of connections, or to revert to Jameson's language, to overcome the very real and enormous 'strategic and tactical difficulties of coordinating local

and grassroots or neighborhood political action with national or international ones.' The sense of shared goals was so intense that soon people started using expressions like 'Rebellious International' or an 'International of Resistance.'

But of course almost everything remains to be done: there was no fall in the Dow Jones rate or in the Nasdaq for all the hope raised in Porto Alegre. The huge task of relating these different movements and the powerful social energy they liberate to a unified political organization that could present a challenge to the existing social order has scarcely begun. But if Porto Alegre does not provide easy answers, it has at least posed fundamental questions. One of them is, of course, what has made this sort of mobilization possible? What can we learn from it?

Obviously I can only comment on those questions from my limited point of view. The feeling being expressed in Porto Alegre was fundamentally anti-capitalist, mainly against its recent more openly imperialist drives. The correlation of political forces seems to have altered however slightly. The Left seemed to have moved out of its defensive post-1989 positions: it was clear that far from being old-fashioned believers of a dead code, we were the ones discussing the fundamental issues for human life on the planet. Ideologically, the Forum managed to illustrate to a wider audience what theory had already charted: the cultural and the social are conflated to serve the ever-increasing needs of the economic. It is as if one of the feats of globalization has been to transform the world in the image and likeness of economism. So thorough has been this process of prioritization of the economic that the most extremist views on the overdetermination of the economic, including the ones dismissed as vulgar Marxism, have become widely accepted as a realistic rendering of contemporary life.

But the most promising feature of the structure of feeling discernible at the World Social Forum is the effective challenge to what we may call globalist common sense. One of the worst ideological consequences of globalization was the way it presented itself as inexorable. We all remember how Margaret Thatcher's 'There is no alternative' echoed in intellectual formulations which seemed to be all anchored in a so-called inescapable need to adapt to neo-liberalism. This accommodating perception was definitely absent from formulations in Porto Alegre. In this respect they represent a clear victory in the discursive struggle to win hearts and minds to ideas of change. The very numbers bespoke of this desire for change: over 15,000 people gathered in Porto Alegre, representing a very unusual social mix – it was a common sight to see an African with his colourful clothes sitting next to a peasant from the Landless People Movement, an Indian next to a well-known intellectual, Ben Bella next to a state governor, a union leader and a representative of the Colombian Farcs. This presented a powerful image of the possibility of realization of globalization's hitherto false promises of a world of variety, integration and pluralism. Even more significantly, for all this multiplicity,

the forum presented a united and a clearly oppositional front against the currently dominating system. As Michel Löwy put it in his appraisal 'Davos and Porto Alegre represent two different historical perspectives, two opposed projects for civilization, two antagonistic and irreconcilable social realities. The new century . . . has to choose one or the other way: there is no viable third way.'[7]

This sounds very much like the historical opposition between socialism and capitalism and yet the word socialism was oddly absent in the main debates. That was for a number of participants, including myself, one of the most disappointing features of the Forum. It is, again, Jameson who puts it neatly:

> If it is in reality capitalism which is the motor force behind the destructive forces of globalization, then it must be in their capacity to neutralize or transform this particular mode of exploitation that one can best test those various forms of resistance to the West. (Jameson, 2000a, p. 67)

I am well aware of the historical reasons why socialism would be kept at an unconscious level rather than presented as the solution to the many horrors of actually existing capitalism. One cannot forget the waves of shock the collapse of Stalinism and the dismembering of the Soviet Union spread on the Left all over the world. But one cannot forget either that another of the ideological victories of the Right has been its successful implantation of the word 'irrevocability' in contemporary discourse: it is impossible to have a better world, their kind of globalization is irreversible, life outside the market and its false integrations is unfeasible, and so on. All this pseudo-irrevocability successfully repressed critical knowledge of the actual functioning of the system and its qualitative difference from socialism. It has also hindered the formation of an international class consciousness.

The two exercises in cognitive mapping presented here point to the formation of a structure of feeling that gives the lie to most of globalization's false promises. The ideological centre of globalization no longer holds, and that is certainly an advance over previous positions on its inexorability. And yet, so much is still to be done.

Maybe a way of tapping the resources of this new anti-capitalism and of liberating its socialist unconscious would be to see this structure of feeling not as something new but as the historical guise of socialism at times of dispersal and defeat. Assessing the political strategies suitable for combating globalization, Jameson calls for a renewal of combination, the old word for labour organization (Jameson, 2000a, p. 68). 'The history of the labour movement offers innumerable examples of the forging of new forms of solidarity in active political work.' As it has always been throughout the history of capitalism, it is the social collective that can give a response to globalization. Porto Alegre offered a good sketch of what this combination may look like in our time.

In the future, we may turn back to those incommensurable examples – in art and in more overtly social practices – as some of the constituents of the moment in which an agonizingly slow evolution towards socialism turned into a decisive step towards the awareness of the necessity of a revolution. And lest we think revolution needs a more portentous moment, we may recall, again, Raymond Williams:

> The point at which particular interests, properly brought together can be seen to be a general interest is the moment of socialism. But this moment comes not once and for all. It comes many times, it is lost and found again, has to be affirmed and developed, continually and practically.
>
> (Williams, 1985, pp. 163–4)

In the meantime it might help if we stopped talking exclusively of the difficulties of socialism and tried to cognitively map the probable locations of seeds of a more promising future. As the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano said in Porto Alegre, 'Let's save pessimism for better times.'[8]

Notes

1. For an enlightening discussion of Jameson's conception of postmodern space, see Sean Homer (1998), pp. 128–42, and for an explanation of its mains characteristics, Martin Donougho, 'Postmodern Jameson' (1989).
2. Roland Robertson (1992), quoted in Jameson, 1998c, p. xvii.
3. See for a comparison the discussion of the poem 'China' in Jameson, 1991a, pp. 28–32, particularly his observation of the 'reemergence across these disjointed sentences of some more unified global meaning' p. 29.
4. All poems are taken from Alvim (2000). The translations are mine.
5. This is how Raymond Williams describes the early social movements of identity politics in his *Towards 2000*.
6. Michael Denning *Culture at the Time of the Three Worlds* (London: Verso, forthcoming).
7. Michel Löwy 'Davos e Porto Alegre: Dois Projetos Antagônicos de Civilização', http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br
8. Quoted in Norman Solomon, 'Letter from Porto Alegre to Znet', http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br

7

Jameson as a Theorist of Revolutionary Philately

Slavoj Žižek

In his analysis of commodity fetishism, Marx asserts that the mystery of the commodity form resides in this form itself, not in the content hidden beneath it, thereby echoing Freud's remark (in his masterpiece with the misleading title *The Interpretation of Dreams*) that the specificity of the dream resides in its form as such, not in the content encoded in this form.[1] For this precise reason, Marx's deployment of the commodity form in Chapter 1 of *Capital* is *not* a "narrative", that is, not a *Vorstellung*, but a *Darstellung*, the deployment of the inner structure of the universe of merchandises – the narrative is, on the contrary, the story of the "primitive accumulation," the myth capitalism proposes about its own origins. Along the same lines, Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit* – contrary to Richard Rorty's reading – does not propose a large narrative of the birth and deployment of subjectivity, but the *form* of subjectivity; as Hegel himself emphasizes in the Foreword, it focuses on the "formal aspect (*das Formelle*)." This is also how one should approach the absence of large all-encompassing narratives today – recall Fredric Jameson's supple description of the deadlock of the dialogue between the Western New Left and the Eastern European dissidents, of the absence of any common language between them:

> To put it briefly, the East wishes to talk in terms of power and oppression; the West in terms of culture and commodification. There are really no common denominators in this initial struggle for discursive rules, and what we end up with is the inevitable comedy of each side muttering irrelevant replies in its own favourite language.[2]

Jameson at the same time insists that Marxism still provides the universal meta-language enabling us to situate and relate all other partial narrativizations/interpretations – is he simply inconsistent? Are there two Jamesons: one,

postmodern, the theorist of the irreducible multiplicity of the narratives, the other, the more traditional partisan of the Marxist universal hermeneutics? The only way to save Jameson from this predicament is to insist that Marxism is here not the all-encompassing interpretive horizon, but the matrix which enables us to account for (to generate) the multiplicity of narratives and/or interpretations. It is also here that one should introduce the key dialectical distinction between the *founding* figure of a movement and the later figure who *formalized* this movement: Lenin did not just "adequately translate Marxist theory into the political practice" – he rather "formalized" Marx by way of defining the Party as the political form of its historical intervention, in the same way that Saint Paul "formalized" Christ, and Lacan "formalized" Freud.[3]

What, then, is this Form? Let us take Ernst Nolte's "revisionist" argument concerning the relationship between Nazism and (Soviet) Communism: reprehensible as it was, Nazism not only appeared after Communism; it was also with regard to its content an excessive *reaction* to the Communist threat. Furthermore, all the horrors committed by Nazism merely copy the horrors already committed by Soviet Communism: secret police reign, concentration camps, genocidal terror . . . Is this the Form we are talking about? Is the idea that Communism and Nazism share the same totalitarian Form, and that the difference concerns only the empirical agents which fill in the same structural places ("Jews" instead of "class enemy," etc.)? The usual liberal reaction to Nolte consists in a moralistic outcry: Nolte relativizes Nazism, reducing it to a secondary echo of the Communist Evil – however, how can one even compare Communism, this thwarted attempt at liberation, with the radical Evil of Nazism? In contrast to this dismissal, one should fully concede Nolte's central point: yes, Nazism effectively was a reaction to the Communist threat; it effectively just replaced class struggle with the struggle between Aryans and Jews – the problem, however, resides in this "just," which is by no means as innocent as it appears. We are dealing here with displacement (*Verschiebung*) in the Freudian sense of the term: Nazism displaces class struggle onto racial struggle and thereby obfuscates its true site. What changes in the passage from Communism to Nazism is the Form, and it is in this change of the Form that the Nazi ideological mystification resides: the political struggle is naturalized into the racial conflict, the (class) antagonism inherent to the social edifice is reduced to the invasion of a foreign (Jewish) body which disturbs the harmony of the Aryan community. So while one should fully admit that Nazism can only be understood as a reaction to the threat of (the Soviet) Communism, as a displaced repetition of the Communist ideological universe, one should locate the Form which determines the concrete functioning of Nazism not in the abstract notion of "totalitarianism" which encompasses both Communism and Nazism as its two particular cases, but in the very displacement to which Nazism submits the Communist coordinates. This notion of Form is the properly dialectical

one: Form is not the neutral frame of particular contents, but the very principle of concretion, that is, the "strange attractor" which distorts, biases, confers a specific colour on every element of the totality.

In other words, formalization is strictly correlative to focusing on the Real of an antagonism. In the Marxist perspective, "class struggle" is not the last horizon of meaning, the last signified of all social phenomena, but the formal generative matrix of the different ideological horizons of understanding. That is to say, one should not confuse this properly dialectical notion of Form with the liberal-multiculturalist notion of Form as the neutral framework of the multitude of "narratives" – not only literature, but also politics, religion and science, they are all different narratives, stories we are telling ourselves about ourselves, and the ultimate goal of ethics is to guarantee the neutral space in which this multitude of narratives can peacefully coexist, in which everyone, from ethnic to sexual minorities, will have the right and possibility to tell his story. The properly dialectical notion of Form signals precisely the *impossibility* of this liberal notion of Form: Form has nothing to do with "formalism," with the idea of a neutral Form, independent of its contingent particular content; it rather stands for the traumatic kernel of the Real, for the antagonism, which "colours" the entire field in question. In this precise sense, class struggle is the Form of the Social: every social phenomenon is overdetermined by it, which means that it is not possible to remain neutral towards it.

From this point, we should return to the thesis that one of the basic features of democracy is the transformation of the (political) enemy into adversary, of the unconditional antagonism into agonistic competition: an adversary is not a mortal threat to power, since the place of power is originally empty, the place for whose (temporal) occupation different agents can legitimately compete (see Mouffe, 1999). However, whenever one hears of the need to suspend the logic of exclusion or excommunication in the field of politics, one should always bear in mind that such an agonistic thriving multitude of adversaries, not enemies, by definition has to rely on some (explicit or implicit) symbolic *pact* which defines the rules of this agonistic competition. For this simple reason, wide as this field of agonistic competition can be, the translation of antagonism into agonism, of enemy into adversary, cannot ever be complete – there will always be some "indivisible remainder" of those who do not recognize this pact. And are the terms in which we *have* to define this exclusion not necessarily ethico-legalistic?

What this means is that the key political struggle is not so much the agonistic competition within the field of the admissible, of political subjects who acknowledge each other as legitimate adversaries, but rather the struggle for the delimitation of this field, for the definition of the line which will separate the legitimate adversary from the illegitimate enemy. Say, the standard liberal democracy involves the excommunication of the extreme (Fascist) Right and (terrorist or Communist) Left: there is no pact with them,

coalitions are out of the question. Why should the Left strategy be not to impose even a more radical exclusion: does the struggle between Right and Left not often turn around the inclusion of the far Right, with the Right accepting its inclusion, and the Left insisting on its exclusion (Haider in Austria, the neo-Fascist *Alleanza nazionale* in Italy, etc.)? Why not, instead of condemning *tout court* the introduction of moralistic and legalistic categories into the political struggle proper, *extend* their application, censuring the extreme Right as ethically evil, as morally unacceptable, as a pariah to be shunned? In short, why not openly *endorse* the politicization of ethics, in the sense of abolishing the distance between the two, of changing the legal and moral terrain into another battlefield of political hegemony, of resorting to direct ethico/legal arguments and measures to discredit the enemy?[4]

Do we thereby effectively court some kind of dangerous "extremism," which is also one of the standard reproaches to Lenin? Lenin's critique of Leftism as the "Child Illness of the Communism" is more than actual in the last decades, in which Left often succumbed to the terrorist temptation. Political "extremism" or "excessive radicalism" should always be read as a phenomenon of ideologico-political *displacement*: as an index of its opposite, of a limitation, of a refusal effectively to "go to the end." What was the Jacobin's recourse to radical "terror" if not a kind of hysterical acting out bearing witness to their inability to disturb the very fundamentals of economic order (private property, etc.)? And does the same not go even for the so-called "excesses" of political correctness? Do they also not display the retreat from disturbing the effective (economic etc.) causes of racism and sexism? Perhaps, then, the time has come to render problematic the standard topos, shared by practically all the "postmodern" Leftists, according to which political "totalitarianism" somehow results from the predominance of material production and technology over the intersubjective communication and/or symbolic practice, as if the root of the political terror resides in the fact that the "principle" of instrumental reason, of the technological exploitation of nature, is extended also to society, so that people are treated as raw stuff to be transformed into a New Man. What if it is the exact *opposite* which holds? What if political "terror" signals precisely that the sphere of (material) production is *denied* in its autonomy and *subordinated* to political logic? Is it not that all political "terror," from Jacobins to Maoist Cultural Revolution, presupposes the foreclosure of production proper, its reduction to the terrain of political battle?

Recall Badiou's exalted defence of Terror in the French Revolution, in which he quotes the justification of the guillotine for Lavoisier: "*La republique n'a pas de besoin de savants*. (The Republic has no need for scientists.)" Badiou's thesis is that the truth of this statement emerges if we cut it short, depriving it of its caveat: "*La republique n'a pas de besoins*. (The Republic has no needs.)" The Republic gives body to the purely political logic of equality and freedom which should follow its path with no consideration for the

"servicing of goods" destined to satisfy the needs of the individuals (Badiou, 2001). In the revolutionary process proper, freedom becomes an end-in-itself, caught in its own paroxysm – this suspension of the importance of the sphere of economy, of the (material) production, brings Badiou close to Hannah Arendt for whom, in a strict homology to Badiou, freedom is opposed to the domain of the provision of services and goods, of the maintenance of households and the exercise of administration, which do not belong to politics proper: the only place for freedom is the communal political space. In this precise sense, Badiou's (and Sylvain Lazarus' – Lazarus, 2001) plea for the reappraisal of Lenin is more ambiguous than it may appear: what it effectively amounts to is nothing less than the abandonment of Marx's key insight into how the political struggle is a spectacle which, in order to be deciphered, has to be referred to the sphere of economics "if Marxism had any analytical value for *political* theory, was it not in the insistence that the problem of freedom was contained in the social relations implicitly declared 'unpolitical' – that is, naturalized – in liberal discourse" (Brown, 1995, p. 14). No wonder that the Lenin, Badiou and Lazarus prefer is the Lenin of *What Is to Be Done*?, the Lenin who (in his thesis that the socialist-revolutionary consciousness has to be brought from without to the working class) breaks with Marx's alleged "economism" and asserts the autonomy of the political, *not* the Lenin of *The State and Revolution*, fascinated by the modern centralized industry, imagining the (depoliticized) ways to reorganize economy and the state apparatus.

This "pure politics" of Badiou, Ranciere and Balibar, more Jacobin than Marxist, shares with its great opponent, the Anglo-Saxon Cultural Studies and their focus on the struggles for recognition, the degradation of the sphere of economy. That is to say, what all the new French (or French-oriented) theories of the political, from Balibar through Ranciere and Badiou to Laclau and Mouffe, aim at is – to put it in the traditional philosophical terms – the reduction of the sphere of economy (of the material production) to an "ontic" sphere deprived of the "ontological" dignity. Within this horizon, there is simply no place for the Marxian "critique of political economy": the structure of the universe of commodities and capital in Marx's *Capital* is *not* just that of a limited empirical sphere, but a kind of socio-transcendental *a priori*, the matrix which generates the totality of social and political relations. The relationship between economy and politics is ultimately that of the well-known visual paradox of the "two faces or a vase": one either sees the two faces or a vase, never both of them – one has to make a choice. In the same way, one either focuses on the political, and the domain of economy is reduced to the empirical "servicing of goods," or one focuses on economy, and politics is reduced to a theatre of appearances, to a passing phenomenon which will disappear with the arrival of the developed Communist (or technocratic) society, in which, as already Engels put it, the "administration of people" will vanish in the "administration of things."[5]

The "political" critique of Marxism (the claim that, when one reduces politics to a "formal" expression of some underlying "objective" socio-economic process, one loses the openness and contingency constitutive of the political field proper) should thus be supplemented by its obverse: the field of economy is *in its very form* irreducible to politics – this level of the form of economy (of economy as the determining *form* of the social) is what French "political post-Marxists" miss when they reduce economy to one of the positive social spheres. In Badiou, the root of this notion of pure "politics," radically autonomous with regard to history, society, economy, State and even Party, is his opposition between Being and Event – it is here that Badiou remains "idealist." From the materialist standpoint, an Event emerges "out of nowhere" within a specific constellation of Being – the space of an Event is the minimal "empty" distance between two beings, the "other" dimension which shines through this gap (see Žižek, 2001, Chapter 7).

Consequently, Lenin the ultimate political strategist should in no way be separated from Lenin the "technocrat" dreaming about the scientific reorganization of production. The greatness of Lenin is that, although he lacked the proper conceptual apparatus to think these two levels together, he was aware of the *urgency* to do it – an impossible, yet necessary, task.[6] What we are dealing with here is another version of the Lacanian "il n'y a pas de rapport . . . ": if, for Lacan, there is no sexual relationship, then, for Marxism proper, there is *no relationship between economy and politics*, no "meta-language" enabling us to grasp from the same neutral standpoint the two levels, although – or, rather, *because* – these two levels are inextricably intertwined. The "political" class struggle takes place in the midst of economy (recall that the very last paragraph of *Capital* vol. 3 where the text abruptly stops, tackles the class struggle), while, at the same time, the domain of economy serves as the key enabling us to decode political struggles. No wonder that the structure of this impossible relationship is that of the Moebius band: first, we have to progress from the political spectacle to its economic infrastructure; then, in the second step, we have to confront the irreducible dimension of the political struggle in the very heart of the economy.

In short, the problem with democracy is that, the moment it is established as a positive formal system regulating the way a multitude of political subjects compete for power, it has to exclude some options as "non-democratic," and *this exclusion, this founding decision about who is included in and who is excluded from the field of democratic options, is not democratic*. We are not playing here formal-logical games with the paradoxes of meta-language, since, at this precise point, Marx's old insight remains fully valid: this inclusion/exclusion is overdetermined by the fundamental social antagonism ("class struggle"), which, for that very reason, cannot ever be adequately translated into the form of democratic competition. The ultimate democratic illusion – and, simultaneously, the point at which the limitation of democracy

becomes directly palpable – is that one can accomplish social revolution painlessly, through "peaceful means," by simply winning elections. This illusion is *formalist* in the strictest sense of the term: it abstracts from the concrete framework of social relations within which the democratic form is operative. Consequently, although there is no profit in ridiculing political democracy, one should nonetheless insist on the Marxist lesson, confirmed by the post-Socialist craving for privatization, on how political democracy has to rely on private property. In short, the problem with democracy is not that it is a democracy, but, to use the phrase introduced apropos of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia, in its "collateral damage," in the fact that it is a form of State Power involving certain relationships of production.

Marx's old notion of the "dictatorship of the proletariat," reactualized by Lenin, points precisely in this direction, trying to provide an answer to the crucial question: *What kind of power will there be after we take power*? And this brings us to the delicate question of (political) violence. I remember Jameson's remark (from a private conversation) that, in a revolutionary process, violence plays a role homologous to that of wealth in the Protestant legitimization of capitalism: although it has no intrinsic value (and, consequently, should not be fetishized and celebrated for itself, as in the Fascist fascination with it), it serves as a sign of the authenticity of our revolutionary endeavour. When the enemy resists and engages us in a violent conflict, this means that we effectively touched its raw nerve . . .

This, of course, in no way legitimizes violence as an end-in-itself – there are modalities of false violence which should be clearly identified. Towards the end of Andrew Davis' *The Fugitive*, the innocent-persecuted doctor (Harrison Ford) confronts at a large medical convention his colleague (Jeroem Kraabe), accusing him that he falsified medical data on behalf of a large pharmaceutical company. At this precise point, when one would expect that the shift would focus on the company – the corporate capital – as the true culprit, Kraabe interrupts his talk, invites Ford to step aside, and then, outside the convention hall, they engage in a passionate violent fight, beating each other till their faces are red of blood. The scene is telltale in its openly ridiculous character, as if, in order to get out of the ideological mess of playing with anti-capitalism, one should do a move which renders directly palpable the cracks in the narrative. Another aspect is here the transformation of the bad guy (Kraabe) into a vicious, sneering, pathological character, as if psychological depravity (which accompanies the dazzling spectacle of the fight) should replace the anonymous non-psychological drive of the capital: the much more appropriate gesture would have been to present the corrupted colleague as a psychologically sincere and privately honest doctor who, because of the financial difficulties of the hospital in which he works, was lured into swallowing the bait of the pharmaceutical company.

In his remarkable intervention at the Krzysztof Kieślowski conference at Univeristy of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in April 2001, Jameson violently

protested against the unexpected death by drowning of the young boy, the traumatic event around which Kieślowski's *Decalogue 1* turns: he emphatically claimed that Kieślowski should never be forgiven for killing the boy, that he should be held accountable for his death, in the same way that, according to some late Medieval legislation, if some author kills a popular fictional character in his narrative, one should be allowed to prosecute him for murder. Brilliant as this idea is, it is probably misplaced: the author who should effectively *never* be forgiven for the way he treats his heroines in *Breaking the Waves* and *Dancer In the Dark*, is Lars von Trier.

Dancer In the Dark is one of those painful films in which it is clear from the very beginning where the story will end: in the total catastrophe. While watching the film, we secretly hope, believe even, that something will happen which will prevent this unbearable ending, so that, paradoxically, the final shock is that there is no surprise: the horrible ending towards which the film pointed all the time *does* take place. The story takes place in the US in the 1960s: Selma (Bjork), a Czech émigré, who works in a textile factory, is going blind because of an inherited disease; she works overtime to save money for the operation which would save her son from the same predicament. Her friendly neighbour in whom she confides steals the money from her; after she kills him, she is condemned to death and executed. How can Selma survive such an ordeal? Her big passions are singing and the musicals: after hours, she participates in an amateur group practising for the performance of *The Sound of Music*, and the drab reality of her life is continuously suspended by the songs she imagines to sing to herself. These songs which grow organically out of the rhythmic sounds of her working environs (reminding us of the good old Marxist theories of the birth of music out of the collective work rhythm) are getting leaner and leaner, with diminishing orchestral background, till, on her way to the execution, we hear just her hesitating voice trying to linger to the melody. The ambiguity is here radical: does *Dancer* celebrate the magical power of music (and musicals) which allows us to survive the horrifying reality, or does it condemn music as an escapist fantasy which makes us passively endure social reality?

So how is Selma able to sustain such a radical subjective stance? By adopting the *fetishist* position. What is a fetish? Patricia Highsmith's short story *The Button* tells the story of a middle-aged New Yorker who lives a miserable life with his wife and a Mongoloid child; once, late in the night, unable to stand any longer the meaningless gibber of his son, he takes a walk on the empty streets where he bumps into a homeless drunken beggar. Although the beggar is in no way intrusive, the hero spills out all his anger and frustrations on the poor beggar; after beating him senselessly to death, he tears off a button from his dirty coat and runs home. From this evening on, he keeps the button all the time in his pocket, clinging to it as to a kind of superstition prop – whatever misery will befall him, there will always be this button to remind him how, once, at least, he was able fully to strike back. He thus

regains the ability to confront life with new hope, even to return a kind smile to his Mongoloid son. This is a fetish at its purest: the in-between element which enables the subject to endure the miserable reality. And, perhaps, the true secret of *Dancer* is that it renders a case of feminine fetishism, turning around the standard psychoanalytic doxa which opposes feminine hysteria and male (fetishist) perversion. Is it not that Selma is able to endure everything, the most painful situations, because she has her fetish – singing – to which she clings all the time? Underlying all this is the question: What *is* singing? Why do we sing? At the very beginning of his *Eugene Onegin*, Pushkin presents the scene of women singing while picking strawberries on a field – with the acerbic explanation that they are ordered to sing by their mistress, so that they cannot eat strawberries while picking them.

Which, then, is the *social* dimension of such a fetishist stance? Let us recall another film which also deals with music and the working class, Mark Herman's *Brassed Off*, whose topic is the relationship between the "real" political struggle (the miners' struggle against the threatening pit closure legitimized in the terms of technological progress) and the idealized symbolic expression of the miners' community, their playing in the brass band. At first, the two aspects seem to be opposed: to the miners caught in the struggle for their economic survival, the "Only music matters!" attitude of their old band leader dying of lung cancer appears as a vain fetishized insistence of the empty symbolic form deprived of its social substance. However, once miners lose their political struggle, the "music matters" attitude, their insistence to go on playing and participating in the national competition, turns into a defying symbolic gesture, a proper act of asserting fidelity to their political struggle – as one of the miners puts it, when there is no hope, there are just principles to follow . . . In short, the symbolic act occurs when we arrive at this criss-cross, or, rather, short-circuit of the two levels, so that insistence on the empty form itself (we will continue playing our brass band, whatever happens . . .) becomes the sign of fidelity to the content (to the struggle against the closures, for the continuation of the miners' way of life).

This role of music achieved its highest expression in the legendary event at the Vorkuta gulag camp Mine 29 in 1953. A few months after Stalin's death, strikes broke out in labour camps all across Siberia; the strikers' demands were modest and "reasonable": the release of the very old and the too young, the ban on random shooting by watch-tower guards and so on. One by one, the camps succumbed to threats or false promises from Moscow, and only Mine 29 at Vorkuta held out, surrounded by two divisions of Peoples Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) troops, with tanks. When the troops finally entered the main gate, they saw the prisoners standing behind it in a solid phalanx, their arms linked, and singing. After a brief hesitation, the heavy machine guns opened up – the miners remained massed and erect, defiantly continuing to sing, the dead held up by the living. After about a minute, reality caught up, and the corpses started to litter the ground.

However, this brief minute in which the strikers' defiance seemed to suspend the very laws of nature, transubstantiating their exhausted bodies into the appearance of an immortal singing collective Body, was the occurrence of the Sublime at its purest, the prolonged moment in which, in a way, the time stood still.

What, then, if we risk to locate *Dancer In the Dark* in this series, conceiving Selma's singing not as an escapist gesture, but as the gesture of heroic defiance? And, furthermore, what if – before immersing oneself into the speculations about the relationship between voice and reality – one takes note of the fact that, in a society with universal healthcare, Selma's predicament (having to toil for the son's eye surgery while going blind herself) could not have emerged in the first place? Furthermore, the supreme achievement of the film is the avoidance of melodramatic effects where the events seem to call for them. The key scene of the film is the exchange between Selma and the neighbour who stole her money out of despair that if his wife discovers that he is broke, she will leave him. So when Selma (in a calm and dignified way, without any pathetic reproaches) confronts him with his crime, the friendly neighbour answers her in a calm rational way, admitting everything and presenting her with the choice: if he were to lose the money, he would not be able to endure the fact that his wife will leave him, so the only alternative for him is suicide. Consequently, Selma has to make a choice: either she leaves him her desperately earned money, or she kills him (and he even gives her his gun to do it), which she then does. This scene is unique in its radical tension: the cruelty of what goes on (the victim confronting the criminal who ruined her life) is rendered in the form of a sincerely open and compassionate exchange between the two true friends, both victims of the circumstances, so that when Selma kills the thief, the act is not accomplished with an uncontrolled rage, but as a tender act of helping a friend, reminding us of the final scene in Brecht's *Die Massnahme*, when the three revolutionaries throw to death their young companion who failed in his work – political liquidation as an act of *pieta*.

However, all this brilliance does not affect the fundamental fact that there is something terribly wrong with the film. *Dancer* is the final term of von Trier's trilogy which also comprises *Breaking the Waves* and *The Idiots*. All three films focus on the same figure of feminine subjectivity, the fairy-tale figure of the girl walking alone in a forest, who endeavours to escape the sense of being exposed to the threatening darkness all around her by offering bits of what she has to shadows that surround her. While professing compassion with the excessively good heroine, the way these films depict her progressive suffering and inexorable self-destruction cannot but put us in the position of the sadistic observer secretly enjoying what he officially condemns: this sadistic pleasure is the obverse, the hidden truth, of compassion. And for *this*, von Trier should never be pardoned.

In an unexpected way, Kieślowski also offers a coded model of the "post-democratic" subversive organization. One should be very attentive to seemingly marginal, but nonetheless key appearances of the political dimension in Kieślowski's work. Recall the key scene of Kieślowski's *The Double Life of Veronique*, the encounter of the two Veroniques in the large square in which a Solidarity political demonstration is taking place: this encounter is rendered in a vertiginous circular shot reminiscent of the famous 360 degrees shot from Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. The camera's circular movement thus signals that we are on the verge of the vortex in which different realities mix, that this vortex is already exerting its influence: if we make one step further – that is to say, if the two Veroniques were actually to confront and recognize each other – reality would disintegrate, because such an encounter of a person with her own double, with *herself* in another time-space dimension, is precluded by the very fundamental structure of the universe. (One can easily imagine a Hollywood version of this impossible encounter along the lines of Disney's *The Parent Trap* in which the same actress (Hayley Mills) plays the role of the two twin sisters: after getting acquainted, the two Veroniques would trade places, the Polish one returning to France and the French one staying in Poland.) No wonder that this revolving movement takes place on the large square on which the police are trying to disperse Solidarnosc demonstrations: the vortex which threatens to dissolve reality is echoed in the prospect of the political revolution which threatens to dissolve the existing socio-political order. And, interestingly, in the second – French – part of *Veronique*, this momentary appearance of the political reality is echoed by another intrusion of the political, the terrorist bomb explosion outside Gare St Lazare in Paris, where Veronique will meet the mysterious stranger who was sending her ciphered messages: political demonstrations in the East, terrorist attacks in the West.

The message is even more complex in *Decalogue*, Kieślowski's series of ten TV-movies conspicuous for its "apolitical" stance: the first thing that strikes the eye of a viewer aware of the historical circumstances in which *Decalogue* was shot, is the total absence of any reference to politics: although the series was shot in the most turbulent period of the post-Second World War Polish history (the state of emergency imposed by General Jaruzelski's *coup d'état* in order to curb Solidarity), Kieślowski resisted to score easy points by spicing up the story with direct dissident thrills. However, as Jameson pointed out, a close analysis demonstrates how this very avoidance of the explicit politicization was in its proper historical context a political gesture *par excellence* – the gesture of rejecting not only the ruling Communist regime, but also the "dissident" opposition, at least in its standard anti-Communist form. Furthermore, the political dimension is not simply absent, but *actively erased*: insofar as the conflict between science and religion in *Decalogue 1* is the encoded formulation of the *political* struggle between ("scientific" atheist)

Communists and the (religious) Solidarity dissidence, the catastrophe in which science and religion suspend each other announces the depoliticization of the universe of the *Decalogue*, the limitation to the world of middle-class privacy with its typical traumas (ethical choices, fidelity, abortion) (see Chapter 12). And, from here, one is tempted to return to Kieślowski's earlier *Blind Chance* – here is the film's storyline: Witek runs after a train. Three variations follow on how such a seemingly banal incident could influence the rest of his life. One: he catches the train, meets an honest Communist and himself becomes a Party activist. Two: while running for the train he bumps into a railway guard, is arrested, brought to trial and sent to unpaid labour in a park where he meets someone from the opposition and in turn, becomes a militant dissident. Three: he simply misses the train, returns to his interrupted studies, marries a fellow student and leads a peaceful life as a doctor unwilling to get mixed up in politics. He is sent abroad to a symposium; in the mid-air, the plane he is on explodes. Insofar as one has reasons to claim that the only "true" story is the third one (the first two being just Witek's hallucinated alternatives when he is approaching death), the film signals the escape into privacy after the deadlock of the struggle between Communists and dissidents – in short, *Blind Chance* provides the key to decode *Decalogue 1*.

However, is this triad really complete, are the options really exhausted, as the final catastrophe (the death of the hero in the plane crash) seems to indicate, functioning as a kind of closure? What if there is a *fourth* option: the repoliticization *beyond* the opposition Communism/dissidence and its sublation in the post-Communist postpolitical society?[7] This politicization is not simply external to the previous one; its base should rather be conceived as the intersection of the two apparently opposite poles of Communism and dissidence. Does not *Decalogue 10* point in this direction, with its society of philatelists, a kind of secret authentic community, thriving under Socialism because it allowed contacts with foreign countries? (see, again, Chapter 12). Are, then, these philatelists not the model for other societies in which the spirit of communality survives, from psychoanalytic associations to subversive half-illegal political organizations? There is yet another aspect to this: Jameson also pointed out how, today, the standard doxa against conspiracy theories (they are the political epistemology of the poor as they project their perplexity into the fantasy of a secret enemy which pulls the strings and the reference to whom thus explains all) is no longer sufficient. Today, a lot of ongoing phenomena *have* to be explained through some kind of conspiracy theory (acts of semi-clandestine government agencies; the strategies of large companies). And, in order to fight them, one more and more needs *our own* half-clandestine organizations. Perhaps, Lenin's formula of the Party from his much vilified *What Is to Be Done*? acquires new relevance today.

Notes

1. When, in "The Civil War in France", Marx praised the Paris Commune as the "finally discovered form in which the class struggle could be pursued to its end" (Marx, 1977, p. 599), the term "form" should also be given all its Hegelian dialectical weight.
2. Quoted from Buck-Morss, 2000, p. 237. At a different level, there are in Palestine today two opposite narratives (the Jewish and the Palestinian one) with absolutely no common horizon, no "synthesis" in a larger meta-narrative; the solution thus cannot be found in any all-encompassing narrative.
3. This difference between interpretation and formalization is also crucial to introduce some (theoretical) order into the recent debates on the holocaust: although it is true that the holocaust cannot be adequately interpreted or narrated, in short: rendered meaningful, that all the attempts to do it fail and have to end in silence, *it can and should be "formalized,"* situated in its structural conditions of possibility.
4. Recall Brecht's well-known scandalous saying: "A Communist tells the truth when it is necessary, and he lies when it is necessary; he is kind when it is necessary, and he is brutal when it is necessary; he is honest when it is necessary, and he cheats when it is necessary . . . Of all virtues, he has only one: that he fights for Communism." This *ethical suspension of morality* is specifically Christian-modern; as such, it is to be strictly opposed to the "pagan" one, in which morality concerns my relationship to others and ethics my "care of the Self" in the Foucauldian sense, what do I make of myself.
5. Is it not that the same "vase/two faces" paradox occurs in the case of the holocaust and gulag? We either elevate the holocaust into the ultimate crime, and the Stalinist terror is thereby half-redeemed, reduced to a minor role of an "ordinary" crime; or we focus on the gulag as the ultimate result of the logic of the modern revolutionary terror, and the holocaust is thereby at best reduced to another example of the same logic. Somehow, it does not seem possible to deploy a truly "neutral" theory of totalitarianism, without giving a hidden preference either to the holocaust or to gulag.
6. And the achievement of Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* is that it is one of the few works which succeed in bringing these two dimensions together: on the one hand, the topic of commodity fetishism and reification; on the other hand, the topic of the party and revolutionary strategy – the reason why this book is profoundly *Leninist*.
7. This society retroactively renders visible the limitation of both poles of the previous opposition, Communists and dissidents: in their very victory, dissidents dug their own grave – is this not the lesson of the fact that, in the post-Communist Poland, the government of the ex-Communists, acting on behalf of the interest of the capital, closed down the Gdansk shipyards, the cradle of Solidarity movement?

8

Talking Film with Fredric Jameson: A Conversation with Michael Chanan

Michael Chanan

I

MC In "The Existence of Italy" you say you felt some discomfort with the hegemonic position once occupied by the journal *Screen*. What was the nature of this discomfort?

FJ *Screen* accomplished a lot, certainly they were a conduit for all kinds of French theory as related to film, and no one would want to downplay their historical role. I found, as with the Althusserians in France itself, that there was a tone of implacable ideological critique, what the Althusserians called specification, which meant assigning people their ideological boxes – which is probably very pleasant if one is on the inside, but not so pleasant if one is on the outside. I would put it this way: they devised a method of ideological analysis of film which was essentially formalistic. We all felt there had been a vulgar content-oriented form of ideological analysis that was traditional on the left, which had to do with what Terry Eagleton would call simply one's general ideology; and while we felt that his distinction between general ideology and aesthetic ideology was a very useful one, the film positions ultimately became codified in the purely formal terms of the latter, so that representation or realism was always ideologically bad and suspect, a form of bourgeois aesthetic ideology – something one could argue about, and which led to very interesting analyses. But all of these forms of newer ideological analysis, the very welcome emphasis on form and *its* ideologies, still left unbridged this connection between general ideology and aesthetic ideology, because there *is* such a thing as general ideology, it plays its role. We all wanted to feel that fascists like Celine and so forth were not simply to be condemned for their fascism, but something was to be done with the form. On the other hand, when it becomes abstracted in purely formal terms we lose all that, and

therefore we lose any sense of history except the modernist story – namely, that we used to have representation, then we became self-conscious of this, we broke with it, and now only those works which foreground the problem of representation and its ideology are to be admitted. This is obviously a very oversimplified caricature, but I would say that's my general area of discomfort and it doesn't only apply to *Screen*, it applies to a whole range of forms of ideological analysis that were developed in the sixties and seventies.

MC I would broadly agree, but I also felt a dissatisfaction with *Screen* for a quite specific reason – the fact that their position, in being very reductive about the idea of film as text, seemed to distil away any sense that film was a construction in time. Because I always felt one of the most important things about film on that level was its commonality with music as a form of structuring time; for me this was symptomatic, although not in the French themselves, of a total marginalisation of music. Was that something which ever drew your attention, in one form or another?

FJ Yes, I think that's part of it. Let me sharpen my discomfort a little more, because I think it meant there was an ideological grab-bag of everything labelled as representational which was generally assimilated to something called realism, and which very precisely had to do with time. In film, for example, it seems to me that what was stigmatised as bad and ideological – which it may have been, I'm not arguing that right now – was continuous editing and the effacement of breaks in the filmic text, in such a way that this temporal continuity was understood as a naturalisation of a production process which was wholly different from that. What that tended to mean finally was that the break became valorised, as over against any other form of temporal continuity, and that all other forms of temporal continuity that might actually have been present, except maybe in the long take, were then to be consigned to the area of bourgeois representation. But I think this is something that really all of structuralism in its larger sense suffered from: that is, once you put the emphasis on the synchronic, it's a very interesting moment when – as in Lacan for example – you try to make your way back to something diachronic, something you naturally want to see in a new way, but the connections are hard to make. So the only category that remains is somehow the break, and I think this approach can deal very well with breaks from one kind of synchronicity to another, but then what goes on inside of those, it really can't deal with. So I would imagine you could have a very interesting *Screen*-type discussion of Mahler, in the way you move from one kind of musical language to another in which the second one counts as a break with the first one, or subverts it or whatever, but what's actually going on in the overall form then becomes harder to deal with. And I guess in general what this means for the novel, for example, is really a rather old modernist idea that the modern novel, whatever that includes, is to take a poetic form in

which it is the sentence that counts, and which essentially serves to subvert the older forms of story-telling that were going on in the nineteenth century. That has some serious consequences for the novel because it ends up encouraging people to produce modernist novels which are completely non-narrative, and while there are some of those that I like, I think it's a loss not to have the others. Postmodernism has presented a problem, because it represented a return to older forms of story-telling; and I suppose in music the newer people that return to melody and dismiss the twelve tone system and so on – they count as a kind of regression, and indeed unfortunately in many cases it *is* a regression, to what were really middle-class musical values.

MC I had another problem with *Screen*, which was about its effects on a generation of emerging film-makers who thought that they should be theoretically aligned with it, and the buzz word was deconstruction. And this had, I think, two results. One was, I'm thinking of students in film-making I had in the second half of the seventies, who would quite frequently turn up with treatments for films which looked wonderful on paper but they didn't have the first idea about how to actually make them, and the second was those films which sometimes did get made and which proved virtually unwatchable, like an adaptation of a novel by de Sade where everything went on off-screen, out of frame, and it turned out to be a candidate for the most boring film ever made.

FJ I think the word deconstruction became another synonym for the formal subversion and undermining of these things; any of those words can serve as well. But then I come to another feature, which has to do with consumption and pleasure. Pleasure got re-appropriated by feminism in interesting ways; but the idea that narrative was a commodity that you consume and from which you derive the pleasures of consumption also stigmatised a great many things. So naturally if you want to subvert pleasure then non-pleasure or boredom is either one of your aims or one of your side effects. There are other ways of handling the problem. I remember my old friend and comrade Stanley Aronowitz writing about the ideology of rapid editing, especially in American TV – I heard de Certeau say this once, too – that the great thing about American television that the Europeans could never really match and the great success of mass culture was the whole notion of rapid changes, so that the limited attention span would be seized by something new. And so Aronowitz observed that if you want to undermine this, then clearly somebody like Ozu is the answer, because then you have the slowness of the thing counteracting your habits. But I think that may not have been the solution either, and certainly in experimental video there's a lot of what you're describing. But there are other "solutions" – for me Straub and Huillet are examples of something that I still like to struggle with, but which is menaced by that exercise of dictatorial power

where you force people to look at something much longer than they really want to. It reminds me of the history of photography, where in the old days you had to clamp the subject's head, because the exposure had to be so long by modern standards that the head had to stay in place for I don't know how many minutes – well, that's sort of the thing that some of this is doing to its spectators, and it certainly de-familiarises something, but I'm not sure if that's really what the vocation of film is.

Now when representation gets to be a grab-bag, it's generally labelled realism as a kind of negative term, and by that is meant any form of seemingly conventional narrative. There are two things to say about this. One is that all realism has also, when it was new, operated as a de-familiarisation, because it takes habits and does something new to them under the guise of showing what reality really is as opposed to what you thought it was, or what your habits told you, and your conventions told you it was. What that means, unfortunately for our critical languages, is that all really powerful forms of realism have always been modernisms. But it also means that Harry Levin's idea – and Levin is now thought to be the most conventional of the theorists of the nineteenth-century novel – in *The Gates of Horn* and elsewhere, is really not so far from the *Screen* position, because his idea is that realism always follows the model of the *Quixote* and takes pre-existing narrative paradigms and does something to them, that is to say precisely undermines them. For me that shows that the notion of subversion or undermining has some very real limitations and ought to be replaced by something both more political and more historical, because I think it corresponds in politics to a certain kind of anarchism, or Dadaism, if you like. And while those explosives are often very effective, in certain very precise historical situations, maybe there are other forms of politics, and of the politics of form, that we ought to be exploring, or re-discovering.

MC That throws up several things which I think we should pick apart a bit. One is the question of deconstruction because of its association with the idea of trying to develop a Brechtian cinema. The second is something I noticed in my own film-making practice, which is the way my own study of very early cinema completely changed my sense of pace. These things are usually overdetermined, and there's a film I made in El Salvador which is built around an interview with someone who spoke very slowly, so because there was a need to create a rhythm which respected that, the film slowed right down. But I was delighted to be able to do that because I felt quite strongly that the average solidarity film, or the average political reportage from a guerrilla war or suchlike, never actually gives you a chance to see, because it moves too fast. In this case the payback was that one or two Latin Americans, when they saw the film, said they were astonished that an Englishman had captured the rhythm of peasant life in El Salvador so well. That gave some pause for thought. I associate this

with a reminiscence of Jean Renoir pointing out that the camera can do two things. It can draw your attention to something, or it can sit back and let things draw attention to themselves. And the kind of narrative construction that we associate with Hollywood, what Noel Burch has called the institutionalised mode of representation, is almost entirely dependent on doing the one and not the other . . .

FJ That is, letting the camera sit back . . .

MC That's right. It never does. There may be occasional shots in John Ford, which are maybe a consequence of the fact that Ford almost never moves his camera, so sometimes you get a very wide shot of somewhere, and it takes you a moment or two to realise that something is approaching from the distance. But this is pretty rare, because for the most part this kind of desire to control the viewer is expressed in this tight framing – as in Hitchcock, for example – which is another form of control, just as important as the rapidity of cutting. So there may also be other ways of countering that, other than slowing down to the point of boredom, no?

FJ I want to mention something else which you've touched on in passing, and I know it's something that interests you – namely, sound. It seems to me that there's also a relationship with sound that has some connection with all of this. And that suggests to me yet another thing, which has to do with internal distance – that is to say that the problem with the shot that is simply held to the point of boredom is that there is not another element which is present to stand in tension with that first sensory condition. The reason I hesitate about the Straubs is that I think they always had a sense of sound as a kind of counterpoint to what they were doing with the camera.

MC Indeed not just something that acts as a counterpoint to the camera but something that fights with it.

FJ That fights with it? Oh yes, even better. And this is really the original question about deconstruction, that it's always in a sense a commentary on a text, but the commentary is supposed just to let the text show its own incoherences, and yet it's also another text in which the text is embedded. So you have that tension between the two texts, or between the filmic texts and the sound and so forth, and that's where the critical emerges. Once those internal distances are lost or diminished, all you have in front of you is the image itself, and it can't really say anything about itself, it can only direct your attention back to your own feelings of frustration about this image. Ideally something else should be there which is commenting on that image. And a break of course does that too, but I think that's only one of the ways that that internal tension or distance or whatever one wants to call it can be realised.

MC Let me bring this back to the potentially subversive nature of realism (and the possibility of escaping from that realism), because what you say about this helps to explain why film has recreated realism several times and sometimes to extremely radical effect. The obvious moment is of course the moment of neo-realism, and its influence beyond the shores of Italy. So you get Latin Americans who go to Italy to learn film-making at the beginning of the fifties, they go back, and they apply neo-realism, first of all because it's the only practical way of making independent films in Latin America at that point, but also because they believe that it can be used to show something that has never been seen on the screen before, and that itself is a revelatory act. Ten years on it's not enough, so something further has to develop, and that is precisely the sixties and the appearance of so-called "Nuevo Cine Latino Americano", which raises another series of questions and problems at another level, but we'll leave that aside for the moment. Now it seems to me that it is a necessary part of that process that indeed realism goes through a cycle of recuperation as well. One of the first effects of neo-realism in North American cinema was to reinstate what had of course been standard practice before the coming of sound, which was to go out and shoot on location, although only for certain moments when you want to remind the viewer that what you're watching is supposed to be located in an actually existing space. But my question is really this: can cinema escape from that realism, except in certain marginal, experimental practices, and can it escape from this cycle of recuperation?

FJ Well, there are obviously several points. I'm not necessarily endorsing the definition of realism that I mentioned, since I think it raises problems of its own. But the first thing one wants to say is that among those things which can be one pole of an internal tension is the outside world itself. That is to say, one can subscribe to Derrida's idea that there is no "hors-texte", that everything is a text, but nonetheless feel the outside world as a different text from the camera. The relationship of the camera to these as yet unseen, unphotographed things – the things you don't look at, or you're not allowed to look at, or supposed to look at – this can also, at certain moments, historical moments, the ones you mention, become a source of this internal tension. Now unfortunately – and this would eventually bring us to Brechtian film as well – unfortunately what seems to be at stake here is simple familiarity: if you're betting everything on novelty, and on the shock of the new – and if even realism is doing that, by showing these things that haven't been seen – once we've seen it, and we've seen it enough, and over and over again, well then it isn't new any more and the shock isn't there, and I don't know how to overcome that problem, except by more history. That is to say, I think if you study the history of film you can hope little by little to put yourself back in a position where you recapture something of this initial shock, and the same is of

course true of the history of literature, but that's very hard to do. This is also a form of reification and it's just inevitable in the process of time. But there are always new things to do, so I suppose one doesn't really have to recover those things except in a historical perspective.

MC If you narrow that down for a second, quite specifically to the trajectory of Hollywood, and ask questions about the representation of things which were at one point forbidden, or so completely stylised in their form of representation, you might arrive at what is not a very novel thesis about the role of the portrayal of sex and violence – the fact that it isn't novel doesn't necessarily mean that it isn't right in this case.

FJ There's been a dialectic of the lifting of taboos, and now we're running out of taboos and it seems to be almost at its end. That has something to do with transgression and there the internal tension is that somehow the taboo still has to be in place for the transgression to have any interest. When it's lifted everything is permitted and all tension and shock disappear.

MC But there are several taboos in present day Hollywood production, and the biggest of all is the taboo on the politics of everyday life.

FJ As well as the dominance of certain kinds of narrative which naturalise this everyday life. So in those cases perhaps there is a way in which some non-narrative forms could destroy that taboo, and there's a way in which some new narrative forms could also destroy it. But this is a society that's increasingly filled with narratives and images; and therefore as sophisticated as we may be with the conventional ones from the old days, we have many more clichés and visual or narrative commonplaces surrounding us and filling up our lives that make it ever more difficult to really show everyday life in some novel form. They're increasingly being mediated by new categories, so when you establish for example a sociological or legal or social service category called the homeless, then all of a sudden you've taken something out of everyday life that we didn't want to see before, that we didn't see, that we couldn't see, and that was shocking, and the new word domesticates it and naturalises it. So then of course the filmmakers who go out and show the homeless are already somehow themselves caught up by this stereotype that the very category lends everyday life, and I think that's something that is not going to go away.

II

MC This is an appropriate point to make a bridge to questions about documentary, because there is of course a certain very crucial strand within documentary, especially in America – the observational mode of Wiseman and others – which is precisely about going out and observing the politics of everyday life, in a manner which is not wholly pre-constructed by

narrative, or at least the object is to go out and find a narrative, not to impose the narrative, and certainly not to direct the viewer's attention either by preconceived notions of what that narrative should be like or by the semantic domination of a narration. But then Wiseman gets accused of subjectivity, as if his subjectivity as an author and the supposed objectivity of the camera are in opposition to each other. Now, it's never seemed to me that objectivity and subjectivity in documentary are in opposition to each other in that way.

FJ It occurs to me that this problem is of a piece with what's going on philosophically, that is the nominalism of present day theory, the hatred of universals, the feeling that all universals involve norms, and that therefore the opposite of that is absolute particularity or specificity, that is, what Deleuze calls a singularity – something that cannot be classified, some unique, unclassifiable, very non-universalisable thing. The truth of that is the increasing organisation of the society under all of these categories, which I would rather call categories of classification, or universals of classification, rather than means of power or control – of course they're that, but on the level of universals and particulars it seems to me it's more a question of the organisation of knowledge, finding ever new slots for everything and everything having its place. And that would be, I think, a hard thing to escape even in documentary; if you decided, for example, that the stereotypes of the homeless are wrong, you want to show some newer kinds of realities that these people live in, but you're still caught in the category of "the homeless", and you can't get out of that no matter how specific and particular the images are. So I think it's a more general cultural problem – and I don't think the operation of the particulars is terribly effective in subverting those categories, the categories are really everywhere.

MC Certainly the kind of documentary that I've raised and you responded to, is almost inevitably a discourse which can only speak of the universal through the particular, and will sometimes come unstuck for that reason. I think for example of a current affairs reportage in England a few years ago about single mothers, which was roundly criticised in the press because it chose to follow a case widely regarded as untypical, and it clearly didn't serve them well whatever the point they were trying to make. So that's part of the game, that the universal can only be represented through the particular, and also contrariwise, the particular is read as a universal. But that doesn't seem to me to be necessarily a problem on the political level if the film-maker has a certain, fairly clear political project. Let's go back to the homeless, because I had a pair of students a few years ago who got a commission to make a short film for a charity to be used as a trigger for discussion, and what the charity wanted was to destroy certain stereotypes of the homeless. So quite clearly they were working within a given classification

but also had a particular political task to fulfil. So they went looking for homeless people who could produce stories of how they became homeless which countered the stereotypes, and found an amnesiac: someone who got off the train one morning and he'd forgotten who he was, and because he wasn't your typical lumpen but an educated man, his account of finding himself homeless and being in a hostel and so forth, did indeed help to break some stereotypes.

FJ Well let me put it on a higher narrative level, then, which comes back to what you said about objectivity and subjectivity. Supposing that the documentaries we're talking about – they ostensibly are exploring pieces of reality and de-familiarising them and so on – but supposing there's a second narrative level in which what we're not seeing but what is present all the time and what the film is really about, is the drama of the documentary film-maker – that is, an actor who has a certain mission. So the whole film can be seen as a kind of dramatic act in this larger, unfilmed story, which is this film-maker doing something to these clichés or conventions. And then of course there's another actor who is often not seen, and these are the people who make the categories up, who are being attacked. So we have a second level of narrative, in which the documentary film is an object in that narrative rather than being an aesthetic object in its own right. And then these questions of what one chooses to do politically within a situation like that get to be part of that larger narrative.

MC I think that's absolutely right, and may help to explain why documentary discovered reflexivity in the first place. It certainly corresponds to my own experience, especially to the moment when you find yourself enclosed within some other power structure. I felt this very strongly filming on human rights in Cuba, but it sometimes came across most forcefully in a negative form – because of the shadowy presence of the CIA in some of the stories we were following, or else because sometimes, when we were filming on the streets and people realised who we were, they would clam up – in those days some Cubans felt that there were certain things you didn't say to foreigners.

But what you say also relates to the question of viewer expectations, doesn't it, which are precisely enclosed within a set of categories that exists nowhere in the world but on the television screen. You can start with Raymond Williams' notion of flow, but then you have to explain something within that flow about how sets of images get categorised. And the question would be, what is it that when you zap from one channel to another, tells you, almost before you've registered the content of the image, what kind of image it is.

FJ But then we're back to generic categories. You turn those channels on and you see, oh well, this is a documentary, or this is live camera coverage

from Florida, or whatever. But these are genres, and there's a whole interplay between them.

And then what must also gnaw away at the freshness or the immediacy of documentary is the generic category of documentary itself. So the film-maker is confined within a certain set of narrative conventions, but the genre of the documentary, it seems to me, also has to have its effects, which I would think are generally bad, they mediate between the object itself and the viewer.

One way of looking at it is that modernism was an attempt to get rid of generic categories, but that genre continues to exist in the subcultures, or in mass culture, and it certainly exists on television. People know what genres they want to see; if they want a documentary they switch to Discovery Channel, for example, and this immediately cuts off some expectations, and organises and manages others.

MC Nevertheless, I tend to think that the question of genre in documentary is on the one hand apparently obvious, and on the other hand extremely elusive. It leads me to want to ask why you think it is that film studies have almost completely ignored documentary until fairly recently, what is it about documentary that gives it a generic status that seems to defy analysis by the same kinds of sets of criteria that arise naturally in fiction?

FJ Well, I think you could look at it in two ways. Maybe the ambition of documentary is also to break altogether with genre, like these modernist works I've been talking about, maybe it wants to be somehow radically non-generic. But given the force of things, genre always expands to re-contain all of that. What they can't handle is probably the absence of narrative. Is that fair to say? Is genre absolutely connected to narrative? I keep coming back to the question of narrative, though, because it seems to me it's central in all the things we've been talking about. And even if there wasn't a narrative in documentary, you would project one onto it and unconsciously develop one, and that's probably what resists the aesthetics of film study; because I think the film categories want to be various forms of narrative and various uses of narrative, or even subversions of narrative, but there documentary doesn't seem to fit in very well.

MC Let's try to specify a little bit more what narrative consists in. I would want to maintain in the case of documentary that there are narrative documentaries and there are documentaries which are not narrative because they are premised on let's say a poetic mode. *[FJ: Yes.]* I would also want to distinguish between narrative documentaries and documentaries constructed by means of some form of argument. *[FJ: Right.]* And that's different from what the French used to call the "film d'essai" – I'm thinking of the films of Franju in the early fifties for example. Brian Winston I think quite usefully points out that you can structure films like that on the basis of what is so simple and straightforward a narrative that it's nothing more

than a set of pegs to hang something non-narrative on – the classic narrative documentaries are "a day in the life of", or something of that kind. *[FJ: Right.]* What that tends to is the notion that there are a whole lot of different sub-genres within documentary, and I'm not sure how happy I am with the notion of sub-genres in this context, because I don't know what documentary as a genre would then consist in. So that for me is part of the problem. How, then, would you specify what narrative consists in, in relation to this? Maybe one way of attacking that is also to ask if it's possible to have a fiction film which is non-narrative?

FJ That's a big question. You know the famous Godard remark about beginnings, middles and ends but not necessarily in that order. There has to be some kind of narrative loop, or pay-off of some sort, which need not of course come at the end, and that has to do with narrative pleasure, and with narrative closure, in some sense, although closure can certainly be derived from leaving everything hanging, that can also be a form of closure. So I guess I want to say that maybe in documentary, the problem of narrative would be that of closure: when does the documentary wrap everything up, when does it feel it's said everything, when has it reached its form of closure, what is its final twist: does documentary have an internal dynamic of that kind? Or is it perceived as being something that could potentially go on and on – not even a slice of life because that was the naturalist novel, and that had plenty of closure? The more beautiful and tight and organised the documentary becomes formally, with twist endings and so on and so forth, the less a documentary it is, one would think.

MC Yes, if it's like that. But it makes me want to say that ironically the documentaries which most conform to the idea that you've just suggested, of something which seems so much just a slice of life that any point at which you end it isn't an ending, it's just an arbitrary halt and life goes on, are precisely those films of Wiseman which have been accused of being subjective narrative constructions.

FJ Yes, of course, because "life goes on", and "a day in the life of", those are all very conventional narrative forms, or paradigms, so the minute you see them you identify them as artifice and art, and then disbelief sets in. So I suppose that the aesthetics of documentary would have to be, above all, to avoid the feeling of artfulness, or of having been arranged by an aesthetic hand, so to speak, even though clearly nothing is so taxing and demanding, as you well know, as editing a documentary film. But probably it's your mode of concealment – Hollywood wants to conceal its transitions and its production process, but yours is to conceal the artfulness of the thing and the formal categories that are involved in making it.

MC Perhaps. I think, for me, a successful documentary is one which gives you the sense that you are taking the viewer into a space where . . . I almost

want to evoke Richard Leacock's phrase about gathering data that can be used to figure out what the hell is going on. And another type, not un-associated with that, but which is probably more explicitly political, which is giving somebody a voice to speak.

FJ Right, but then I think you have to distinguish those two things, because data really suggests that meta-data has to be produced, and that's certainly an artificial effect: to give people what they want to take as broad data but which in fact has already been thoroughly processed, in order to appear to be broad data. Now, the other thing, the matter of the voice, I think that's something else, because we're talking about this in a very formal way, and yet the great thing about documentary is the things that people say, not necessarily giving them the platform to say the things they want to say, but surprising them in saying a whole raft of things; that is to say, having some other presence within the film that is not that of the film-maker, but which is some other human being who by way of speech is affirming some absolute freedom – to use the Sartrean term – some unforeseeability that you could only capture that way, that a script-writer has to try to imitate in various narrative films, but probably doesn't want to imitate absolutely because you can give people in fiction films some unusual and unforeseeable things, but you do it for some kind of effect. In this case it is not only unplanned, but has some other centre of human power or creativity.

MC You appeal there to a Sartrean notion. I would appeal to Bahktin and the idea of the double voice.

FJ Alright. It's a question of how the freedom of the other is somehow respected. I don't like this formula, but it conveys what I'm trying to get at. And I think Bakhtin meant that too: the dialogical meant that there really was another voice, and therefore another centre of freedom, or otherness, or whatever you want to call it.

MC I'm interested in why you don't like that way of describing it, because on one level, if you're talking about this as a political task in documentary, then that's exactly what it's about, and it's an ethical issue. That's to say, documentary is very much an ethical undertaking in a way that fiction filming is not. And then these things are connected, and that's why I like the Bahktinian idea of double voicing. So much of the time the documentarist is attacked on the grounds that they are imposing an ideological framework on the people within the film, as if those who attack in that way, who attack the documentaries for their subjectivity, are incapable of registering the kind of dialogical reality that Bahktin is talking about.

FJ But since you encourage me to say these nasty things about *Screen*, I do have to side with them on this. The reason I feel discomfort is humanism.

It seems to me the "respect for the freedom of the other" is very much one of these humanist slogans that I would prefer to avoid. And I would also rather you said a political act than an ethical act, because for me the latter is also a humanistic category, and after all one may be respecting the freedom of the people talking in the film, but one also wishes very much to use that politically against some other people's freedom. So I think there's something conflictual here that one has also to "respect", so to speak. I don't mind the way we're saying this, but I'm trying to see where this sense of radical otherness can come from and what kind of people it can come from; that is to say, is it possible to film just anybody and have this happen? We taught, a year or two age, this long series called *An American Family* in the course of which the family broke up, and went in different directions, and so on and so forth, and there I suppose the sense of otherness was really again connected with time, temporality. The documentary was able to capture not just the changes in this family over I think a year or so, but also, and very importantly, the influence of the making of the documentary itself on all of that: so the camera became very much a character in what was happening in this family. I remember a wonderful film about the Portuguese Revolution, that did this too, *Torre Bela* (Thomas Harlan, 1977), in which little by little the process of making the documentary had its effect on what the peasants did with this estate. So the respect for the freedom of the camera as an other in this process, or even the film-maker and the film group, is also part of it. But somehow the feeling always is that if it's fiction that somehow is not present, and it isn't really dialogical, and that there is a single person or director somehow controlling all this process, so that even if what a fictional character says is astonishing and fresh, after all somebody did write it, and even if it's improvised, it's still controlled. I know that a lot of fiction film-makers have improvised a lot, but somehow there's a matter of control there, which is of a different kind.

MC I think I see that partly in relation to, let's say Schiller's notion of *schein*: that it's not illusion; it's the illusion of illusion.

FJ Yes, I think for a lot of things that would be true. But that takes us back to the mystery of the construction of the documentary, and *its* illusions, so I guess one would be led to another frustrating position, which is that documentary is that form which tries to conceal the illusion of its being a documentary, of its being constructed, and so on and so forth; it has its own illusions.

MC Except that so much contemporary documentary doesn't do that any more, because it tries to incorporate a self-reflexive sense, which acknowledges that this is what is happening. I think something else is at issue, which is captured in a formula I like to use, which says that the documentary that you see is only one version of the documentary it could have been.

Why? First, because the other versions are lying on the cutting-room floor. Second, because the documentary that was shot is also only one version of what could have been shot. And not only that, but there was always whatever was going on behind the camera at the moment of filming, whichever way you point the camera. So you can only indicate these other putative versions by some kind of reflexivity, but you can never show them.

FJ There's a supplementary question that this reflexivity produces, and that's whether reflexivity in most of modernism – and we're sort of talking ourselves into making of documentary the supreme form of modernism, as opposed to all the fictional ones [MC: I like that . . .] is that reflexivity can always destroy illusion, and break through it. Is this so? Or is there a supplementary illusion involved, an illusion of the second power of reflexivity which re-contains it? It seems to me that would then be the problem that we're unfortunately creating for ourselves.

III

FJ We were talking about something which distinguishes the most wonderfully devised realistic dialogue in a novel, from this effective truth of the unforeseeableness of people's answers in a documentary. But is the interview documentary?

MC I think you could argue that it is, because although it's set up and controlled in some way, it's also unpredictable. In some respects it's like a game of chess, at other times it's like one of those games Wittgenstein talks about where a player can change the rules as they go along. I'm thinking of situations I've been in where, for example, the interviewee turns the tables and asks the interviewer questions. What's curious about this is that it turns the interview back into something like an ordinary conversation, so you also get situations where the interviewer, instead of asking a question, makes a statement, but it's taken as a question, which regularly happens in ordinary conversation. And these are precisely the moments when the interview comes most alive.

FJ Right, but what I was trying to get at was that in both these situations it is no longer the controller, the interviewer, or the documentary filmmaker who is getting this out of somebody else, but rather a non-human, namely the camera, or the interview situation which is provoking a revelation of the other person that is not controlled somehow by the first human subject, so to speak.

MC Well, it's true there's a kind of unwritten contract whereby the interviewee accedes to the power of the camera, but I would want to take this

by stages. I like the idea of talking about the situation here. Partly what appeals to me in this description is that what is going on in these moments when it comes alive is unrehearsed and cannot be repeated . . .

FJ That's very important.

MC . . . so it corresponds to the documentarist's dream that the only true documentary image is the one you get in the first take (because repeating it, even if you could, would make it look stilted). Now there are some notable exceptions. There's a story about Joris Ivens filming in Cuba, he's with the Cuban Militia, they're in a clearing and some counter-revolutionaries emerge from the wood and get arrested, but the camera wasn't turning, so he asked them to do it again! It's a famous shot, the mercenaries emerging from the jungle, hands above their heads. From one point of view this just means that the successful documentarist has to have, in common parlance, a large dose of "chutzpah", no? And I don't know how to theorise that exactly, because, like Stravinsky said about rhythm, either you've got it or you haven't, right? But I accept that from another point of view it might mean that the instrument, the camera, does create a situation in which various elements come into play that are beyond the individual will. So for me, one of the most exciting things that can happen when you're shooting, even if you're filming in a completely conventional way, is when something happens in front of the camera which the camera has provoked but you couldn't anticipate, and you know it can't be repeated.

FJ Now, it strikes me that this notion of unrepeatability is somehow very important. It seems to me that's one of the crucial markers, and it brings us back to temporality; we're also then moving away from the fictional film towards photography, and its mysteries, which no one has really properly theorised. What is it about the photograph which is so completely different from photographic works of art like Cindy Sherman, and also from fiction? But now, the other feature is that somehow the camera is being more than a simple registering device in this process. If there's a reflexivity in documentary it's because the camera is somehow making this unrepeatability happen. Would you agree to this?

MC I'm slightly loath to say that it's the camera that's doing it. I wonder if this isn't the point to ask another question that I want to raise, about a Lacanian understanding of where film lies. Because the formulation that I've arrived at would go like this: I don't think that film belongs exactly to the Symbolic because I don't think that it's really a language . . .

FJ This was the great thing they were struggling with, in the heroic days of film theory.

MC Yes. But it's more like music. It's not a language in the full sense; it has some kind of grammar, but in the case of film that grammar is even weaker than it is in the case of music, and we've seen that the grammar of music is not exactly stable. It's a puzzle because there is this curious state of affairs in music where you can switch between one grammar and another instantly, and recognise it instantly. But there's certainly no vocabulary, and nor is there in film, except that within the discourse of a particular style you can create the illusion of a vocabulary. I'm thinking of the way that Hitchcock, for example, will induce you to feel that a shot looking up the staircase always has a certain import, and therefore when he reverses it and looks down the staircase, it means something else.

So film can't be placed within the realm of the Symbolic, and intuitively one would suppose it belongs in the realm of the Imaginary. But I keep feeling that in documentary there's another level. I feel it most strongly when I'm watching historical archive footage, or when I recently saw a home movie of Freud which was shot by an American psychoanalyst in the 30s who was an amateur movie-maker – where you're looking at these images and keeping your eyes peeled and saying to yourself, this ought to be telling me something but I don't know what it is. You're trying to interrogate the pictures for some information which you feel they must contain because this is the trace of the real thing, but the images don't give up their secret, and so in Lacanian terms I want to say that what I'm confronted with in this peculiar way is a re-presentation of the Real.

FJ Well look, I don't think I could produce a full, new Lacanian reading of film. He talks about these things once in a while but it's not very central. But I do think one can take a cue from the way in which he handles this triad of the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real – the Real being, of course, the most elusive of all these terms, it slips around all over the place. But the whole thrust of Lacanianism in the early seminars is directed against the Imaginary, and the illusions of the Imaginary, which are unity, and the ego. So in that moment the Symbolic order played the role of destroying the illusions of the Imaginary, and the Symbolic is introduced in human development to lift the person who's locked into the illusions of the Imaginary, break the subject out of that into some other order which is not a personal order, although it does involve a big Other somewhere. Now, I'm tempted to say that this is the way one should still proceed, and in that case, all right then, fiction film is the realm of the Imaginary, it is the construction of the Imaginary, the ego of the viewer, and so on; all the mesmerisations and the illusions of the Imaginary are present in fiction film. Whereas documentary, when it works, is like photography again. Like your Freud home movies, you have this photograph of something that was once there, and is now not there, and that is irrevocable and unrepeatable, because it's in the past; and yet here's this thing and

often it does not produce the effect of the Imaginary, and probably not the Symbolic either. So despite the slipperiness of the term 'Real', it seems to me that documentary would be a situation in which it is somehow the resistances of the Real that are used to destroy the Imaginary captation or fascination, and that the Symbolic only plays a role in so far as the Real is used against certain persisting signifiers from the Symbolic, that is to say, universal ideas and clichés and so forth. But the crucial enemy has to be, I think, the use of vision in the promotion of this Imaginary fascination. So it would be my temptation to try a version of this. Because in Lacan it's never just the one or the other, the terms are always used in some relationship, normally of tension with each other, if not outright conflict, and I think you wouldn't really have a Lacanian theory unless you respected that conflict somehow.

MC I like that, because it suggests that the dialectic that goes through the history of documentary is a dialectic between the attempt to contain the documentary image within the Symbolic all the time, for example by means of the infamous "voice of God" commentary, and the attempt to escape from that, precisely not by going into the Imaginary because that's the realm of fiction, but by re-invoking the Real in some sense.

FJ And the Real in its quality as unrepeatable, I would say. That's the connection one would want to make. I'm persuaded by what you've said, that that's a very crucial constitutive element of this, that without that you don't really have documentary. But there too, the spillage of that problem over into the problem of photography, it seems to me, is another reason why film studies departments find this whole problem rather discomforting.

(Recorded 5 December 2000, at Duke University.)

9
Postmodern Negative Dialectics

John O'Kane

The legacy of Western Marxism reveals an understanding of socio-political, economic and cultural changes which "orthodox" persuasions mostly rejected. The challenge to orthodoxy occurs during two key phases of Western Marxism's development: in the aftermath of World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution; and along with changes in the global order succeeding World War II which bring the upsurges of 1956 and a new left experimental climate. A turn to culture, aesthetics and philosophy has stamped this species of Marxism, but it is in the post-1956 era when these concerns become especially significant through Western Marxism's extension to France. This breeds both its expansion and near demise, an openness toward Marxism and its Hegelian concepts which finally seeds a general skepticism about systems. De Bord's adventures, for example, constructed new situations to consider whether conditions of excess reification and imaging might reveal cultural sense if systematically pushed to their limit (Wollen, 1993, pp. 124–5). But if Kant and poststructuralism were mostly victorious by the end of the 1960s, the rationalizing mindset was far from an endangered species (Descombes, 1979, pp. 1–8). Sartre's experiments are perhaps symptomatic. Motivated by the need to construct situations not explainable or anticipated in advance through familiar syntheses, he expanded his method into an amalgam of Hegel and Kant (Sartre, 1968, see especially pp. 148–50).

For Western Marxism then the 1960s were indeed testy times, not unlike those for the first generation of critical theorists who tried to place the confusions of Fascism into a reasonable story. Then the players proliferated to wear hats not easily identified as black or white. The grayness of the moment revealed that Fascism had taken multiple, misrecognized forms in the apparatuses of power to frustrate these storytellers in their efforts to rationalize the social order. Simple theories of manipulation and prediction inherited from the earlier generation were put on hold in a climate where it seemed the rationalities of mind and world hopelessly diverged, no longer part of a common wisdom pool. Do these conditions inhibit – even prevent – dialectical thinking and method? In its Hegelian form the dialectic, as a mode

of logical argument, momentarily neutralized such dire splits. Dialectical theory could engineer infinite correctives, patch together the seemingly most incommensurable qualities into a resolution both subjective and objective. Even its materialized form boded some match of cognitive powers with the world's contradictions, a space where logic was grounded in the dialectical laws of capitalism through shocks and reversals. The contemporary dilemma spells the increasing difficulty to match logical categories with the world's engulfing complexities, its contraries and slippages which refuse the pat answer. Lucio Colletti's burrowing through and out of Marxism – from within the enclave of its "Western" structuralist form – is perhaps symptomatic. Colletti could finally not locate evidence of the mind's dialectical powers in the intractable real (Colletti, 1975).

It is this gulf between subjectivity and the real which fuels Fredric Jameson's critical commentaries on postmodernism, a concept which names a certain sense-making effort to represent irrationalities peculiar to our moment. These new conditions appear as a virtual transformation of space and time where, according to David Harvey, 'aesthetics has triumphed over ethics as a prime focus of social and intellectual concern, images dominate narratives, ephemerality and fragmentation take precedence over eternal truths and unified politics' (Harvey, 1990, p. 328). They are both real and second-order symptoms for Jameson, palpable surface expressions which are finally readable and changeable. His gambit is to grapple with these latest capital-induced crises to represent – both logically and materially – the rationalities of mind and world. Yet exactly how can this be done? Can his refinement of dialectical method be effectively used within the constraints of a postmodernized Marxism, which by definition must be implicated with these conditions?

As an all-consuming "cultural dominant" of the era, his postmodernism convolutes reality and appearance to frustrate the theories it inevitably entraps. Yet entrapment need not be complete and final if dialectical thought is retooled within postmodernism's categorical constraints, and remains open to mediations and irrationalities en route to more realistic dialectical expression. Jameson avoids Colletti's unfortunate path but takes the wisdom of fellow anti-Hegelian skeptics to heart in devising this escape. He offers a symptomatic sketch to rationalize the contemporary order's newest irrationalities, a refinement of negative dialectics true to the spirit of method within Western Marxism as well. In the following I contend that his reading accomplishes this task. After discussing Western Marxism's tradition of thinking about concerns of method, I turn to the conditions which Jameson confronts in keeping faith with Lukács's "orthodox" revisions of Marx: the new excesses of late capitalism peculiar to the late 1960s. Since Jameson's early thoughts on dialectical thinking offer the basis for its complication in recent times, I then discuss how he accounts for late capitalism's defiance of logically inevitable stages, and especially how renewed attention to method can explain this unpredictability. He has located a new category in capitalism's

evolution – cultural logic – which complicates its material machines. This categorical complexity reveals a coexistence of greater illogic and old-fashioned economic control, a structured ambiguity in the system graspable only through some logical form yet to surface. His dialectical rationalization of this postmodern capitalism is a form of "immanent criticism" which gives more attention to intended truths than Adorno's negative dialectics, while avoiding new species of economic reductionism. Yet it is also an acknowledgement of the need to take the logic of capital more seriously (hence his recent search for new economic models), however much this must be guided by the lessons from Adorno's open form.

I

There is an estranging quality to Jameson's work which goes beyond the commonly cited stylistic difficulty. This stems not so much from what he writes about – though his persistent debunking of capitalism with the language of Marxism rubs against the majority grain – as it does from how he justifies his claims with mostly European authorities. Though an American intellectual, Jameson seems more comfortable with theories and ideas barely familiar – at least until quite recently – to most critics and concerned citizens on this side of the Atlantic. His audience is the initiated who already converse in the canon of "Western Marxism." It is *Marxism and Form*, a compilation of European authorities who epitomize this extended lineage of enrichment within the Marxist heritage, which first secures his reputation in the early 1970s. Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch, Marcuse, Lukács and Sartre are introduced to Americans as if developments on the home front paled before this stretch of luminaries (whose attention is unsullied by indigenous new left currencies he mostly ignored).[1] What he does and how he does it are true to this legacy of challenge to classical Marxism. Material concerns become articulated with those of aesthetics and philosophy to better investigate the culture of mature capitalism.

His attention to postmodernism – the cultural logic of late capitalism – is therefore a natural consequence. It enables the economy to be approached through the productive dimensions of aesthetics and philosophy, and in a way which avoids reductions to the merely material. For Perry Anderson his work on the postmodern responds to the "same basic coordinates" as earlier generations while synthesizing "different instruments and themes" from the classic repertoire:

> From Lukács, Jameson took his commitment to periodization and fascination with narrative; from Bloch, a respect for the hopes and dreams hidden in a tarnished object-world; from Sartre, an exceptional fluency with the textures of immediate experience; from Lefebvre, the curiosity about urban space; from Marcuse, pursuit of the trail of high-tech consumption; from

> Althusser, a positive conception of ideology, as a necessary social imaginary; from Adorno, the ambition to represent the totality of his object as nothing less than a "metaphorical composition." (1998, p. 71)[2]

This synthesis is integral to method, what organized Western Marxism's assault of the classical corpus and its articulation of aesthetics and philosophy with material matters. As the epistemology of a critical understanding of society, method was naturally geared toward forging creative, multi-causal syntheses within broader frameworks, producing a more substantial – interdisciplinary – knowledge of developed capitalism's culture than what the mechanistic distortions of Stalinized "dialectical materialism" allowed. At a most basic level this pertained to how positivist reality – and especially the factual object of capitalism – was to be evaluated and explained with existing theoretical properties. Given the resolve against a mere acceptance of empirical reality as true, how then could one's perception help transform it into knowledge? How could concrete everyday realities be identified and processed within a design for greater awareness of the whole system and its effects, and especially one which boded systemic change?

At a higher level this has to do with fine-tuning the means to make reliable connections about the real from inside the whole system. A focus on *dialectical* method will therefore be the natural result. What exactly does this involve? It was Hegel's virtue to have supplanted the formalism of classical logic with a structure of rational argument binding internal subject and external object. But it was Marx and his early successors who materialized this gain, refining dialectical logic itself to arrive at the possibility for subjectivity to match the complexities of the real without the exclusive guidance of philosophy's categories. For Lukács, in an essay formative of Western Marxism, what defined the progressivity of Marxism was its privileging of method, its priority attention to the complex links between the concrete real and the mind's theoretical designs. This is what "orthodox" Marxism should always be, Lukács claimed (upending the familiar pejorative), since the scientific perspective which organizes relations between concrete and abstract must be a mainstay on "the road to truth." What must persist in the development of dialectical materialist method is the belief that its expansion can only occur within the confines of the founders' original mandate. Its essentials should only ever be modestly modified because all attempts at improvement 'have led and must lead to over-simplification, triviality and eclecticism' (1971a, p. 1).

Method in this sense is a formal impulse to register complex truth and not mere knowledge or didactic information (a distinction which Walter Benjamin used in 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' to kick-start a lifelong search to accommodate varying causalities – derived from Hegel, Kant and Marx – in constructing constellations of ideas with unintended patterns (1977, pp. 27–8)). Lukács' impulse maximizes truth over mere doctrine, and especially claims which rely on the immediately evident fragments of reality to document

injustice. As for Benjamin, this must lead to the construction of a larger unit for explaining factually obvious bits of knowledge. The essential lesson transmitted by Lukács is the refusal to let the capital-mediated decimation of real existence speak for itself. He justifies this in the spirit of Marx's fragmentary remarks on method in the 'Introduction' to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (which would be virtually the same as the 1857 'Introduction' to the *Grundrisse* Lukács had not yet seen). Key to this refusal is an affirmation: that knowledge of the "isolated facts of social life" will become "knowledge of reality" only if integrated into a totality (Lukács, 1971, p. 8; Marx, 1981a, 1993). Yet questions arise from this proposal. Will these facts comprising the concrete totality closely resemble its abstract reproduction? If the mind can construct a fair approximation of capitalism's workings, what concepts will best produce the integration? Capital's forward impulse realizes an essentially dialectical process, where positive gains for many co-mingle with lacks and deprivations for others. It negates and affirms simultaneously and in succession, leaving constitutive antagonisms and contradictions as the not so apparent reality of the surface. Yet can these "real" workings match wits with their supposed equivalent in the mental confines of logical argument?

In the dialectical materialist scheme no real is merely given, ready to be extracted in its truthful purity. All reality as perceived is an effect of mental reconstructions which must be reproduced with explicit and implicit designs. As Marx claims in this 'Introduction' – duly registered by Lukács – the concrete totality as perceived is far from an entity graspable in its pure originality. It comes to us layered with packaged notions and reprocessed sentiments, as a concrete embedded with concepts: 'The concrete concept is concrete because it is a synthesis of many definitions, thus representing the unity of diverse aspects.' Mere "real" and concrete elements are not the concrete totality, and this totality will not be what the reasoning mind has finally reproduced (the abstracted concrete totality). The positive givenness and apparent harmony which the mind initially confronts is this, but a conceptual synthesis of negativity and antagonism as well which needs unraveling with the mind's synthesizing powers to reproduce the true situation. That is, the key for Marx was faithfulness to how the thinking mind 'assimilates the concrete and reproduces it as a concrete mental category,' a process which moves in the 'opposite direction' from the 'evolution of the concrete world itself.' The illusion is that this initial totality appears 'in reasoning as a summing up, a result, and not as the starting-point, although it is the real point of origin, and thus also the point of origin of perception and imagination' (1981a, p. 141).

This point of origin is also a historical endproduct, a completed cross-section of positive facts and convoluted abstractions. Truth-seeking method must construct a framework – an alternative totality – to represent this illusion (before intervening to change the system which perpetuates it). The steps taken

for sorting through the confusion of means and ends, surface and essence, have to model the full complexity of a truthful real by refusing to let the concrete world's commonsense and simple narratives carry authoritative weight. For Lukács and Marx this involved a simultaneous critique of idealism and – vulgar – materialism. This critique was no simple rejection of each, but a form of recuperation through the – dialectical – process of becoming aware of their limits as isolated phenomena. Ideas and matter could fully mean only within a totality which processed relationships as historical products. The "delusion" of idealism, as Lukács claims, is its confusion of the 'intellectual reproduction of reality with the actual structure of reality itself.' Yet the mind must always try to forge a replica of this structure, however limited the venture, if only to check the potential engulfment of mental forms from factual nullity. And the problem with vulgar materialism according to Lukács is it's easy "take over" of the 'immediate, simple determinants of social life' as 'facts in abstract isolation' from the 'concrete totality' (1971, p. 9). But since the material is constitutive – if not fully determinative – of social life, the impulse to materialize all dimensions of existence in tandem with intellectual designs must be upheld.

As the critical recuperation of these simultaneously expressed impulses, this dialectical method was crucial for keeping intellectual perspectives on the whole at such a level of intensity to set the dynamics in motion for fundamental change. But this was insufficient in itself. Even Lukács' relatively early idiom of Western Marxism, markedly hopeful about prospects for rationally challenging the capitalist order, acknowledged a lack. He believed the abstract totality of true knowledge could be secured only through the mind's practical insertion into the existing antagonisms and contradictions. Only the linkage of theory and practice could realize this greater truth, the rational transformation of capital's existing regime into one of universal freedom and equality. The practical missing link for Lukács was of course the proletariat, a force fully tapped into universal values and thus privy to means for realizing the union of objective necessity and subjective intention. This was to be an epistemological nirvana where mental and factual totalities would finally mesh.

The fate of dialectical method in the aftermath of Lukács' projections seeds contemporary predicaments. As the utopian fervor of Soviet experiment expires in a rush of counter-revolutionary sentiment to crystallize in Fascism, visions of a rationalized social order fade. For early Western Marxism what kept the progress of reason alive was a belief that the logical mind thinking dialectically could match – and assuredly fathom – the dialectical workings of capitalism. But this correspondence was placed in ever greater doubt. The generalized assault against reason associated with Fascism affirmed – as a kind of equivalent for – what appeared real and obvious: capital's evolution was linked to certain irrationalities which could not easily be explained or legislated away (a symptomatic deferral of progress through Hegel's "cunning

of reason?"). It was not so much that suddenly capitalism no longer worked dialectically. Could it still be deemed a *mostly* rational process? As the political powers rationalized the irrational, masked over systemic aporias to defuse crises and regulate disorder, the question was inevitably raised as to whether some new ghost in capitalism's machine had recast the rules of the game. The loss of agency – the diminished force of a proletariat or its equivalent we have now come to accept as normal – had made the mind's topheavy presence in the dialectical method a meager substitute for full opposition to the system's engulfing irrationalism.

Marcuse pondered this dilemma in the late 1930s and early 1940s as Fascism institutionalized, when the need for a unified agency to check the wholesale assault against reason had arguably never been greater. He rehearses differences between Hegelian and Marxian dialectical method in default to theory's separation from practice. Neither intellectuals nor activists could arrest this course of events. Capitalism's inherently dialectical nature, its necessary and negative – 'every form and institution of the economic process begets its determinate negation' – progression of contradictions in motion, had produced an acute crisis. The pinnacle of wealth production coincided with the greatest oppression and misery, and the negation of this condition was the sole cause for hope to transform the larger system. But theory and practice could not be put back together through the logical refinements of method alone. This method was no match for the forces set in motion by Fascism's state-sanctioned freedom for capital (producing the exact antithesis of Hegel's benevolent form). It could not force a series of shocks or reversals to change the system. The mind's power to integrate an abstracted concrete totality of true knowledge was placed in doubt since, according to Marcuse, capitalist society's process of abstraction had come to impose upon the dialectical method itself. Synthetic, abstractive maneuvers to unravel the convoluted abstractions of the concrete totality had become enmeshed with capital logic, its greater abstraction of labor through commodification. Not able to integrate a true equivalent of the concrete totality, the muddied mind could only renounce the illusion of an immediate merger with a concrete sure to be false. Marcuse suggested a kind of detour, an 'abstraction from the abstraction' which might restore the 'true concreteness' (1996, pp. 312–13).[3]

II

Where would this abstraction end, and how long and convoluted would the detour be? This was indeed a heavy burden for theory. If the impulses of method could not be loosed from capital's ever more illogical effects, how could the enslaved mind forge a rational representation of it? Jameson inherits a near caricature of this dilemma, making the question of method especially inviting. Can we even begin to consider his symptomatic maneuvers in credible alignment with the spirit of dialectical method as passed through

Western Marxism? The changed contemporary scene notwithstanding, there is some continuity with Lukács in the sense that Jameson also seeks to capture complex truth and not mere knowledge. His method reconstructs the abstract concrete whole and refuses to let the capital-mediated decimation of real existence speak for itself. And central to this refusal, as it was for Lukács, is the awareness that the given fragments of social life can become a true knowledge of reality only it they are integrated into a totality. The perceived real is likewise merely an effect of mental reconstructions which must be reproduced with explicit or implicit designs. It comes to us layered with packaged notions and reprocessed sentiments, as a concrete embedded with concepts. But of course Jameson's moment is overwhelmed with new conceptuality, such that he must confront a different configuration of the given and ideal to begin abstracting the effects of abstraction and integrate a truthful totality. His simultaneous critique of idealism and – vulgar – materialism has to recuperate a mesh of limits within a social formation which processes relationships through a different historical grid.

Jameson's contemporary moment is surely different: the material given of capitalism has changed; Western Marxism has become further ghettoized to defend theory in times averse to systemic change through unified agency (the hopelessly fractured working class or its equivalent); idealisms peculiar to the mediations of postmodernism have arrived; and new unexplainables have emerged – antinomies of a now displaced "bourgeois" consciousness – to groove the ever expanding assaults against reason. His method must effectively respond to this difference as well as the preeminent critical perspectives steeped in idealism and – vulgar – materialism. Can his necessary update of Lukács' dual critique still issue in a progressive form of dialectical materialism faithful to Western Marxism's legacy? I believe Jameson's practical maneuvers reveal it can, despite the obstacles thrown up by these notable changes in the contemporary order. That is, these differences present a formidable barrier to the renewed integration of an abstracted concrete totality of true knowledge with the state of things.

How significant is this barrier? Jameson's scenario of futility is necessarily a product of topheavy theoreticism homaged to real mediating influences, but to what extent is this justified? What are the proportions of limited mental construction and inevitable irrational effects in the actual evolution of advanced capitalism which overdetermine his position? If some semblance of the dialectical method is still viable, should not a full rationalizing of the contemporary be possible, at least through theory? We can accept Jameson's historical inability to perform with a complete arsenal, given the fateful turns of recent times. Yet the very premise of his nominal revitalization of truth-seeking method is that reason can finally represent irrationalities and antinomies.

However we assign the blame, the burden is great for Jameson. The late variety of capitalism is more abstractive than what earlier generations had

to cope with, a change which becomes evident for him in the late 1960s. These were years of unprecedented wealth creation, when the expansion of capital spawned a striking excess and variety of commodities. The system had taken a virtual "dialectical leap." More and more products were circulating, and ever more spaces of everyday existence – what seemed to have escaped the reach of a moneyed world – were brought within the cash nexus. The pressures of commodification were apparent in a different "quality" of life, one where value – and especially signification – could no longer be taken for granted. Representation itself had become a problem, Jameson believed (1984a, reprinted in Jameson, 1988b, p. 200). The sudden inability to match signs and images of things with their semblance in the real-appearing everyday, allowed indeterminacies and non-identities to creep into the mix. Capital-induced, this abstractive excess of the contemporary placed new demands on method's means to abstract, its proposed rationalization within the confines of reified reason. The embedded conceptuality and reprocessed notions spliced haphazardly into this recent order constitutes the new given, the convolution of fact and illusion which the mind must integrate into an abstracted concrete totality to fully understand it as true knowledge.

Jameson's given is a social fabric weaved with – postmodern – mediations which make it resilient to dialectical reasoning. As such it is a virtually metaphysical force and will be difficult to critique with mere logic. This presence has been stitched into our imaginaries as a dominant – but not absolute – mode of perception, one kept in place through a saturated reciprocity of cultural and capital logic (and endowing it with systemic authority: I will return to this complex and stimulating articulation in the next section). These capital-induced abstractions have made mind and will into weakened replicas of themselves, leaving subjective forces with little chance to gain perspectives on the whole situation. The objective conditions of the contemporary are such that "progressive" elements have become splintered and defensive, and the mind left with the – gargantuan – burden of setting in motion the contradictory impulses which might issue in shocking reversals of the state of things. This consciousness will lack help from what once would have been the social system's naturally evolving tendency to force dialectical crises, especially those which reveal the positives of reason being generated from its negatives. For Jameson the force of this dominant has not only impeded the subject's capacity to will the process of change. In this convoluted force-field of fact and illusion the subjective faculties can barely – if at all – extricate themselves from the overwhelming object. This new broad-reaching order of excessive reification – by definition – has trashed the very ability of individuals to reflect critically both on and within the scene they find themselves in.

Jameson's earliest thoughts on the dialectic and method in *Marxism and Form* are engaging for two reasons: they initiate an audience barely familiar or sympathetic with either Marxism or "continental" criticism (the book is

nominally a work of Marxist literary criticism and aesthetics); and they offer a complex glimpse into dialectical thinking which forms the basis for recent postmodernized articulations. This book's method is "metacommentary," his term for the reflexive posture intellectuals must maintain to produce perspectives about literary and social phenomena (1971b, reprinted in Jameson, 1988a, pp. 4–9). Hegelian critical awareness is quite thoroughly defined and its relevance to literary studies clearly formulated. Yet a more authoritative comment is never far from these expositions, one which debunks this lesser mindset. His purpose is no mere rejection, but the recuperation of positives within a more comprehensive frame to build the superior materialist equivalent. His overriding motivation is to offer us "genuine" dialectical thinking and method as a preservative cancellation of Hegelianism.

This means the mind's abstractive – rational and logical – propensities will be refunctioned in the materialist schema. The mental operation will gear up, strained to produce ever greater understanding about phenomena which implicate it. For Jameson this should be a persistent process in which the mind's desire to know more reaches its momentary limit when confronted with new socio-historical realities. But its self-awareness of this fact then enables an expansive 'new glimpse of reality:'

> first, through a coming to consciousness of the way in which our conceptual instruments themselves determine the shape and limits of the results arrived at (the Hegelian dialectic); and thereafter, in that second and more concrete movement of reflection which is the specifically Marxist form, in a consciousness of ourselves as at once the product and the producer of history, and of the profoundly historical character of our socio-economic situation as it informs both solutions and the problems which gave rise to them equally. (1971a, pp. 372–3)[4]

The reference here to the 'specifically Marxist form' signals Jameson's intent to firmly position himself within the continuous legacy of materialist thought. And this definition unwittingly provides the basis for later complications. If subjects are to gear up in the face of new socio-economic complexities and successfully rationalize them, some form of metacommentary will be needed. Peculiar to the materialist grounding of the dialectic is a 'more concrete movement of reflection' in which consciousness is enhanced – by necessity – to fathom the overdetermined existent. The greater burden on subjective powers of thought comes from this immersion in the 'profoundly historical' flux which always escapes the merely individual means to understand. A refunctioning of the mind's abstractive powers in the materialist schema will inevitably push them to the edges of reason and representation and impact the nature of consciousness. The subject can be adequately conscious of itself only if it turns more attentively toward the outside world. In the process it leaps to a level of greater consciousness which includes enhanced

self-reflection (caricatured in the postmodern?), and offers a better option to figure complex determination. Subjective selves are historically positioned as producers and products simultaneously, forced to apprehend the immediacy of solutions and the conditions of possibility which created the original problem.

Integration of the abstracted concrete whole needs ever more fine-tunings of consciousness to build this multi-directional sympathy. In *Marxism and Form* Jameson named the essence of dialectical self-consciousness as 'thought to the second power' (1971a, p. 338). This geometrical metaphor defines dialectical thought as a self-generating expansion of reason (an equivalent of capital's capacity to create exponential increases in value?). It is not a power conducive to analytical operations which compartmentalize objects of concern from a distance in an accumulation of insights about them. Rather, the whole process is implicit in 'any given object.' The structured self-consciousness of this thought reckons the thinker into the experiment. Jameson describes it as the 'attempt to think about a given object on one level, and at the same time to observe our own thought processes as we do so.' This reckoning strains the power of logic to its limit, especially since the complete reality of the socio-economic situation cannot be fixed and fully known, and the categories used by the subject are historical, always in flux and ready to be jettisoned for new ones. The straining of this multi-directional consciousness may encounter momentary bouts of noisy confusion, but for Jameson this sort of dual historical focus is indispensible for a better and wider look at the state of things. Genuine exponential thought power must therefore 'always include a commentary on its own intellectual instruments as part of its own working structure' (1971a, pp. 335–40).[5]

In Jameson's postmodern, metacommentary will be a welcome tool for thinkers at pains to figure an apparently less – and more – logical real. Mere commentaries will hardly suffice in a climate of such extreme subject–object confusion, where all forms of rationality seem suspect. Jameson's metacommentary-infused dialectical consciousness will tackle the abstractions, idealisms and all second-order manifestations of the late capitalist presence with a vengeance for deferral. His fine-tuned consciousness will help force new relations into relief, those still buried in the existing object-world's movements. In times of such stark asymmetry between theory and practice, Jameson symptomatically avers, the very capacity to rationalize and resolve must be historicized with a revitalized arsenal of concepts. The imagined real must be pressured into being with experimental designs that constitute the impulse to expand dialectical thinking and method.

III

To call Jameson's embrace of the postmodern an *expansion* of dialectical thinking and method – the legacy passed from Marx through Lukács – is

perhaps premature. His impulses are surely consistent. He vows to abstract the abstractions of the late capitalist system and integrate them into a totality of true knowledge (Sartre's "totalization," the persisting urge to fashion non-reductive wholes for epistemological evaluation, invests Jameson's output, see O'Kane, 1998). We could say he inventories the contemporary equivalent of Marx's concrete given, the practical activity and actual life process peculiar to capitalism, observing its detailed surface through the simplest categories. Yet this starting point for Jameson hardly jives with a methodical appropriation of empirical reality, that which Marx had in mind when he penned his limited remarks on the method of political economy. He accepts – as a matter of theory – the assumptions and findings of the latter while isolating simple forms and categories to penetrate the conceptuality and prejudices embedded in this given whole. Consistent with Marx's 'method of inquiry,' Jameson must attend to the fundamental place of the commodity as an elementary form, before adding more determinations and discovering new links between new and more complex categories to get at the complexity of recent capitalism. While much of the necessary dialectical progression of categories and forms from simple and abstract to complex and concrete is merely assumed (not retheorized), he inherits a new system of layered mediations linked – by necessity – to Marx's fundamental discoveries. It is his focus on this addition, the maze of cultural mediations and altered commodification which inevitably transforms the process of theory construction necessary to produce an abstracted concrete totality (the 'method of presentation' in Marx).

Unable to reinvent the wheel, Jameson must engage with existing discursive layers of knowledge about the system to perform the same old task: force the surface image of capitalism into its true condition by the end, and reveal the essential limits of capital and its structural hold on people through the mysterious transformations of the commodity form. This does not involve a retracing of this form's systematic progression into the money and capital forms, what Marx manages to do in *Capital*.[6] Jameson accepts this evolution's essential mechanism, the split between use and exchange value which necessarily ensures the accumulation of capital and its persistent means to expropriate labor. And this is far from a matter of mere logic, of simply taking over Hegel's immanent categories to ballast this necessary progression. As with Marx, forms beget forms from practical and material necessities peculiar to capitalism as a social practice, an inevitability which defies a logic of contradiction and resolution through mental designs. Jameson's forcing of the state of things accommodates this necessary grounding in real concerns and contradictions, where logic is materialized in a synthesis of mind and existence. Such a grounding is constitutive of materialist dialectical method, which always and inevitably expresses the principle of the critique of ideology. According to Paul Mattick Jr, this critique is not 'primarily logical but anthropological and historical, in that it aims to demonstrate that the insufficiencies of

economic theory for the comprehension of capitalist reality are due to its practice of taking the forms of social interactions – in reality the product of human history – for ineluctable structures' (1993, p. 131).

If located and historicized, can there now be an understanding of these "forms" which leads to a critical analysis of the capitalist system? A simple inversion will hardly be possible, leaving something called "ideology" especially elusive. Jameson's method begs the question of whether critique in some traditional sense is an option in the postmodern. What is the fate of a multi-directional, self-reflexive dialectical consciousness when it attempts to theorize an existent which does not appear to work as rationally as it once did (for conventional critics, at least)? Is the clash of mind and world still producing mostly logical representations, or actually tautological ones?[7] Jameson cannot simply take over Marx's "presentation" guide to rationalize capitalism step by step and identify its obvious value-perversions and repressions. The objective conditions have changed to the extent that agents can barely dissociate themselves from them, step outside the web of intensified reification and put the pieces in order. The latter have become weak rationalizers at best, straining the powers of metacommentary to the max. Let me first inventory Jameson's extended presentation of these conditions.

The key concern for Jameson is the changed relations between culture and economy in late capitalism. Whereas these entities were once separable in fact and theory, the contemporary order is such that they have become complexly linked. Postmodernism, a significant presence in this order, is defined as the cultural logic of late capitalism. As mentioned above, he identifies the latter with changes occurring in the late 1960s, when the system had taken a virtual "dialectical leap" from the heightened pressures of commodification. The sheer quantity and increased visibility of culture as a commodity was an important byproduct of these changes. Yet most revealing was culture's intangibility, its new reality of the appearance as a complex mediating and mediated form within the collapse of base–superstructure relations in the object world. The key to this apparent enigma lies in the alleged existence of postmodernism as a preeminent force-field of influences which are far from being either uniform or absolute.

Postmodernism is a "cultural dominant" and not some standardized domination. That is, this changed climate realizes a 'dominant cultural logic or hegemonic norm' without totally eliminating options to maneuver within its terms (or even the potential for evasion). And it is not just that "culture" is different, having become more visibly and qualitatively resonant. The social formation's reciprocally overdetermined levels have become acculturated: nothing can escape the effects of cultural mediation. His metaphors almost tell the story. Culture in the postmodern has suffered a "mutation," suggesting the existence of some new entity emerging unpredictably from the union of prior forces and categories yet to be named. The postmodern is difficult to track since its cultural logic is inseparable from the "dilation" of the cultural

sphere generally. And these effects allow culture to be magically attached to, recombined with or unmoored from other entities – especially the economy – without advance notice. Culture 'cleaves almost too close to the skin of the economic to be stripped off and inspected in its own right,' Jameson claims, the natural result of a new system coming into focus from the catalytic momentum of prior systems clashing. The economic and cultural systems 'somehow crystallized in the great shock of the crises of 1973,' seeding the feeling of a structureless state before people could be fully aware of it (the new system, paradoxically, appears asystemic) (1991a, pp. xv, xx).[8]

The cultural dominant of postmodernism is then secured with "cultural logic," an enigmatic and slippery force which must be explained to understand culture's special effectivity in the postmodern. Its readiness to mutate, dilate or crystallize needs to be grounded in a better feel for this acculturation process, since the dominant is ephemeral and transitory, the mere 'reflex and concomitant of yet another systemic modification of capitalism itself' (1991a, p. xii). This means the logic of capital as an enduring presence, however modified in our late capitalist mode of production, needs to be identified and explained in relation to this cultural logic. This mode – though layered with earlier ones – is the purest expression to date of capital's logic of "separation." Unlike precapitalist modes which 'achieved their capacity to reproduce themselves through various forms of solidarity or collective cohesion,' Jameson claims, the 'logic of capital is on the contrary a dispersive and atomistic, "individualistic" one, an anti-society rather than a society, whose systemic structure, let alone its reproduction of itself, remains a mystery and a contradiction in terms' (1991a, p. 399; 1998c, p. 38). This paradoxical "originality" of capitalism, however, is curiously repressed from the concepts available to understand it, and the workings of the process itself. Capital confuses value and makes things equivalent in its very momentum to dissociate and atomize.

This much is mostly an old story. Is it an infusion of cultural logic which makes recent capitalism truly different, to the point of overloading the mind's potentially dialectical circuits? We might say that cultural logic reinforces the contradictory, universalizing tendencies of capital, but in far from transparent ways. This is because Jameson grasps the convergence of systemic changes in capitalism and postmodern culture as revealing the effects of a "break," a transformation produced from existing forces having reached a 'certain threshold of excess' in the late 1960s (as alluded to above) (1984a, reprinted in Jameson, 1988b, p. 200).[9] He believes the once-evident autonomy of the cultural sphere has been "destroyed" by an accumulation of logical tendencies at the systemic breaking point. Culture no longer has a distinct – if peripheral – presence. Its enhanced circulation and thorough integration into commodity production have endowed it with a different social function. Once special, isolated and visibly resonant, culture is now a universal presence which seems to have disappeared because of this very enhanced familiarity. So everything

in our social life has become "cultural," from 'economic value and state power to practices and to the very structure of the psyche itself' (1991a, p. 48). But this excess, whereby all entities are stamped with a veneer of culture, can initiate the process which undermines the effects of "thorough" commodification. Cultural logic can surely become an ally for capital, especially in screening the effects of its rationalizations. Yet culture's enhanced social functioning seeds the potential for unforeseen appropriations and the possible evasion of capital's power. Cultural logic can disperse, circulate as apparently alogical communication and ally with paradoxical value reversals – tautology to the second power? – that confuse cause and effect.

What is it about Jameson's theorizing of cultural logic in relation to contemporary capitalism which shows the system's real difference, justifying a modified method to capture its less-than-predictable transformations? He has effectively identified a new complex category at work in capital's evolution, one necessarily linked to the chain of categories which have classically defined capitalism as a system. This category fulfills capital's systematic progression of levels but with something more than consecutive expectation. The cultural logic of capitalism names a certain nonsynchronicity where capital's next categorical move appears both necessary and surprising, inevitable and eruptive. This structural tendency of our latest capitalism mixes time and space, giving us an upgrade of the system's appropriation of value and securing of class relations, along with a layering of qualities which ever so slightly alters the whole's dynamics. Jameson's acculturated social formation reveals progressions from the commodity form through its expansion into money and capital accumulation in a state of peak performance – late capitalism is the purest realization of efficiency principles – which has nonetheless overextended itself. The logic of old categories persists as these are pressed to their breaking point in what has become a cultural economy. No longer merely economic, the commodity form now drips with culture; money's evolution from the commodity betrays its identity as more than a mere mechanism for regulating value and guiding the rationalities of production; and capital accumulation has entered a phase where speculative attitudes invest the mindsets of industrial transformation, fetishizing finance capital with a new turn of cultural value (Jameson's recent interest in the work of Simmel, Fitch, Arrighi and others has forecasted this shift).[10]

The categorical changes in this acculturated economy leave in place a new illusion to be grasped. The victory of postmodernism – *the* cultural logic of this latest capitalism – announces culture as the realization of new sense-making possibilities. Yet while culture's greater presence in the circuits of exchange conjures freedom (enhanced by its capacity to mediate), it has been paradoxically dematerialized. As Jameson claims, culture now lacks an autonomous material identity but has acquired a different – and no less potent – one from residing in these new circuits. Excessively circulated and refunctioned, it has seemed to disappear 'by becoming universal' (1990b, p. 202). But in fact

its spreading diffusion has merely become difficult to detect, the omnipresence diluted and amorphous, leaving the potential for it to materialize capital's presence in ever more unpredictable ways. This sense-making attaches to a veritable metaphysical power, the sensation of being able to 'reverse the priorities of the real' (1990b, p. 22).[11] This dematerialization is then not what it seems. There is an insidious "mechanization" – indebted to Mandel – of culture which is other than a crude determination since the presences of culture and matter are now metaphorically interchangeable:

> To say that my two terms, the *cultural* and the *economic*, thereby collapse back into one another and say the same thing, in an eclipse of the distinction between base and superstructure that has itself often struck people as significantly characteristic of postmodernism in the first place, is also to suggest that the base, in the third stage of capitalism, generates its superstructures with a new kind of dynamic.[12]

This generation of superstructures is a categorical necessity in our latest capitalism, but this process hardly issues in a logically transparent end result. We are left with an ambiguous structural tendency in the system: superstructures do the duty of a mechanizing base without either controlling or fully depending on it. The power of capital's new universal, mechanized reach enables an expression of cultural logic which can both translate this power and undercut it.[13]

IV

Jameson's postmodernized capitalism is a peculiarly ambiguous breed. A strategy which does it justice must abstract its opacities and abstractions as an equivalent of the newly complex and concrete totality of true knowledge. He admits as much in concluding his 1984 essay on the cultural logic of late capitalism. We need a 'complex representational dialectic' for mapping a global system ever more difficult to rationalize with outmoded mental "machinery." This is because we must make a 'breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing' (1991a, p. 54). Does Jameson succeed only by mostly abandoning the terms of dialectical rationality? The effective representation of this complexity must be open to multiple perspectives while trying to rationalize the capitalist system with a facsimile of Western Marxism's reinterpretations of Marx. The task seems daunting: offer an analysis of capitalism's new dynamic structural interchanges which hedges on the final summation, and avoid temptations to rely on narratives external to the system while urging connection. As postmodernized, this capitalism is a stew of predictable and unforeseen, logic and illogic, and reason and the irrational. This dominant represents a breeding ground for metaphysical

speculation and anti-dialectical construction, and must be met with a renewed savvy – in sympathy with Adorno – about these object-dictated changes that can somehow model them without a mere dismissal.

This involves a waiting game. He identifies an "intransigent dilemma" in the contemporary object world which intellectuals cannot think themselves through in the absence of concrete structural changes. All the political and economic promise of the new world order, as shaped through capital's adaptability to crisis, is occurring along with a loss of 'autonomy and subsistence' on personal and collective levels. Since it is only the 'ripening of structural contradictions in reality that produce the dawning anticipation of new possibilities,' a new attitude adjustment is necessary but hardly sufficient to combat these obstacles. The mental waiting game will have to keep alive a desire to link what has fallen asunder, maintain an awareness of paradox within dialectical logic which salvages the negative (1991a, p. xx).

An adjustment in attitude is one with the only kind of theory contemporary intellectuals can do in the grips of this dominant. This is theorizing aware of its own fallibility, a deafness to the incomplete historical record, leaving merely a strong desire for "recuperation:"

> Postmodernism theory is one of those attempts: the effort to take the temperature of the age without instruments and in a situation in which we are not even sure there is so coherent a thing as an "age," or zeitgeist or "system" or "current situation" any longer. Postmodernism theory is then dialectical at least in so far as it has the wit to seize on that very uncertainty as its first clue and to hold to its Ariadne's thread on its way through what may not turn out to be a labyrinth at all, but a gulag or perhaps a shopping mall. An enormous Claes Oldenburg thermometer, however, as long as a whole city block, might serve as some mysterious symptom of the process, fallen without warning from the sky like a meteorite.
>
> (1991a, p. xi)

A persistent salvaging of the negative will make do in the absence of conditions for praxis. Theory – even this limited variety – can help prepare the ground for a different attitude. While we must follow this dialectical thread, Jameson suggests, the outcome may be far from certain. The labyrinth may be an illusion which has momentarily veiled the eruption of repression, or thrown into starker relief the ubiquity of consumption as a way of life. This theory is dialectical since it has the wits to accept these general limits and stay pealed on the uncertainty to better assess it (avoid outright rejection). However dismal things appear, negative propulsion can recuperate reason despite the nearly complete eclipse of critical distance. The complexity this theory must confront is essentially linked to transformations in the social whole, which can no longer merely stand in for Hegel's truth. This changed formation is a lite replica of the fascist order Horkheimer found in the early

1940s, one whose residuals of truth and reason were being revealed 'as unreason' (1998, p. 46). The consequences of such a synthesis on the downside of Hiroshima are not so palpably dire, but the form which rational-irrationalism assumes in the postmodern poses another dilemma. As Marcuse observed in his 1960 'Preface' to *Reason and Revolution*, the contemporary situation could be meaningfully described with two seemingly irreconcilable propositions: '"The whole is the truth", and the whole is false.' Reality was governed by technological facts which were curiously impeding objective and truthful resolutions within and about the social fabric. These facts were oppressive in their permeation of all discourse and action, seeding a kind of effusive irrationalism for the theoretical mind to engage with. The cognitive potential to grasp the whole was made difficult, reversible only by dredging up materialist powers of negation. Established forms of life were indeed reaching the 'stage of their historical negation,' symptomatized as an opposition between reason and unreason. But since reason had been adjusted to oppressive institutions within an ethic of progress, any advance beyond existing forms of reason had to remain within reason. However, these negative developments had to be met with a regenerated theoretical consciousness which demonstrated 'negation as a political alternative implicit in the historical situation' (Marcuse, 1998, pp. 450–1).[14]

Jameson meets postmodernism's negations while inside the system this dominant authorizes. His symptomatic moves prepare an attitude through a politics of theory which confronts the gap between logic and empirical reality with an expanded rationalization. The contemporary forms of life as constituted by these coexisting wholes cannot be simply represented. Dialectical contradictions within the reality of postmodern culture – a product of capitalism's categorical evolution – defy propositional value. In this new dynamic social formation where culture and the economy can say the same thing, where its other levels may be cultural in some new way, we encounter objects invested with gradations of the possible and the real. Not only is culture not automatically dependent on the economy in Jameson's staging: articulations between these and other entities and levels cannot be expressed as either-or resolutions. Differences between, among and within all objects and levels have to be represented through multiple predication, a sympathy which reveals one of his many debts to Critical Theory.[15] The slide into pure difference, and the disappearance of any predication whatsoever, is what Jameson's postmodernized negative dialectics is meant to forestall and recuperate. Yet these tendencies also define the cultural dominant's naturalization of antinomial logic, its insinuation of infinite differential expression removed from any language of connection.

Jameson's task is then to represent these differences in a way which goes against their seeming nature, as relating despite themselves. This dominant appears asystemic, as a commonsensical conglomeration of differential movement, but possesses the character of a metaphysical system which in fact

cannot be delinked from the whole (the larger system of late capitalism). Since this metaphysical differentiation mediates between the mind and empirical reality, Jameson's negative urging must systematize all of this while refusing system (the critical structure of dialectical thought for him is 'anti-systematic'), and must make palpable the language of 'difference relates' without violating difference. His multiple predication must represent the complex mediating presence of anti-dialectical pressures which frustrate reason as it glimpses some structure behind the conflation of economy and culture in the grip of metaphysical differentiation. This must be a formidable task since Jameson's goal is no less than the abstracted concrete totality which explains late capitalism's recent rationalizations of unreason with only what 'postmodernism theory' will allow. However, this is all as it could be since the dialectical method, as he contends, instances form moving in time, a mental operation which is an 'inner "permanent revolution"' geared to avoid the moment when thought 'freezes over into a system' (1971a, pp. 361–2).

That is, this complex representation will be secured only with an anti-systematic critique of this illusorily asystemic 'difference relates' which simultaneously maps the larger system in small doses and without rigid preconceptions. Yet mapping as coherent representation is itself at issue since metaphysical differentiation threatens to screen the critical mind from the real. The larger system – 'late capitalism,' the acculturated and illogical economy – will recede from view without a strategy which somehow articulates capital's logic with the mediated fragments. Jameson's moves acknowledge the odds against defining the relations latently investing the nominal fragments which defy systematic resolution. He alleges that the incongruous postmodern cannot be 'disproved insofar as its fundamental feature is the radical separation of all the levels and voices whose recombination in their totality could alone disprove it' (1991a, p. 376). Under these conditions, any hope to recombine must proceed through the negative and on the surface as a form of immanent criticism. This kind of critique – central to Critical Theory as well – is meant to force a measure of accidental truth from an existent not offering easy access to its mysteries: to confront the surface immanence on its own turf, and with the authority of its conceptual principles, so that the gap between actual and desired will be thrown into relief and potentially transcended (Jameson's reading of Doctorow's aesthetic strategy is an especially lucid exercise in this brand of criticism).[16] The positivity to come from this forcing of the unintended will be meager and sporadic, but this is precisely the point. Old-fashioned depth is inaccessible in the postmodern, and so strategies which assume otherwise will be doomed to oversimplification.

Rather than reduce antinomies to the latest dynamic of capitalism, Jameson forces an immanent awareness of their necessary entwinement. Capital is a total system which appears to be a mere series of nominal fragments, and

antinomial logic is an unwitting ally in this cover-up. The trick here is to avoid saying this incommensurability reflects economic forces: conjure the conceivable within the terms of the surface to capture a fleeting image of what can only make full sense if related to deeper structures. The representation of the latter is itself at issue, and thus the language which encompasses the language of 'difference relates' cannot be directly referenced. Jameson accordingly proposes that the symptoms of metaphysical differentiation be articulated with this effectively prior language, but without directly affirming simple dependency. That is, the language which authorizes mutually exclusive oppositions and antinomies must be related to that which permits the potential for seemingly pure differences to contradict under specific historical conditions. The former stops making complete sense on its own. It merely underwrites the screening of capital's force in the postmodern. But these antinomies defy the relatedness of contradiction. The antinomy, Jameson claims, 'states two propositions that are radically, indeed absolutely, incompatible, take it or leave it.' The contradiction on the other hand escapes such mutual exclusivity in acknowledging 'partialities and aspects' with the potential for propositional compatibility (1998c, p. 51). The privileging of antinomies as the social fabric's thread concerns formal logic. Extradiscursive forces of the contradictory real, which contextualize logical positionings and open up arguments and options (the matter for Bhaskar's (1993) 'critical realist' dialectic), are cancelled in this stress.

Consider Jameson's evaluation of Kant's antinomy between space and time, a still crucial ballast of the postmodern system. The mutual exclusion of these empty, ahistorical categories is a construction which legislates incommensurability, an absolute inability to connect and synthesize contraries. This secures an inside-outside rift and myopic insularity with respect to the contradictory real. Jameson ballasts this emptiness with an attention to history to fulfill its destiny as a dialectical representation. The conceptualization of relations between space and time must be now tuned to the nature of change itself. Time has become dependent on speed to the point of being 'perceptible only in terms of its rate or velocity.' A profuse speed-up has eclipsed a sense of ordinary lived time, an experiential slowness, which has dropped out of the equation. For him this means that change no longer has an opposite: it has been absolutized. Time and space have folded 'back into each other' making it 'impossible' to distinguish them, or even 'object from subject' (1998c, pp. 51–2).[17]

We cannot just stop here, however, enveloped by some accelerated collapse of dualisms. The logic of contradiction must intersect this space-time transformation – where the 'essential spatialization' of postmodernity demands the terms of temporality pass through a 'spatial matrix' to find expression – if we think the newly reified conditions of capitalism. The effects of commodified excess in the reorganization of everything into units of identical value leaves more than the immediate appearance of time and space interpenetrating.

There is a larger and paradoxical equivalence which cannot be adequately exposed without attention to these new contradictory conditions. The 'unparalleled' increase in the velocity of change in all sectors of life coexists with the hyper 'standardization of everything' from feelings to built space. This incommensurability incites us to rethink the very nature of change itself. Jameson claims the 'logic of fashion' has come to replace some authentic version of change, leaving a 'steady stream of momentum and variation that at some outer limit seems stable and motionless' (1998c, pp. 57–9). Change in perpetuity implies no change at all, but this is not representable through a language of antinomies blind to 'partialities and aspects.' The pulse of theory striving to sustain a dialectical vision can penetrate this figure-ground chaos, expose the mediations which keep the cultural dominant in place. If we at least feel this pulse and desire, Jameson implies, we will have found a home in the force-field of connectedness.

V

The metaphysical differentiation of the postmodern cannot be represented without the language of contradiction, and yet this language can barely be represented. This is indeed a curious condition, consistent with Jameson's construction of the illogical postmodern, but is it justified? Has he backed himself into a corner and so qualified dialectical rationality as to slip right out of the Western Marxist tributary? Has he delivered an abstracted concrete totality, or merely lapsed into the transitional gesturing of theoretical generalities? Is a reconstruction of the concrete totality in the mind possible now through some semblance of the dialectic?

Everything hinges upon whether sufficient rationality for representing the negatives of capital logic survives this illogical postmodern. If we accept the thorough trashing of reason at the poststructuralist fringe, which makes irrationality normal and inevitable, there is little hope. But Jameson patently rejects such a constriction, opting to parlay the more useful notion of dialectical reason at the root of Hegel's reordering of Kantian faculties (this type placed above and subsuming mere "understanding" or analytical reason). This superior mode of reason 'corresponds to a social organization that does not yet exist,' but we must assume its episodic incidence provides a hopeful means of defense against alleged irrational oversaturation. In fact, in Jameson's view, the power of this reason for dialectical thinking consists in its capacity to translate and redefine cultural and "irrational" sentiments and ideas, and engage and reassess them within an enlarged sense of what is now rational. After Freud, Nietzsche and Foucault have instilled new sympathies for what people have come to do and believe, 'our very notion of reason may be expected to have expanded well beyond its former boundaries and to include much that for strait-laced respectable burghers used to count as "irrational"' (1990a, pp. 236–7).

These comments, not surprisingly, come from Jameson's 1990 book on Adorno, where we find two related concerns: the validity of "negative dialectics" as a critical tool in the wake of the Wall's collapse; and the justification of Adorno's ideas for better understanding postmodernism. As a thinker who worked through modernism and Marxism on the cusp of the postmodern era (passing in 1969), Adorno must be a most appropriate model for Jameson's upgrade of dialectical method in changing times. Though we cannot honestly characterize him as postmodern, the value of his work was to have included a 'place for the possible emergence of the postmodern.' His ideas are 'consistent with and appropriate for' our current postmodern age in capturing a primitive sensibility change all-too-familiar to us now (pp. 229, 247). This was an early glimpse of what postmodernism would finally look like once its signs were thrown into relief, no longer episodic and marginal. Adorno saw the symptoms emerging of an overrationalized industrial order changing into something which appeared different; transmutations of positivist excess into the cultural veneer of a-logical difference. This bears resemblance to Lyotard's observation about how the elements of postmodern futility and fragmentation were produced from the exhaustion of reason and science hitched to the logical successes of instrumental performance (borrowing heavily from Nietzsche's celebrated link between rationality and nihilism) (Lyotard, 1999, pp. 467–70). It is evident, according to Jameson, in Adorno's very language. We find:

> a stuffy petty-bourgeois republican nineteenth century philosophy of science emerging from the cocoon of its time capsule as the iridescent sheen of consumerist daily life in the Indian summer of the superstate and multinational capitalism. From truth to state-of-the-art merchandise, from bourgeois respectability and "distinction" to the superhighways and the beaches, from the old-fashioned authoritarian families and bearded professors to permissiveness and loss of respect for authority (which, however, still governs). (1990a, p. 248)

This positivism, like our postmodernism, wages battles against subjectivity in the form of thoughts, interpretations and opinions. It makes the empirical present the 'sole pattern for imagining other situations and other temporal moments.' And it 'wishes to abolish value as such, and any thinking that raises the issue of ends . . . , not excluding the dialectic itself, but very much including all the other visionary ideologies of which it equally also promises the "end"' (pp. 248–9). So like our postmodernism, Adorno's positivism posed the issue of whether the larger whole was meaningful and, above all, representable; if existence could be valued and purposeful in a world where objective forces and subjective inclinations were in constant motion. But this did not lead him toward a crippling agnosticism, however. While this whole was not mappable into clear, contradictory patterns, neither was it

unrepresentable and unknowable. His claims about this fluid universe stop short of endorsing utter impossibility, and his solutions conform to this hesitation. 'Adorno's life work stands or falls with the concept of "totality",' but only as a theoretical commitment to keep imagining its reconstruction amid the dwindling of faith (p. 9). This qualifies his dialectic as 'introspective or reflexive,' a subspecies of the older notion of 'critical theory as permanent negativity.' We need such a synthetic reserve, Jameson contends, because of the new global order's unevenness and unpredictability, where the 'relationship between the individual and the system seems ill-defined, if not fluid, or even dissolved.' So what many claim is Adorno's overemphasis on theory is actually a mandatory response to refractory conditions, those demanding skills which permit intellectuals to detect the 'absent presence of totality within the aporias of consciousness' (pp. 251–2).

Adorno's species of dialectics is not mere negative propulsion, but a 'temperamental and cantankerous quietism' which reserves judgment. It is negativity with hesitation and conscience. And as such it is a welcome tool for slicing through history's post-socialist facade, more congruent with times which themselves have become quiescent, silenced by a neoliberal void where 'only big business can flow' (p. 250). That is, Adorno was not our ally when times were politically contentious – over the extended generation of Fascism's rise and decline – since his detections buffered us from what we really needed, a frontal assault on the relatively obvious dynamics of oppressed power. But he can be now when nothing is very obvious besides the emergence of a 'new and more genuinely global capitalism' whose unpredictable movements have somehow escaped a politics of opposition while somehow endorsing ever greater brutality and immiseration. We need a muse who religiously tracked these movements, someone who can prep us in the difficult task of detecting capital's refined circuitry (the language of monopoly capitalism only seemed outmoded). A fully transparent grasp of this latest capitalism, one privy to its categorical confusions and confident of intervention, is hardly possible. But then this is not the lesson which Jameson extracts from Adorno in any case. It is the desire to move ever closer toward the possibility of grasping the system's constellations, the mobile and shifting set of elements which only appear random. We may not be able to draw the 'entire web of interrelated social levels together into a totality,' but until this can be represented and articulated, Adorno's brand of tempered detections will have to be deemed both necessary and dispensable, support to momentarily freeze the system *and* throwaway ruses to manage chaos (pp. 249, 251).

Adorno's dialectic, as Susan Buck-Morss claims, has the quality of quicksilver: 'just when you think you have grasped the point, by turning into its opposite it slips through your fingers and escapes' (1977, p. 186).[18] Like a band from the late 1960s – Quicksilver Messenger Service – which captured the reigning spirit of anti-communication, the messages processed through this dialectics will need further decoding to grasp the fleeting micro-propositions

stitching together the patches of noise and anti-meaning. Messages are not freezable, and postmodernism is the admission that even if the totality exists, it is not likely to be known in the foreseeable future. So Jameson can hardly embrace a strategy sure to boggle the dialectician's mind in times when some transformed economic dynamism beckons, but he can surely neither jettison the dialectical impulse either. He sides with Adorno:

> The dialectic – even that frustrating and infuriating thing, the *negative* dialectic – is perhaps a way of squaring this circle that we haven't yet tried: starting at least from way back inside the head and its stereotypes without believing for one minute that any of them are personal or subjective. If such thought could finally manage to climb up, and look out of one of the sockets (like the character in *Endgame*), it might glimpse something real for a moment before the ladder collapsed. (1990a, p. 248)[19]

Jameson's hesitations fit squarely within the dialectical tradition in pushing to rationalize the illogical and tautological, force some reality into momentary objectivity. But since dialectical strategies premised on a distance from and outside the targeted system (and thus an easy and inevitable position-taking) cannot muster the needed complexity, he must give priority to refining negative dialectics. The value of the latter is its power to break the grip of closed systems while in their confines, thus shattering the illusion – taken to the extreme in metaphysical thought – that certain substantive ideas can have a privileged, unreflected status external to the system. This power is not all that alien to Marx's concept of *Kritik*, where the presentation of a system is simultaneously its critical evaluation (Mattick, 1993, pp. 122–3). Yet the securing of unintended truth through perpetual negativity far from realizes Marx's impulses. A critically rational perspective on the postmodern must articulate an intention to freeze a message (if without finality), and partially negate the anti-system of negative dialectics as quickened silver. That Jameson admittedly fails to sufficiently theorize this larger impulse and map the emerging concrete, does not diminish his significant advances within the legacy of Western Marxism.[20]

I would like to thank Peter Wollen, Douglas Kellner, Sean Homer and David Ruccio for their invaluable comments during the course of finalizing this chapter.

Notes

1. I owe insights about Jameson's relation to domestic developments and the new left to a conversation with Michael Denning in September 1998.
2. The Adorno citation appears in *Marxism and Form*, p. 7.

3. As Marcuse claims, the Marxian dialectic is not just a mere matter of logic. It is premised on the idea that capital's ever more inclusive abstractions through the commodity form are real, and that this could be appropriately modeled with the method's abstractive potential to penetrate this core. According to him, the 'abstractions that underlie the first volume of *Capital* . . . put the reality so that it "conforms with its notion"' (p. 304). More prosaically, the laws of capital for Marx made capitalist society into a contradictory unity: 'It gets freedom through exploitation, wealth through impoverishment, advance in production through restriction in consumption. The very structure of capitalism is a dialectical one' (pp. 311–12). No matter how mystifying this all became, the 'methodological procedure' could keep with this dialectical structuring. That is, the 'inadequacy between existence and essence' was central to the 'very core of reality,' but the method could abstract surface phenomena and apprehend the core's essential structure (pp. 304–5).
4. Jameson clearly defines the distinction between Hegelian and Marxian dialectic throughout this book, revealing the limits of the former in mere refinements of logical argumentation. The mostly philosophical modeling of Hegelianism is abolished in social life, Jameson contends, where the limits of logic become the limits of socially grounded thought. The Hegelian model 'projects the Marxist model out of itself,' however, and so we must take Hegel's system to task in the process of improving materialist dialectical criticism, and especially in constructing a method appropriate to the contemporary order. His practical outline for the latter at this stage lacks the resiliency and openness to frame the complexities of socio-economic change or cultural diversity to come (though his attention to 'tautology,' to which I will return, indicates the concern with a logic of overdetermination). This perhaps reveals too great an association with Hegel, evident in Jameson's isolation of categories and construction of sequences for thought to begin figuring the complexity of the real and strain toward the concrete whole. The full formative complexity of Marx's working distinction between the methods of inquiry and presentation – set forth in the 'Introduction' to the *Grundrisse* (1993) – is not a structuring presence or absence in this early Jameson text (pp. 309–73).
5. For Jameson this dialectical thinking is 'doubly historical: not only are the phenomena with which it works historical in character, but it must unfreeze the very concepts with which they have been understood, and interpret the very immobility of the latter as historical phenomena in their own right' (1971a, p. 336).
6. For a thorough explanation of this systematic progression, see Smith (1993) and Fraser (1997).
7. There was an interesting section in the conclusion – 'Towards Dialectical Criticism' – to *Marxism and Form* where we get a glimpse of what Jameson means by tautological representations. He claims that at its 'extreme limit thought tends somehow to unravel itself, and it is this more than anything else that justifies the description of dialectical thought as tautological – tautological in the ontological sense, as part of a dawning realization of the profound tautology of all thought.' But this goes deeper than mere logic. It extends to the world's linguistic battles between subject and object, and the very laws underlying the universe. Dialectical thinking dissolves the fixity of propositional elements used in arguments, while the language of the real reveals a ceaseless clash of positions, a similar unending interchange of tendencies in the realization of the world's evolution through paradox (1971a, pp. 341, 343–4). In this sense tautology implies both constraint and openness, limits which come from circularity and a perpetual seeking linked to the inherent dissolution. This sort of expansive engagement will be crucial to his writings on postmodernism.

8. Other related metaphors common in his writing on postmodernism are infection, and homeopathy. These are borrowed from the field of medicine – as is "dilation" – and connote pervasive sickness and decay, the extent of which can be corrected only through a complex process of attention to inner-workings of the system itself and on its own terms.
9. Jameson dates this break between 1967 and 1973 when presenting a genealogy of the conditions of possibility for the postmodern.
10. Jameson's concern with finance capital and a different economic model from that offered by Mandel is found in the last three essays of *The Cultural Turn* (1998c): 'Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity'; 'Culture and Finance Capital'; and 'The Brick and the Balloon: Architecture, Idealism and Land Speculation.'
11. Jameson states: 'If we follow DeBord's argument about the omnipresence and the omnipotence of the image in consumer capitalism today, then if anything the priorities of the real become reversed, and everything is mediated by culture, to the point where even the political and ideological "levels" have initially to be disentangled from their primary mode of representation which is cultural. Howard Jarvis, Jimmy Carter, even Castro, the Red Brigade, B. J. Vorster, the Communist "penetration" of Africa, the war in Vietnam, strikes, inflation itself – all are images, all come before us with the immediacy of cultural representations about which one can be fairly certain that they are by a long shot not historical reality itself' (1990b, p. 22).
12. The generation of superstructures by the base implies something other than either correspondence or dependency, familiar "orthodox" relations. As David Harvey has shown, the dynamic of recent capitalism has invested a vast range of speculative and unpredictable activities peculiar to politics, culture, law and ideology with the 'rationalizations of profit-making,' while culturalizing the entrepreneurial domain with these very same activities (1990, p. 344).
13. Yet it would be hard to deny that Jameson gives the economy a potential last word. In 'Periodizing the 60s' (1984, reprinted 1988b) he identifies a certain systemic revenge, a return of 'repressive power' to check the inflationary momentum of all the 'surplus consciousness' circulating in this decade: '. . . this sense of freedom and possibility . . . can perhaps best be explained in terms of the superstructural movement and play enabled by the transition from one infrastructural or systemic stage of capitalism to another. The 60s were in that sense an immense and inflationary issuing of superstructural credit; a universal abandonment of the referential gold standard; an extraordinary printing up of ever more devalued signifiers. With the end of the 60s, with the world economic crisis, all the old infrastructural bills then slowly come due once more; and the 80s will be characterized by an effort, on a world scale, to proletarianize all those unbound social forces that gave the 60s their energy . . .' (p. 208). This is not unlike Benjamin's chess-playing automaton maneuvering within a system of mirrors whose transparency eclipses both its puppet status and the expert finality of the system which ultimately guides activity on the sly (1983, p. 253).
14. On Marcuse's more complex perspectives on reason, the dialectic and the social whole, see Douglas Kellner, 'Marcuse and the Quest for Radical Subjectivity' (forthcoming).
15. Andrew Arato describes this expansive methodological attitude embraced by Critical Theory: 'The dialectical contradictions within empirical reality, the antitheses which "negate" the theses, are not a matter of the absolute existence or nonexistence of a predicate; the dialectical contradiction of "a" is not "non-a" but

"b", "c", "d", and so on – which, in their attempt at self-assertion and self-realization, are all fighting for the same historical space. Instead of assuming a complete package of predicates as either belonging or not belonging to the object, instead of assuming pure qualities as the fixed identity of an object, critical theorists assumed multiple modalities for any historical object, different parts of which are activated, repressed or created in different and overlapping constellations' (1998, pp. 398–9).

16. For a definition of immanent criticism, see Horkheimer (1979, pp. 181–3). Jameson is fascinated with Doctorow's aesthetic because it makes creative use of homologies. That is, Doctorow says something substantive about American identity within postmodern depthlessness. He offers commentary – and "metacommentary" – on the existent which is indirect and other than conventional realism, but it adds up to a significant statement about what really is. These commentaries are theoretical practices which play with the option of interpreting the constellation of present and past in depth, but withdraw into a reflexive mode where no conscious reconstructions are made (see Stephenson, 1989, pp. 17–18).
17. This is the world described by Paul Virilio in *The Vision Machine* (1994). The technological 'logistics of perception' in the advances of the twentieth century have enhanced a 'topographical amnesia.' The colossal increase in speed and the disorientations brought about through the preeminence of images (especially visual ones), have left a collapse of subject–object dualism in their wake. Unfriendly to memory, this process has contributed to a delocalizing of 'geometrical optics' and 'ushered in a eugenics of sight, a pre-emptive abortion of the diversity of mental images, of the swarm of image-beings doomed to remain unborn, no longer to see the light of day anywhere' (p. 12). Virilio's diagnosis – similar to but more pessimistic than Walter Benjamin's – finds local compatibility in Jameson's constitutive depthlessness.
18. For a critique of Adorno's dialectic see Held (1980), pp. 200–22.
19. Adorno's seemingly ambiguous attitude toward the totality, as well as open dialectic, bears a momentary resemblance to elements of Althusserianism which Jameson also reworks. Althusser similarly wanted to reinvent the dialectic – remain within the parameters of dialectical thinking – however difficult this proved to be. And he demonstrated his loyalty to the totality in theorizing "structural causality" and the structured complex whole. Jameson appropriates Althusser's challenges to identity thinking and simple Hegelian mediation in the framework which retrospectively authorizes his earlier thoughts on postmodernism. In the 'Introduction' and 'Conclusion' to *Postmodernism*, written in 1990 especially for this book, he positions postmodernism within an overdetermined social formation of uneven relations between culture and economy, mostly accepting Althusser's revamping of base–superstructure relations.
20. I have hardly meant to whitewash Jameson's method, or perspective on the dialectic generally. There is considerable controversy about these matters. What has most concerned me here is Jameson's productive efforts to symptomatically expand dialectical thinking, something which continues in his *Brecht and Method* (1998). For an excellent discussion of Jameson's limits, see Sean Homer (1998). The best companion to this book is a collection of essays from the late 1980s edited by Douglas Kellner (1989).

10

Modernity as Cultural Politics: Jameson and China

Xudong Zhang

Although Fredric Jameson is a towering figure in theory and culture analysis in American academia and beyond, I am tempted to say that nowhere does he have more profound and overarching theoretical and intellectual influence as in post-Mao China. To many contemporary Chinese intellectuals who first exposed themselves to the post-Hegelian, post-Realist, and post-Philosophical discourse or what we call *lilun* (theory) today, terms like "critical theory," "cultural criticism," not to mention postmodernism as a theoretical discourse are either certifiable Jamesonian inventions, or else something thoroughly shaped and inspired by his theoretical presence. Ever since his 1985 visit to China, where he taught at Peking University during the entire Fall semester, Jameson as a text and his Literature Program at Duke have become a privileged place on an increasingly cosmopolitan intellectual map of new generations of Chinese students. Visiting scholars from the West, regardless of their intellectual background, academic specialization, and political persuasion have learned, sometimes uneasily, to anticipate questions from their stubborn Chinese students with persistent reference to Jameson's work or the Jamesonian problematic. For some visiting Western and overseas Chinese sinologists in particular, that could and often did constitute a rude awakening if not a traumatic experience, a forced encounter which has helped produce an on-and-off but invariably passionate debate within Chinese studies – both in the US and in China – over empirical research versus high theory, text versus context, "scholarship" versus "thought," aesthetics versus politics, and so forth.

In the following, I will try to describe some of the particular social-political and intellectual questions and problems in post-Mao China which condition and determine the reception of Jameson as a privileged – though contested – theoretical/intellectual discourse. In doing so, I seek to show how Jameson's theoretical intervention has lent itself to the formulation of some of the central concerns of contemporary Chinese cultural and intellectual politics; how an amazing eclectic affinity or "fusion of horizon"

between the cultural-political consciousness of contemporary China and Jameson's theoretical-political stance can be found at work in the theoretical articulation of some of the markedly Chinese positions as utopia and ideology in one; and how such cultural politics and self-consciousness have shaped the particular discourses on Chinese modernity, postmodernism, and the future of Chinese socialism under the global capitalistic condition.

Modernity as capitalism

One can say that the central concern of contemporary Chinese intellectuals is the question of modernity. Their unsettled or entrenched positions – always in conflict with one another, and each and every one of them riddled with internal tensions and contradictions – within this conceptual space has constituted the pre-understanding (or what is called "prejudice" by Gadamer) of their reception of Jameson, whose work will most certainly have effected the future formulation and theorization of the discourse on modernity as a historical question encountered, experienced, and crystallized in the particular Chinese situation. An outline of this decades-old but still incipient discourse is necessary but can hardly be adequately drawn within the space of this chapter. Instead of tracing the Chinese and not-so-Chinese genealogies of this discourse on modernity in China, I want to use its as-yet under-theorized relationship to a theoretical discourse perceived "outside" the Chinese space of history and intellectual production, namely the theoretical discourse of postcolonialism and multiculturalism, to highlight indirectly some of its main thrusts, positions and, in particular, its cultural politics.

In *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty pointedly quotes that famous paragraph from Marx's *Grundrisse*:

> Bourgeois society is the most developed and the most complex historic organization of production. The categories which express its relations, the comprehension of its structure, thereby also allow insights into the structure and the relations of production of all the vanished social formations out of whose ruins and elements it built itself up, whose partly still unconquered remnants are carried along within it, whose mere nuances have developed explicit significance within it, etc... The intimations of higher development among the subordinate animal species... can be understood only after the higher development is already known. The bourgeois economy thus supplies the key to the ancient...
>
> (Marx, 1973, p. 105; Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 30)

For Chakrabarty, this paragraph is indicative of the "peculiar way in which all these other histories ['Indian, Chinese, Kenyan, and so on'] tend to become

variations on a master narrative that could be called 'the history of Europe'", which Marxism also practices. What looks suspicious to Chakrabarty is that along with the production and multiplication of this discourse, "Europe remains the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories," whereas "other histories are condemned to a position of subalternity." To put into question the Marxian discourse of universalism, and to highlight a cultural politics and an alternative narrative of modernity central to the intellectual movement/theoretical discourse of subaltern studies and postcolonialism, he suggests that we play a simple, subversive language game: "For capital or bourgeois, I submit, we read 'Europe' or 'European.'"

Many contemporary Chinese intellectuals, I would like to speculate, would read these observations with fascination, sympathy, and profound ambivalence. The validity of Chakrabarty's critique of Eurocentrism in the Marxian, to be more precise, Western Marxist, tradition is obvious. His concern with the question of sovereignty is likely to be shared by non-Western as well as Western intellectuals wearily facing an ever more aggressive and militaristic expansion, as well as the political and cultural self-assertion of the American empire which sees itself as the embodiment and realization of the universal and the future of humanity as such. Yet despite the effectiveness of Chakrabarty's discontent, many contemporary Chinese intellectuals probably would be hesitant to wage a theoretical critique of the universal from the self-assumed positionality of the particular. Rather, out of complex historical, political, intellectual, and cultural reasons, many of these contemporary Chinese intellectuals would tend to continue to explore the dialectic of the universal, which not only sees universality as a political and strategic rhetoric of the particular (i.e. modern Europe), but, more importantly, allows the reinvention and redefinition of the universal as a historical totality, which accounts for, realizes, and dialectically sublates the ideological and utopian potential of every culture and form of life as a historical *being-in-itself*.

Without going into a sustained discussion of the specificities of such a stance, I would like to point out its basic historical and political conditions of possibility implicit or explicit in the legacy of the Chinese revolution: Mediated by the revolution and the socialist state, the cultural universalism of traditional China as a self-centered civilization is at once dismantled and kept alive, indeed, intensified in the "world-historical" project of universal modernization and liberation. The state-sanctioned Marxification of Chinese intellectual world ensures the self-positioning of the Chinese world as but a stage of a universal movement, but by removing the racial or "cultural" barriers that separated the Chinese universal (*Tianxia*, or all under heaven) and the world of universal modernity, the Chinese world of life is not particularized but indeed universalized. Such collective consciousness (or ideology) of being the Subject rather than the Object of History (read Modernity) is inconceivable without a strong, affirmative notion of Self as sameness amidst difference, but this notion of productive and multiple Self

has as its philosophical prerequisite the persistence of the historical dialectic of the universal and the particular in universal terms, that is, as a totality.

Such a collective *habitus* or *doxa*, to be sure, reflects a nearly century-long intensive schooling and self-education in the Hegelian-Marxian-Leninist tradition by different generations of modern Chinese revolutionaries and intellectuals. It also, one must add, indicates the persistence of the remnants or elements of a classical Chinese universalistic culture or worldview, which, for better or worse, simply does not know how to position itself "on the margins" of the world of human affairs or live a collective political and cultural life that is less than "world-historical". To consider all that in terms of national characteristics or pride is to resort to mysticism, as everything "cultural" in appearance is in reality overdetermined by the political situation of the modern Chinese state whose origin is a mass revolution led by a Leninist party against the national and class enemies of the masses at the same time. Rather than denying the role of culture in favor of a politico-economic analysis, one must take cultural expressions and aspirations into full account as the particular and semi-autonomous cultural politics of the Chinese form of life shaped by the revolutionary state tradition.

Therefore, there is always a keen interest among contemporary Chinese intellectuals in constructing some particular ways in which an "ancient," pre-capitalist, pre-bourgeois universalism, autonomy, and self-centeredness, even in their ossified and deeply ideological form (the "national psyche") somehow permits if not gives rise to lively and unruly imagination of a post-bourgeois future of social life, indeed, of humanity, which is both a utopian vision and concrete moral, political, and cultural search for alternatives. Such imagination, if distinguishable from ethnocentric self-indulgence and delusion, must be hinged on a critical historicization, functionalization, and relativization of not so much Europe *per se* but global capital itself as a universal norm. So the particular Chinese question concerning identity or "subjectivity" does not have its answer in "provincializing Europe," but in how to see the bourgeois universal as a moment in the most Hegelian sense, that is, as a temporary and precarious compound of contradictions and properties that have their own historicity. In other words, the persistence of the socialist state institutions and the Chinese national economy under the state tutelage always tends to nudge the collective imagination of and quest for identity, autonomy, and subjectivity away from the spatial relations of power (as in that of the colonial centers and the colonized or postcolonial peripheries, as is assumed in most postcolonial discourses) and into temporal relations or contradictions of the political meaning of the universal.

In this context, Jameson's following proposition becomes particularly relevant and appealing to the need for coming to terms of the socioeconomic, political, and cultural historicity of contemporary China in the context of

global capital. In *A Singular Modernity*, in reference to Lukács's thesis in *History and Class Consciousness*, Jameson writes:

> reduced to the commodity of sheer labor-power, this devastated proletariat will now alone of all the classes or groups of capitalist society have the structural capacity to grasp the capitalist social order as a whole, in that unity-of-theory-and-praxis that is Marxism. (Jameson, 2002a, p. 85)

To the attentive ears of contemporary Chinese intellectuals, the key phrases in those paragraphs would be "structural capacity" and "as a whole," as well as "that unity of theory and praxis," because they seem to allow a theoretical commensurability between the proletariat and the socialist state form and its intellectual-cultural politics. The historical specificity of the question of Chinese socialism can be grasped, to a certain degree, in the fact that the political agency of the socialist state must be at the same time a cultural or cultural-political agency, and vice versa. This translation of the structural relationship between capital and proletariat into that between the universal moment of global capital and a state form backed by both a "form of life" (a "civilization") and class politics, first and foremost requires a hermeneutic enterprise by which to integrate cultural (or national) consciousness and class consciousness into the fundamentally political discourse of the legitimacy of the state form, which is in all actuality still socialist if no longer revolutionary in nature. From this peculiar Chinese perspective, the ongoing rivalry between socialism and capitalism is not that between two rivaling ideologies of global capital as a universal moment, but between the particular and the universal or, to be more precise, between competing claims on the universal which express themselves as conflicting "cultural" values and as political identities and wills.

Thus, despite the misleading national culturalist self-positioning, what matters in the cultural political self-assertion of contemporary China is, in the end, a political hermeneutics which seeks to capture what Jameson has called "the meaningful totality" (and not the mere "micro-process of labor") by which the collective subject understands its own historical property. Neither the leading discourses of liberal political philosophy (i.e. John Rawls or Jürgen Habermas) nor rigid orthodox Marxist dogma seem capable of offering a general cultural-philosophical framework in which this particular Chinese situation can be reflected upon critically and historically in all its overdetermined complexity, although the political-philosophical implications of Jameson's cultural theory, as made explicit in its Chinese reception, has yet to become a topic in the Western academic beyond the professional specialization and disciplinary compartmentalization. Modernity in this context is not merely various figures and forms of the universal tempo determined by the most advanced mode of production, but a constellation of historical epochs and forms of life. In other words, often in an unreflected

and theoretically crude fashion, contemporary Chinese intellectual life tends to function with the premise of modernity as a *moment* in the classical Hegelian sense, a moment which pertains to the destruction and reconstruction of concrete social relations, of what Jameson has called "collective social being," that is, something loosely and often misleadingly associated with the question of identity, value, and self-recognition.

Culture as politics

Such a meta-historical construction of temporality is nostalgic in appearance but utopian in nature. Because, looking closely at the use of the word modernity in the context of contemporary Chinese cultural politics, it quickly becomes clear that it is simply capitalism itself. By subjecting "modernity" to the dialectic process of history, even the national culturalist argument has in fact foregone any claim on particularity, residues, or surpluses of the cultural dimension, which, in postcolonial discourse is what constitutes the "alternative" and is what the replacement of capitalism with modernity is all about. To clarify the social meaning of the phrase "Chinese modernity," one must try to spell out the political content of what looks like conventional forms of nationalism, statism, and culturalism. To demystify this envisioned Chinese modernity as modern and Chinese at once, one does not have to look for cultural qualifications but instead, as I have suggested above, the particular history of the state form in imperial and modern China. The continuities and discontinuities of the Chinese state form, rather than some mythic and essentialized notion of Chineseness defined culturally and ontologically, have provided concrete forms of the social and the political, which in turn have preserved, transformed, and reconfigured economic and social relations prior to and independent of the logic of capital (what Chakrabarty describes as History 2 in his work), whose sheer survival and development are now conditioned by the universal unfolding of the logic of capital itself (History 1). Based on this observation, I would suggest that, in the context of contemporary Chinese cultural politics, when we search for the utopian truth-content of narratives caught up in various tropes of national history or national culture, replace "nation" and "culture" with "socialism." Similarly, in all the rhetoric of particularity, exception, and uniqueness, what strives to come to terms with itself is a cultural-political intentionality toward a new universal.

Even though Chakrabarty's chosen interlocutor is Marxism, his polemic can perhaps better be grasped in a different though related context, namely the social theory of Max Weber as a self-conscious alternative to Marxism. It is indeed curious that Weber's theorization of what he calls "the rational capitalistic organization of free labor" is widely viewed as a value-neutral sociological model or "ideal type," whereas his express goal is so unmistakably

narrative in nature, cultural-specific, and value-driven. In the preface of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, he writes:

> A product of modern European civilization, studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances the fact should be attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which (as we like to think) lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and value. (Weber, 2001, p. xxviii)

It is no secret that Weber holds that all fundamental concepts serving as pillars of modernity, namely science, law and citizenship, public sphere in which the modern print culture flourished, and the internal logic of capital accumulation are uniquely Occidental. For me, what best illustrates this total and deliberated folding of the rational into the cultural (or vice versa), which defines Occidental uniqueness and exception, is his notion of Western music. Weber's normative description of classical music – from harmony and counterpoint to the instruments; from the sonata, symphony, and opera form to the organization of the orchestra; from tonality to chromatics – resembles, indeed allegorizes his sociological observation of capitalism itself, and yet music, at least in the particular German romantic (not to mention the Nietzschean) tradition, is the most pure, immediate, and organic of all artistic expressions of the productive, unalienable Self in search of its eternal return. In this view, what is unique about the Occident is its unique endowment and capacity to grasp modernity/capitalism as a natural development of its internal history, as something not only compatible with, but indeed embedded in and derived from culture, spirituality, or unique soul of the Occidental being.

In sweeping and necessarily reductive generalization, I would say the difference between a postcolonial and a post-socialist positions lies in this: Whereas the postcolonial critique would ask why the subject here is European, and how one can replace – in theory if not in practice – it with a non-European one, the hidden link (as it is provided by the secret or not so secret truth of Weber's story) between European cultural-moral uniqueness and what Weber calls "a line of development having universal significance and value" is not questioned or negated, if only the main stance of postcolonialism seems to be inclusion and respect in an anticipated multicultural, multiethnic expansion of civil society which offers not only equal rights but also equal recognition of the former colonial subjects. In contrast, the post-socialist critique, even in its latent form, seems to take for granted the convergence of the universal value and significance, on the one hand, and specific collective forms of life, or "cultural phenomena" as Weber calls it, on the other. What it questions and recognizes only critically, if not reluctantly, is the very political structure and nature of the bourgeois constitutional

state which in fact manages, mediates, and controls the intricate overlap and confrontation between culture and polity, thus monopolizes the sole power by which to define legitimacy and sovereignty on world-historical scale. That is, once the bourgeois constitutional state is not viewed as defining the ultimate historical horizon, its legitimacy is no longer considered to be immanent and to be "achieved" by those who happen to fall out of its realm of inclusion. The last observation may explain why, in China, even in the field most sophistically and eloquently worked upon, namely the study of power relationship between Western metropolitan and non-Western "provincial" literary productions, it is Jameson's "Third World Literature in the Age of Multinational Capitalism", and not Said's *Orientalism* or other major texts from the postcolonial discourse, that has made the first and so far most sustained impact.[1]

It is no longer difficult for contemporary theory to argue that such uniqueness is the affect produced by the narrative such as the one found in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and this Weberian narrative of the continuity of Occidental history at the expense of that of other histories and cultures has in the past decades been critiqued, most notably from the perspective of multiculturalism and postcolonialism, even though one often suspects that the mythological core of the Weberian argument remains unscathed, which is the argument for the integral unity between capitalism as an objective – in both formalistic and naturalistic senses – socioeconomic being and a subjectivity to be called modern/capitalist, which defines the universal and the ultimately human. Moreover, today one witnesses the intensified tendency to universalize, not to relativize, the unique soul of the Occident, as global social, ideological, and cultural norms. This is what Jameson has called "singular modernity" in his most recent work. Although the ostensible Weberian formulation operates on the surface of a singular culture defined by religion, we have seen that this is by itself not necessarily culturalist or particularistic in nature, but, rather, quite capable of expanding its horizon toward other cultures and traditions that are forced to scramble to invent various narratives and imaginations which can lay claim to an intrinsic compatibility with capitalism at a "deeper" and more "internal" level. Confucian capitalism is a case in point. The discourse of Chinese modernism or a Chinese modernist selfhood (as an aesthetic figure or allegory of a socially obscure private property right) is another. What they have in common, to be sure, is nothing else than a Weberian belief that historical circumstances can be narrated only in terms of a mysterious unity between the rational and natural, between the natural and the moral, and finally between a particular self-recognition and its universal claims ("return to Kant"!).

All that has to do, I believe, with the conventional mis-identifying the kernel of the Weberian sociology as either rationality or culture. Even though this observation correctly observes the juxtaposition and overlap between

the two (as indicated by the very title of Weber's most influential work), it fails to spell out the innermost drive of the Weberian narrative of a value system, which is nothing else than politics itself. Without a critique of Weber based on a critique of his politics, one risks falling into the Weberian trap while exchanging categories of capitalism and modernity in search for some kind of cultural or religious alternative. Without capturing the political nature of Weber's value-driven, cultural-specific rhetoric of the value-neutral universal, which is everything that comes with the "rational capitalistic organization of free labor," one may often end up rejecting the Weberian premise of Occidental exception and uniqueness at the level of identity politics but in fact accepting the deeper assumptions and politics of Weber's legitimization of precisely that exclusive, alienating form of combining capitalism and power, that false and oppressive totality of the sovereignty of the bourgeois, or what Mao called "bourgeois rights" (*faquan*), which was the central target of his ill-fated Cultural Revolution.

In this light, the postcolonial critique of Marxian narrative of universal history is right at a sentimental level, but it does not seem to provide a theoretical or political alternative by resorting to a culturalist reinvention of History 2 or an urgent call for inclusion into the – real and imagined – universal civil society of the postcolonial middle class who see themselves as being unfairly kept in the "waiting room of history" by their former colonizers who are their equals in every tangible economic, social, and cultural categories but whose power mysteriously lies still somewhere else. By submitting to the universal thus defined at the political level but disengaging Marxism at a discursive level, the postcolonial discourse fails to gain something one would expect it to claim, namely the Weberian intuition that the conflict of modernity is an irreducible conflict of irreconcilable values; that economics, understood as politico-economy, is not a value-free international science but a matter of collective struggle; that both economy and society are vacuous categories before they become political or, in Carl Schmitt's language, until they reach the political as an ontological, autonomous state of human existence (Schmitt, 1996, pp. 19–79). Thus, whereas the nationalistic glorification of culture and value was in Weber a covert and rhetorical strategy to raise the real question, namely, "whether the German bourgeoisie has the maturity today to be the leading political class" (Weber, 1994, p. 23) of the German empire; in postcolonial discourse today it becomes a self-negating substitution of political economy, class struggle and state form with culture and value whose very political qualification, and hence whose true cultural and value-specific meaning, is predetermined, indeed, dissolved by an uncritical submission to "universal civil society," which Weber himself refers to as "the illusion of independent socio-political ideals" (Weber, 1994, p. 27).

This illusion finds its way back with those neo-idealistic notions such as "the inclusion of the Other" or "world domestic politics" (presumably managed

by a global homeland security); as well as with the misuse or mis-generalization of meaningful and often effective tactics used by minorities within the Western welfare states in the struggle for their civil rights. Without the anchoring of a socioeconomic program and the political self-assertion of collectivity, culture, value, tradition, and particularity are no more than sentimental inventions of identitarian rhetoric. The Nietzschean pathos in Weber when he insists on the supremacy and irreducibility of value must be read as an allegory of the anxiety of the German bourgeoisie facing the domestic pressure from the lingering power of the landowning aristocracy and the rising working-class consciousness within the national border and the fateful international competition from the imperialist and colonial expansion of such "political [politically mature] nations" as Britain, France, and America. The Weberian cultural politics, which swings back and forth between a Nietzschean gesture toward transvaluation and the sociological excess of "rationality" in search of the political substance of the German national cultural identity within the context of imperialist rivalry, shows in a breathtaking way what Marx has plainly observed that in every age, the dominating ideology is the ideology of the dominating class.

A critical or intuitive grasp of the impasse of "alternative modernity," aided by a die-hard pre-bourgeois sensibility for the universal, may shed new light on what may look like nothing more than an anachronistic national idiosyncrasy and self-indulgence that to some extent characterize contemporary Chinese cultural life: a cultural-political obsession with autonomy, subject, and wholeness; a cultural-hermeneutic impulse for totality; a cultural-narrative fixation on continuity. None of them, to be sure, has any internal value to speak of, but, as I am tempted to argue, they can be rearticulated in a more interesting and productive, not to mention intellectually and politically relevant form once they are combined with, informed and transformed by the Jamesonian operation of dialectic thinking.

Culture as political hermeneutics

The Chinese reception history of Jameson coincided with the Chinese economic, social, and to a less degree, political reforms that have scrapped much of the material and cultural infrastructure of socialism of Mao's China, a period of radical change which overlapped with, indeed conditioned by a global historic shift now commonly characterized by the sweeping forces of the market, privatization, consumer culture, and the predominance of the twin-ideological discourse of neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism. A thorough depoliticization or rationalization of Chinese society inevitably leads to the dissolution of Marxism as a theoretical totality capable of providing a coherent narrative of the totality of contemporary Chinese social life. With Marxism degenerated into an ossified scholastic philosophy and an official ideology of developmentalism comes the general collapse of

intellectual-discursive subject-position and moral-political sense-certainty of contemporary China. What Walter Benjamin has called "dialectic at a standstill" took shape in post-Mao China in the form of a splinter to technology and market economy and the rapid swelling and multiplication of things, and of a profound rupture if not void in something Heidegger still called a worldview (*Weltanschauung*).

To understand the entry of Jameson's work into the hermeneutic circle of contemporary Chinese cultural-intellectual production, one must account for this general sense of the breaking of totality, of entering into a world of fragments and signs and a space of multiplicity and uncertainty. The breaking of the totality of Mao's China with its world-historical anchor or subject-position has generated various experience ranging from a cultural-conservative nostalgia – more precisely, an ideological longing for an imagined anchor in the universal history interrupted by the revolution – to a radical hermeneutic stance toward critical synthesis, with various positions across the political and cultural-political spectrum actively in search of forms, narratives, discourses, and, in typical 1980s language, "methods" or "methodologies." I would say that this hermeneutic stance, even in its crudest form, marks the Chinese reading of Jameson's theory of postmodernism not as an "end of history," but as an intellectual proof for the necessity to confront the bewildering dispersal and reconfiguration of history itself, before which a reader must, as Paul Ricoeur repeatedly reminds us, lose himself in the labyrinth of signs in the hope of gaining an enlarged self at the other end of the reading process (Ricoeur, 1981, pp. 43–63). This cultural-political unconscious of reading postmodernism through the prism of Jameson's theoretical intervention has played an important role in formulating the cultural vision for post-socialist Chinese society, in which various figures of alienation, in their reified uncanniness, also prefigure the utopian return of the totality of socialist mode of production and form of life in their own historicity.[2]

The first thing I want to say about Jameson's reception in China is his arrival as a systematic and integrated enterprise of explanation, interpretation, and understanding, that is, as a hermeneutic tool in an almost "value-neutral" if not apolitical and almost technical fashion. In fact, this reception history is one of the most conspicuous reminders of the intellectual and theoretical advantage and prestige the Western Left has enjoyed vis-à-vis its mainstream and rightwing rivals who have clearly gained an upper hand in Western social and political life at large since the ebbing of the global 1960s. For many Chinese students of culture and theory, whose interest and passion for historical understanding is constantly and systematically censored and self-censored by an internalized *raison d'état* of depoliticization during the post-Mao decades, the intellectual appeal and persuasiveness of Jameson, as that of Adorno, Benjamin, and Raymond Williams, are first and foremost "knowledge based" and aesthetic in nature. Thus a seemingly quaint propensity for reading Jameson as something pertaining to the hermeneutic

Geisteswissenschaften is but an indication of a suppressed longing and preparation for a critical praxis capable of thinking about totality. This is the reason why the challenge to Jameson's privileged influence in China today does not come from the waning of intellectual curiosity and fascination, but, rather, from professionalization of the university and the ensuing division and compartmentalization of intellectual labor that have come to be seen as markers of Chinese universities' success in measuring up to international, that is, American, standard.

Indeed, Jameson's continued influence in today's China owes a lot to his work having been made available to the Chinese readers since the 1980s and sustained the assault of American style professionalization of the academia. During this period of massive expansion, growth, disorientation, and search for theoretical framework, Jameson as a text has been a vital "portal" and a powerful "search engine" for a generation of Chinese cultural critics and their necessarily differentiated pursuit of information, knowledge, narratives, concepts, and politics. To be sure, throughout this process, it is Jameson's own preeminent position within the American academia, if not a certain American identity of his intellectual life that often is, ironically, cast in doubt in his native environment, that has always been an advantage. But one is tempted to say that this is one instance that critical theory and radical politics seems to have beat the most ruthless form of global capital in capturing a significant share of that mythologized Chinese market, in setting up theoretical and instructional strongholds (such as the Institute of Comparative Literature and Culture at Peking University) and elaborate network of distribution and mending services. But even here the triumphant aura, the fame effect of the Jamesonian discourse, both for graduate students devoting their career to the study and practice of it and to the reading public has its theoretical and political relevance embedded at a deeper and more systematic level: As Jameson himself has readily admitted, the power of theory lies ultimately in its object of analysis, in his case in global capital as a totality which produces continuity and discontinuity at the same time.[3] By implication, and an implication rarely lost among his Chinese students, his overdetermination by and close encounter with US capitalism and American mode of cultural production have lent his work an experiential, analytical, historical, and political immediacy which in turn invigorates the negativity of his thinking as a negativity of totality. This advantage enjoyed by the Jamesonian discourse is far from secure, however, as since the mid-1990s, it has, along with Theory as a whole, been forced into a new market environment filled with other name brands of theories, discourses, and ideological positions mass-produced by the American academia. Rather than deploring this new development, one should expect the Chinese readers of Jameson to come to a more intimate and thorough understanding of his work in his own *habitus*, his own "national situation," and in relation to other challengers and opponents within the immediate space of intellectual

production and ideological position-taking, where the power of Jameson's intellectual enterprise is displayed at its fullest, namely, as critical absorption of otherness, as dialectical synthesis, as *Aufhebung*.

This leads to my second observation. As a hermeneutic tool in the reconstruction of post-Mao Chinese intellectual life, Jameson, as both a text and "way of thinking" (*silu*, a "path of thought" with an all too fitting Heideggerian ring to it), seems to appeal to all those who long for training, experience, and "craft skills" in a personal as well as collective struggle to gain critical and productive knowledge – a cognitive mapping – of the rationalized and internally separated realms of capitalist production which was, throughout the Chinese 1980s, still referred to as "the outside world" (a one-size-fit-all name for the new, the unknown, the Western, the objective, the co-existent Other, the general or universal condition, etc.). Despite the obvious naivety, the desire of contemporary Chinese intellectuals to share Jameson's epistemological and critical enterprise points to what Jameson has called "the ability to totalize or to grasp the meaningful totality" (Jameson, 2002a, p. 85); "to confront and to conceptualize that ultimate reality." It is worth noting that by the last Jameson means capitalism, though it was seen by many of his Chinese readers at that time as something defined much more loosely, ranging from Hegelian *spirit* to Heideggerian *being* to psychoanalytic unconsciousness or the hermeneutic or poststructuralist "meaning"; for others, it could and did also mean a national essence to be discovered; a lost order restored; a utopia in which the unique Chinese value and a unique Western thing (be it technology, commodity, or power) can live peacefully with each other, if they are not one and the same thing. For a certain period – a brief utopian moment – Jameson's theory seemed to allow all those imaginations, desires, obsessions, ideologies, and fantasies to find a comfortable and hopeful dwelling in his ever shifting, always fluid, nonstoppable movement of theorization. In doing so, the imagined totality of Jameson the text itself turns into a road map for a collective intellectual journey. For some it is a long march tantamount to a self-exile; for others it is a shortcut promising easy overview of a complex terrain, not to mention quick return in the form of practical knowledge and profitable skills.

This road map theory inevitably leads to my third point, which is that the existence of Jameson's continued and ongoing effort constitutes a "bridge" or mediation between radical contemporaneity underscored by the global condition of commodity in theoretical terms and a nineteenth-century philosophical-intellectual sensibility and conceptual framework. Unlike Foucaudian archeology, Derridean or Heideggerian deconstruction, or Habermasian construction of normativity, all of which give the reader a glimpse into previous philosophical traditions but only in a flattened form subject to the ideological impulse of the new language game, in Jameson one finds a genealogy of knowledge which shows the mutual relevance between theory and older forms of intellectual and political intervention in the

history of Western modernity. Marxism here plays an important role. Perry Anderson's *Considerations of Western Marxism*, as the first book on such a topic read by many Chinese scholars and intellectuals during the 1980s, masterfully anchors Jameson's work in a rich tradition – a tradition of defeat nonethess, however – which evolved from the age of the rise and fall of great bourgeois revolutions. Jameson's Marxism not only establishes an intricate pattern of continuity and discontinuity within his own theoretical operation, but helps orient and situate contemporary Chinese intellectual inquiry in crucial theoretical and political terms and, in doing so, addresses the central contradictions of the subject-position of Chinese cultural politics. I argue that this subject-position is Hegelian-Marxian in its innermost philosophical impulse even after the thorough de-Marxification or depoliticization of the Chinese field of intellectual production. Marxism, both as a shared intellectual frame of reference and as Form (precisely as it is suggested in Jameson's *Marxism and Form*), is essential in a hermeneutic posture toward the new and the fragmented, which allows a critical distance, at least a recognized zone of suspension, postponement, and differentiation, between the subject-position and the symbolic order as a world of alienation. It is, finally, only through this Marxist framework that the post-socialist intellectual could try to "go beyond" Marxism by "reconstructing" what might be considered the Chinese equivalent of *Geisteswissenschaften* in German philosophy of life. In both formalistic and substantive terms, Marxism is the theory of totality.

It is in light of Jameson's work providing a crucial intellectual and political genealogy that one of the crucial intellectual and political positions of contemporary Chinese intellectuals can be described as a critique of theory of sovereignty inscribed in various historical paradigms of bourgeois politics and political philosophy. The post-Cold War liberal universalism seeks to revive Kant's notions of "universal civil society" and "perpetual peace" but never acknowledges the historical and political condition of the Kantian ideal. The Kantian moment of bourgeois Enlightenment and universal reason is, in fact, built upon a particular (not to mention particularly idealistic) self-recognition of private property as natural and rational all at once, which legitimizes and indeed logically gives rise to the bourgeois constitutional state. The homogenous internal space – its homogeneity is ensured by its self-conception as both natural and rational – shows its limit only in its external relations to other states. It is this limitation that historically determines the politically and socially exclusive universalism of the Kantian moral and political philosophy.[4]

The Hegelian moment thus lies as a crucial mediation between the Kantian origin and its re-politicization in Nietzsche, Weber, and Carl Schmitt. In Hegel, the transition from self-contained civil society and constitutional state to "world history" governed by international law is not and cannot be the "rational" logical deduction from an innocent bourgeois political self-identity, but its alienation and self-negation in real historical conflicts

such as class struggle, nationalism, colonial expansion, and imperialist rivalry, which constitute the historical substance of German political and cultural-political thinking from Hegel to Weber. One must remember that the ending of Hegel's *Elements in Philosophy of Right* is a carbon copy of the beginning of his *Philosophy of History*. Or, literally, the legitimate, legal-philosophical point of departure of bourgeois world history is the very concept of bourgeois right and its universal self-assertion. Thus the effort at de-Marxification in political philosophy is a straightforward proposal to collapse Kant and Hegel into each other in order to theoretically eliminate the possibility of the self-negation of the bourgeois identity and replace it with its self-affirmation. But in this passion to return to Kant, the age of globalization, the age of empire, the age of the totalization of capital has made it clear that it cannot and will not go beyond the historic and historically overdetermined discrepancy between the universal claim of bourgeois right rooted in an exclusive polity or citizenry and the radical unevenness and conflict as a result of exclusion, coercion, and oppression. To this extent, Carl Schmitt's sharp and ominous intuitions that democracy is about exclusion as much as it is about inclusion; and there is only equality among equals and inequality among unequals; that liberal democracy is but a wishful illusion to suppress the irreducibly political, all seem to vindicate themselves even though Schmitt's context was never beyond the cultural-political or national rivalry, and, by extension, the economic and political unevenness among competing bourgeois polities.[5] In this political-philosophical sense of the limit of bourgeois right, and not in the sense of the limit of the reach of capital, we can strategically claim that there is always an outside; and that utopia of the inside as totalistic is, dialectically, the unconscious acknowledgment of the outside; its dream of the future is in fact the dream of this outside, and in dreaming of this outside it becomes its own awakening. For those Chinese intellectuals who seek to explore a theory of sovereignty outside the imperial self-assertion of the political and cultural institutions of global capitalism yet are guarded against falling into the trap of culturalism and nationalism, Jameson's unrelenting dialectical historicization constitutes a rare intellectual and political framework that keeps a utopian historical horizon open in a close encounter with the present.

This political philosophical resonance is not something abstract but can and should be anchored in a close reading of Jameson's theory of Third World literature as a crucial link in the global conditions of possibility for imagining the future. As his notion of "national allegory" has come under attack by those who are equipped with a heightened but often undifferentiated sensibility for identitarian politics trained in the postcolonial and cultural studies school, I would like to recast its theoretical relevance in light of Deleuze's useful concept of minor literature.

Minor literature, as Deleuze defines it, demonstrates a degree of high co-efficiency of deterritorialization: a major language within a minorian group.

In this regard, one may speculate that the writings of Jameson themselves can be considered as a form minor literary experiment. This obviously has to do with English as a major language. Taking on my earlier observation on Jameson's American identity and attraction perceived by some of his Chinese students, we may recognize how being a leading Marxist cultural critic in the English-speaking (more precisely, in the language of America) can strike many as odd, miraculous, even unthinkable. But this may be regarded as a textbook example of the subversive "minor practice of a major language from within" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 18), with language again taken in its broadest socially symbolic sense, as the cultural logic of global capitalism itself. Equally important, one must consider that Marxism, being one of handful of universal intellectual languages or knowledge systems (Catholicism being another), with the theoretical ambition for the grasp of totality, has encompassed various minority positions or consciousness with its own body of experience. This, of course, only confirms the fact that Marxism is the universal medium by which the particularities of the Chinese situation are grasped and articulated but only as the contradictions of the universal, as epitomized by Maoism, and not the self-assertion of the particular, as various forms of ethnocentrism and cultural nationalism. Thus, within their own intellectual and political specificities, Jameson's writings often create, as Deleuze puts it, "a whole other story [that] is vibrating within it" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 17).

This leads to another feature of minor literature as pertaining to the notion of collectivity and collective struggle. This interest is, I believe, the political core of Jameson's infatigable fascination with culture as expressions, styles, and forms of specific historical, above all political, situations. In a way, his interest in Third World literature vis-à-vis great bourgeois literary canons is better described by Deleuze when he writes:

> What in great literature goes on down below, constituting a not indispensable cellar of the structure, here takes place in the full light of day, what is there a matter of passing interest for a few, here absorbs everyone no less than as a matter of life and death. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 17)

It is important to differentiate Jameson's attention to various formulations of collectivity and territoriality from various forms of emphatic self-projection, guilt-trip, or even self-pity as expressions of isolated individual yearning for a larger identity or group consciousness. Whereas the latter belongs to the realm of psychology, Jameson's interest is thoroughly political and critico-cognitive in nature. Here collectivity is not an end in its own right, but, rather, is understood as registers of the revolutionary possibilities of history not in any bourgeois notions of Subject or subjectivity, but in "collective assemblages of enunciation" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 18). This leads to the third feature of Deleuze's notion of minor literature: Everything is political.

The political is the ultimate category by which and in which to understand Jameson's cultural analysis and theoretical intervention. Even the utopian is a subordinate category, which derives its historical and philosophical substance from the political, that is, as a particular form of the intensification and articulation of the political. But instead of trying to establish durable, fortified – that is, pseudo-scientific – conceptual categories, methodological procedures, and philosophical systems characteristic of works of mainstream bourgeois construction of "major" texts, Jameson's is a "minor" theoretical discourse which shows the immediacy, fluidity, concreteness, and historicity of politics. Here, Deleuze's description of the political nature of minor literature has come stunningly close to not only Jameson's notion of Third World literature, but also his own mode of writing with its utopian spirit:

> The political domain has contaminated every statement. But above all else, because collective or national consciousness is 'often inactive in external life and always in the process of break-down,' literature finds itself positively charged with the role and function of collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation. It is literature that produces an active solidarity in spite of skepticism; and if the writer is in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community, this situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility; just as the dog of 'Investigations' calls out in his solitude to *another science*. The literary machine thus becomes the relay for a revolutionary machine-to-come, not at all for ideological reason but because the literary machine alone is determined to fill the conditions of a collective enunciation that is lacking elsewhere in this milieu: *literature is the people's concern*. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, pp. 17–18)

The contemporary challenge of Jameson

Today, all Jameson's major works have been translated into Chinese, with new translations trailing the publication date of the original version by months, sometimes weeks. As many Western visitors and observers of contemporary Chinese intellectual life can testify, to many Chinese students, Jameson seems to have become a one-person clearing-house of critical, innovative ideas, a general frame of reference and a collective reference point by which to confront and reflect on the puzzling dynamic of the "cultural logic of late capitalism" which has since the early 1990s defined the landscape of Chinese everyday life under the so-called "socialist market economy." Looking back at the reception history of Jameson in post-Mao China, one can say without exaggeration that his theoretical and intellectual presence has not only helped define the contours of contemporary Chinese literary criticism and cultural theory, but also, and more importantly, shaped the theoretical

ambition, political agenda, and the very self-understanding of the critical consciousness of contemporary China. In China, one can see it with particular clarity that Jameson's work transcends the narrow professional and disciplinary conventions and divisions of the academia and lives in a historical time as a living proof of and testimony to the possibility of dialectical thinking and historical imagination.

And yet the adventure of the text called Jameson in contemporary China is a complicated one, in which passionate embrace and bitter resistance, triumphant march and tantalizing suspension entangled with each other to expose the complex social and ideological terrain of post-Mao Chinese daily life. A meaningful narrative of this experience requires not an explanation, but an interpretation. First of all, one may note that, similar to the reception of Walter Benjamin, now a cult figure in circles of Chinese literary, film, and cultural studies and among artists and a new generation of urban *flaneurs*, Jameson's work must be read in contemporary China in light of a historical irony: namely, the first and perhaps most forceful impact of Jameson's writings came to China during the 1980s, when Chinese economy and everyday life were on the verge of conversion to a market system but in practical terms still remained decidedly outside the grip of thorough, sweeping commodification. As many have observed, Jameson as a text or theoretical discourse has been unique in that it enjoys both the post-revolutionary legitimacy of being "Western," "American," even "postmodern" and the lingering but more than nominal legitimacy of being "Marxist," "dialectical," and "critical". At the very least, as the bitter opponents to the Jamesonian influence in China would rush to tell, Jameson offers a symbolic if not psychological solution to the ideological and political dilemma or anxiety to those who waver and hesitate in a disorienting transformation. Be true as it may, the usefulness of Jameson's theoretical presence goes well beyond this mundane concern. Rather, it is the concrete socioeconomic condition of post-socialist China, above all its large-scale, intense though extremely uneven integration into the global system that makes many Chinese intellectuals urgently look for critical tools of analysis that have got to be Marxist in nature, as one faces an unprecedented upheaval and homogeneity of world capitalism, and yet "current" and "advanced" in an almost technological sense, as technology in this intellectual battle means above all an intimate knowledge and tested skills as a result of daily and prolonged wrestling with a highly sophisticated, flexible, and productive capitalistic system which is at once economic and cultural. It is no accident that the most fervent students of Jameson's are those active in the "emergent fields" such as critical sociology, cultural studies, theoretically informed and problem-driven literary, film and art criticism, and so forth. And it should be remembered that in China today, both the moribund orthodox Marxist tradition and the trend-chasing, name-dropping "discourse-performance" practitioners are equally hostile to Jameson's work.

One must not leave out the stark contrast between the basic tenors of Chinese political and intellectual life in the1980s and the 1990s. The Jameson of the Chinese 1980s was, quite independent of the will of the author himself, also received as a messenger of the brave new world called America as it was imagined by the collective desire of post-Mao China, a different kind of utopia whose material power, ideological density, legal properties, and intellectual freedom could then only be experienced and imagined aesthetically (aesthetic most literally in the Kantian sense) or, in a quintessential 1980s' jargon, "poetically," that is, in terms of philosophical speculations and abstract theoretical exercises which drew from and playfully consumed the social energy under the confines of the old regime of sense and rule. It was, in other words, America as a sign of productivity and technical/technological know-how, as the Name of the new, rather than innovative Marxist cultural critique, which captured the imagination of his audience. Marxism nevertheless played a crucial but covert role in this encounter. Suffice it here to point out that the shared critical lexicon of traditional Marxism and Western Marxism made it easier for the Chinese students to navigate themselves in the dazzling and bewildering terrain of signs and discourses while clinging to some notion of totality or *Aufhebung* but only as an unreflected self-affirmation of old habit, not as the result of a new critical synthesis and negativity. Such imagined and subjective reception of Jameson during the Chinese 1980s is evidenced by the scarcity of the translated materials available. Besides a couple of articles, the only book length text is the Chinese translation of the transcribed lecture notes entitled "postmodernism and cultural theory," which till this day is the most popular among all Jameson's work available in Chinese.

The large-scale, systematic translation and popularization, or, the institutionalization of Jameson during the Chinese 1990s coincided with, rather, was conditioned by, the professionalization of the Chinese academia modeled after the US research universities. Translating, quoting, and writing on Jameson have also become part of the career equation. Along with that came academic politics, of those who defend the centrality of the Jamesonian text against those who would rather promote, say, New Criticism, Foucault, postcolonialism, or cultural studies as alternatives or simply fashion updates. With the professionalization of the Jamesonian discourse in China, Jameson risks becoming another name brand of theoretical discourses competing with other name brands in the last frontier of global cultural capital. For those Chinese students who have not experienced or do not know the particular social and intellectual history underscoring the reception history, Jameson being a particular name brand in the academic supermarket is both normal and desirable. For many younger generation students of literary and cultural theory, it is difficult to mention Jameson without also mentioning a dozen or so names – Barthes, Lyotard, Raymond Williams, Lacan, Derrida, Said, Spivak, Žižek, Homi Bhabha, Harold Bloom – within the

same breath. This is no trivial matter, since it only reflects the general differentiation of the Chinese social spheres and the internal ramification and stratification of Chinese intellectuals throughout the 1990s. In the new field of intellectual production, with frantic professionalization taking up much of the scholarly energy, the ideologically and intellectually predominant interest, one must admit, lies in a systematic introduction of liberal – both classical and neo-liberal – brand of social theory and political philosophy. Burke, Acton, Weber, Berlin, Arendt, Rawls, Habermas, and Leo Strauss are "rediscovered" along with the more politically engaged advocates of "open society" and "free market" such as Popper and Hayek. Probably only in China is Jameson forced to co-exist in uncomfortable proximity with those names, identities, and positions, whose commonality is conceivable only in an unreflected fashion in their being "Western" and pertaining to a certain kind of authority, if not absolute truth. But by virtue of their irreducible difference, the new Chinese intellectual discourse on universal truth is all but internally fractured and divided, as something in internal and irreconcilable conflict. This internal multiplicity or reletivization of "truth," to be sure, has also had a negative impact on those who naively treat Jameson as a stable, even metaphysical conceptual framework or methodology which offers a secured path to a deeper reality.

The rise of liberal political theory and political philosophy should be viewed as a symptom of social ideology rather than a "progress" or "graduation" in knowledge acquisition. By social ideology I mean in particular the intellectual and popular self-projection backwards into a more classical moment of bourgeois social-, political-, and intellectual history reveals a central obsession of mainstream Chinese intellectuals as part of the new technocracy of a post-socialist society in that it fulfils a "forward looking" worldview underscored by developmentalism with a sentimental nostalgia for its imagined roots or anchor in the very classical moment of universal bourgeois history, something considered by many Chinese liberals today as the missing link China has briefly and precariously possessed and then lost to mass revolution and socialist modernity during the last years of the age of colonialism and imperialism. Such ideological self-repositioning, which is performed dutifully by Chinese liberal intellectuals throughout the 1990s to acknowledge China's place in the universal chain of social evolution and in international division of labor makes the new intellectual environment in China hostile to theory in general and Jameson's theoretical intervention in particular. It has also, as I would like to argue, uncannily leveled the ground of intellectual debate, which allows a more historical – that is, more politically and philosophically substantive – account of contemporary dialectical and utopian thinking in an "natural-historical" lab situation (that is the undiscriminating, crude, and passionate field of contemporary Chinese intellectual production based on radical differentiations of the social sphere) where it has no choice but to seek to defend itself against and competes with

contemporary ideological currents and thrusts – a battle of genealogies without the protection of specialization and professionalization.

Jameson's reception in China is, by and large determined by the transition from the 1980s into the 1990s, that is, from a moment of socialist modernity underscored by a collective political utopia to that which is driven by a more fully "rationalized" and bureaucratized pursuit of economic growth and political "neutrality": Even though the Chinese translation and discussion of Jameson's work continues to multiply during the 1990s, and even though his many concepts and ideas are circulating constantly in many circles in Chinese intellectual life, his access by intellectuals as a whole is increasingly challenged by the rapid formation of the new Chinese academic institution (whose centrality is professionalization and quantifiable management) and by a new intellectual-political norm based on liberal political philosophy and its discourses on state vs society, liberty and property, constitution and citizenship, "public sphere," power, desire, and "ethics." The new heroes of "Western thinking" in the Chinese 1990s are Hayek, Berlin, Rawls, Habermas, and Foucault, often with the full backing of neo-liberal economics on the one hand and all kinds of rejuvenated theory of a "universal civil society" on the other, including a strong dosage of the Foucauldian celebration of the absolute bodily freedom to make dull topics sexier. As a liberal intellectual historian in China has pointedly observed: "as China triumphantly enters the global, postmodern age, the leading diagnostician of Postmodernism is losing his domination of the field in China."[6]

As the Jamesonian discourse on the postmodern allegedly loses its perceived hegemonic status in China, its historical, theoretical and political relevance in a critical rethinking of modernity is renewed and intensified in his most recent book, *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present*. The book, instead of moving away from the ongoing debate on the postmodern, encompasses the late or global stage of capital in a larger context which addresses many doubts, confusions, and questions in the Chinese context, which also brings the author face-to-face with the liberal discourse on modernity prevailing in China since the early 1990s.

In summer 2002, Jameson visited China and delivered the preface and conclusion of the book as a highly publicized speech in Shanghai. Aided by national media coverage, the speech caused a controversy that is still unfolding as I write. Crude as some arguments may be, several points have emerged to indicate the intellectual, emotional, as well as political focus of this debate:

First, modernity as an "incomplete project." In the speech, Jameson made explicit the crucial difference between the famous Habermasian proposition and his own take on the issue, which "entertain[s] the possibility that modernity is incomplete because it never could be completed by the middle class and its economic system" (Jameson, 2002a, p. 11). For the apologists of the state-sanctioned modernization project in China, this observation comes as a rude reminder of the historic and political limit of the middle-class

society which its Chinese admirers would like to believe to be of universal value and whose temporary incompleteness only ensures the historical urgency to complete or realize it. The bizarre twist in the Chinese controversy, however, lies in the indignant accusation of Jameson's "First-World arrogance" in telling the Chinese that they can forget about entering into universal modernity and civil society, that, indeed, such desire is a mistake to begin with.[7] The accuser, having expressed profound disillusionment in following Jameson's theory of postmodernism, which was expected to show Chinese scholars a way of being included in the international club of cultural production, then goes on to call for a self-dependent pursuit of Chinese modernity and postmodernity coupled with Chinese autonomy and uniqueness. The shift cannot be more telling, as Jameson's philosophy of history that carries a utopian horizon beyond capitalism and its liberal-democratic self-legitimation finally found its diagonally opposite position of embracing the capitalist global market but with an assumed national essence which duplicates the international power hierarchy at home while keeping at bay the critical consciousness conditioned by the general condition of world capitalism in the name of national autonomy.

Second, the modernity/postmodernity dialectic, which is often twisted in today's political culture to mean, as Jameson sharply observes, those who still believe in social reason, top-down planning, centralized state-power, among other things, "are unmodern because they are still modernists; 'modernity' however – in the newly approved positive sense – is good because it is postmodern. Then why not use that word instead?" (Jameson, 2002a, p. 10). What Jameson has pointed out is the politically grave situation where free-market capitalism has managed to define "the modern" in neo-liberal terms and thus is positioned to use the metaphysical divide between the "modern" and the "pre- or unmodern" for its own political and economic control. The question here is not the play of terminology, even though terminology sometimes is a matter of life and death for critical intellectuals, as Jameson unfailingly reminds us. Rather, by reintroducing modernity as a historical singularity, Jameson brings our focus once again to the question of capitalism, compared to which modernity as a myth, including its various culturalistic self-assertions (the rhetoric of Confucian capitalism, "alternative modernity," etc.). The boisterous criticism of Jameson's Shanghai speech, in a way, reveals some Chinese intellectuals' new-found political allegiance with a postmodernity defined precisely in neo-liberal ideology of global free market with its attendant universal consumer. The sentimental attack on Jameson's "retreat from postmodernism to modernism," is but a frustrated attempt to cling to the wishful thinking that "postmodernism" not only allows China a comfortable niche in the world market, but permits her a cultural identity. The critical observation that such imagined postmodern identity is nothing more than a mirror image of the mythical, singular modernity, the universal but qualitatively Western/bourgeois soul, cannot but be seen by the Chinese Jameson bashers as an inconvenient truth that it has to be repudiated as "modernity" to be overcome by "post-

modernity" but in the name of "the modern." This ideological maneuver, together with a Weber-inspired belief in the ideal type of a rational capitalist society backed by a mysterious cultural soul, as I have discussed above, only highlights the importance of the politics of terminology, above all the politics of "the modern" in the global struggle of narrative, imagination, and ideology.

Third, the question of "collective social being" (Jameson) and its intellectual formulation: In the Jameson controversy in China since summer 2002, what has not been lost is the fact that it is not Jameson, but Karl Marx himself who first wrote about the universal destruction and production of capitalism, its ability to "batter all the Great Walls of China" with its cheap commodities. Beyond the baseless accusation that Jameson is falling back to singular Western modernity and proclaims the death of meaningful social-political features attempted by non-Western societies, a more serious debate is going on in China which, rooted in a closer and more sympathetic reading of Jameson's work, raises the question of the possibility of "constructive" (jianshexing) social, political, and cultural projects.[8] "Constructive," I would suggest, must be understood as a code word pointing to an urgent search for the historical substance of Chinese revolution and socialist culture and state form, and, within the framework of this historical substance, a search for a new national ideal that transcends the mere national which is necessary for articulating and building a new social system. Conversely, "constructive" is also a covert criticism of the Chinese students' blind following of Western academic practice, the best of which, more often than not, offers a philosophy of negativity that has a parasitical relationship to the very capitalist system it seeks to critique. These discussions indicate that what seems to be the outer boundary of Jameson's theoretical operation is in fact the intellectual-political core of his life work. In the famous "The Task of the Translator," Walter Benjamin (1973) writes that the afterlife, the "essence" of a text, can only be achieved in its translation. It sounds convincing judging by the way the political and cultural-political significance of Jameson's work is being played out in China today.

In the place of a conclusion: Of utopia and patriotism or, Jameson contra Rorty

In his 1998 book *Achieving Our Country* Richard Rorty makes Fredric Jameson a main target of his critique of the "Cultural Left" in contemporary America. The seemingly trajectory from a welcome debunking of Platonic system and essentialism (hence the "death of philosophy" as we know it) to Marxist critique of the capitalist totality is for Rorty an unfortunate mistake. In Rorty's own words:

> The Foucauldian academic Left in contemporary America is exactly the sort of Left the oligarchy dreams of: a Left whose members are so busy

> unmasking the present that they have no time to discuss what laws need to be passed in order to create a better future. (Rorty, 1998, p. 139)

At the core of his critique is Jameson's alleged substitution of "utopian, inspirational values of great literature" with abstract and totalistic "knowingness." For Rorty, the former is necessary for upholding American patriotism in striving for the country's as yet unachieved idea of democracy; whereas the latter, represented by the "Cultural Left" in general and by Jameson in particular, is unpatriotic and detached from the American Leftist tradition of social reform.

In the Chinese context, however, the liberal attack on the New Left in general and on Jameson's work in particular offers a comical twist or mirror image of Rorty's criticism. Even the harshest among Jameon's Chinese critics rely on his analysis of postmodernism as the "cultural logic of late Capitalism." Their complaint is that there is too much, not too little, utopianism in Jameson; that the overtly utopian element of his cultural critique involves reflections on the Chinese situation in an unsettled global intellectual debate about an uncertain future. For the Chinese liberals, it seems imperative to end this ideological conflict by putting an end to the Leftwing idealism, radicalism, and utopianism so that Chinese society can be smoothly nudged into a rational, myth-free, law-abiding world of individuated life based on private property, legal codes, and the stabilizing mainstream ideology of the middle class. To these Chinese believers in the rational and the individual, Rorty's call for social idealism, national moral identity, utopian imagination, and even political participation must be utterly confusing as they seek to impose a positivistic and procedural social and legal order capable of diffusing social passion of any collective political substance. Ironically, the fantastic universal order they invoke, which is, at least under the current Chinese economic and social circumstances, so blatantly an ideological apology for an utterly uneven and undemocratic order of things, overlaps in its ultimate ideal almost completely with Rorty's idea of US capitalism as a self-fulfilling, self-perpetuating experiment.

Through the prism of ongoing Chinese intellectual-political debate, it becomes clear that what Rorty really accuses Jameson of is not his lacking utopianism – Jameson is certainly one of the most eloquent utopian thinkers of our time – but his thinking off the limit of the ideological framework of American democracy and off the limit of the socioeconomic and political system of capitalism as we know it. If Jameson's critical utopianism entails or implies a historical horizon beyond capitalism understood as a Hegelian moment in the contradictions of human history, then Rorty's "unachieved America" an inverted form of the Wilsonian idealism exists as the ultimate horizon of history and the "new conception of what it is to be human" (Rorty, 1998, p. 18). And this is what he means by referring to Whitman's claim that "America does not need to place itself within a frame of reference" (Rorty, 1998, p. 29).

Rorty's political essentialization of the idea of America, despite his philosophical anti-essentialist rhetoric, meets the ideological need of the liberal intellectuals in China to identify with the absolute universal, namely the mainstream bourgeois civilization, despite his emphasis on utopian idealism and collective moral identity runs counter to the their determination to rationalize. Neither, however, wants to say anything about how such notion of the universal is intertwined with and embodied by the status quo of the world under global capitalism, its power hierarchy, its distribution of wealth, its cultural-ideological domination, and its suppression of explorations, social or intellectual, for alternatives.

One of the more interesting moves in Rorty's intellectual narrative of American democracy is his linking of Whitman and Dewey with Hegel, who, as Rorty puts it in Whitman's words, writes the history of humanity as the growth of freedom. The discovery that Whitman was a big fan of Hegel's is wonderful, though Rorty quickly tells us that he believes that Whitman had read no more than two pages of a synopsis of the German philosopher. Yet in this crucial aspect of the Western liberal discourse, Jameson proves to be a better student of Hegel. His Marxist problematic determines his being determined by his object of critique, which means capitalism functions as the organizing principle in his cultural analysis and theoretical interventions. Yet capitalism – and not least its most brutal form, namely US capitalism – also carries him to the battle zones on the margins of its world-historical spread, to the areas formerly called the Third World, which now exist at once inside and outside the territories claimed, while connected, managed while oppressed by global capitalism. For Abraham Lincoln, another towering figure in Rorty's story, American democracy means not only social reform within the system but also human emancipation that shatters the status quo. In the light of Lincoln, and from a distance – a distance embodied not so much by geography or "cultural difference" as by the nameless masses who are not yet qualified as bourgeoisie, and probably never will – things may look a little different. For Whitman, only Hegel's thought was worthy of the unbound promise of American democracy. In today's world, for those who believe in universal democracy (which I take for granted to be mass democracy), it is the "unpatriotic" Jameson, not the patriotic Rorty, whose thinking appeals to them as "fit for America" and is "large enough and free enough" (Whitman, 1984, p. 201; Rorty, 1998, p. 20).

Notes

1. Jameson's "Third World Literature in the Age of Multinational Capitalism" was first translated in 1988 and published in the leading literary studies journal, *Wenxue pinglun* (*Literary Review*). It was instrumental in the discussions on Chinese literature's dual ambition to be cosmopolitan and "native" at the same time. An example of such discussions and their influence by Jameson's article can be found

in a forum published in *Zhongshan* an important avant-garde literary magazine in the late 1980s and early 1990s, participated by the leading literary and film critics Chen Xiaoming, Dai Jinhua, Zhang Yiwu, and Zhu Wei. Edward Said's *Orientalism*, though often alluded to, was not translated until 1999, more than a decade later, and whose readership is more limited to the emergent field of Cultural Studies as opposed to literary criticism and cultural theory, which are still more susceptible to Jameson's work.

2. For a discussion of the correlations of a Marxist understanding of postmodernism and a critical analysis of the constructive elements of the postmodern condition in the emergence of a post-socialist sphere of everyday life that reflects the mixed mode of production of today's China and coincides with the rationalization of the Chinese state-form, see Zhang (1999). A longer version of the essay is included in Dirlik and Zhang (eds) (2000).
3. For a self-reflection on his own mode of dialectic thinking and its coherence endowed by its object of negation, namely late capitalism as a totality, see Jameson (1998d), especially the sections "Marxism and Late Capitalism" and "Dialectical Thinking".
4. See Kant (1991) especially "Idea for Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose", "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch", and "To Answer this Question: What Is Enlightenment?"
5. See Carl Schmitt (1985, 1996, 2001).
6. The comment was made by Xu Jilin during a seminar on Fredric Jameson attended by the author. His observation is included and commented upon in Zhang (2002).
7. See Wang Yuechuan, *Shanghai Shehuikexuebao* (*Shanghai Social Science Weekly*).
8. The issue of the "constructiveness" of critical theory was raised first by Wang Xiaoming and his students at East China Normal University during a seminar discussion with Fredric Jameson in summer 2002. For the transcripts in Chinese translation, see the "Cultural Studies Web", Centre for Contemporary Chinese Cultural Studies at Shanghai University, directed by Prof. Wang Xiaoming at http://culture.online.sh.cr/asp/list3.asp?id=65&writer='jameson'

11

Jameson, Brecht, Lenin and Spectral Possibilities

Esther Leslie

Everything changes. You can make
A fresh start with your final breath.
But what has happened has happened. And the water
You once poured into the wine cannot be
Drained off again.

What has happened has happened. The water
You once poured into the wine cannot be
Drained off again, but
Everything changes. You can make
A fresh start with your final breath
(Bertolt Brecht, c.1944)

Fredric Jameson's star rose in the late 1980s when theorists located within the discipline of cultural studies latched onto his essay 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism'. This essay became a guiding text for what was perceived as a new epoch. It appeared at a moment when epochalism was rife, and its proclamation of so many endings, and definitions were eagerly sought. The essay claimed to outline this new stage of world history and world culture, dependent on a new scenario in world economics. 'Postmodernism . . .' did not just define a new scene: it was taken as a certain conferment of legitimisation to the new postmodern epoch, tantamount to a justification. Now named and outlined, the new epoch could be lived and affirmed. There was no going back – going back was understood to be a return to 'modern' concepts, which were bound up with 'old style' Marxist politics and economics and high art elitism, and these two seemingly opposite principles were cast aside as co-dependents in an old, excessively hierarchical world. Despite its critical animus and stance towards the new postmodern world, the essay attested to postmodernity's existence – if negatively. It became its map. The map turned into a gazetteer. It inflated

and became a baggy book of encounters with contemporary culture, which attempted to 'cognitively map' comprehensively the era of multinational late capitalism. Just like Marx and Engels' gigantic and, in the main, only partially read *German Ideology*, the book version of the postmodernism essay aimed to deal with the key thinkers and ideas in the contemporary landscape. The book was also keen to reanimate the dead, attempting to refract the legacy of a number of cultural theorists who had occupied Jameson in earlier work through the lens of postmodernity. As Jameson wrote in the Introduction, '. . . any sophisticated theory of the postmodern ought to bear something of the same relationship to Horkheimer and Adorno's old "culture industry" concept as MTV or fractal ads bear to fifties' television series' (1991a, p. x). This was a comparative exercise – and not necessarily so much because of the value of measuring the distance travelled by cultural forms via these models from the past, but rather because, simply, that is how cultural criticism is done, or, at least, how it was done before – and 'before' and 'after' is reputedly what is in question here. Around this time, which was the time of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the New World Order's recomposition of the political map of the world, Jameson turned quite melancholy about the prospects for critical intellectual writing. Using the approach of the modernist cultural critics of the pre-Second World War era was futile, though it may still be attempted, and if it was the only mode in which critique could be conducted, something other than critique may be coming into being. In a review of the English edition of Walter Benjamin's selected correspondence (Adorno and Scholem, 1994) and the Adorno–Benjamin letters (Adorno and Benjamin, 1994), Jameson seemed mournful about the prospects for criticism, as epitomized by 'the last intellectual', Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt School tradition (1995b, pp. 8–9). Postmodernity precludes the possibility of existing as a critical intellectual. Intellectuals speak into a void, for they can no longer 'form and inflect public taste' in the highly mediated public-sphere (1995b, p. 8). Our world is flattened out. It is a vast screen of perma-spectacle. Its surface is sheer and evenly illuminated. There are no toeholds that enable the scaling of spectacular walls. After critique comes commentary. Jameson genuflected to Baudrillard – a prominent commentator on glossy cultural surfaces in a world of hypermediated meaning – in the conclusion to his book on postmodernism:

> my version of all this . . . obviously (but perhaps I haven't said so often enough) owes a great debt to Baudrillard, as well as to the theorists to whom he is himself indebted (Marcuse, McLuhan, Henri Lefebvre, the situationists, Sahlins, etc., etc.). (1991a, p. 399)

But that was some while ago, and the years that passed afterwards were far from uniform in character. Textures and cracks and crevices reasserted themselves on the once homogenous space-time of non-history. Jameson

noted in his 1991 book on postmodernism that 'cognitive mapping was in reality but a code word for class consciousness' (p. 15), and class consciousness, of course, in traditional Marxist terms, has a tendency to light up and dim down, to be false and be true. Flickers appeared on the screen of history, and in parts of the screen the light is now dimmer, now brighter. The process of 'globalisation' produced its antithesis, a globalised resistance – which might be resistance to globalisation or, more specifically, resistance to world capitalism on a world scale. This global fightback established its own channels of information, discussion, distribution, commentary and critique. Digital developments played a crucial role here. Jameson's 'Postmodernism', in essay form and book form, is largely free from the digital imperative that was to become the hallmark of mid-1990s postmodern theory. The computer screen had come to be the defining motif of postmodern theory – but in its bleak negative form envisioned as a pacifying control system of 24 hour surveillance and 'global paranoia' (1991a, p. 38), that could be challenged only by the lone terroristic activity of the cyberpunk or hacker. From the mid-1990s a different discussion of digital potentials emerged, as the World Wide Web was seen to present new modes of interaction, informatics and connectivity. A new discursive space – inside the mediated space – opens up, and it is one that is connected to possibilities of action in the world wide beyond the web. And so resistance and intellectual dissidence and text-based subversion was reborn from the weave of the postmodern. Jameson, in the late 1990s, rediscovered the possibilities of criticism, but not in the same terms, for there were something too sunnily techno-futurist about the web and the internet as potential spaces of emancipation for someone as influenced by Adorno's critique of technological rationality. Jameson's revived critical framework is made of a bricolage of leftovers from the earlier age whose legacy formed him. Long after the death of Walter Benjamin, 'the last intellectual', who died a second time in the post-literary carnival of postmodern skepticism and anti-intellectualism, Jameson resurrects the distinctly unfashionable voicepieces of the highpoint of modern Marxist praxis and class struggle: Brecht and Lenin. Jameson brings them back into a dialogue with the 'postmodern' present, which secretly they inform – Brecht as decentring anti-humanist and proponent of a 'politics of pleasure' and Lenin as internationalist (critical globalist) and theorist of class struggle and politics – moments of decision – as well as economic analysis.

In the book version of 'Postmodernism . . . ' Brecht is cited as an exponent of pedagogical culture – though his 'prodigious' work was 'still imperfectly understood' (1991a, p. 50). He is also cited as enthusiast of a process of anti-individualism in poststructuralist theories of 'death of the subject'. Lenin is barely present in this book. He is cited as a dialectical thinker who sees the progressive aspects of the 'older imperialist global network' (p. 50). Lenin is also the legitimator of new epochal thinking, having himself identified a stage beyond Marx's schema: 'the so-called monopoly stage, or the moment

of classical imperialism' (p. 400). Having named one new stage, any post-Marxist might now feel able to name another. Lenin legitimates renaming. The new epoch that had just been named was postmodernism, announced in melancholic and nostalgic tones, for it presented the spectacle of intellectual conferment of meaning to an age that apparently screened the interlocutor out. It left him no room, or rather it left to him only the historically remaindered form of systematising and historicising reflection on an ahistorical, unsystematised age. What it wrote out laboriously in order to outline 'the ultimate realities and experiences' (p. 412), a cultural artifact such as the film *Blade Runner* or the music group 'The Talking Heads' could do instantly, providing an immediate and more appropriately contemporary 'aural and visual' (p. 38) experience. The new space is inherently anti-critical, anti-reflexive. It leaves nothing to hold onto, grab onto, in order to make a stand or understand:

> The new space . . . involves the suppression of distance (in the sense of Benjamin's aura) and the relentless saturation of any remaining voids and empty places, to the point where the postmodern body – whether wandering through a postmodern hotel, locked in to rock sound by means of headphones, or undergoing the multiple shocks and bombardments of the Vietnam War as Michael Herr conveys it to us – is now exposed to a perceptual barrage of immediacy from which all sheltering layers and intervening mediations have been removed. (pp. 412–13)

Sheltering layers or intervening mediations are the niches and functions of the critic, who, so exposed, can only remap the points of this glassy and reified landscape. Such repetition can gain little critical purchase. Ten years on though, a decade after the 'end of history' proved itself to be wishful triumphalism against a horizon of snaggy remnants, new beginnings and tenacious remains, the unholy duo of Brecht and Lenin push to the fore in Jameson's thought. These become the guiding *Geister* for a 'period of political effervescence such as we now seem once again to be entering' (2001b, p. 36). Through Brecht and Lenin, Jameson has reasserted the possibility of pedagogy, the persistence of contradiction and the necessity of reinvoking a revolutionary perspective, as prelude to action.

Brecht and method

Jameson's *Brecht and Method* appeared in 1998. This book was not a rediscovery of a lost Brecht, for Jameson insisted that Brecht's thought was present in much contemporary culture, even if it is not recognised as such. It is to be found in post-war drama and film and popular culture – for example, Jean-Luc Godard, Orson Welles, Peter Brook and Robert Crumb.

It is also present in French poststructuralist theory with its emphasis on the historicity of nature and the denaturing of the human. Brecht's brutal and anti-sentimental dismantling of the bourgeois individual found an echo in post-war French theory. For example, Roland Barthes discovered Brecht for structuralism in 1954, when Brecht and his East German theatre troupe, the Berliner Ensemble, came to Paris. Barthes reports that he was 'set on fire' by a production of *Mother Courage*. He was also enthusiastic about a passage of Brecht's theoretical writings, included in the programme. Barthes drew several lessons from Brecht. Theatre is to be understood in cognitive rather than emotive terms. Techniques of estrangement produce a theatre of consciousness not one of action. Theatre should not try to tell us what things mean but call attention to the way meaning is produced. Theatre should exploit the arbitrariness of the sign, drawing attention to its own artifice rather than attempting to conceal it. There is a demystificatory political potential in any drama that abandons a theatre of character and inner psychology. Anti-humanism and demystification were taken by Barthes into a critique of the coherent, unified, self-identical individual, though, along the way, any emphasis on proposals for concrete political acts of solidarity were shed. For Barthes, in fact, this was a return of theatre to questions of 'moral' enlightenment. Brecht provides the 'secret' undergirding of the subsequent poststructuralist turn. The plays, the stories and poems, allow historical representation and reflection of the self and on the self. This aspect – the historical character of all manifestations – is what made Brecht important for Barthes, evident particularly in his *Mythologies* where everything that appears natural and eternal is shown to be the product of a historical moment. Brecht prepares the way for current anti-essentialist notions of subjectivity. His alienation effect acts out Lacan's sense of how the self is a foreign body. Such an assertion may not come as a surprise to those aware of the rediscovery of Brecht by *Screen* in the 1970s – in that context, just as, in part, in Jameson, through lenses focused by Althusser and Lacan. But Jameson, operating now in a different historical context, characterised by him in 1998 in *Brecht and Method* as a time of deep defeat for the Left and a time of stasis within 'market and globalization, commodification and financial speculation' (1998b, p. 4) is more concerned than *Screen* with dialectical questions of the part and the whole. It is as if stasis must be rattled into movement by the dynamiting effect of dialectics, by the impact of an approach based on mobility and flux. Jameson revives Brecht at the fin-de-siècle in a different way to that of structuralism/poststructuralism's resuscitation. Brecht proposes a critic who aims for political effect, rather than simply critique. Jameson maintains Barthes' emphasis on reflexivity, essentially thinking about thinking and historicising history, as well as nature. But he also insists on indexing the work to questions of acting historically, beyond the intellectual business of ideology-critique.

Brecht's output – a stunning productivity across genres from poetry to theory to plays to novels to songs – is a long gush of fragments. Each fragment shard acts as a mirror, reflecting on each other fragment, on the shifting history that spawns them and on Brecht himself. Brecht's output is seen 'dialectically' by Jameson from the off. This dialectical approach asserts a break with any insistence on the coherent body of work stemming from a unified individual. Such a view of individuality is dismantled in the plays – even in one of the earliest ones: *Man is Man* (1925). The hero of the play, Galy Gay, is a man who flows with the tide, a man subject to social circumstance, an extremely adaptable character. Brecht takes no moral standpoint. In *Man is Man* humans are shown as victims of circumstance. There is no essential human nature and no essential human goodness. Galy Gay is lured into the British army and transformed during the course of the play from a peaceful mind-your-own-business type of a man into a ferocious warrior. A deliberate interruption is made by one of the characters, who comments directly to the audience on the action: 'They'll soon, if we don't watch over him, in the wink of an eye make a butcher of him'. In this act of direct address, all illusion of the theatre as a slice of life occurring on stage, voyeuristically observed by spectators, is broken. It also exposes the motility of human personality and human beings' capacity for action. Brecht's dramatic writings evince a 'decentred structure', and like Mother Courage's wagon, it is possible 'to wheel them around in various directions'. This decentring destabilises the oeuvre as a whole too. The young Brecht of *Baal*, and the expressionist anarchist urbanism of *Drums in the Night* and *In the Jungle of the City*, is matched, undercut, and challenged by the older Brecht of the didactic 'Lehrstücke' or the expansive 'great plays' so favoured in the East German Berliner Ensemble repertoire.

Dialogue, dialectic, multiplicity is found by Jameson in every possible circumstance of his production (and life). The appreciation of multiplicity and anti-individualism counters recent debates about the originality of the work and the speculation on Brecht's cool cynicism – fuelled by a gossip-based scholarship purveyed by John Fuegi (1994). Jameson locates Fuegi's bad faith as emanation of a politically motivated insistence on bourgeois originality and genius, which Brecht then fails to achieve. Against this, Jameson asserts positively Brecht's principle of collective authorship, 'the promise and the example of utopian cooperation' (1998b, p. 10). Brecht's oeuvre is a product of collective action. Jameson poses Brecht's simultaneously Marxist and modernist texts as 'intertexts', productive plagiarisms of other people's work as much as reworkings of his own work and practice.

Jameson's meditation on Brecht emerges from the swirl caused by three 'events'. The first is the fallout of 1989 (overt finale to Brecht's now cherished now mocked communist system). The second 'event' is the correlative success of postmodernity (which, in contradistinction to high modernity, Jameson insists has reopened the possibility of didactics, while also rejecting all high

culture (and critique) because of its love-affair with the 'popular'). The third 'event' is the re-encounter with 1930s' debates over realism and modernism in the context of structuralism, post-structuralism and post-humanism. This last complex throws up not only issues connected to aesthetics and form but also questions of ethics, responsibility and action.

Brecht and Method is in dialogue primarily with a set of parables called *Me-ti; Book of Transformations* or *Book of Changes* or *Twists and Turns* or *Book of Turning Ways*, a cryptic book, unpublished in Brecht's lifetime. This book emulates writings by the Chinese dialectician and anti-Confucian of the classical period Me-ti, who was regarded by many nineteenth-century scholars as a proto-socialist. The title – Book of Twists and Turns, or Turning Ways – stems from a Confucian text – the *I-ching* – which can be translated likewise as the book of transformations. Brecht in yoking two contrary things together was acting eclectically, but was also foregrounding contradiction, that is, laying out the field of study as criss-crossed by oppositions. Such a stance arguably underwrites the whole of *Me-ti*, an attempt to reflect critically on the method of dialectics, as taught to Brecht by Karl Korsch, and to use that dialectical method to relate a covert history of the Soviet Union, which proposes, pragmatically, contra Korsch, the 'usefulness of Stalin', if not his endorsement. (Jameson is keen to express similarly the usefulness of Brecht, rather than his 'greatness': a 'usefulness, which, although it certainly involves teaching, is something a little more fundamental than mere didacticism'.) Jameson takes on the question of Brecht's relationship to Stalinism only in a roundabout way, preferring to use Brecht's 'Chinese dimension' (1998b, p. 3) to think about the possibility of Brecht as Maoist – Jameson calls him a 'secret Maoist' after 1949 (p. 138). Brecht's Chinese fixations – including philosophy and method as well as theatrical practice – diverge from Stalinist prescriptions, presenting an articulation of the dialectic in terms of flow, flux, change, transformation and all that is non-eternal. Taoist or Maoist, no matter, each has an honesty and a completeness denied in the more regularly flaunted self-understanding of the modern epoch. For Jameson, as apparently for Brecht, the advantage of a Taoist-inflected, 'pre-capitalist' philosophy is that it acknowledges death. Death is repressed by the bourgeoisie, who eternalise and naturalise their rule. It is also repressed by the Stalinists for whom it would mean their rule too on Earth is time-limited, an unacceptable position for a one-party, one-leader state. Death, then, for Jameson, is seen to hold open the possibility of history, and change.

Jameson details the intricacy of Brecht's 'intertexts', with their scenes ingeniously laid out for reflection on the nature of choice and the time-tethered nature of truth. Given that Me-ti's original work was an attempt to found rules of behaviour on socio-political considerations, Jameson foregrounds the question of individual ethical behaviour in the context of collectives. The theme of choice is recurrent. Jameson shows how Brecht offers us a choice about modes of choice, that is to say, he reflects on the modalities of choice,

demonstrating sometimes choice as a matter of yes/no, of acceptance or refusal, and sometimes choice as the opening up of multiple possibilities, not just 'yes/no' but 'either, or, or, or . . . '. Choice, if it is to be real, must contain within its own form a choice as to what it is. The scenes also facilitate clashing temporalities of peasant, exploiter and urban poor, and they set in conflict their contra-dictions (literally, discursive differences: austere and simple peasant idiom meeting profuse, mixed-up city jargons). Such multi-layered reflection and self-reflection, reference and self-reference, comprises Brecht's method. Its vigour and its politics consist in the way that the works tear open a gap for individuals to think about themselves historically, enabling them to view themselves in the third person. They are then able to use that self-setting in history as a basis for judgement. Jameson's accenting of separation, distance, decentring, multiplicity, choice and contradiction locate Brecht's politics in a zone far removed from the conceptual rigidity or dogmas of Stalinism.

Jameson is enthusiastic about the political possibilities of pleasure, underscoring Brecht's insistence on the relationship between science, didactics and joy. He insists that Brecht is not prescriptive, but performative, his work an 'embodied logic'. His plays do not provide answers but attempt to show people how to perform the act of thinking, that is how to begin to search for answers themselves. Jameson is adamant that Brecht is a pragmatist, not a Western Marxist toying with questions of ideology and ideology-critique. His method is not philosophical system building, but enactment, not description but praxis. His modernist realism is both referential (it shows the recognisable) and auto-referential (it shows and its shows itself showing, as Brecht puts it in one of his 'theatre poems'). Through its barrage of techniques, it shows itself showing not as some aestheticist formalist quirk, but in order to be a resource, of practical pedagogical worth. Jameson indicates how, for example, in the opening scene of *Galileo* we see a teacher – Galileo – teaching, not just as a representation, a chip of content or story, but as an object lesson in how to teach (1998b, pp. 74, 90). Form and content become one. Jameson identifies other moments of self-referentiality, where a gap is torn open in the text. This is a gap torn open not just in the text as representation of the real, but also in the text as representation of itself. Brecht's own dramatic theory is put on the stage, in a complex sequence of mediations when, for example, in *The Threepenny Opera*, Peachum demonstrates to the beggar-actors how begging is all about the arousing of pity [*Einfühlung*, *Mitfühlung*]. Peachum, the boss of a begging business, has his beggars parade around as cripples, so that he may judge how effective their dissimulations will be on the people from who they hope to beg. First we see the beggars as healthy, if dirty, men and women. Then they are transformed before the audience's eyes into lame and incapacitated victims, dressed in filthy rags and carrying placards, upon which are emblazoned slogans about how they have suffered for King and Country. But Peachum tells them they have it all wrong. There

is a difference between appealing successfully to the public, on the one hand, and, on the other, frightening them away by horrifying them. Poverty and degradation should appear to go only so far. This moderation will produce the desired financial results, Peachum counsels. By displaying Peachum's methods so graphically, the audience is invited to reflect on the condition of the poor who have no Peachum. They are also invited to reflect on their relationship to the poor and under what conditions they give money. Also, in absurdist form, the activity of dressing up and disguising, refers back to the very constructed nature of theatre itself. The familiar practice of begging is exposed and turned into something strange, constructed, artificial and non-natural. The slogans on placards mirror Brecht's other slogan practices that were crucial to his 'literarisation' or 'footnoting' of the theatre. But the central point for Jameson is that here enstaged is a dramatic praxis that cancels out Brecht's own anti-empathetic dramaturgy. The very grounds of Brecht's dramatic practice are placed in question by the dramatic practice. Galileo's gourmandism is cited as such an example of self-critique. Brecht is known to have been personally ascetic and he was vociferous in his negation of 'culinary aesthetics' (Brecht, 1967, p. 97). Jameson's argument notes how time flows and Brecht too flows with the time, updating, upgrading and starting over again. Brecht's practice and theory fold in on themselves, making Brecht's a yield of sustained and extraordinary intelligence. Brecht's output engages its audiences, its figures and its author in reflection and self-reflection.

Opposing a populism rampant in Cultural and Media Studies, which claims to be inspired by the democratic gestures of Walter Benjamin's *Artwork Essay* with its privileging of reproduced and reproducible artworks and its nailing of the theatrical space as bourgeois and outmoded, Jameson sets out to defend, unfashionably, the theatrical space. This is an actual not a virtual space. It has a history of being the space in which moral and political reflection occurs. It is a space of representation, but it is a space of presence too, in which collective change undertaken in real time may occur. In as much as Brecht incorporates the audience as participants in his drama, it takes on aspects of the courtroom – also thematised by Brecht in his plays. That is to say, the theatre becomes a place of judgement. Brecht chose theatre above film, because of its openness to possibility, dialogism, change, action, response and counter-response. It is unfixed, and here is film's crucial problem, the reason why it refuses the micro-history and potentialities of the moment. Film is fixed on celluloid and always the same in each projection. But, as Walter Benjamin pointed out, Brecht borrowed from film its structuring principle, its language and its tempo. Film is always conceived as scenes, as episodes, strung together, just as in epic theatre. And yet at the same time, Jameson points out, Brecht is undogmatic in his choice of media. In techno-futurist fashion, Brecht not only represents but also uses the newest technologies, such as in his deft use of the radio-play form. This is another 'paradox' in

the Brechtian ensemble. Jameson approaches Brecht as a theorist of paradox and a paradoxical theorist. For him, such flexibility – the ability to be wheeled in all directions – is Brecht's strength, and proof of the muscularity of Brecht's method and politics. Brecht's 'paradoxicality' is evident in the poising of the parable – a narrative – against the proverb, with its artful concision. It also emerges in his dual conception of time. On the one hand, there is the time of the peasants ('the immemorial peasantry' that is seen to stand behind so much of Brecht's work and language), cyclical and slow. On the other hand, there is the time of the urban working class, presented as frantic, discontinuous and overcrammed (1998b, p. 139). Likewise, nature is bare and stripped and minimal – reduced to a few objects – whereas the city is chock-full, profuse, and if it has its natural analogy then it is that of the jungle, not bare European plains. That Brecht brings these two temporalities into play is part of his 'Maoist' predilection, the possibility of forging an alliance between peasants and workers. Brecht found the key paradox in the peasantry. But even its temporality is paradoxical and deconstructing. Peasant life is 'immemorial', in stasis, but peasant history was turbulent at that point when it comes most under threat of disappearance. So it had to be included in the drama so as to recapture and represent the note of Hope it alone might afford. Peasant history provides a redemptive moment 'a vision of change as a kind of immense window, not unlike Bakhtin's theorization of Rabelais as a brief moment of freedom between a scholastic Middle Ages and a counter-revolutionary baroque' (1998b, p. 139). It was a '"golden age" that lasted but a season'. Paradox – as dialectics – is not absent from Marxism. Brecht maintains a typically Marxist ambivalent relationship to capitalism – that system of exploitation, of needs, that produced its own gravediggers.

The sustained theme of *Brecht and Method* is an insistence that in Brecht, as in life, there are two tendencies – the endless flow, a permanent transformation *and* the breaking-up, a discontinuity, and a starting over again. Such an image repeats the image of the Fordist conveyor belt with its division of labour – an organisation of production that has its proponents and detractors in the Marxist movement. Brecht's 'solution' to what could be perceived as a movement in two directions – flow vs intervention – is to represent the ceaselessness, while at the same time, alienating it, that is to say interrupting it by denaturing it, or making it comprehensible by making it incomprehensible, strange.

Brecht's dramatics straddles both the valuing of flux and ceaseless change and also epic theatre's idea of breaking-up the flow, of interruption, slicing the narrative into scenes and the scenes into *Gestus*. The insistence on a kind of inevitable transformation, the flow of time, meets the demand for analysis. Analysis means to 'break up'. History, the passing of all things, and agency, the decisive moment of force, are preserved in Brecht's method. If the two aspects are brought together, revolution is a prospect. In splintering

representations – by analysis – the possibility of worldly reconstitution under new laws springs up.

Revolutionary thoughts on possibility and the possible

From this point on, revolution was firmly back in Jameson's notebook. That is to say, the idea of revolution is back and revolution as idea necessitates thinking about revolutionary thought or thought in revolution, which is dialectics. Dialectics has to take up its rightful place in relation to revolutionary thought too. In a lecture on Lenin in 2001, at a conference called 'Is There Politics of Truth After Lenin?'/Gibt Es Eine Politik der Wahrheit Nach Lenin?', organised by Slavoj Žižek, Jameson laid out the necessity of an economically based revolutionary Marxism. He observed that in Marxism there are two modes: economic analysis, and the political or class struggle. Economics is concerned with processes, politics with the eventual. These two modes have different vocabularies. Lenin apparently skewed the course of twentieth-century Marxism by setting too much emphasis on 'the political', the event, the moment. Lenin always thinks politically. Jameson worries that 'thinking politically' is not compatible with philosophical thought. It is too pragamatic, moment-oriented, and not able to abstract, reflect or step back. Lenin's dominant code is one of class struggle, not economics. Economic analysis implies a theoretical rather than a practical stance. This is not, apparently, Lenin's stance, for he is seen as a figure of 'practice', action, politics, and not reflection, contemplation, theory. At least, that is how he was taken up in subsequent years. This may have emerged from a selective emphasis on Lenin's writings – *State and Revolution* – rather than the *Philosophical Notebooks*, for example. It was underlined by the anti-Hegelianism (which Jameson locates as a post-war anti-Germanism) on the part of the French Left, who became so dominant theoretically across the rest of Europe and the USA in the period after the Second World War and, with renewed vigour, after 1968's events. Subsequent Marxists were sanctioned to forget the economic, the base, questions of the (interconnected and contradictory) totality, and instead concentrated excessively on institutions, such as the state (as in the work of Nicos Poulantzas). Althusser had certainly overemphasised the role of institutions, and he had purged Hegel from the scope of Marxism, by insisting on Marx's 'epistemological break' with Hegelian methodology and its attendant dialectics. Poststructuralist thought then waged a war against Hegel, wrongly painting Hegel as a static and totalising thinker, as a synthesiser who has no room for a politics of difference. But any reading of Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* shows that Lenin, at least, understood the splitting, the multiplicity inherent in Hegel's 'system', even if this was not conveyed to subsequent Leninists. Jameson's demand to mix Hegel into revolutionary thought is borne out by a reading of Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*. A study of this philosophical commentary on Hegel's *Greater Logic*, from 1915, shows

that Lenin's practical activism was impossible without such philosophical engagement. This work was arguably the indispensable philosophical study that made the revolutionary-pragmatic proposals of his 'April Theses' thinkable. Commenting on Hegel, Lenin observes thought's pressing of a discontinuity onto the flow of actuality. Thought always interrupts continuity, deadens. Lenin criticizes the frozen concepts of mechanical thought, the postponement of movement in order to make thought thinkable (see Lenin, 1972, pp. 259–69). The dialectical method aims to bring about understanding that can transcend the deadening effects of conceptual categorisation. It aims – via method – to bring life back into movement, or movement back into life, through recognition of the 'unity, or identity of opposites'. Dialectics takes the discontinuity of conceptual thought up into itself, in its effort to transcend. Dialectics tries to remap a world that is there and is in movement.

Jameson asserts the need to reintegrate Hegel into the study of Lenin – for the dialectical method, expunged by structuralism and its aftermath, is still in becoming, yet to be invented. If this Hegel-reading Lenin is found again, then out of him some sort of Brechtian Lenin can be conjured forth. What it makes possible is a de-emphasis of the role of institutions and a re-emphasis on the interconnected and contradictory totality. From this perspective, revolution comes to be re-perceived, not as single event but as permanent process. Through Hegel, Lenin found his way back to Marx's *Capital* and its methodology, its originary undergirding, before the idealist content was shaken out and replaced by materialist substance. The materialist replacement of the ideal succession of moments of consciousness is essential too, for thereby Marx theorises a totality, in which economics, the base, is determinant (in the same way that sexuality is determining for Freud). Such causality has been contested, by postmodernist doxa, and yet, asserts Jameson, that most controversial of Marxist claims – that the economy is causal, basic and determining – now seems innocuous to the ruling class. In a globalised post-monetarist age, everything appears obtrusively economic, and the economy is the reason for everything, the much-heralded rationale of all policy or lack of policy. Economic determinism is the least of Jameson's worries, but it must be seen only as the crucible within which analysis takes place, rather than the excuse for evolutionism and the passive acceptance of the working out of necessary laws. Accompanying the recognition of economic sourcing must be a philosophical, dialectical method that posits all the things that Brecht proposed for the theatrical space: the possibility of change, the historicality of all concepts, the flexibility of thought and the flows between thought and practical engagement and so on. Revolution must take its place here as a philosophical concept that acts on the economic context. (Revolution is the 'dialectical' third term that Jameson introduces in order to find a perspective from which questions of the political and questions of the economical are indistinguishable.) Revolution is in its very substance

possibility, that is, it is shaped as moments of potentiality (which in a Hegelian sense is already a moment of the actual: '. . . Actuality is first of all **Possibility** . . . ' [§143, *Smaller Logic*, 1830]). But, at the same time, Jameson views the enunciation of revolution as itself a possibility – that is to say, it itself has to be mapped back onto the schema of futures. Revolution is possibility; and revolution is possible. The first statement – revolution is possibility – must be said to seal off revolution from determinism, dogma, Stalinist and Social Democratic visions of progress assured though a passive but ever more productive workforce. The second statement – revolution is possible – swims against the current, and is the minimal performative utterance that must be voiced as insurance for the future. To assert the possibility of revolution is not a resurrection of a past, seemingly outmoded concept, a resurrection of the dead – such as would be achieved by bringing Lenin back from a grave whose lid has been firmly nailed down by postmodernism. Rather it is a disavowal. Jameson structures his argument around a dream that Trotsky had on the night of 25/26 June 1935. Trotsky dreamt that he was with Lenin on board a ship. Trotsky is recovering from illness. Lenin asks him:

> Last night, or rather early this morning, I dreamed I had a conversation with Lenin. Judging by the surroundings, it was on a ship, on the third class deck. Lenin was lying in a bunk; I was standing or sitting near him, I am not sure which. He was questioning me anxiously about my illness. 'You seem to have accumulated nervous fatigue, you must rest . . . ' I answered that I had always recovered from fatigue quickly, thanks to my native *Schwanzkraft*, but that this time the trouble seemed to lie in some deeper processes . . . 'Then you should *seriously* (he emphasized the word) consult the doctors (several names) . . . ' I answered that I had already had many consultations and began to tell him about my trip to Berlin; but looking at Lenin I recalled that he was dead. I immediately tried to drive away this thought, so as to finish the conversation. When I had finished telling him about my therapeutic trip to Berlin in 1926, I wanted to add, 'This was after your death'; but I checked myself and said, 'After you fell ill . . . ' (Trotsky, 1958, pp. 130–1)

For Jameson, the dream appears to be about the 'degeneration' of the workers' state – embodied in the form of Lenin, and perhaps Trotsky too – and this was indeed the question that vexed Trotsky: At what point is the revolution dead? At what point is it, and all that it promises, no longer actual or even possible. When would it need to be done again? The dream appears to be about the specific disastrous fate of his workers' state under Stalin. Jameson's reading of the dream donates a more general application. It is a type of wish-fulfilment, a making right that is the very ground of possibility for revolution. Lenin does not know that he is dead. As long as he does not

know, then that 'the end of communism' has taken place, it remains a process, a project that can be continued. Jameson asserts that we have to believe that Lenin is alive, which means to assert that revolution is still alive as possibility, just at that moment when it has become a stumbling block or scandal. Dialectically, there is continuity and there is movement.

And so, too, Lenin can be written back into a history of Marxism of the twentieth century, thereby denying the Western Marxist aura that has subsumed philosophical Marxist currents in the post-war. Lukács provides a testing ground here. The rediscovery of Georg Lukács' 'Chovstismus und Dialektik' (*A Defence of History and Class Consciousness; Tailism and the Dialectic*) in the Soviet archives in the late 1990s is championed by Jameson as evidence that Lukács was a Leninist, not only after 1925 when he wrote his study *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought*, but also already in those years immediately after the Hungarian revolution when he drafted *History and Class Consciousness*. This is significant because *History and Class Consciousness* was a book that became known as the ur-text of Western Marxism. Lukács is rediscovered for Jameson too as a post-philosophical theorist of the totality, rather than a Western Marxist. In 'Postmodernism . . .' Lukács is present particularly as theorist of the 'historical novel', which is understood by him as an appropriate mode of articulation of the worldview and dynamic of a rising bourgeois class. Jameson took from this the insight that particular epochs and class formations generate apt forms of representation, that is to say, that 'class-ideological analysis' or the 'analysis of the constructive links between thought and a class or group *standpoint*' is possible (1991a, p. 323). Now more was needed than analysis or 'theory', that travesty of thinking that dresses up all work in the humanities these days. In his review of the little book that re-Leninises early Lukács, Jameson comments:

> whatever the historical destiny and fate of Leninism, it can be confidently asserted that it relegated to the past and to obsolescence the whole bourgeois tradition of political philosophy, whose revival today is little more than pastiche, unless it is simply a joke. (2001a, p. 36)

Lenin discovered the uses of philosophy *for* politics during the murderous years of the First World War. Jameson's concept of postmodernism of the 1980s emerged from the static of the 1980s, but this apparent stasis was set in turmoil by the years of perma-warfare that dawned after 1989 (Panama, Haiti and Somalia, Iraq, Serbia, Kosovo, Afghanistan). It was only apparent. Eric Hobsbawm, in an article on war in the twentieth century and beyond, has observed that the twentieth century was a century of war and there has been no point at which the world has been fully at peace since 1914. Hobsbawm also notes the increasing percentage of civilian impact of war – through refugee displacement or death and injury across the century and into our own day. He notes a general blurring of boundaries between states of

war and not war, civilian and combatant, interstate conflicts and conflicts within states (2002). But since 1989 those wars and campaigns are led and won by the country in which Jameson resides, the USA, and are more present in the consciousness of Americans and Europeans, that is to say more present in the powerful centres of intellectual and academic life, less able to be ignored or written off as distant disturbances. War's insistent appearance may be why the political philosopher of revolution is reanimated. Any smiling assumptions about liberation through technology or a future without conflict have been trashed, and the only future certainty is violence, terror and crisis. Marxist-Leninism, according to Jameson, is not the assertion of economic necessity – that is the dogma of the rulers, including the oil and business seeking warmongers. Marxist-Leninism becomes the theory of possibility (living differently) rather than necessity, and yet it is the only true necessity, in the Marxist sense that genuine possibility and necessity are so interconnected. As Jameson noted at the conference on Lenin – today, in the world system, everything is linked and it is impossible to change anything without changing everything.

12
Dekalog as *Decameron*

Fredric Jameson

It is always wise, when confronted with a mass frenzy of interpretation, to sober up on purely formal problems. I will therefore approach Kieślowski's philosophical enigmas by way of a little structural analysis, of the now old-fashioned kind. Actually, it is to the Russian Formalist tradition that we owe what is perhaps the most dazzling narrative analysis in the canon[1]. To begin with that would constitute an acknowledgment of the peculiar kinship of the episodes of the *Dekalog* with the short story as a form, radically different as they are in temporality and in plot resolution with the standard-length feature film, about which one does not want to decide whether its kinship lies with the novel or not, but which at least arouses very different generic expectations, that any perceived kinship with short-story form tends to frustrate (just as it is frustrated in another way by theatricality and the limitations of the filmed play).

'The Hawk' is the shortest story in Boccaccio's *Decameron*: it tells the story of a poor young nobleman, whose only possession is a hawk as legendary throughout the region as is his own skill in maneuvering it. Pining away for love of a neighboring heiress, he invites her to his modest dwelling. She accepts, because her dying son has become facinated by the hawk and the expertise of its owner. But having no money to buy food, he has had to serve her the hawk for lunch.

It is one of the most fascinating stories in the archive, and not least because it is about fascination as such. If it seems to promise to reveal the very secret of the short story itself, this is probably accounted for by the fact that the central experience of the short story, namely chance – Goethe's *unerhörte Begebenheit*, or unexpected event – is here for once internalized within the narrative as such, and motivated. Chance here suddenly becomes revealed as what people themselves do as part of their destiny.

So this is the Formalist insight: 'The Hawk' is a paradigm of the short-story genre in that it offers two distinct plot lines or centers: the hawk and the love-passion. But these are like the empty shells of the shell game: we think the telltale pebble is under the one, it is in reality under the other. The hawk

unexpectedly passes from its plot line, over into the other one where it becomes a dinner fowl. And this abrupt displacement unites the two plot lines, but against all probability: their sudden unification is the paradigmatic event of this genre and after it happens, nothing more remains to be said.

Of course a great deal might still remain to be said in the way of interpretation: Is not the lover himself, all skin and bones and eternally fasting from love, indeed, devoured by it, is he not himself the bony carcass he serves up in honor of the noble lady? Or we could talk about thirdness, and the way in which the hawk makes a third in the process of producing a couple, and emblematizes the inevitable foreign body (the dying son) that intervenes to prevent any face-to-face immediacy, any absolute transparency of communications. Or we could relate the consumption of the hawk to the consumption of the tale itself, as though the author pined for his reader and found nothing better to give. We could talk about class dynamics, or we could talk about tragedy or fate. That is the flesh and feathers of the hawk, or as it were its vital uses and actions; the bare bones I take to be established in this classical structural analysis of the two narrative lines or series and the prestidigitation of their mutual substitution for one another.

It is this structure which we find again in the first episode of the *Dekalog*, where we confront two alternating lines, that of religion and that of science. At the center of this episode stands a computer, whose status has always surprised and fascinated me, in its strange formal isolation as some postmodern technological artifact, in the midst of a still essentially modern or even 19th century life-world. (In hindsight, we may recall that diagnosis of the Soviet collapse that highlighted the failure to computerize the economic system.) At any rate, mysterious green lights and enigmatic unprogrammed signals underscore the duality of this technological object, which in its Polish setting emits strange and isolated messages from out of the silence of an otherwise old-fashioned and seemingly familiar bourgeois context. The computer here speaks with a strangely silent yet urgent piercing voice, much as God is supposed to have spoken in another context out of the burning bush. The computer is the voice of science, absolute, like Lacan's *sujet supposé savoir*; no wonder the father imagines it to be God. And as for the other line, the boy's vague religious and metaphysical questionings, one has to suppose that they simply reflect standard primal mysteries and sexual confusion, particularly in the situation of parental separation. The boy is then the swap or substitution between these two lines, which officially identify themselves as science and religion.

I must say that, although, like everything in the *Dekalog*, every moment here is mesmerizing, this is for me a bad beginning. I do not like the religiosity, although I am willing to agree that it is far worse in the later work. But I very strongly object to the author's decision here to kill the boy; and this is certainly the author's doing, and not God's.[2] Lionel Abel floated the weirdest theory, many years ago, that when a character is caused to die in a fictional

narrative, the author ought to be made to assume responsibility for his death, for it is the author who is guilty of the murder. As far as God is concerned, one need only quote Sartre or Camus (I do not remember which), who said that God was the first murderer because he invented death in the first place. Yet on some more restricted level, I think we have all had the feeling, faced with certain kinds of plots in which things could go either way, that there was something intolerably arbitrary about the decision to have a tragic ending, for example (or a good one either). There are some plots – the good ones, perhaps? – in which the ending has some real inevitability about it, and by this I do not necessarily only mean death (happy endings can also be inevitable, as in Jane Austen[3]). Thus, in retrospect, it was clearly inevitable that Boccaccio's protagonist kill his hawk. But for Kieślowski or Piesiewicz to kill off the little boy seems somehow unforgivable; although I am willing to entertain the possibility that my very indignation is the aesthetic effect desired here: the substitution of some properly aesthetic transgression for religious ones that are no longer operative.

At any rate, my thesis lies elsewhere and is more formal, namely that Kieślowski is essentially a short-story writer; where his films, which constantly, as we shall see, push the limits of that form, manage to transcend those limits altogether, they are, for me at least, much less interesting (and also far more "philosophical"). Thus my canon would include his wonderful early work *Personnel* (1975), any number of documentaries (in particular *Curriculum Vitae*, from the same year); the official first "fiction film" *Amator* (mistranslated as *Camera Buff*, 1979), and *White*, the only Polish sequence in the so-called color trilogy and in my opinion the best of the three. But here the color motif does not function as a metaphysical clue or an incitement to interpretation. Rather, it becomes a color term, which, like a pun, or Saussure's paragrams (or indeed Raymond Roussel's "method") gathers up the various substitutable plot lines into a single portmanteau word: mariage blanc (unconsummated marriage), nuit blanche (sleepless night), the blank of a blank cartridge, and so forth.

The other color films all express the perplexity of the Polish director in the new situation of Europe, or in other words after the end of communism, the Cold War and "dissidence" itself. *The Double Life of Veronique* is paradigmatic of these works and their fundamental form-problem, in the way in which it gives us two versions – East and West – of everything, following a principle of narrative variation we have yet to examine.

As for *Camera Buff* – the hawk that hangs across its opening shot is almost too coincidental for my purposes here – it is not easy for the foreigner to decode the encrypted messages which make up the relationship of such works to the ever changing day-by-day situation in which Poles then lived and which would need no explanation for the Polish public, while remaining opaque to non-participants. But in one sense this is the very theme of *Camera Buff* itself: a politics in which what looks like evil, that is to say, bureaucratic

abuses, corruption, and inefficiency, is in reality good and a positive community program. My understanding is that it was precisely in this way – at least in the period in question – that Polish communism and the party functioned: paying lip service to Soviet models while pursuing its own agenda behind the scenes – in this case, as the director of the plant explains, neglecting to fulfill a quota which would in fact have resulted in the unemployment of several hundred workers. In this kind of reversal (which is of course formally the short-story narrative mechanism I have already referred to), the director, who has come before us as the very essence of the bureaucrat and (what is worse for intellectuals) the censor, is suddenly unmasked as the agent of collective wisdom and the good of the community. It is a reversal familiar in the West in what I am tempted to call the Anglo-Catholic model of the spy story, as in Graham Greene, where the wicked stasi agent turns out to epitomize the good, while the naïve, well-intentioned Westerner (generally an American and a protestant) turns out to bring nothing but evil and destruction with him. But in these Western works, the emphasis is on ethics and the ethical binary as such – the way good turns into evil and vice versa – and the ethical abstraction finds itself grounded, not in the sociopolitical but in religion. They offer as it were a reverse image of the concrete Second-World raw material, and may be said to bear the traces of Second-World influence (nothing of the sort is detectable in the older Nazi-based spy stories, for example).

I want to posit a specific Second World form here, something one might call the dialectics of the Comintern, and which one finds in the West at certain moments of Sartre's work and belatedly, but full-blown, in Peter Weiss' *Aesthetik des Widerstands*. This dialectic draws its paradoxes from the incommensurability of the collective and the individual, the politics of the party and the personal intentions of its members or opponents. In Poland it seems to me very centrally developed, with great originality, in that filmmaker deliberately placed at the center of Kieślowski's *Camera Buff*, I mean Krzysztof Zanussi, whose subtly ambiguous conversations rehearse paradoxes which perhaps have their equivalent in the West, but only for the realm of love and pure subjectivity, in the films of Eric Roehmer. But this is only a passing phase of Kieślowski's own work, which clearly enough evolves with the Polish 1980s, even though it continues to remain ambiguous in this good and formal sense.

Kieślowski himself foregrounds what he thinks of as his central theme in the title of his second film, *Przypadek*, which does not mean blind chance but simply chance as such. For is not chance always blind, and what would non-blind chance mean? These are the kinds of stupid questions we do not want to find ourselves entangled in; particularly since they lead us away from the essential formal meaning of this theme. You will remember that the film offers three versions of a life: the first as a party member, the second as a dissident and a Catholic, the third as someone who avoids

either commitment, but in an honorable way. The theme of chance is supposed to be linked to the protagonist's catching or missing the Warsaw train (and if you like, to the completely gratuitous ending to which you are welcome to apply all the things I said about the arbitrary ending of the first episode of the *Dekalog*).

I call chance a theme here rather than a concept: this does not strike me as a philosophical film (whatever that might be, but perhaps Zanussi qualifies); and I also tend to feel that philosophically the very notion of chance is bound up with its opposite, namely providence, and that you cannot really have the one without the other. Is chance then related to contingency as such – for example the rabbit falling out of the sky in the *Dekalog*, or the car-wash rags similarly falling out of nowhere in the episode about murder? But maybe contingency (certainly a medieval concept) also has to be staged against a background of meaning; and I have always found it very interesting, in connection with the existential sense of contingency, that Sartre relates the concept to his early movie-going experiences as a child. Everything in films was meaningful (even when the filmmaker tried to introduce something contingent); and therefore, Sartre says, when you came out of the theater you were all the more intensely aware of the fundamental non-meaningfulness of the real street and the real world.[4]

Be that as it may I want to argue that chance here has a functional role as the operator of variation. Chance is the formal peg upon which the variant outcomes, the variant lives, the three variant tales, are strung: chance converts the limitless and formless area of sheer possibility into the structurally constrained and delimited number of variations; it gives form and number to possibility, carrying it even beyond sheer potentiality into a precise combination scheme. And this is where our generic topic of the short-story form returns: for without the structural variation achieved through chance, each life is simply a set of unrepeatable empirical facts. Indeed, there is no life or destiny any more but simply experience, of whatever kind – personal, political, historical, professional. Without variation we are simply in the world of being. The mechanism of chance now allows us to transform that incomparable realm of experience into so many alternative short stories or *récits*. But these are stories that are as it were produced laterally, in place of each other, synchronically; rather than one after the other. It is as if the short-story form suddenly developed some new structural dimension: a machine, a combination apparatus, that not only produced narrative differences, but differentiation within narrative identity. It is difficult to work this out theoretically, but what I want to show is simply that with the theme of chance and its effects of variation we can also touch the matter of the short story, but from a rather different formal angle.

In fact, in *Blind Chance* Kieślowski does not want to give us a novel, the ontology of a life or a situation; he wants to offer us an anthology of tales.

The gimmick is very specialized, to be sure; and like related ones, whether adorned with hyperintellectual structuralist theoretical slogans or simply taken as an "experiment", it would not seem very promising. Indeed, the next film, *Bez konca* (*Without End* rather than *No End*), fails in its effort to produce variations by way of a ghost; which should also have given us three possibilities: (1) what the tale would have been like had the protagonist lived; (2) what it was like after his death; and (3) what it was also like when he was neither dead nor alive but always present as a ghost. The variations are then – in anticipation of the *Dekalog* – organized around a trial: which is naturally enough the form most suitable to structurally precise and delimited alternate outcomes. There is certainly some wonderful acting here, but it is good that Aleksander Bardini gets the chance to return in force in the *Dekalog*. Yet the film's incoherence heralds that of *Blue* and *Red* later on; and you can probably already guess what I think of the ending. But now let us try to confront the *Dekalog* itself, which is surely Kieślowski's true masterpiece, and something without equivalent anywhere in world film. Is there any way to deal with it without simply taking up one episode after another?

Well, he himself does, in a whole variety of ways. I had originally thought of making a comparison between this short-story collection (as it were) and Altman's *Short Cuts* of 1993, based on a number of stories by Raymond Carver. But the principles are completely different: Altman's work has often been Dickensian in the formal sense I alluded to earlier, in which crosscutting between various narratives produces an entanglement of plots (in Dickens also motivated by serialization); the short stories lose their autonomy as separate episodes and become a kind of totality which moves forward toward some final complex interrelationship (in the case of *Short Cuts*, the earthquake, but many other things as well). This marks the tying together of all these narrative lines and is a very specific aesthetic effect, which we have on the basis of themes or motifs in Joyce's *Ulysses*, where virtually everything reappears in the Nighttown sequence. The same is true in Fassbinder's *Alexanderplatz*, with its long and nightmarish recapitulation; and oddly enough it also happens at the end of the trilogy, in *Red*, where any number of individual destinies shoulder each other and come to their ends in the sinking of the ferry boat.

But this is not at all the organizing principle of the *Dekalog*; and although for many of us the final stamp-collecting sequence may be the most glorious and comic moment of the whole series, it certainly does not tie anything together. Perhaps indeed the motif of the stamp collection may serve as a veiled comment on precisely this lack of closure: the individual stories are collected together like so many precious stamps, of varying value; but then the entire collection vanishes without totalization or conclusion. When you are robbed, indeed, there is always that strange feeling that something more ought to happen; the lost object's destiny ought at least to come to your

knowledge, the story ought at least to be concluded. But nothing is there, even the lack or absence is somehow missing, and you wander about, confused and somehow incomplete; the event of the robbery has itself somehow been confiscated.

Still, there are some other principles of organization that ought to be mentioned. The Man in the Macintosh, for example: this is the meaningless designation for an enigmatic figure whose appearance throughout *Ulysses* is noted but never clarified. Is it the author, or some mysterious angel; a political gunman; the reader; an English spy? We never know, and no one has ever identified this character; so that we are obliged to fall back on a purely formal description, namely, that the Man in the Macintosh is the very allegorical personification of interrelationship and repetition itself, the anthropomorphization of the urban totality. In Kieślowski, an analogous figure appears warming himself at a fire by the frozen lake, carrying something through the woods, riding a bicycle. The important interpretive question is then whether this figure marks the presence of destiny (which as we have seen is the same as chance) or whether, as I have been suggesting, he marks the interrelationship of all these destinies, a very different matter indeed and a formal one rather than a metaphysical signal. But what I am calling formal here, and what I clearly prefer as a reading, is itself the reflex of the social as such: in this sense, this particular genius loci can be thought to be the dialectical counterpart of the apartment complex, which itself stands for the city and ultimately for urban society as such.

I think that what in Balzac is called "*le retour des personnages*" is a little different from this: to glimpse in one episode a character from another one is a kind of supplementary bonus of pleasure, as Freud liked to call secondary elaboration. It reminds us that all these episodes belong together, something less imperative in the *Dekalog* than in the color trilogy, where the brief incursion into the French courtroom (in the middle of a speech in Polish) comes as a shock which at the same time reassures us about the deeper interrelationship between the three episodes (which will only be definitively confirmed at the end of *Red*, with the tragic fait divers I have already mentioned). But these are, as it were, reassurances about the author's intentions and his trustworthiness: so he does mean them to be interrelated after all, we think. And otherwise they can simply count as chance: but a chance that means nothing, that marks another narrative no doubt; but that mainly contributes to the surface appearance of the whole, namely the impression and the illusion that it is about chance in the first place.

I want rather to underscore a different organizational principle, one also based on lies as it were, or if you prefer on illusion; but an illusion of an altogether different type. This is the very frame itself, which encourages us to think that these ten episodes are somehow to be thought through in terms of the Ten Commandments, that is, somehow as modern versions of the Biblical injunctions – whereas as everyone ends up admitting, the

connections are for the most part tenuous indeed and the search for parallels a truly frustrating and unrewarding task. Even Joyce's *Odyssey* parallels are more satisfying and fully executed than this; yet even this comparison may be misleading to the degree that in *Ulysses* two narrative lines can be set in juxtaposition with each other, whereas here we have the formal disjunction of a narrative on the one hand and a law on the other.

What can the relationship between two such different forms of discourse possibly be in the first place? It is clearly a different one from, say, the way in which a maxim (like those of La Rochefoucauld) is somehow illustrated (or disproved) by a story; or the way a story proves to have a moral, as in a fable or a parable. This is then the moment to mention a neglected work I consider to be one of the great books of modern literary theory, namely André Jolles' *Simple Forms*, which first appeared in 1929 and to this day has still not been translated into English. Jolles' premise is that there exist a certain number of simple or primitive speech genres – he analyzes nine of them – which serve as something like the kernel or core of more complex and artificial literary genres. They are as it were the most fundamental gestures of language itself, and like Heidegger's etymologies vouchsafe a glimpse into older and simpler forms of life (thereby sounding an ambiguously primitivist note in the nationalist context in which both theories appeared). His first forms seem already fairly elaborated: legend, saga, and myth; but then we find riddles, proverbs, fait divers, and jokes (or witticisms; as in Freud it is difficult to distinguish the two in German), alongside the equally elaborated fairy tale. But it is the ninth form that interests us here, besides being relatively original and unusual in this double sequence: this is what Jolles calls the *Casus*, and is as he himself admits a hitherto relatively uncodified form, to which we are normally accustomed only in the specialized context of the law. Indeed, the trial, if it is to be thought of as a more elaborated literary form, may be thought to have as its simple form, or its primitive kernel, very precisely the *casus* as that mode in which we compare an anecdotal narrative with an equally reduced and simplified legal injunction. Nor is it merely a question of weighing evidence or deducing motivation: there is some first question of universals and particulars to be resolved, namely, whether the act falls under the purview of the law in question, and even whether the law in question has any validity in the first place. I quote Jolles:

> In the casus itself the form derives from a standard for the evaluations of various types of conduct, but in its fulfillment there is also immanent a question as to the value of the norm in question. The existence, validity and extension of various norms is to be weighed, but this very appraisal itself includes the question: according to what measurement or what norm is the evaluation to be performed?[5]

As in the fable, two types of discourse are juxtaposed; but in the more familiar form we attempt to subsume the one under the other, whereas here the two radically different types of discourse interrogate each other and call each other into question. I want to see the presence of the legal in Kieślowski – the court cases, the judgments in *Red*, and so forth – not as some primacy of moral or legal judgment, but rather the other way around, as projections of this more fundamental speech form which is the *casus* itself, where what we call judgment is the interrelationship of two types of discourse, each of which remains to be determined: is there an event or a fact, an act; and is there a law?

Still, this line of approach would seem to lead us back to the standard interpretation of the *Dekalog* in terms of the Ten Commandments. I mean it to do something rather different, for which the comparison with Joyce and the *Odyssey* parallel remains fruitful in a different way. I want to argue that these parallels have no content, but simply designate closure and uniformity. Homer lends Joyce a specific number of episodes, after which his book can be considered as finished and closed: it is this famous principle, about which so much that is sensible and so much that is idiotic has already been said, namely, that the form that resists and allows a genuine free play of invention within and against itself, a freedom that would not have been possible if everything was permitted in the first place.

Here, in the *Dekalog*, I think we can be more precise than that: the fact that these are all commandments means that they are considered to be all alike, and of the same form: they thereby solicit a reading which is programmed in advance – the specific form of attention and interrogation determined by the *casus* – and at one and the same time a constant comparison back and forth between episodes considered to be more or less "the same" in their general form and the type of meaning they are supposed to carry. Meanwhile the traditional cultural and scriptural fact of "ten" commandments gives us closure, and assigns a term and a limit to Kieślowski's work. It does not have to be indeterminate, let alone infinite, ten is enough, the task is completed, and so forth: but this limit is more powerful than Boccaccio's conventional numbers, since it is also doubled by history.

It is this double structure – closure and formal replication – which gives the *Dekalog* its fascination and launches a rich and inexhaustible interpretive process: for however finite the interpretation of any given episode may be, it always ends up in an activity of comparison which can virtually by definition never know a limit (and at the same time never arrive at any fully satisfying solutions either, which is another way of saying the same thing).

Let us try it anyhow; and begin with the obvious. This is a film or a series about daily life, but about daily life of a very special sort. I am tempted to say (however anachronistically) that this is a middle-class daily life led by professional or managerial people. The two taxi-drivers are the exception; but, as mobile as the camera itself, they do not tend to give us any sense of

working-class life either. Moreover, seen from the standpoint of the various apartments in the complex, and despite the yuppie overtones of skiing and mountain-climbing and the like, this seems a rather old, stable, and a genuinely traditional kind of middle-class life. But we are, after all, in a preeminently political country, and in a period in which convulsive political struggles are taking place and will continue. None of that enters the series; the only political note is the ancient politics of resistance to the German occupation in episode 8. Not a trace of socialism and its problems here, but also not a sign of the heroic stereotype of the dissident, as it was galvanizing an anti-communist Europe during this same period. I believe that all this has been excluded symbolically by the first episode, about which I have already said something. Here we have two disembodied forces pitted against each other starkly: science and religion. Surely these are the ideological forces appealed to on the one hand by Marxism and on the other by the anti-party movements. These two forces turn into each other in effect and each deconstructs the other if you will, both are eliminated in the process. This inaugural act of the series thus removes politics altogether, in either of its forms: no heroism of protest, no dialectic of the party. What is thereby opened up is an appearance of bourgeois life and its temporality; but only an appearance: for this Utopia is in reality that of socialism itself, it is a Second World Utopia, which has here found expression thanks to the bracketing of the political as such. It is the Utopian daily life of the future returning to us in the guise of Eastern European middle-class life in the past. I will briefly quote a remark of Slavoj Žižek about this phenomenon (from an essay which deserves to be examined and quoted at much greater length).

> What we are dealing with here is the old structural notion of the gap between the space and the positive content that fills it in: although, as to their positive content, the communist regimes were mostly a dismal failure, generating terror and misery, they at the same time opened up a certain space, a space of Utopian expectation which, among other things, enabled us to measure the failure of really existing socialism itself.[6]

Kieślowski in the *Dekalog* manages to project the latent Utopian content of bourgeois life itself. It is as though an essentially 19th-century cultural tradition and mode of life had been lifted out of its own historical infrastructure into a different one, characterized above all by the silence of the commodity form. No doubt, the *Dekalog* gives us glimpses of the arrival of the new image culture, the new commodification; but its interiors strangely express a kind of repressed Utopian content of 19th-century bourgeois life which surfaces in actually existing socialism (as a ghostly parallel to Lukács' recommendation of the incorporation of "great bourgeois or

critical realism") in some last moment before being eradicated in the East and West alike, and swept away by globalization and postmodernity, by late capitalism as such.

Perhaps this fleeting Utopian glimpse has something to do with what Deleuze calls virtuality; if so, then we must grasp the latter's operations in a very peculiar space indeed. In fact, I tend to agree with those who have concluded in some exasperation that the *Dekalog* has little enough to do with the original ten commandments but very much to do with the matter of lying[7] (not particularly mentioned in them, as I recall). On the other hand, Lacan thought the Biblical injunctions all had to do with the emergence of the Symbolic Order, or in other words language itself, where lying and the very possibility of lying plays a primordial role. Eco also observed that speaking is not the precondition of lying as rather the other way round: you cannot speak unless you can lie. At any rate, in the *Dekalog* it is precisely lying that enables a kind of Deleuzian virtuality. Lying produces multiple narratives, the possibility of narrative variations and the coexistence of fictive or imaginary alternative story lines.

Thus at once the second episode presents us with a wonderful *casus* problem and a dramatic if pseudo-Solomonic judgment: the heroine will have her lover's child if her husband's illness is considered fatal; and have an abortion if he is likely to live. The doctor's lie combines the narratives into a new one, which is unexpectedly successful. The salvational motif proves that you can and must play God; and that lying is a rich force of invention and of creativity. And perhaps this power of the lie sheds retrospective light on *Camera Buff*, where the will to tell the truth is destructive in a more than Nietzschean sense. But now I find myself wondering whether I have not painted myself into a corner I would rather not be in: for one of the motives of praise with which I wanted to conclude here was that, at least in the *Dekalog* we are spared the usual postmodern glorification of art and aesthetics (normally accompanied by this or that religious motif) which tends to mask the absence of concrete content of the worst kinds of contemporary artistic production (and which can of course also be found ad nauseam in Kieślowski's final trilogy). But it will be objected, is not the motif of lying itself a kind of celebration of art in the form of fictionality? And does it not precisely emerge in what you have called a Utopian space opened up by the exclusion of that concrete social content we call politics?

This is at least certainly true enough for the next two episodes, in which narrative multiplicity is achieved by the coexistence with a dream life, with a fictive existence either told to oneself (as with the incest-prone father and daughter of number 4) or the mythomaniac temptations of the taxi driver's old flame in episode 3. These episodes tend to tilt powerfully toward the purely subjective and its seemingly shapeless fungibility, held only in check and given precise definition by the requirement that it offer a narrative alternative and not merely a vague daydream.

The episode of the false mother (number 7) makes this particular formal issue a good deal clearer: for the grandmother's alternate narrative (that she is the real mother and not her hapless and maternally incompetent daughter) is socially objective: that is to say, it is a public lie in which everyone else believes, and not some mere figment. As for the holocaust episode (8) and the impotence narrative (9), in these cases narrative options take the form of historical mysteries, or the reconstruction of missing causalities: the Jewish child was refused, not because the couple suddenly changed its mind and became more hard-hearted, but because of a crisis in the resistance network and the possibility of a traitor. In episode 9, the husband believes the wife has taken a lover because of his incurable impotence, whereas she had the lover beforehand, and thus, I am tempted to say, there was in reality nothing personal about this passing infidelity. That leaves us with three missing exhibits: the two central ones, important enough to be extracted and turned into feature films in their own right, on death and on love – the murder sequence and the voyeur episode; and finally the last one, the stamp collection.

In episode 5 it seems clear enough that the real narrative option at stake here is not whether the taxicab driver lives or not, nor even the struggle between capital punishment and something else, but rather the alternate life that might have been possible had the boy's little sister lived. A classic short-story-form chiasmus is then set in effect where the narrative virtuality is transferred from the victim (and also from the lawyer, the third party in all this) to the killer. It is a painful, moving, maybe even sentimental *casus*.

As for episode 6, the voyeurism episode at least has the merit of doing away with the opposition between love and sex. The boy loves his fantasy image because of the sex involved: this is a case in which pornography has the most uplifting and morally inspiring, even spiritual results. The swap here is that the victim becomes the aggressor, making the most offensive physical advances to the boy, while the latter, the pervert and aggressor, is the truly pure and innocent victim of this aggression. Meanwhile, the "rear-window" situation would seem to place this episode squarely within aesthetic reflexivity, as an exploration of the camera and of film and the latter's exhibitionistic immorality: where does that leave us as the audience of this television series?

From the dead son to the dead father: the sons indeed can stand as two very alternate narratives, into which pop or punk music intervenes with something of the old meaning of bourgeois or Western degeneracy it had in Soviet times (as Perry Anderson has observed, the lyrics invite us to break virtually every commandment on the books). The old Utopian bourgeois or Victorian traditions of the apartment building are coming to an end; the uniqueness of People's Poland is about to give way to the unknown quantities of some new market-oriented Europe. This is the point at which the discovery of the dead father's narrative is climactic. For it is not only the

discovery of a secret life; nor even of the value of objects to which you had never given a thought before.

What the sons really find is a whole other world, a secret society within this one. Unnamable, unmentionable to outsiders, ignored by the great social institutions, it is like a secret league of foot-fetishists from all over Eastern Europe, or like the child pornography rings hidden away in the Internet. This is the secret society of philatelists: it has its classes and its gradations, its officers, president, local dignitaries, and the like. It also has its traditions, its history, its heroes: the father is one of those, a dead partisan, a legendary figure even in his own lifetime. This is the older Utopian world hidden away and promised within the dissolution of the old one, the supercession of individual crises and stories by the collective. It is a joyous and salvational ending, with something of the gaiety of an Irish wake – something it was worth losing the stamp collection for.

We have tried, in this discussion, to minimize the importance of metaphysical or religious interpretations as much as possible. But in conclusion we must confront the issue of ethics as such: can it be so easily evaded as an interpretive category? And are not the various suspended endings so many Brechtian appeals to choice and to an essentially ethical form of judgment? I would prefer to follow Slavoj Žižek in interpreting the ethical in Hegel's or even in Lacan's sense; from which it would follow that the fundamental theme of these films is not ethics but rather morality: or, if you prefer, that we have here to do with the critique of morality by ethics itself (rather than the expression of an ethical position in its own right). This is in fact the very space of Kieślowski's politics as such, restricted to precisely this ethical critique and thereby marked historically by the Eastern European situation in the 1980s – the dialectic of "honesty", for example, the ambiguity of dissidence but also of communism itself, and so forth. But this particular situation comes to an end in 1989, and is therefore no longer available, either as theme or situation, for the later works, which must transform it into transnational paradoxes.

Notes

1. See Tzvetan Todorov, *Grammaire du Décameron* (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), pp. 73–75.
2. The published scenario included a naturalistic explanation for the melting of the ice; significantly, the film omits it.
3. For a more substantial development of these thoughts with respect to literature, see my essay "Esperimenti col tempo: realismo e provvidenza" in Franco Moretti, ed., *Il Romanzo* (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), volume IV, pp. 183–212.
4. Simone de Beauvoir, *La Cérémonie des adieux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), p. 181.
5. Andre Jolles, *Einfache Formen* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1982), p. 190.
6. Slavoj Žižek, "When the Party commits suicide", *New Left Review*, #237 (1999), p. 46.
7. Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire*, vol. VII (Paris: Seuil, 1986), pp. 84, 98–102.

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