

**FREDRIC JAMESON:  
BEYOND A MARXIST HERMENEUTIC?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **FREDRIC JAMESON: BEYOND A MARXIST HERMENEUTIC?**

This thesis provides a critical study of the theoretical work of the North American Marxist theoretician and critic Fredric Jameson. Jameson has been described as probably the most important cultural critic writing in English today and yet there has been no major study of his work published to date. This thesis sets out to contribute to such a study.

One reason for Jameson's relative critical neglect has been his adherence to a tradition of Marxist thought, that both within Marxism itself and theoretical discourse in general has been superseded by Structuralist and more recently Post-structuralist modes of thought. The first chapter, therefore, provides an exposition of Jameson's Hegelianism which is rather more sympathetic to Hegel and dialectical theory than the accounts one usually encounters today filtered through Structuralist and Post-structuralist readings. The following three chapters focus upon key areas of theoretical debates that have emerged over the last two decades - that is, questions of history and representation, desire and subjectivity and finally postmodernism. The concluding chapter returns to the concerns with which this study opened and once more reflects upon issues of totality, politics and style from the perspective of having worked through Jameson's own corpus of work.

My methodology is Jameson's own, that is, I historically situate Jameson's work and provide an immanent critique of his texts. This study is by necessity selective, focusing upon specific areas of Jameson's *oeuvre* that I see as theoretically important today and to which Marxism still has significant contributions to make. The question that underlies this thesis is in brief: are the specific concerns of Hegelian Marxism once more back on the theoretical agenda and can Hegelian Marxism provide answers to some of the aporias of contemporary cultural, theoretical and political discourse?

## NOTES AND ABBREVIATIONS

Quotations from Jameson's major publications are cited with the abbreviation listed below. All other quotations followed by a superior number refer to the edition cited in the Notes at the close of each chapter.

- SOS            *Sartre: Origins of a style* Second Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984)
- MF            *Marxism and Form: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971)
- PH            *The Prison House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972)
- FA            *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis The Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979)
- PU            *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981)
- LM            *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 1990)
- SV            *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1990)
- PLLC        *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991)
- GPA         *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (London: British Film Institute, 1992)

## INTRODUCTION

Fredric Jameson is probably the most important cultural critic writing in English today.<sup>1</sup>

This study originates from the belief that Colin MacCabe is right to extol the work of Fredric Jameson, whilst at the same time acknowledging the relative paucity of critical attention that body of work has attracted.<sup>2</sup> It is not the aim of this study to reflect specifically on this situation but rather to redress the balance through a critical assessment of Jameson's theoretical work. Jameson remains unashamedly an Hegelian Marxist and in the contemporary postmodern climate this is seen to present a particular difficulty with his work, that is, his concern for totality, or totalizing thought. Whilst the concept of totality itself is not the focus of any single chapter it can be seen to provide the underlying thread that runs throughout this study. Indeed, I would suggest that in emphasising the totalizing nature of Jameson's thought and its corollary, his style, both Jameson's critics and admirers tend to commit the same errors that he is all too frequently accused of; in short, of stressing identity and continuity over difference and variability. MacCabe delineates the problem well in his discussion of the difficulties one encounters with Jameson's work:

At one level this difficulty must simply be encountered - Jameson's style is an integral part of the effort to understand the world as both one and multiple, and if there is difficulty and awkwardness there is also pleasure and grace. ... He is a systematic thinker, like Sartre and Adorno, his two great masters. That is to say even the most local and specific analysis finds its place within an overarching theoretical framework. The specific analysis is always related, albeit in a dialectical fashion, to an extraordinarily sophisticated and detailed theory of culture and society. That theory, however, provides the underlying assumptions and reference - it is not present explicitly in every text. It is thus the paradoxical case that to read Jameson is always to read the entire oeuvre rather than a single particular text.<sup>3</sup>

This sense of Jameson's *oeuvreism* is also endorsed by Douglas Kellner in his introduction to the only published collection of essays devoted to Jameson's work.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand I share this view and it provides one of the organising principles of the present study; however, it is also my contention that an emphasis on Jameson's *oeuvreism* tends to play down the situational nature of Jameson's discourse. It elides the extent to which Jameson's use of terms such as "totality" and "narrative" has changed and evolved over the years, as well as the extent to which the political-theoretical context has determined the emphasis and nuance of his work. To argue such a case is not to reject the first premise but in fact to keep faith with Jameson's own historicizing project and to assert the priority of context over text.

Each of the chapters that follow will focus upon one specific area of Jameson's oeuvre, that is: form, history, desire and postmodernism.<sup>5</sup> In keeping with the totalizing principle that to engage with one part of the work is to engage with the corpus as a whole I will attempt to explicate not only Jameson's own texts but also the theoretical presuppositions and positions that lie behind many of his formulations. There is often with Jameson's work the sense that a particular text is building upon work that has been done elsewhere or developing an idea that was argued for and settled in a different context. Therefore, I have tried both to situate Jameson's texts and to lay bare many of the debates from which his work emerges.

This is a theoretical study and I do not offer a critique of Jameson's critical practice, accepting his own dictum that 'no interpretation can be effectively disqualified on its own terms by a simple enumeration of inaccuracies or omissions, or by a list of unanswered questions' (PU, 13). There are indeed plenty of critiques of Jameson which offer alternative interpretations to his and I leave these to individual readers to decide which they find most satisfactory.<sup>6</sup> The method of analysis I have adopted is also Jameson's own, which is neither to uncritically endorse nor to refuse a particular theory but rather:



working [my] way completely through it so as to emerge, to the other side, into some wholly different and theoretically more satisfying philosophical perspective. (PH, vii)

My method, then, is one of immanent critique, to take Jameson's work on its own terms and gradually work through its categories and concepts revealing their own theoretical weaknesses and inconsistencies, finally to emerge at a "politically" more satisfying perspective. Such a procedure I would contend does not invalidate Jameson's project as a whole, nor does it discredit the many insights of his critical practice, but it does provide the opportunity to reformulate certain of the problematics with which he wrestles and above all allows us to retain the problems themselves: that is to say problems of totality, of history and agency, of the relationship between cultural artefacts and their socio-historical moments, of representation and political aesthetics. These are issues that many postmodernists, following Baudrillard, are all too ready to bracket and it is one of the great strengths of Jameson's work to have kept them at the centre of his theoretical concerns. Jameson's texts therefore are marked with a political commitment that is rare in contemporary theory and also, what is either overlooked or ignored by most critics, an intellectual generosity that can genuinely tolerate difference, opposition and contradiction.<sup>7</sup>

This political and theoretical equanimity is itself very much rooted in the vicissitudes of the American Left and precisely the position of the radical intellectual in post second World War American society. Jameson's passage to Marxism was rather oblique and this personal history has had a lasting resonance on the orientation, tone and the political-theoretical emphasis of his work. Jameson's formative political experiences were during that period of the late 1950s and early 1960s that were characterised by the emergence of the "New Left". In *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left*<sup>8</sup> Paul Buhle traces the evolution of the New Left out of the complex conjunction of the new social movements of Feminism, Black consciousness, civil rights and Nuclear Disarmament. According to Buhle, the New Left marked a distinct break from the old left tradition of economic Marxism, which

focused primarily on industrial struggles and saw the state as the principal vehicle of socialist transition. The New Left, on the other hand, privileged areas of cultural politics, focusing on the universities as their primary site of struggle, as bases from which to 'start controversy across the land'.<sup>9</sup> In an essay with James Kavanagh, Jameson has himself reflected on this situation of campus Marxism. 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, Jameson and Kavanagh suggest that 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'.<sup>10</sup> The politics of culture were no longer seen by the New Left as some mere superstructural epiphenomenon but as a crucial component for the development of a 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.<sup>11</sup>

With respect to culture, however, the New Left also substantively differed from previous generations of radicals in that they were the first generation born into an era of television and an all-pervasive mass culture; unlike its forebears the New Left did not share an unreserved reverence for European High culture and the printed word. Jameson's own work is interesting in this respect in that it presents a prolonged meditation on the classics of European literature: Balzac, Flaubert, Conrad, and Joyce, for example, whilst simultaneously reappraising what are often seen as more marginal figures like George Gissing and Wyndham Lewis, and giving such popular forms as crime thrillers, Science-Fiction and Hollywood blockbuster movies equally serious attention. Recently Jameson has paid less attention to the canonical works of realism

and modernism, focusing more upon popular forms and less well known figures of Second and Third world culture.

The specific political and theoretical trajectory of the New Left, suggests Buhle, has its extrinsic, historical explanation; in the period immediately after 1965 'there was a renaissance of traditional forms of American radicalism', particularly in the areas of racial conflict, the women's movement and the free press. However, what was very obviously lacking 'were the two historical conditions ascribed as central to mass radicalism by orthodox Marxism',<sup>12</sup> that is to say, an economic crisis and working-class militancy. The absence of these two central characteristics of traditional Marxian analysis appeared to discredit the older Socialist and Marxist teleologies. The answer lay not in repeating old formulas but in constructing a new Marxism appropriate to a new situation. Above all, what distinguished this younger generation of radicals, notes Buhle, was that they 'grew up almost completely ignorant of the struggles that had passed by'.<sup>13</sup> Buhle writes:

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.<sup>14</sup>

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:

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.<sup>15</sup>

Sartre was, as Douglas Kellner has pointed out, Jameson's "original choice", that initial *gesture or unjustifiable decision which, in existential terms, inaugurates one's "project"*. The influence of Sartre can still be seen in Jameson's most recent writings, not only in the

recurrence of categories such as totalization or "praxis" but more significantly through Jameson's commitment to consciousness and the experiential. Jameson's existential-phenomenological roots exerts a strong influence on the inflection of his Marxism and what is often criticised as his residual humanism.<sup>16</sup>

Reading *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* today one is immediately struck by the complete absence of any perceptible Marxist influence, an impression enhanced by Marxism's obvious centrality to Jameson's second publication: *Marxism and Form*. Speaking of his own conversion to Marxism, Jameson observes that it was not so much a direct result of reading Sartre, but rather a case of reading through him:

I came to Marxism *through* Sartre and not against him; and not even through the later, Marx oriented works such as the *Critique*, but very precisely through the "classical" existential texts of the immediate post-war period.<sup>17</sup>

In other words Sartre's texts paved the way for Jameson's acceptance of Marxism by establishing both the theoretical background and the "problematic" with which he was to wrestle. However, this problematic or original choice that Jameson made contains within it certain dilemmas that remain unresolved in Jameson's work. Kellner notes that:

The early Sartre was received in the 1950s in the U.S. and elsewhere as a figure of the individualist radical intellectual, as the rebel against convention of all sorts.<sup>18</sup>

In adopting Sartre as a role model Jameson was signalling his own radical, nonconformist intentions; but at the same time he was adopting as his model of *intellectual engagé*, an individualistic radical who sought to redefine the role of the politically committed intellectual outside of any mass political organisation. Perry Anderson has eloquently charted the fate of Sartre's own project,<sup>19</sup> and I shall not rehearse the arguments once more here; suffice it to say that Sartre's pessimism and disillusion have been shared by many in the Western Marxist tradition and have also left their mark on Jameson's own work.<sup>20</sup> For the North American

radicals of the early 1960s the problem was how to define a position in opposition to the hegemonic discourse without a readily accessible Marxist tradition.

This dilemma is instructively inscribed within Jameson's own early work, *Sartre: The Origins of a Style*, which, as the title indicates, is concerned with the development of a particular style. Jameson, rejected the then dominant New Critical doctrine of the text as a self-enclosed unity or verbal icon, rather focusing upon the interrelationships between a text's intrinsic properties and its extrinsic determinates. The essential problem with *The Origins of a Style* was that the conceptual framework which provided Jameson with his analytical categories was none other than the those of the study itself. There was thus a certain circularity about the whole exercise. This was not simply a moment of theoretical blindness on Jameson's part but was itself constrained by history. Jameson was attempting to develop a theoretical position in opposition to the dominant strain of Anglo-American positivism and, with respect to literary theory, a still hegemonic New Criticism. The dilemma for Jameson and his contemporaries was to find a suitable conceptual framework with which to challenge these orthodoxies and in the absence of a Marxist tradition, the principal alternative model was the existential/phenomenological, the very object of Jameson's study. This political and methodological double-bind provides the particular conjunction from which Jameson's radical and critical project will emerge; it also:

points to an 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 mobilize it or offer models of radical self-identification.<sup>21</sup>

This was a situation that Jameson, amongst others, set out to rectify and has over the last few decades radically transformed.

Notes.

- 1 Colin MacCabe, 'Preface' to *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (London: British Film Institute, 1992), p. ix.
- 2 To date, and in contrast to most contemporary continental theorists, there has been no major critical study of Jameson's work.
- 3 MacCabe, 'Preface', p. ix.
- 4 Douglas Kellner, 'Jameson, Marxism, and Postmodernism', in *Postmodernism, Jameson, Critique*, ed. D. Kellner (Washington: Mouton de Gruyter Press, 1989).
- 5 The first chapter - 'The Dialectics of Form' - is predominantly expository, considering the nature of Jameson's Hegelianism and his earliest formulations of a number of a key categories: form, narrative, allegory, desire, Utopianism and history. However, I also indicate a number of problems with Jameson's work that will recur and will be considered in greater detail in the chapters that follow.
- 6 See bibliography appended.
- 7 Indeed, as I shall argue throughout this thesis one problem with Jameson's work is its capacity to be overly tolerant of divergent and incommensurable theoretical positions.
- 8 Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: Remapping the History of the American Left* (London: Verso, 1991).
- 9 Ibid., p. 232.
- 10 James H. Kavanagh & Fredric Jameson, 'The Weakest Link: Marxism and Literary Studies', in *The Left Academy: Marxist Scholarship on American Campuses*, vol. 11, eds. B. Ollman & E. Vernoff (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 1.
- 11 Ibid., p. 3.
- 12 Buhle, *Marxism in the United States*, p. 222.
- 13 Ibid., p. 226.
- 14 Ibid., p. 227.
- 15 Fredric Jameson, 'On Aronson's Sartre', in *Minnesota Review*, vol. 18 (1982), p.122.
- 16 See for example Philip Goldstein, 'The Politics of Fredric Jameson's Literary Theory: A Critique', pp. 249-67 and Haynes Horne, 'Jameson's Strategies of Containment', pp. 268-300, in *Postmodernism, Jameson, Critique*, ed. D. Kellner.
- 17 Jameson, 'On Aronson's Sartre', p. 122.
- 18 Kellner, 'Jameson, Marxism, and Postmodernism', p. 8.
- 19 Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1979).
- 20 See Michael Sprinker, 'The Part and the Whole: Jameson's Historicism', in *Imaginary Relations: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Theory of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1987).
- 21 Kellner, 'Jameson, Marxism, and Postmodernism', p. 9.

## THE DIALECTICS OF FORM

Despite its lack of a Marxian conceptual framework, *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* does serve to highlight a number of Jameson's most abiding theoretical and philosophical concerns, in particular on questions of narrative and form. In this opening chapter I shall examine these questions under the rubrics of: the logic of form, the logic of content and Metacommentary. The logic of form will consider Jameson's conception of form as in itself political and ideological and also his own form and practice, specifically in relation to the notion of a dialectical style of writing and thinking. The logic of content entails what is, for Jameson, a fundamental dialectical law of form, that is to say, a work's ultimate determination by its content. I shall initially outline the nature of this dialectical law before considering the content of Jameson's own early work, in particular *Marxism and Form*. This chapter will, therefore, be predominantly expository which in itself raises a formal dilemma as *Marxism and Form* is also an expository text. Whilst acknowledging the problems that such double exposition involves, particularly in terms of over-simplification, I believe such an operation to be justified with regard to the centrality and recurrence of a number of key concepts in Jameson's corpus, concepts which find their earliest articulation in this text. I have already mentioned those of narrative and form to which we could add: allegory, genre, Utopia, reification and History. Therefore the purpose of this section will be to clarify Jameson's use of these concepts and terms. Finally I shall sketch Jameson's initial formulations for a method of dialectical criticism or Metacommentary.

## The Logic of Form

the content of a work of art stands judged by its form, and ... it is the realized form of the work which offers the surest key to the vital possibilities of that determinate social moment from which it springs. (MF, 55)

In the preface to *Marxism and Form* Jameson identifies the conceptual opponent of his work as that amalgam of 'political liberalism, empiricism, and logical positivism which we know as Anglo-American philosophy' and suggests that it is the critique of this tradition 'which makes up the tendentious part of my book, which gives it its political and philosophical cutting edge' (MF, x). *Marxism and Form*, however, undertakes no such critique in the sense of explicitly and systematically contesting the ideas and presuppositions of empiricism or positivism. Indeed Jameson does not even go so far as to identify any particular currents or tendencies of Anglo-American philosophy which he is against. It is rather the ideological function of such discourses with which he is concerned:

The method of such thinking, in its various forms and guises, consists in separating reality into airtight compartments, carefully distinguishing the political from the economic, the legal from the political, the sociological from the historical, so that the full implications of any given problem can never come into view; and in limiting all statements to the discrete and the immediately verifiable, in order to rule out any speculative and totalizing thought which might lead to a vision of social life as a whole. (MF, 367-8)

Speculative philosophy is the designation Hegel gave to his own practice to distinguish it from the critical philosophy of Kant. For Jameson, then, "speculative thought" is "dialectical thought", it is thought which moves from the whole to the part and back to the whole again. The difficulty that many encounter when confronted with dialectical prose is not so much a stylistic one, suggests Jameson, but 'a measure of the unfamiliarity, in our society, of attempts to think the total system as a whole'.<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps the consistent emphasis upon this concept, the concept of "totality", more than any other of his ideas, that defines Jameson's corpus as a



distinctive body of work in relation to contemporary theory. Jameson's work has relentlessly argued for the necessity of critics and theorists to retain a conception of "totality". In place of the anti-speculative and individuating bias Jameson identifies with Anglo-American philosophy, notably its emphasis on the individual fact or object, *Marxism and Form* adumbrates an alternative mode of thought, that of dialectical thinking. The text "represents" rather than argues for such an alternative in the sense that, for Jameson, the dialectic as a mode of thought is 'nothing more or less than the elaboration of dialectical sentences' (MF, xii). We must look for his critique not in the "content" of the text, in the sense of an argument or thesis, but in its own "form". Dialectical thinking directly challenges those isolating and inhibiting tendencies of empirical and positivistic thought by foregrounding the essential interrelatedness of events and phenomena and, through its very procedures, forcing its practitioners to make connections and thus draw 'unavoidable conclusions on the political level' (MF, x). Indeed for Jameson there is an ultimate obligation to 'come to terms with the shape of the individual sentences themselves, to give an account of the origin and formation' (MF, xii) if any concrete description of a literary or philosophical phenomenon is to be complete. A concrete description of Jameson's own *oeuvre* will therefore sooner or later be obliged to give an account of what Terry Eagleton has called Jameson's 'magisterial, busily metaphorical'<sup>2</sup> sentences. Paradoxically this most palpable feature of Jameson's texts, their particularly dense and rhetorical style, has, as Eagleton notes, so often been passed over 'in polite silence or with a shyly admiring phrase'.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, some less sympathetic critics, have seen Jameson's style as a sign of a more fundamental and inherent weakness in his work and thought.<sup>4</sup> The present analysis therefore will take as its minimal unit the sentence before considering progressively larger units of composition: the example, the essay and the book itself.

Whilst the isolation of such units is by no means arbitrary, they should not be taken as absolute and fixed categories in the sense that there is a particular form of "dialectical

sentence", which we may pick at random and hold up as an example of how all the others are written, or should be written. Such an approach would itself be undialectical to the extent that it seeks to isolate and freeze the dialectic, seeing it as a static and mechanistic operation, the application of a "thesis - antithesis - synthesis" formula to any given problem. This is to treat the dialectic as an essentially formal practice or device which one can use with a little ingenuity to resolve any conceptual antinomy or textual contradiction. On the contrary, nothing could be further from the processes of dialectical thought; the dialectic is not simply a formula to be applied, but is intrinsic to the object itself. Every object carries within itself that which it is not, it carries within itself its own opposite as an implicit comparison or differential perception which, even if unacknowledged, is always made. One always identifies an object by differentiating it from what it is not, what is known in classical Hegelian dialectics as the "identity of identity and non-identity". The dialectical method is profoundly relational and comparative in character, the terms of the dialectic do not exist *a priori*, as pre-existent categories but rather emerge from the dialectic's object or content. As a method of analysis and critique it is inseparable from the gradual working through of the system's own inner logic, through 'a sympathetic internal experience of the gradual construction of a system according to its inner necessity' (MF, xi).

Dialectical thinking is, for better or for worse, irrevocably associated with systematic thought, for which Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* stands as the great model. For Hegel systematic philosophy was not simply a matter of personal preference but an objective necessity, in other words, what is in the system is not the result of individual caprice but a consequence of the logic of the system itself. The order and organisation of the system will be determined by the structure of the object of study. For example the object of the *Phenomenology* is "spirit" or "mind", it therefore commences with the most basic level of consciousness: that of sense-certainty. Hegel shows how such a conception of consciousness is internally contradictory and incoherent; for a more adequate understanding of consciousness we must move to a higher

level of consciousness, which he calls self-certainty, whereupon he again repeats the operation. The *Phenomenology*, then, represents a series of stages or conceptual shifts that consciousness must undergo if it is to attain "Absolute Knowledge". Absolute knowledge is not so much an idea that is suddenly revealed to us at the end of the system but is the journey itself, the progression from a partial to a complete understanding; it is the process, the development of consciousness that matters.<sup>5</sup> The whole dialectical process, the elaborate construction and working out of the dialectical system represents or enacts this movement towards absolute knowledge. As the system itself emerges from its object, the whole system correspondingly remains implicit in any given object or indeed at any given moment of the process.

If we take an example from Jameson's analysis of Adorno we can see how the dialectical system begins to unravel itself from a given point of departure. Jameson describes a passage from Adorno's *Philosophie der neuen Musik* as an object lesson in dialectical thinking and a 'poetic object' in its own right (MF, 7), a status that Jameson's own prose can be said to emulate:

What happens is ... that for a fleeting instant we catch a glimpse of a unified world, of a universe in which discontinuous realities are nonetheless somehow implicated with each other and intertwined, no matter how remote they may at first have seemed; in which the reign of chance briefly refocuses into a network of cross-relationships wherever the eye can reach, contingency temporarily transmuted into necessity. (MF, 8)

In a single sentence Jameson momentarily holds together the 'fleeting instant' and the 'unified world', a 'discontinuous', fragmented reality and an intrinsically interrelated universe; each subordinate clause moves from the particular to the universal, from the disparate to the unified, from the part to the whole. But the sentence does more than grasp these moments as a set of static and rigid binary opposites, it grasps them as moments in flux, in process. The

sentence rhetorically carries us forward through a series of expanding horizons: an instance, a world, a universe, and simultaneously higher levels of abstraction: a 'fleeting instant', 'discontinuous realities', 'the reign of chance'. As so often with a Jamesonian sentence, it pivots on the semi-colon, veering round upon itself. The dialectic of the sentence passes over into its opposite as the ephemeral and contingent comes face to face with the brute fact of necessity.

However, this tendency of the dialectic to unite what we had previously felt to be irreconcilable differences or opposites is only the first movement of the dialectic. Dialectical thought is thought to the second power, in the sense that it is thought at once about its object and at the same time about its own operation and status as thought; it seeks to be both conscious and self-conscious simultaneously. It is that movement that Hegel described as *Aufhebung* or "sublation", which at once cancels and preserves its object through a process of "immanent critique". Immanent critique does not displace an opposing view simply by insisting that it is incoherent and asserting one's own view as the better option but rather by immersing oneself in the opposing perspective and revealing how it is internally incoherent and thus neutralising or cancelling it.<sup>6</sup> At the same time it preserves the original categories by working through them, explicating their inconsistencies and contradictions, and demonstrating how a coherent understanding of these categories can be reached only by reconceptualizing them dialectically. To put it another way, the categories that we use to describe the world are themselves inadequate to the task and the contradictions they reveal can only be resolved coherently when we reflect upon the nature of the categories themselves. Jameson has described his own method in a similar way; it is not, he suggests, a matter of refusing or rejecting outright an alternative system of thought but of:

working our way completely through it so as to emerge, on the other side, into some wholly different and theoretically more satisfying philosophical perspective.

(PH, vii)

We should not simply reject or abandon inadequate categories out of hand but lift them up and rethink, reconceive them, or, as Jameson says, convert 'the problem itself into the solution' (MF, 34). The classical dialectic operates through this double movement or double negation: first, as we have already seen, by passing over into its opposite and then by negating this first movement, transcending it and incorporating both elements at a higher level of abstraction, whereby one can see not only what differentiates objects but also what unites them.

To return to our example, Jameson's use of the semi-colon signifies that initial shift of gears of the dialectic, at once differentiating and binding together the two distinct but dependent halves of the sentence. It signals that a connection has been made but that these remain determinate parts, in other words, a conceptual shift has taken place or a jump in levels of abstraction. In the present case the immediacy of the textual analysis is transcended as we pass over to the realm of chance and necessity. But this remains only the first step, the first negation; if thought is to become fully self-conscious it needs to reflect back upon its own operations. This dual movement is what Hegel called "absolute negativity".<sup>7</sup> In terms of Jameson's sentence this negation of the negation would entail a process of self-reflexivity, of reflection upon the process of thought embodied in the sentence itself. Contingency is not usually considered the dialectical contrary of necessity; necessity designates that situation in which man must struggle with the material conditions of life, at its most basic level with nature itself, to satisfy his most fundamental needs and requirements, to maintain and reproduce life. The dialectical contrary to this realm of necessity, a realm in which human potential is able to develop in its own right and not under the immediate constraints of material need, is what is known as the realm of freedom. To lift thought fully to the second power therefore we must make one more turn of the gears as we transcend the realm of necessity and attempt to recover the realm of freedom. But that as yet unrealised realm cannot be articulated in the content of the work except as an empty and abstract intellectual category and can therefore only be realised in the form, in the very structure of the sentence. Thus the transitory character of Jameson's lexis: 'fleeting',

'briefly', 'glimpsed' and 'implicated' foregrounds the very elusiveness of the concept, of our inability to visualise or conceive such a realm except in the most provisional and transitory manner, as an aesthetic experience, in the *connectedness* of it all. The sentence does not insist or belabour the necessity of totalizing thought, or the dialectical unity of part to whole, but operates as a gestalt in which foreground and background oscillate continually. The visual and spatial metaphor refocuses our perception as the eye moves from the isolated fragment to the farthest horizon. Just as Adorno's text for Jameson temporarily transmutes contingency into necessity, his own text transmutes the immediacy of textual analysis into a glimpse of the totality.

Jameson's style, then, is not a matter of adornment, the expression of an individual taste or personal preference but rather a style of "enactment". It is in Jameson's own form, in the shape of his individual sentences as well as his texts, that the method of dialectical thought is embodied and demonstrated. Language is not a transparent medium through which we perceive meaning but is itself productive of meaning, and dialectical thought constantly holds up before us this productivity as it reflects upon its own situation and status. It is as much through his syntax and punctuation as in the content or meaning of the words he employs, that Jameson conducts his polemics against Anglo-American philosophy and enables or shapes alternative modes of perception. It is a style that unapologetically makes demands of its readers; the very density and self-consciousness of dialectical prose spurns the quick and superficial reading. In a 1982 interview Jameson responded to a question on the difficulty of his style with the observation:

Why should there be any reason to feel that these problems [of culture and aesthetics] are less complex than those of bio-chemistry?<sup>8</sup>

The difficulty of dialectical thought and writing is proportionate to the difficulty of the ideas with which it is dealing; "real" thought, suggests Jameson, whether it be about bio-chemistry

or literature, is difficult and an insistence on the virtues of "clarity" does not necessarily correlate with a greater insight or understanding.

The basic story the dialectic has to tell us, according to Jameson, is that of the dialectical reversal, 'that paradoxical turning around of a phenomenon into its opposite of which the transformation of quantity into quality is only one of the better known manifestations' (MF, 309). Jameson sees this paradoxical reversal as essentially a question of limits, 'of the reversal of limits, of the transformation from negative to positive and from positive to negative; and is basically a diachronic process' (MF, 309). To gain a full understanding of any given reversal, or set of reversals, Jameson argues, we must always reimmerge the dialectic in concrete history. This dialectical imperative towards the concrete, which I shall discuss at greater length in the final section of this chapter, marks every step of Jameson's text. If we take as our next unit of composition not the compositional unit of the paragraph but the conceptual unit of the "example", it will become apparent how Jameson consistently regrounds his own text. Jameson initially situates each author or analysis in its own concrete historical moment. Thus his discussion of Schiller places 'the *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* during that fateful winter of 1793-1794' (MF, 85) when the French Revolution was increasingly torn between the twin alternatives of the Terror and counterrevolution. Similarly, the originality of Herbert Marcuse is seen as his attempt to rethink the philosophical systems of Hegel, Marx, Freud and Schiller in 'the light of the utterly new socio-economic environment of post-industrial capitalism which began to emerge at the end of World War II' (MF, 106-7). Historicizing the object, however, is only the first step, it is the essence of the dialectical method to raise us to a level of self-consciousness which is simultaneously directed at the object, the example in question, and the thought process itself. Thus, not only is Marcuse's originality to be judged in the light of his rethinking of previous philosophical systems in the light of his own historical moment but it is also with regard to that historical moment, that paradoxical context of '[a]bundance and total control' (MF, 107), in which we must assess

Marcuse's own achievement.

For Jameson, the example, or rather the necessity of using examples, is a sign of 'thought imperfectly realised' (MF, 338). Examples are 'always the mark of abstraction or distance from the thought process: they are additive and analytical, whereas in genuine dialectical thinking the whole process would be implicit in any given object' (MF, 338). In such a situation, suggests Jameson, the thought process is rent asunder, on the one hand providing us with a presentation of a method, and on the other, a series of examples of objects. Yet it is the very essence of dialectical thinking to deny such a separation between form and content, between the thought process itself and its object of study. In transcending this subject-object split the dialectic can be said to be doubly historical, at once historicizing its object of study as well as its own conditions of possibility. Whether he reflects on the nature of Science-fiction in the Cold war<sup>9</sup> or the dialectics of post-World War II missile technology (MF, 310) Jameson constantly grounds the abstract in the concrete.

Dialectical thinking, then, is nothing less than the practice of the dialectical method, the 'ceaseless generation and dissolution of intellectual categories' (MF, 336). Each sentence stands as a figure for the process as a whole, but at the same time we can only grasp the full import of an individual sentence when we situate it in relation to that more elusive and difficult concept of "totality". It is the very abstractness of the dialectical style that forces us to move beyond the individual and isolated phenomenon and apprehend it as part of a network of relations:

abstract terminology clings to its object as a *sign* of the latter's incompleteness in itself, of its need to be replaced in the context of the totality. (MF, xiii)

Herein lies the real difficulty of dialectical thinking and particularly of a dialectical style of writing, 'its holistic totalizing character' (MF, 306). Dialectic thought is totalizing thought,



exhibiting an inherent 'preference for the concrete totality over the separate abstract parts' (MF, 45), it consistently makes connections, drawing together the most disparate phenomena and historical moments. This tendency to draw everything together accounts for some of the complexity and density of dialectical prose as well as its breadth, as it ranges over what we had always accepted as distinct and specialised areas of study revealing hitherto unnoticed connections. At its best this creates what Jameson calls a "dialectical shock" as the reader is forced into a new perception through the yoking together of what we had previously perceived as utterly distinct phenomena. Such a shock, suggests Jameson, is 'constitutive of and inseparable from dialectical thinking' signalling 'an abrupt shift to a higher level of consciousness, to a larger context of being' (MF, 375). Its presence, for Jameson at least, will be the mark of any genuine Marxist criticism.

Some preliminary remarks are required here, with regard to the evaluative implications of Jameson's hierarchical metaphor.<sup>10</sup> Jameson takes over from Hegel the notion that each movement of the dialectic takes one to a "higher" level of consciousness, or, to a "larger" context of being, although the presuppositions behind these statements are never drawn out. A higher level of consciousness would also imply a "lower" level of consciousness, a level that the more enlightened Hegelian Marxist is presumably above, or, outside of. Jameson, correctly I believe, criticises Hegel for reserving a place outside of his system for the philosopher, arguing that, not even the philosophers can escape history. And yet, Jameson's argument frequently appears to reserve that position for the Marxist theorists. The notion of higher and lower also implies a value judgement with regard to distinct kinds of consciousness without clarifying how such value judgements are made and, above all, by whom?

The presence of the dialectical shock is not only to be felt at the level of the sentence or example, but also with larger units of composition, of which Jameson's favoured form is the essay. If we exclude his doctoral thesis, *Sartre: The Origins of a Style*, all of Jameson's major

published works, such as *Marxism and Form*, *The Political Unconscious*, *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* and *Signatures of the Visible* are volumes of collected essays, whilst the shorter works: *The Prison House of Language* and *Fables of Aggression* are essentially extended essays. It is by no means coincidental that the essay was also Adorno's preferred form, and indeed, suggests Jameson, the form in which his best work was accomplished.<sup>11</sup> In 'The Essay as Form' Adorno reflects upon the characteristics of the essay:

Instead of achieving something scientifically, or creating something artistically, the effort of the essay reflects a childlike freedom that catches fire, without scruple, on what others have already done.<sup>12</sup>

This sense of transgression and playfulness has its analogy at the level of the sentence with Jameson's emphasis on the role of punning or "wordplay" as the very essence of the dialectic. What is often perceived as a confusion of terms in dialectical thought is, according to Jameson, nothing less than the attempt to push against the very limits of the terms themselves.

If we take for instance Jameson's use of the term "form" we can see that he simultaneously uses the term to designate a particular individual style of writing as well as the conventional classifications of genre and also specific modes of thought. Form would thus appear to function as a generic term which directs our attention not to one specialised area of aesthetics or poetics but operates as a mediatory category between individual modes of representation and wider social forces. Form is both an aesthetic category and an historical phenomenon, it is implicated in both but is reducible to neither and the wordplay of the dialectic forces the reader to think both situations simultaneously. Similarly the category of the aesthetic remains undefined within Jameson's texts, designating both the aesthetic experience of the spectator and reader as well as broader historical and cultural movements such as modernism and postmodernism. What such dialectical wordplay foregrounds therefore is the priority of

context over text, the precise meaning of the word comes from the context in which it is used rather than a definitive univocal meaning.

Jameson is aware of the objections that will be raised against this notion of wordplay, suggesting that such wordplay maybe seen to confuse categories and be inadmissible in older types of analytical and logical reasoning. But it represents the very essence of the dialectical method, 'a scandal for static rationality, its inner movement dramatizes the irresistible link between a formal concept and that historical reality in which it originated' (MF, 335). However, such dialectical wordplay may simply be a way of facilitating a rather vague and imprecise use of terminology. For example, what exactly does Jameson mean by older types of analytical and logical reasoning? Jameson never openly identifies the philosophical traditions he is polemicizing against, which makes it difficult to construct a counter argument in terms of his critique. It also means that his criticisms remain at a very general level and are once again difficult to refute with regard to specific criticisms. If we go back to the notion of the inadmissibility of wordplay for analytical philosophy, the suggestion behind the term "inadmissible" is that something ought to take place but does not. In other words, that analytical philosophy ought to allow such wordplay but in fact denies it. However the reasons for avoiding such wordplay in a philosophical discourse, such as its lack of terminological precision or intellectual rigour and consequently a tendency towards conceptual confusion, are not considered by Jameson.

To return to Adorno once more, the essay, he argues, eschews traditional notions of method and enquiry taking as its raw material objects already culturally and historically determined and 'treating what is normally held to be derived, without however pursuing its ultimate derivation'.<sup>13</sup> The essay thus has the freedom to commence and conclude where it chooses, it has to draw no "final" conclusions. It gains its polemical and critical force through its capacity to reorder, or recombine, its pregiven material in a new and potentially disruptive way:

the law of the innermost form of the essay is heresy. By transgressing the orthodoxy of thought, something becomes visible in the object which it is the orthodoxy's secret purpose to keep invisible.<sup>14</sup>

If we consider Jameson's much acclaimed essay 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture' we can see how, at his best, Jameson cuts through the often polarised and static positions of academic debate, lifting the reader onto a terrain where the north American tourist indiscriminately rubs shoulders with Heidegger. Jameson commences his essay by defining the conventional polarity between "Mass" and "High" culture, and indeed, will retain and use these designations albeit in a qualified and modified form. For instance, those who valorise mass culture need to take account of its pervasive anti-intellectual and anti-theoretical stance, particularly as this position is largely propagated by intellectuals themselves who have as yet failed to provide an adequate method of study for those objects they valorise. On the other hand, strong advocates of high art, specifically those derivative of the Frankfurt School, suffer from a corresponding over-estimation of the positive value of high art, 'namely the valorization of traditional modernist high art as the locus of some genuinely critical and subversive, "autonomous" aesthetic production'.<sup>15</sup> What is immediately apparent is that Jameson is seeking to move beyond the sterile binary opposition which the debate between high and mass culture has all too frequently been locked into and which inevitably declines into ethical and value judgements. He insists on the need to replace such sterile debates with a more historical and dialectical approach:

Such an approach demands that we read high and mass culture as objectively related and dialectically interdependent phenomena, as twin and inseparable forms of the fission of aesthetic production under capitalism.<sup>16</sup>

Jameson's primary rhetorical gesture is that of the dialectical reversal, at every twist and turn of the text we find ourselves attempting to look at the situation from at least two perspectives, or as Jameson would say of looking both ways at once. If we take the concept of reification

itself we can see how such reversals function. For Jameson:

The theory of reification (here strongly overlaid with Max Weber's analysis of rationalization) describes the way in which, under capitalism, the older traditional forms of human activity are instrumentally reorganised and "taylorized," analytically fragmented and reconstructed according to various rational models of efficiency, and essentially restructured along the lines of a differentiation between means and ends.<sup>17</sup>

With the universal commodification of labour power under capitalism, continues Jameson, all forms of human labour can be separated out from their 'unique qualitative differentiation as distinct types of activity' and be distinguished quantitatively 'under the universal exchange value of money'.<sup>18</sup> In this sense, then, the distinct quality or "ends" of human activities have been bracketed, 'leaving all these activities free to be ruthlessly reorganised in efficiency terms, as sheer means or instrumentality'.<sup>19</sup>

However, the notion of reification also provides us with an alternative perspective, that of *consumption*. Reification not only transforms human activity into sheer "means" but also into an "end" in itself, the commodification of labour power turns it into a product, or commodity, to be "consumed". The implications of such a reversal, with regard to culture, are that not only should we reflect upon the commodification of cultural artefacts but also upon the fact that in a consumer society all commodities take on an aesthetic dimension. One does not just buy the commodity itself, the new car, the television set, clothes or food, but one also buys an image, or into, what is often referred to as, a "life-style". In this sense, argues Jameson, we consume 'less the thing itself, than its abstract idea',<sup>20</sup> and it is this image or abstract idea that Jameson calls the aesthetic dimension of the commodity.

The dialectical shock and the dialectical reversal are characteristic of Jameson's texts and persistently underscore the need to re-perceive familiar problems in a new light. Jameson

continues by refuting the spurious equation of "mass" with older forms of popular and folk culture on the grounds that mass culture is defined by its social situation which is structurally distinct from and not directly equitable with pre-capitalist forms of culture. Likewise, our notions of "high" culture are distinct from the historical situation of a Shakespeare or a Dickens. In other words, High culture designates *Modernism*, whose dialectical contrary is *Mass* culture and to begin to view them in this light is to move beyond the specializations of English Literature and Cultural studies, opening up a whole new shared terrain upon which they can both be seen to dialectically interact.

By focusing on the historical specificity of high and Mass culture Jameson highlights not only what separates and differentiates these two realms but also what unites them. Both are products of commodity reification and the escalating fragmentation of capitalism:

Capitalism systematically dissolves the fabric of all cohesive social groups without exception, including its own ruling class, and thereby problematizes aesthetic production and linguistic invention which have their source in group life.<sup>21</sup>

Both Modernism and Mass culture have (in the broadest sense of the term) the same content; what differentiates them is the way that each processes or transforms this raw material:

Both modernism and mass culture entertain relations of repression with the fundamental social anxieties and concerns, hopes and blind spots, ideological antinomies and fantasies of disaster, which are their raw material; only where modernism tends to handle this material by producing compensatory structures of various kinds, mass culture represses them by the narrative construction of imaginary resolutions and by the projection of an optical illusion of social harmony.<sup>22</sup>

Thus in a final dialectical transformation of the essay we find Jameson bringing to bear upon the artefacts of mass culture the analytical methods of the Frankfurt School and revealing that repressed and critical, or negative, 'dimension of even the most degraded type of mass

culture'.<sup>23</sup> In other words, its Utopian impulse, the repressed desire for a collective existence which implicitly stands in contradiction and antagonism to the social order from which the artefact itself emerged.<sup>24</sup>

In the essay, then, concepts gain their precision and weight not through their derivation and definition but in relation to one another:

concepts do not build a continuum of operations, thought does not advance in a single direction, rather aspects of the argument interweave as in a carpet. The fruitfulness of the thoughts depends on the density of this texture.<sup>25</sup>

This fecundity is again demonstrable from our present example. In 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture' Jameson weaves a rich texture which encompasses not only Modernism and mass culture, the Frankfurt school and Hollywood but also Kierkegaard and pop music, genre theory and the Freudian unconscious, the writings of Guy Debord and Baudrillard. The conjunction of such discourses is not an end in itself but serves as an incentive to further thought, as the essay gestures towards various potential areas of study. For instance: Jameson offers a redefinition of Modernism not as the solution to commodification but as a reaction to it. He also highlights the common ground between the Marxian concept of reification and post-structuralist notions of the materialisation of the signifier, as well as pointing to the paradox of repetition from Freud to Baudrillard's notion of the simulacrum all the way to TV soap operas. Jameson does not resolve these questions but leaves them open ended, whilst his own short analyses of *Jaws* and *The Godfather* (parts I and II) illustrate just two possible options.

The essay is an inherently discontinuous and fragmentary form, a form which does not attempt to mask its fragmentary status but on the contrary accentuates it. The dialectical essay ought to be, according to Adorno 'the critical form par excellence',<sup>26</sup> at once more dynamic and

more static than, what Adorno designates as, traditional thought. The unity of the essay is determined by the unity of its object, it does not attempt to abolish discontinuities but works through their fissures, there will always be a tension between presentation and what is presented, between form and content.

Paradoxically, then, it is the very restrictiveness of the essay as a form that facilitates the release of the full potential of the dialectical imagination. The tension between form and content gives it an edge and intensity which is lacking in more discursive prose. The problem for the essayist-dialectician is how to link these fragments together:

For the fundamental problem of the dialectical writer is precisely that of continuity. He who has so intense a feeling for the massive continuity of history itself is somehow paralyzed by that very awareness, as in some overloading of perception too physical to be any longer commensurable with language.

(MF, 50-1)

Jameson suggests that what binds together Adorno's essays are less their thematic content than their "style" and their shared historical moment; the problem of continuity is resolved less through the writing of a narrative than the "construction" of larger units. As much could be said for Jameson's own texts: *Marxism and Form* is organised 'around the sign of Discourse itself' (MF, xii), it is Jameson's most self-consciously dialectical text and one feels at every moment that imperative to totalize: from the strenuous efforts of the individual sentence to his readings of other writers, Jameson is constantly making connections. He insists on the interrelatedness of Sartre's existential and Marxist views, reading the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* not as a break with the ideas of *Being and Nothingness* but as its completion:

Marxism is a way of understanding the objective dimension of history from the outside; existentialism a way of understanding subjective individual experience.

(MF, 208)

Rather than foregrounding the discontinuity of Sartre's thought and insisting on the presence



of an epistemological break, Jameson emphasises the consistency of categories between Sartre's early and late work. Similarly Jameson gives us a dialectical reading of Lukács in which the idealist categories of *Theory of the Novel*, mediated by *History and Class Consciousness*, are related to the more concrete and historical categories of *The Historical Novel*. *The Political Unconscious* with its focus upon narrative is organised around a central narrative of Realism - Naturalism - emergent Modernism. *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* on the other hand, drawing on the heterogeneity of its own object of study and reflecting the collapse of grand narratives in the postmodern age, lacks a core narrative presenting a more copious and expansive text befitting its dominant organisational category of "space". It ranges over such disparate phenomena as: architecture, economics, New Historicism, photography and De Manian deconstruction, which are bound together by the historical moment of the postmodern. In his work on postmodernism we can also see how far Jameson has moved away from a purely dialectical mode of thought. The dialectic clearly persists in these works but their principal conceptual instrument is what Jameson calls "transcoding". The notion of transcoding was first sketched by Jameson in *Marxism and Form* :

What is implied here ... is the notion that at a certain level of concreteness the *thing itself* - or what we will later call its existential reality - may be formulated in any one of a number of alternate codes, may be rearticulated in any one of a number of different dimensions: as literary structure, as the lived truth of a determinate social organisation, as a certain type of subject-object relationship, as a certain distance of language from its object, as a determinate mode of specialization or of the division of labor, as an implied relationship between classes. (MF, 354)

The operation of transcoding serves to rewrite a given problematic in order to cast it in a new light, to see it from a different perspective, from which solutions may be more apparent. It is this operation which Jameson sees as accounting for the eclecticism of his work rather than some all-inclusive Hegelian system building. He also suggests that the transmigration of the

earlier dialectical concept of "metacommentary" into a procedure of transcoding is to be accounted for by the transition from a concern with the individual literary or cultural text and intrinsic polemics around various methodologies and interpretations and the move to theoretical struggles or polemics at a higher level of abstraction. We shall return to assess how satisfactory Jameson's formal solutions are in later chapters.

A more pressing formal dilemma, though, we could perhaps characterise as (to borrow Jameson's own phrase) the "waning of affect". If we consider for example two of Jameson's path-breaking essays: the 1971 'Metacommentary' and his influential 1984 work on postmodernism 'Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism'. Both of these programmatic essays became sites for intense theoretical debate, for Marxists and non Marxists, alike and as one rereads them today they retain all of their initial impact. They both have that combination of breadth and clarity which we have already discussed with respect to 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture'. Their "shock-effect" is not as a consequence of their novelty, of having had revealed to oneself something entirely new, but rather the sense of the familiar being revealed in an entirely new light, of having disclosed to oneself something that was simply there all the time if only we could have thought about it in the right way or clearly enough. These essays have the effect of startling one out of the complacencies of comfortable but rather tired modes of thought. But the effect seems to be lost when the thirteen pages of 'Metacommentary' are expanded to a hundred pages on the nature of dialectical criticism (as in the concluding chapter of *Marxism and Form*), or the forty pages of 'Postmodernism' is incorporated into a four hundred page book (*Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*).

There is a tendency with dialectical prose to try to say everything, to cover every angle and perspective, before one actually says what it is one wishes to say. This can lead to diffuseness, to the style becoming ever more convoluted and opaque as it draws-in ever increasing

amounts of raw materials. The price that is paid for this is often the loss of that dialectical shock which Jameson sees as the mark of genuinely Marxist criticism. This is by no means to dismiss or play down the significance of the longer discursive works but to suggest that what is most scandalous and transgressive in dialectical thought, its shock effect for the Anglo-American consciousness, is somehow lost. The polemical and critical cutting edge of the essay is lost as it is incorporated into larger forms. Indeed, as we read the longer texts we tend to slip back into traditional modes of thought, into a narrative or analytical frame of mind. I do not wish to suggest that the need for greater clarity and understanding is undesirable in itself but rather that a dialectical mode of thought and style is not necessarily the best instrument for achieving such clarity and understanding.<sup>27</sup> A book brings with it different expectations, the anticipation of a synthesis, the need for concrete conclusions. Again this is not to suggest that Jameson avoids such issues - see for instance the extended theoretical chapters which form the core of his books, 'Towards Dialectical Criticism', 'On Interpretation', 'The Existence of Italy', and 'Secondary Elaborations'. But, as Jameson notes, the essay can be seen as 'fragments of or footnotes to a totality which never comes into being' (MF, 52) and the parts never quite form a whole; they can never be more than yet another fragment. The essay can offer a glimpse of the totality, but it always remains out of reach. The more the ideas are fleshed out and elaborated the greater the sense of repetition, and the feeling that we cannot actually get beyond the starting point. There is then, I would suggest, an initial anti-climax on reading Jameson's books, a sense of formal disappointment which must be off-set against the sheer intellectual intensity of the individual fragments themselves.

### **The Logic of Content**

It is ... one of the most basic lessons of dialectical method that the potentialities for development of a given mode of thought lie predetermined and, as it were, foreordained within the very structure of the initial terms themselves, and

reflect the characteristics of its point of departure. (MF, 9)

What we have examined so far in terms of the political and ideological aspects of form should not be taken to imply that Jameson is a Formalist. Formalism has a tendency to downgrade content, seeing it as little more than the projection of the form. The Russian Formalists for example saw literary history as:

a series of abrupt discontinuities, of ruptures with the past, where each new literary present is seen as a break with the dominant artistic canons of the generation immediately preceding. (PH, 52-3)

But this process of perpetual change and renewal was seen as 'being inherent in the nature of artistic form itself,' (PH, 53) once a particular form had grown stale and lost its force a new form emerges to replace it, to once more "defamiliarize" and make-strange the literary artefact. For Jameson, on the other hand, form is an historical phenomenon not regardless of its content but precisely because its content is social and historical in character. Form, suggests Jameson, is nothing less than 'the working out of content in the realm of the superstructure' (MF, 329), the evolution of forms, far from consisting of a self-motivating logic, represents the emergence of new types of content forcing their way to the surface and displacing the older obsolete forms. In other words, literary change 'is essentially a function of content seeking its adequate expression in form' (MF, 328), a process Jameson designates as the "logic of content". The logic of content dictates that the raw materials themselves shape and restructure the formal codes of presentation:

content, through its own inner logic, generates those categories in terms of which it organizes itself in a formal structure, and in terms of which it is therefore best studied. (MF, 335)

Such a process entails a movement from the intrinsic to the extrinsic, that is to say, a gradual enlargement of the critical perspective from the individual work to that larger social reality from which it emerges. So, for instance, reflecting on the nature of Marx's materialism Jameson observes that we cannot fully understand Marx's ideas until 'we understand that

which it is directed against, that which it is designed to correct' (MF, 365-6), we need to move beyond the isolated texts to consider their background and conditions of possibility. As much needs to be said for a full understanding of Jameson's own theoretical project, as well as his Marxism. The particular problem or dilemma that this poses with respect to Jameson (as indeed for many Marxist writers) is that his work must be seen in relation to not one but two backgrounds. Jameson's texts are always directed against, at least, two audiences simultaneously, what we may broadly define as an academic audience and a political one. I have already noted how Jameson's preface to *Marxism and Form* identifies a general intellectual antagonist or opponent. This can be said to represent the negative or critical component of his text; I should now like to consider its positive component. In situating his own text Jameson notes the 'absence of any genuine Marxist culture in academic circles' (MF, x), indeed, in the early 1970s when north American students thought of Marxism they only had recourse to the struggles and polemics of the 1930s which bore little relation to their contemporary needs and aspirations. Similarly the few familiar Marxist critics still readily accessible, Christopher Caudwell or Ernst Fischer, no longer seemed adequate or applicable to current critical requirements, particularly with the shift of critical emphasis since the 1930s from content based criticisms to more formally based methods. In his 1982 *Diacritics*<sup>28</sup> interview Jameson enlarged on this need for a Marxist cultural presence, suggesting that any real systematic change in American society required as a minimal first step the creation of a social democratic movement but this in turn entailed two preconditions: the creation of a Marxist intelligentsia and of a Marxist culture, or intellectual presence. The significance of *Marxism and Form* lies not just in its methodological formulations and theoretical insights but in the central role it was to play in creating a strong Marxist presence within academic circles. *Marxism and Form* was to make available to an American audience, for the first time, an alternative tradition of Marxist literary theory, a tradition which focused not upon the content of works but upon their form. *Marxism and Form*, therefore, has an immediate academic audience at once popularising and disseminating Marxist ideas, whilst, as we saw in the

previous section, challenging current academic and intellectual orthodoxies.

However, *Marxism and Form* also has an implicit, or esoteric, audience as the text is engaged in its own dialogue within Marxism. This internal dialogue finds formal expression in the tendency of Marxist thinkers and writers to "speak in code": with Jameson, for example, his persistent reflections on the possibility for a renewed Utopian imagination or Utopian impulse can be rewritten in a more orthodox terminology of a socialist society and socialist transformation. Similarly Jameson's recent formulation of the concept of "cognitive mapping" is perhaps more familiar to us as that older notion of class consciousness. The practice of speaking in code is not simply a matter of the esoteric propensities of individual writers but can be seen as a consequence of the diversity of Marxisms. Marxism is by no means a homogeneous or unified body of knowledge and as Jameson observes:

it is perfectly consistent 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. (MF, xviii)

As a figure in the nascent New Left, Jameson was an active participant in the search for an adequate theoretical discourse through which an understanding of post second World War North American capitalism could be achieved. Paul Buhle has described it as a feeling of starting over again, observing that 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'.<sup>29</sup> The Frankfurt School seemed to offer just such a model of critical practice but appeared lacking in other respects:

The Frankfurt School anticipated much of the distinctive problematic of the New Left, which would soon disinter its works and reestablish its influence. Yet at the same time the Frankfurters, in their peculiarly European despair, were unable to feel the real pulse of resistance in American popular life.<sup>30</sup>

What was required was a Marxism appropriate to the demands of an affluent consumer society, a Marxism that did seek to impose its own political solutions but dealt with the realities of the United States in the 1960s and 70s. Buhle identifies two of the most pressing dilemmas of the New Left as the need for a 'reformulation of the concept of revolutionary agency'<sup>31</sup> - as Jameson says the problem for the street fighter today is 'precisely where the street is in the superstate' (MF, xviii) - and the need for a coherent theory 'of developing a politics and theory equal to the ambition of naming, and overcoming, a system for which the available analyses had fallen short'.<sup>32</sup> *Marxism and Form* is very much part of this realignment and renewal, indeed, it is seen by many as the Ur-text of the renaissance in Marxist studies in the 1970s: 'establishing the legitimacy of Marxist aesthetic theory among broad sections of the literary critical profession'.<sup>33</sup> Jameson's own project is unrepentantly theoretical:

there is no tactical or political question which is not first and foremost theoretical, no form of action which is not inextricably entangled in the sticky cobwebs of the false and unreal culture itself, with its ideological mystification on every level. (MF, xviii)

The only theory adequate to the task in hand, for Jameson, in its ability to encompass the sheer quantity of raw materials, is Hegelian, or what is known as "Western" Marxism, a tradition of which Jameson is now the foremost practitioner and advocate.<sup>34</sup> The inaugural text of this tradition is Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* with its own philosophical roots in the Hegelian dialectic. Throughout *Marxism and Form* Jameson relentlessly argues for the case for a Hegelian-Marxist model over and against the more deterministic varieties of economic Marxism and dialectical materialism. Thus *Marxism and Form* delineates the tradition from which Jameson's ideas are evolving as well as addressing the perceived needs and priorities for a contemporary Marxist critical practice. Furthermore *Marxism and Form* can be seen to map the conceptual parameters of some of the most central and recurrent concerns of Jameson's theoretical career: Benjamin as allegorist, Bloch on the Utopian impulse, Schiller and Marcuse on the hermeneutics of freedom, Lukács on narrative and

mediation, Sartre on the primacy of history and class struggle and finally the relationship between Marxism and Hegelianism along with Marxism's conjunction with other philosophic and academic disciplines. I shall briefly consider each of these figures in turn, specifically highlighting Jameson's theoretical interest in each dialectical theory, before turning to the actual nature of his Marxism in the next section.

### **Adorno and Form.**

As we saw above Jameson derives from Adorno an abiding concern for the *shape* of individual sentences; he also discovers in Adorno a very particular conception of form, a conception that is both historical and political in character. Jameson characterises earlier forms of Marxist criticism as genetic in that they emphasise the historical evolution of works of art and the emergence of capitalist institutions from pre-capitalist societies. Such criticism he suggests:

has furnished a convenient introduction both to the subtleties of the dialectical method and to the complexities of Marxist social and economic doctrine.

(MF,11)

This form of criticism has tended to focus upon the content of literary works and how this content "reflects" its social and historical moment. However much validity a content-orientated criticism may retain for contemporary, as well as historical, Realisms is not at issue here but clearly such criticism will face major obstacles when it comes to deal with much twentieth-century art and literature. Therefore Jameson argues that what was once demonstrable from the content of literary works must now be seen to be at work within the form itself, as it is 'the model that now helps us to read the bewildering and massive substance of the real of which it began by being the projection' (MF,11). However Jameson does so with the proviso that we distinguish between form as an isolated phenomenon, the single cultural artefact, and the individual form as a figure for some much larger historical process. In other



words, we must differentiate between a model that is synchronic and static and one that is diachronic and dynamic.

Jameson observes that 'to juxtapose against its historical background a cultural item understood in an isolated, atomistic way ... is to ensure the construction of a model that cannot but be static' (MF, 9). If we are to construct a model that is dynamic we must transcend the individual artefact and move from the juxtaposition of an individual form against its socio-historical background to the juxtaposition of the *history* of the particular form against that same background; to construct what Jameson calls an "historical trope" whereby the individual cultural artefact stands as a figure for the history of the form itself; in the sense that Adorno saw the names of the great artists not as solitary geniuses, as isolated figures, but as 'so many moments in the history of the form, as so many lived unities between situation and invention, between contradiction and that determinate resolution from which new contradictions spring' (MF,19). The transition from the individual object to its history also necessitates a change in language as the relationship between the cultural item and its background is changed from one of point to field, or particular to universal, to become one of two contiguous fields, thus 'the language of causality gives way to that of analogy or homology, of parallelism' (MF, 10). This process entails a double movement, the individual cultural artefacts must be viewed on two distinct but interrelated levels: firstly, in relation to their own semi-autonomous sphere with its own internal history and dynamic and secondly, in relation to their specific socio-historical moment. The difficulty such a procedure encounters, according to Jameson, is the tendency with literary discourse, particularly in its more representational forms, 'of slippage from form into content which cannot but blur the methodological points to be made' (MF, 11). Jameson's argument is similar to that of the Russian Formalists, with their notion of "defamiliarization" or "estrangement," Jameson suggests that if the form becomes too familiar it becomes increasingly difficult to draw methodological and historical conclusions from its analysis. Therefore, we need to estrange

the object of study in some way, to perceive it in a new light. Thus, argues Jameson, the ideal 'material for a full-scale demonstration of such historical models would no doubt be drawn from spheres as distant from everyday life as possible' (MF, 11). Paradoxically then, it is precisely the tendency of art and literature in modern society to attempt to seal itself off within its own specialised and hermetic sphere, to attempt to retain its sense of autonomy that enables us to see it as profoundly historical in nature.

According to Jameson, one of the great values of literary and cultural studies in relation to the dialectical process is that they provide a microcosm of the method as a whole. The processes of change and development that we can see relatively transparently within the realm of culture thus provide analogies for change and development within the more opaque macrocosm of the socio-economic system. However if the work of art can be said to be a microcosm of the larger socio-historic moment in that it reproduces the structure of society, this is not in terms of its content as a reflection of that society but rather through its formal resistance to that given historical moment:

The work of art "reflects" society and is historical to the degree that it *refuses* the social, and represents the last refuge of individual subjectivity from the historical forces that threaten to crush it. (MF, 34-5)

The socio-economic is inscribed in the work not as mimesis but as 'concave to convex, as negative to positive' (MF, 34), in other words, as a contradiction right at the heart of the work itself. As Terry Eagleton writes:

The aporia of modernist culture lies in its plaintive, stricken attempt to turn autonomy (the free-standing nature of the aesthetic work) against autonomy (its functionless status as commodity on the market); what warps it into non-self-identity is the inscription of its own material conditions on its interior. <sup>35</sup>

The work of art, suggests Eagleton, is divided against itself, it is "contradiction incarnate",<sup>36</sup> at once a commodity and the attempt to refuse, or deny, its own commodity status. For

Adorno, the work of art is inherently contradictory, and herein, argues Jameson, resides its political value, through its attempt to reconcile real social contradictions.

### **Benjamin and Allegory.**

Frank Lentricchia commences his book *After The New Criticism* with a discussion of the relationship between "symbol" and allegory. Following Frank Kermode's work *Romantic Image* he observes that a distinction between the symbolic and allegorical usage of language has been made since the early Romantics and locates its most recent expression in the New Critical doctrine of the unity of the poetic object and the heresy of paraphrase. The distinction is essentially an ontological one whereby the symbol is seen as 'ontologically full while allegory is thin at best, and at worst "unsubstantial" ... only an illusion of being.'<sup>37</sup> Just as Cleanth Brooks insisted that a poem *is* and cannot be paraphrased or rewritten in any other discourse without a consequent diminution of its aesthetic qualities, the symbol can be said to have a privileged relationship to Being in that it facilitates a direct experience of Being rather than some second order representation or vision of Being. Allegory, on the other hand:

As a type of arbitrary and abstract discourse ... maintains ontological separation and the division of the subject and object. <sup>38</sup>

Paradoxically this privileging of the symbolic function of language, rather than providing ever greater numbers of readers with a direct experience of some ultimate Being or meaning, seems to have had the reverse effect. Lentricchia notes that the poetic language of the symbol was not only seen to be different from ordinary language but "better"; 'since it is the locus, ... of our most satisfying and valuable experiences as human beings'.<sup>39</sup> As this distinction between poetic language and ordinary language deepened the difference, writes Lentricchia, escalated into privilege and 'privilege, in a supreme irony, drives the seer and his expressive language into the silence of solipsistic revery'.<sup>40</sup> In other words the symbolic function of poetic language becomes *exclusive* rather than *inclusive*. With the gradual dissolution of the New Critical

hegemony in the 1950s there was a marked shift towards once more demystifying poetic language and restoring it 'to the place where the forbidden subjects of history, intention, and cultural dynamics could be taken up once again'.<sup>41</sup> One of the key texts in this transition was Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* and as we shall see in the following chapter Frye's archetypal model has a significant influence on Jameson's own political hermeneutic.

In *Marxism and Form*, however, Jameson reconsiders the value of allegory through the work of Walter Benjamin:

Benjamin's thought is best grasped as an allegorical one, as a set of parallel, discontinuous levels of meditation which are not without resemblance to that ultimate model of allegorical composition described by Dante. (MF, 60)

Jameson transposes Dante's four levels - the literal, the moral, the allegorical and the anagogical - into the more contemporary categories of the psychological, the moral, meaning in language and politics, thus regrounding Dante's eschatology so that 'the human race finds its salvation not in eternity, but in history itself' (MF, 61). The contemporary value of allegory for Jameson is inextricably entwined with the fragmentation of social life:

allegory is precisely the dominant mode of expression of a world in which things have been for whatever reason utterly sundered from meanings, from spirit, from genuine human existence. (MF, 71)

Jameson also notes that the preference for the symbol over allegory is the expression of a value rather than an aesthetic judgement 'for the distinction between symbol and allegory is that between a complete reconciliation between object and spirit and a mere will to such reconciliation' (MF, 72). Benjamin, on the other hand, suggested a temporal distinction between symbol and allegory, the symbol allows that sense of reconciliation but remains contingent, the reconciliation is instantaneous but cannot endure over time and as such represents the historical limitations of the symbol as well as expressing the historical

impossibility of any enduring reconciliation in the contemporary world. Whilst:

Allegory is, on the contrary, the privileged mode of our own life in time, a clumsy deciphering of meaning from moment to moment, the painful attempt to restore a continuity to heterogeneous, disconnected instants. (MF, 72)

In a world which we perceive as increasingly fragmented and discontinuous, allegory allows us to move from the psychological to the historical, to move between levels of experience without abolishing the specificity of each individual level but at the same time doing justice to what Jameson perceives as a yearning for completion, for wholeness.

### **Schiller and Marcuse: The Hermeneutics of Freedom.**

The concept of Utopia, maintains Ruth Levitas, 'is about how we would live and what kind of a world we would live in if we could do just that'.<sup>42</sup> However, there is a sense in which our visions of the future, be they Utopian or Dystopian, are not so much about the future as about our own present. Indeed, one could go further and suggest that all visions of the future are dialectically related to the present as that moment's completion, as with the scientific and technical Utopias of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, or as its negation, as an indictment of current society and its imaginary rectification. This is by no means an incidental feature of some futuristic visions but is structurally inherent in the genre itself, a consequence of the dependence of thought upon its social and historical moment. If we take the inaugural text of the genre, Thomas More's *Utopia*, we find the first half of the text is nothing less than a meditation on contemporary social evils, whilst the latter half offers us a vision of society in which these evils are remedied. Conversely Swift's Utopian, or rather dystopian, vision in the final book of *Gulliver's Travels* offers us a stark contrast between the Yahoos and the Houyhnhnms, a contrast which reverses the conventional text book distinction between a rational (Man) and an irrational being (a horse) which Swift studied as a student in Dublin. What this suggests is another characteristic of Utopian thought, that it is constrained

by the present. A full Utopian or alternative society will only be realisable in the future, in an already transformed environment. For example, William Morris's classic vision of a future society *News From Nowhere* provides us with a polar opposite to the technical and industrial visions of Saint Simon or Bellamy but it also enacts an 'inversion'<sup>43</sup> of the contemporary relations between manual and mental labour. Morris's envisaged rural and artisan community is nothing less than a projection of his own way of life and concerns, what Perry Anderson has called a 'collective transvaluation' of his personal life-situation.<sup>44</sup>

If, therefore, our visions of the future speak to us not so much of the future but of our own present, what does this say for an age in which Utopia is no longer conceivable? Does our inability to visualise an alternative future not pass judgement on the impoverishment of our own imaginations rather than the possibilities for any given future? Jameson's desire to reawaken our "Utopian impulse", the desire for a qualitatively different kind of society, finds expression in the need for a new hermeneutic. For Jameson, hermeneutics is not merely the technique of biblical exegesis but is also a 'political discipline' providing 'the means for maintaining contact with the very sources of revolutionary energy during stagnant time, of preserving the concept of freedom itself' (MF, 84). The concept of freedom provides the privileged instrument for a new political hermeneutics but the concept must be viewed as an "interpretative device" rather than a philosophical idea:

For wherever the concept of freedom is once more understood, it always comes as the awakening of dissatisfaction in the midst of all that is - at one, in that, with the birth of the negative itself: never a state that is enjoyed, or a mental structure that is contemplated, but rather an ontological impatience in which the constraining situation itself is for the first time perceived in the very moment in which it is refused. (MF, 84-5)

Whatever form the concept of freedom may take, it inevitably involves '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' (MF, 85). It also involves, therefore, a shift in levels of perception: from the individual to the social, the psychic to the historical, the subjective to the objective. The concept of freedom, therefore, will entail that operation outlined in the previous section as "transcoding", the rewriting of the terms of one level of experience into the terms of another.

Jameson offers two models of a political hermeneutics, that of Fredric Schiller and Herbert Marcuse. Jameson reads Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Mankind* not primarily as a work of aesthetics but of politics and as one of the first meditations on cultural revolution. Schiller posits an 'ideal presupposition' or 'ideal harmony' (MF, 87) against which the various forms of modern alienation can be judged. This ideal harmony which Schiller describes as the "state of nature" is defined by two essential characteristics or drives: the *Stofftrieb* and the *Formtrieb*. The *Stofftrieb* designates the various material passions and appetites whilst the *Formtrieb* designates the attraction of Reason under the sway of which the individual ceases to be an isolated monad and becomes a "species-being". A state of nature or harmony is achieved when these two drives are in equilibrium, when both are satisfied without the suppression of either. Schiller thus identifies a third drive through which the other two may be balanced and a state of harmony attained:

Such a drive is the *Spieltrieb*, the impulse to play, which underlies artistic activity in general, and in which both the appetite for form and that for matter are satisfied together. (MF, 89)

Freedom is seen at this point as 'nothing more than the mutual neutralization of these two powerful drives' (MF, 89) but the importance of the aesthetic experience, suggests Jameson, is that it provides a 'practical apprenticeship for the real political and social freedom to come' (MF, 90), a glimpse of an alternative world and qualitatively different way of life. Indeed for Jameson the real significance of Schiller's work lies in his analysis of works of art as (what

Jameson will later call) a symbolic act:

teaching us to see the very technical construction of the work as a *figure* of the struggle for psychic integration in general, to see in images, quality of language, type of plot construction the very figures (in an imaginary mode) of freedom itself. (MF, 91)

In the harmony of the work of art we can catch a glimpse of that ideal state of nature. Schiller then recasts that older opposition between a state of nature and civilization as an opposition between different forms of poetry, between "naive" or primitive poetry and the abstract poetry of modern times. However, the problem with Schiller's model is that it is diagnostic rather than prophetic, situating Utopia in the past rather than in the future. It needs, therefore, to be dialectically completed, or complemented, and for this Jameson identifies not its chronological successor, Romanticism, but the work of the Surrealists. Jameson argues that Romanticism could not be said to complete or complement Schiller's project in that it was not "new" in a positive sense of the term, as a solution to those problems meditated upon by Schiller, but was rather a reaction against the unprecedented material changes taking place. The familiar Romantic topoi and motifs represent so many "defence mechanisms" (MF, 95) by which a generation attempted to ward off unpalatable social transformations. The Surrealists, on the other hand, represented a direct challenge not only to orthodox notions of rationality but also to the 'middle-class business world' itself. Jameson draws a parallel between the Surrealists' conception of the image as 'a convulsive effort to split open the commodity forms of the objective universe by striking them against each other with immense force' (MF, 96) and Schiller's conception of Freedom as the neutralisation of two powerful drives or forces; with the qualification that 'now the commodity impulse is turned back upon itself, its own inner contradictions transformed into the motor of its self-destruction' (MF, 97).

According to Jameson, Schiller's thinking can be said to be dialectical to the extent that it defines phenomena against one another, that the *Stofftrieb* is defined in relation to the



*Formtrieb*, but his system is also static to the extent that the twin drives remain relatively symmetrical, thus still enabling them to balance each other out and a state of harmony be achieved. Today, however, it may be more appropriate to define ourselves as in a situation where the *Formtrieb* can be said to be dominant:

Little by little, in the commercial age, matter as such has ceased to exist, and has given place to commodities, which are intellectual forms, or forms of intellectualized satisfactions: this is to say that in the commodity age, need as a purely material and physical impulse (as something "natural") has given way to a structure of artificial stimuli, artificial longings, such that it is no longer possible to separate the true from the false, the primary from the luxury-satisfaction in them. (MF, 96)

The transition from Schiller to Surrealism in Jameson's text also entails a shift in register as Jameson rewrites, or reinterprets, Schiller's dualism in the more familiar terms of the Freudian economy of drives. In an increasingly commercialised and commodified epoch, argues Jameson, it is no longer adequate to see freedom in terms of the neutralisation of equally contending forces, as in Schiller's model, but rather in terms of the liberation of the suppressed force. In Freudian terms, the pleasure principle has been completely subordinated to the reality principle, and it will be through the reawakening of the pleasure principle that freedom is expressed. Jameson writes:

desire is the form taken by freedom in the new commercial environment, by a freedom we do not even realize we have lost unless we think of it in terms, not only of the stilling, but also of the awakening, of Desire in general. (MF, 101)

Jameson, then, wishes to make a distinction between what he calls desire as the 'pseudosatisfactions which make up the market system' (MF, 100-1) and "Desire" in general. The distinction between the lower case desire and the capitalised Desire represents, for Jameson, a distinction between the satisfaction of singular desires, as in the satisfaction of simple consumption or the gratification of immediate needs, and 'Desire as a force' (MF, 102). The distinction is important in the sense that desire, as singular and contingent, entails the

renunciation of other desires for its satisfaction, whilst "Desire" requires the 'release of all desire' (MF, 102) for its satisfaction. However, it is not clear in his presentation what Jameson means by "Desire as a force". This presents some difficulties: for example, Jameson's text moves from Schiller to Surrealism to Freud and Marcuse, but are all these figures using the term desire in the same sense? With regard to Freud, is Jameson referring to desire as the libido, of the *Essays on Sexuality*, or desire as Eros, of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*? Again, what is the relation between the capitalised Desire which Jameson uses in these pages on Schiller and the lower case desire in the following pages on Marcuse? In the present context Jameson wishes to make a distinction between the two but in his consideration of Marcuse he appears to make no such distinction.<sup>45</sup>

The work of Herbert Marcuse, suggests Jameson, provides us with a contemporary rethinking of this dilemma, of the nature of freedom and desire, in the context of the post-industrial consumer society. By the 1960s the scientific Utopias of the post-war period had been thoroughly discredited; it was also a period which saw the loss of any visible "agents" of historical change. Marcuse's attempts to theorise a new strategy of liberation must be seen in the light of this paradoxical situation of over-abundance and ubiquitous control:

the happier we are, the more surely we are given over, without even being aware of it, into the power of the socio-economic system itself (MF, 108)

Advanced capitalism's ability to co-opt and incorporate all forms of resistance has the effect of neutralising the negative, to the extent that even tolerance itself can be said to be a repressive mechanism. For Jameson 'a genuinely human existence can only be achieved through the process of negation' (MF, 108); it was the value of Adorno to reassert the role of negative dialectics in the realm of aesthetics and the originality of Marcuse's work to theorise the role of negation within the psychological and socio-economic spheres. Thus at the level of the psyche Marcuse formulated the notion of "repressive desublimation" whereby it is not only the

repression of sexual drives that results in neurosis but also their uninhibited release that results in psychic fragmentation and disorientation:

the society of sexual abundance encourages overt but specialized sexual activity as a way of reducing conscious unhappiness within the system, of foreclosing conscious dissatisfaction with the system, while at the same time compensating for the necessarily increased impoverishment of the environment from an emotional or libidinal point of view. (MF, 109-10)

At the political level, the co-optation of all forms of opposition and struggle results in a corresponding weakening of class struggle as there appears to be no way of negating the system as a whole. This is where the Utopian impulse once more emerges. As the symbolic negation of all that is, it replaces the role of art in Schiller as the blueprint for a future society, embodying 'the newest version of a hermeneutics of freedom' (MF, 111). Individual, contingent freedoms must be seen as *figures* for freedom in general and it is only when we grasp happiness as not merely positive satisfactions of somatic needs but also as 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' (MF, 112). As with Jameson's discussion of desire, he insists on the need to move beyond happiness as solely the concern of the individual to happiness as a collective phenomenon, if the slogan is to have any political force. For Marcuse, this new hermeneutic, indeed the foundation of all hermeneutic activity, is grounded in memory. 'The memory of gratification' quotes Jameson, 'is at the origin of all thinking, and the impulse to recapture past gratification is the hidden driving power behind the process of thought' (MF, 113). Memory, therefore, will serve a crucial mediating role between the psychological and the political, the inside and outside, and in this sense is the origin of Utopian thinking:

The loss or repression of the very sense of such concepts as freedom and desire takes, therefore, the form of a kind of amnesia or forgetful numbness, which the hermeneutic activity, the stimulation of memory as the negation of the here and now, as the projection of Utopia, has as its function to dispel, restoring to us

original clarity and force of our own most vital drives and wishes. (MF, 113-4)

### **Bloch's Utopian Impulse.**

A problem that all Marxist criticism must confront is the position that it accords to so called right-wing or reactionary literature. Indeed the relative paucity of a "revolutionary" or socialist literature suggests the need for a response that is more positive than the older forms of *ideologiekritik*. In one of his earliest essays<sup>46</sup> Jameson observed how ideology was also an attitude towards "Being", towards the world itself. For a conservative ideology to work it simply has to "Be", to be in the world without drawing attention to itself or its essential historical and political nature. The problem for radicals, on the other hand, is that by definition they are not interested in the world as it is but in changing it, in moving beyond or through Being searching out its flaws and contradictions. The radical, not content with Being itself but with ideas and ideals, is drawn necessarily into abstraction. This suggests a certain dilemma with respect to the "political" nature of literature in that the 'very source of literature's intensity lies precisely in its contact with Being',<sup>47</sup> its sense of permanence and timelessness. To define a conservative or reactionary literature as that which does not wish to draw attention to its own political and ideological situation is to define it as 'just literature itself'.<sup>48</sup> A revolutionary literature, on the other hand, which seeks to show the world not as it is but as it ought to be, not as eternal but as historical, as both changing and changeable, will by its very nature tend towards the abstract. Such a literature cannot rest comfortably in the world but must draw attention to itself, to its historical situation and status, and can only do this through the exposition of ideas, that is to say, through "talk". Theoretical abstraction always threatens to abolish the work itself, as it becomes merely a "novel of ideas" or a "thesis play".

The problem of "great" literature, therefore, is that it is inevitably reactionary; what is required, according to Jameson, is not so much an ideological critique as a model through which:

the official opinions and positions of such reactionary authors may be considered surface phenomena, rationalization and disguises for some more basic source of energy of which, on the analogy of the Freudian model of the unconscious, they are unaware. A Marxist hermeneutic would then have the task of restoring to that energy the political direction which rightfully belongs to it, of making it once more available to us. (MF, 119)

Jameson detects the sources for such a model in the philosophy of Ernst Bloch and the work of Paul Ricoeur, particularly in Ricoeur's distinction between a negative and a positive hermeneutics. Ricoeur defines a negative hermeneutic as the hermeneutics of suspicion, as demystification and the destruction of illusion; the critiques of Marx, Freud and Nietzsche are all exemplary in this sense. A positive hermeneutic, on the other hand, seeks to restore some original forgotten meaning and offers renewed access to some essential source of life. For Jameson any successful "concrete" hermeneutic will combine these two impulses, the demystificatory and the restorative, and Bloch's notion of the 'Utopian impulse' provides the vehicle for just such a gesture.

Bloch defines "Utopia" not in terms of form or content, in the sense of a specific literary genre or a blueprint for the realisation of a future society, but rather as a function, a specific tendency toward the future. Ruth Levitas includes within Bloch's definition of Utopia, not only literary Utopias, but also: day dreams, myths, fairy tales, travellers tales, sea voyages of medieval Irish Monks and alchemy, and suggests that what binds these diverse materials together is that they all 'constitute "dreams of a better life"'.<sup>49</sup> According to Jameson, it is not just our narratives that constitute dreams of a better life but objects themselves, 'everything in the world becomes a version of some primal figure, a manifestation of that primordial movement toward the future and toward ultimate identity with a transfigured world which is Utopia' (MF, 120). There is an imperceptible tendency of all things toward the future which becomes known to us through what Bloch calls *Spuren*. By its very nature then this tendency

is rather difficult to define and acceptance of it seems to require an act of faith rather than logical argument or analytical justification. *Spuren* are the traces or tracks, or in contemporary terminology the signs, by which we read the world. The *Spuren* or trace can be anything and everything:

the trace in Bloch is both an external object and an immediate experience: its authenticity is certified, before any conscious intellectual interpretation, by the sheer fact of the astonishment with which we pause before these glowing emblems in which some urgent yet utterly personal secret seems to be concealed. (MF, 122)

Adorno compares this process of deciphering with the childhood experience of reading Indian stories:

A broken twig, an imprint on the ground speak to the expert eye of youth, which does not confine itself to the things everyone sees but engages in speculation instead. <sup>50</sup>

There is, in other, words always something concealed, something hidden in the traces of everyday life, one may not know what this is but there is a feeling, a certainty, that it is there and it is at this point that speculation focuses. For Bloch then there is an ontological tendency toward the future, Being is incomplete in itself, it is always in process of Becoming. "Astonishment" is what one feels towards the world itself, it is for Bloch 'one the most concrete possible modes of our being-in-the-world' (MF, 122); however, what astonishes is not being itself but the anticipation of being-to-come, the traces or signs of the future in the present. The essence of Bloch's conception of Utopia, notes Levitas, is "anticipatory consciousness", the anticipation of some, as yet, unrealised future. This notion of the anticipatory consciousness is itself dependent on Bloch's central concept of the "Not Yet". There are two aspects of the Not Yet: its subjective, ideological pole in the form of the Not-Yet-Conscious and its objective, material pole as the Not-Yet-Become. The former concept rests on the notion of the unconscious as not only the repository of repressed material and

drives but also as a creative source in its own right; it is also the source of preconscious material that has, as yet, not come to consciousness. The latter rests on a conception of the material world as fundamentally unfinished and always in process:

Utopia, as the expression of the Not-Yet-Conscious, is vindicated in so far as it reaches forward to the real possibility of the Not-Yet-Become; it is thus actively bound up in the process of the world's becoming as an anticipation of the future (rather than merely a compensation in the present) and, through its effects on human purpose and action, as a catalyst of the future.<sup>51</sup>

The concept of the Not-Yet serves to account for the relationship between desire and satisfaction, or rather the drive from one to the other, but, argues Levitas, if Bloch's conception of Utopia is not to relapse into idealism or voluntarism it must distinguish between 'dreams of a better life that constitute real possibilities and those that do not'.<sup>52</sup> Bloch, therefore, makes a distinction between what he terms "abstract" and "concrete" Utopias, or those that project "compensatory" elements and anticipatory elements respectively. The task of cultural criticism is to reveal or recover the anticipatory elements 'from the dross of contingent and compensatory elements which Utopia is dressed up in particular historical circumstances'.<sup>53</sup> However, for Bloch, even the most abstract of Utopias is better than no Utopian thinking at all, as it contains the intention towards a better life. There can be found, therefore, in the most contingent and compensatory representation a vestige of anticipatory consciousness.

For Jameson, this question of the status given to the future marks the distinction between Bloch's philosophical and hermeneutical systems. According to Bloch, there are two ways in which we experience lived time: filled-affects or emotions and expectation-affects. Both are fully temporal experiences but the former projects what Bloch calls an "inauthentic future" in that:

they ask for fulfilment in a world at all points identical to that of the present, save for the possession of the particular object desired and presently lacking.  
(MF,126)

They are thus a compensatory affect whilst the expectation-affects, on the other hand, aim less at a specific object than at a 'future disposition or constitution of the self. ... the experience of hope consists in a coming to consciousness of that relationship to the as yet inexistent implicit in all these emotions, and may therefore stand as their structural archetype and at the same time as their most concrete affective manifestation' (MF,127). According to Jameson, Bloch's transition from philosophy to hermeneutics:

consists in a changing of valences, a transition from negative to positive, which suggests the deeper underlying principle that every negative in some fashion implies a positive which is ontologically prior to it; indeed, that every negative may therefore serve as a means of access to that positive which it conceals.  
(MF,132-3)

The positive is to be found located within the negative itself as it is in the nature of hope always to be thwarted: the future is never quite as we imagined it to be. The negative must be reabsorbed back into the positive as 'an enlargement of our anticipations to include and find satisfaction in their own negations as well.'(MF,137) Utopia is always deferred but it is this essential anticipation and dissatisfaction that moves time forward and transforms each contingent wish into a figure for the Utopian wish and each contingent present into a figure for Utopia itself:

Utopian moment is indeed in one sense quite impossible for us to imagine, except as the unimaginable; thus a kind of allegorical structure is built into the very forward movement of the Utopian impulse itself, which always points to something other, which can never reveal itself directly but must always speak in figures, which always calls out structurally for completion and exegesis.  
(MF, 142)

We shall see the concrete working out of this Utopian impulse in the following chapter. For the present, I should just like to note that the level of abstraction involved here makes it very



difficult to understand what the Utopian impulse actually is. For example, what does "a changing of valences" with regard to philosophy and hermeneutics really mean? Also, for a philosophical discourse are such vague and imprecise terms appropriate, or does that very imprecision mask a deeper philosophical confusion?

### **Lukács: Reification and Class Consciousness.**

If there is a single text that underlies Jameson's theoretical project it is not so much Hegel's *Phenomenology* or Marx's *Capital* but, as Terry Eagleton has pointed out,<sup>54</sup> Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* and in particular its chapter on German idealism, 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat'. For Jameson, Lukács is not merely a theoretician of Realism, but rather of "totality" and "mediation",<sup>55</sup> and he draws on Lukács for two of his most abiding theoretical concerns: the role of narrative as a fundamental organisational category of the human mind and the essential mediatory function of reification in modern life.

Jameson reads *History and Class Consciousness* as not so much a political text as an epistemological one, laying the foundations for a Marxist theory of knowledge. Marxism is often understood as a theory of economic or material interests but, for Jameson 'Marxism is a theory of *collective* or *class* self-interests' (MF, 184), class consciousness being defined as 'the a priori limits or advantages conferred by affiliation with the bourgeoisie or the proletariat upon the mind's capacity to apprehend external reality' (MF, 182). Thus in 'The Antinomies of Bourgeois Thought' Lukács reveals how it is the material conditions of society itself that define the limits of modern critical philosophy:

the contradiction that appears between subjectivity and objectivity in modern rationalist formal systems, the entanglements and equivocations hidden in their concepts of subject and object, the conflict between their nature as systems created by "us" and their fatalistic necessity distant from and alien to man is nothing but the logical and systematic formulation of the modern state of society.<sup>56</sup>

Lukács argued that Hegel's epistemological break was to insist upon the dialectical and historical nature of knowledge, that knowledge is not the result of a 'confrontation between rigid forms'<sup>57</sup> but is dialectically enacted between the subject and the object. For Jameson:

Lukács' originality is to have returned this abstract philosophical problem to its concrete situation in social reality itself, and to have posed the question of the relationship between universality on the epistemological level and the class affiliation of the individual thinker himself. (MF, 184)

Lukács rejects the notion of a Marxist epistemology as a theory of reflection, as this implicitly conceals the rigid duality that it was the virtue of Hegel to transcend, insisting that the identity of 'thought and existence' lies in the fact that they are both 'aspects of one and the same process',<sup>58</sup> that is history itself. Martin Jay notes that Hegel could defuse the problem of the correspondence between thought and existence through an endorsement of Vico's *verum-factum* principle, that is to say, the 'true and the made are interchangeable'.<sup>59</sup> Thus for Hegel:

the subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge were inherently identical because the latter was produced out of and constituted by the former.<sup>60</sup>

Whereas, Hegel posited the notion of "Absolute Spirit" as the totalizing subject of history, as 'both subject and object of knowledge, the maker and the made of reality itself'<sup>61</sup> Lukács substituted the proletariat for the role of both the subject and object of history, as both the makers and the made of history and thus being in the privileged position of achieving knowledge of the totality. The central concept in Lukács' epistemology, to explain the non-identity of thought and existence, or the subject-object split, is "reification".

Reification, broadly, has two senses in Marxist thought: firstly, it refers to the 'act ... of transforming human properties, relations and actions into properties, relations and actions of man produced things which have become independent ... of man and govern his life.' And

secondly, it refers to the 'transformation of human beings into thing-like beings which do not behave in a human way but according to the laws of the thing-world'.<sup>62</sup> The concept can be found in Marx, particularly in his analysis of commodity fetishism in *Capital I*, ch.I sect.4 and more generally applied to all categories of capitalist production in *Capital III* ch.48. But it was with Lukács' "creative" reinterpretation of the idea that it emerged as a central concept in Marxist thought and it is in this sense that Jameson generally uses the term. Lukács saw the commodity-structure 'as the central, structural problem of capitalist society in all its aspects'<sup>63</sup> and the essence of this structure

is that a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a "phantom objectivity," an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people.<sup>64</sup>

In other words the essence of commodity-structure is reification; as the commodification of society increases, in the sense that capitalism must continuously reproduce itself at ever higher levels of productivity, reification penetrates ever more deeply into every aspect of our lives.

For Lukács reification is synonymous with what Max Weber defined as "rationalization", or the 'strictly rational *organisation of work* on the basis of *rational technology*'.<sup>65</sup> Rationalization designates that process by which older forms of production are broken down into their component parts and reorganised into more efficient units of production. We can again see the means/ends split whence ends are to all intents and purposes "bracketed" and the way left open for the total rationalization or instrumentalization of society as a whole.

Finally, Lukács' conception of reification is closely related to, although not identical with, the concept of alienation, in that human labour becomes objective and independent of human beings themselves. Alienation designates that double-bind whereby human labour comes to stand over and against those labouring as a hostile alien force. Under capitalism human labour

is no longer a means to an end, the satisfaction of human needs and desires, but becomes an end in itself as all "natural" human relations are replaced by commodity exchange, a worker does not sell himself as a labouring person but his abstract capacity as labour power. Thus all human needs and desires must be satisfied in and through the commodity exchange system, and following Lukács subject to the inexorable logic of reification:

The transformation of the commodity relation into a thing of "ghostly objectivity" cannot therefore content itself with the reduction of all objects for the gratification of human needs to commodities. It stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man; his qualities and abilities are no longer an organic part of his personality, they are things which he can "own" or "dispose of" like the various objects of the external world. And there is no natural form in which human relations can be cast, no way in which man can bring his physical and psychic "qualities" into play without their being subjected increasingly to this reifying process. <sup>66</sup>

#### **Sartre: Agency and History.**

In the light of Jameson's later trajectory rereading *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* one is struck, not so much by its lack of Marxian categories, as by its lack of historicity. In a 1984 'Afterword' Jameson had recourse to the work of Walter Benjamin as a theoretical corrective for this historical deficiency but in *Marxism and Form* he was to reassert the primacy of history and class struggle through Sartre's own work, specifically the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. For Jameson, the value of the *Critique* for 'dialectical literary criticism lies in the way it poses the problem ... of *mediation*' (MF, xiv), that is to say, the movement from one level of social life to another: the psychological to the political, or the cultural to the economic. The project of Sartre's *Critique* was to provide 'a theory about the collectives in and through which our individual lives are pursued' (MF, 209). In place of what Jameson sees as orthodox Marxism's economic determinism and reduction of individual experience, the *Critique* reasserts the central role of "agency", by posing two fundamental historical problems:

the responsibility of the individual for collective events over which he clearly has no control, and the manner in which the material and contingent accidents

of history are to acquire a kind of meaning (without which, history itself becomes accidental and contingent). (MF, 287)

Sartre's response to these questions revolves around the twin categories of, what he terms, "seriality" and the "group-infusion". History from Sartre's perspective can be seen to oscillate between two poles, between:

moments of genuine group existence and long periods of serial dispersal, or, at any given moment, as a complicated coexistence of groups at various stages of their development and masses of serial individuals surrounding them. (MF, 249)

In place of the Hegelian notion of stages, or historical periods and the Marxist notion of successive modes of production Sartre posits a cyclical view of history. As Jameson points out, there are a number of difficulties with Sartre's model; not least that, in his desire to redress the balance of the Marxian theory of history with a reassertion of agency, a reciprocal over-estimation of the role of individual actors and their historical consciousness has taken place. There is also the problem of social class: Jameson acknowledges that as a phenomenological description of the real sense of urgency and intensity of group dynamics Sartre's account may be exemplary, but it in effect precludes that fundamental Marxian category of 'social class as an actor in history' (MF, 256). The group is essentially 'timeless' and as such: 'can experience time and change, *durée*, merely as a gradual deterioration from that initial moment of intensity in the formation of the group'(MF, 261).

Marxism, according to Jameson, has 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 has chosen the second of these codes, whilst presupposing the first, rewriting the 'entire complex of reified relationships in terms of that first and basic reality of human action and human relations' (MF, 297). Social class is a mediatory category, it

partakes of both, in Sartre's terms, serial and group formations. For Marxism, class affiliation is defined not ahistorically but as 'a particular relationship to a particular, determinate mode of economic production' (MF, 283). Marxism's two codes are thus dialectically interrelated, neither can be privileged at the expense of the other. The complex dynamics of social class and history will be considered in greater detail in the following chapter.

### Metacommentary

What is wanted is a kind of mental procedure that suddenly shifts gears, that throws everything in an inextricable tangle one floor higher and turns the very problem itself (the obscurity of [a] sentence) into its own solution (the varieties of Obscurity) by widening its frame in such a way that it now takes in its own mental processes as well as the object of those processes.<sup>67</sup>

Jameson's 1971 programmatic essay 'Metacommentary' provides the first sketch that such a procedure would take. This short essay outlines the fundamental principles for a dialectical criticism which Jameson will reconsider in much greater depth in the concluding chapter of *Marxism and Form*. His discussion commences with a consideration of the current disrepute that interpretation has fallen into, with the aim not so much of reasserting a particular mode of interpretation as of reflecting upon an historical moment in which we no longer feel the need to interpret:

The starting point for any genuinely profitable discussion of interpretation therefore must be not the nature of interpretation, but the need for it in the first place.<sup>68</sup>

Indeed, is it that the meaning of modernist art has become so transparent that we no longer have to involve ourselves in the elaborate processes of deciphering or is it, on the contrary, the very "meaninglessness" of such artefacts that engenders theories of emotive and purely sensual rather than cognitive responses? Jameson takes Susan Sontag's influential book *Against Interpretation* as his point of departure, recounting the historical nature of this anti-interpretative tendency, noting that in both philosophy and literature all the major twentieth

century schools have shared a similar preference for method in place of metaphysics or form over content. What is less often remarked upon, however, is the tendency of form to slide into content in the sense that what is initially a preference expressed by the critic is then projected onto the work itself becoming an aesthetic in its own right. Thus Sontag:

begins by denying the rights of *all* interpretation, of *all* content, only to end up defending a particular type of (modernistic) art that cannot be interpreted, that seems to have no determinate content in the older sense.<sup>69</sup>

Jameson observes that this is also the case with the Russian Formalists who inverted the traditional relationship between form and content, viewing 'the aim of all technique as the production of the work of art itself'<sup>70</sup> rather than directing the reader outside the work to some ultimate ground or meaning. But what was initially an attempt to isolate the uniquely literary quality of the work, what defined "literariness" apart from everyday discourse, eventually resulted in a 'radical aesthetization of life'.<sup>71</sup> For:

if content exists in order to permit form, it follows that the lived sources of that content - the social experiences, the psychological obsessions and dispositions of the author - also come to be formally motivated, to be seen as means rather than ultimate ends or meanings.<sup>72</sup>

Indeed, even the author comes to be seen as merely one more device for bringing the work itself into being.

As with Sontag's recourse to modern art the Formalists' emphasis on the lyric and the short story can also be seen as a consequence of its own procedures. The Formalists identified literariness, or poetic language, with language that drew attention to itself, drew attention to its own status as language and as such renewed one's perception of the material quality of language. Literature achieves this through a process of "defamiliarization" or "making-strange", in other words, literature retards perception, it causes one to dwell on its own status as an artefact. As a particular form once more becomes familiar the method of defamiliarization must be renewed or rejuvenated in some way, to once again jolt one out of

familiarity, and for the Formalists this process worked through the elevation of a new "popular" form. Jameson observes that there are two particular problems with the notion of defamiliarization. Firstly, it is an ahistorical concept: Shklovsky saw the process of literary change as 'a uniform mechanism the same at all times and all places' which militates against any genuine sense of literary history and 'ends up turning diachrony into mere appearance' (PH, 59). Secondly there is the problem of events in time: does defamiliarization operate only upon the isolated image or figure, or can it also deal with a series of events or narrative? For Shklovsky the technique remained the same in both cases, it was just a matter of a difference in scope. But the problems of narrative cannot be solved by the simple enumeration of techniques and devices, by the exposition of how well a given work "retards" its own progression. Following Lukács, Jameson proposes narration as a 'basic way of coming to terms with time itself, and with concrete history' (PH, 62). Narrative is a temporal experience and unlike the short story, myth, or tale:

there are no pre-existing laws that govern the elaboration of the novel as a form: each one is different, a leap in the void, an invention of content simultaneous with the invention of the form. (PH, 73)

The very notion of retardation implies a separation of form and content though, formalised as the dual concepts of "fabula" (story) and "szujet" (plot, or discourse). Shklovsky's method therefore is unable to deal adequately with narrative and this finds its correlative in his principal object of study: the short story.

Jameson attributes to Formalism the paradoxical status of 'the basic mode of interpretation of those who refuse interpretation'.<sup>73</sup> At the very heart of its procedures is the notion of "bracketing": if all content is merely the projection of form then texts have no extrinsic referent, a given text speaks only of itself, of 'its own coming into being' (PH, 88). The bracketing of all extrinsic referents allows for the construction of an intrinsic system or model



of literariness but it also returns the content by the back door:

Only pre-existing things - objects, institutions, units of some kind - can be defamiliarized; just as only what has a name to begin with can lose its familiar name and suddenly appear before us in all its bewildering unfamiliarity.

(PH, 70)

In other words, we must bring with us a sense of an original meaning, a knowledge of the content prior to its formal presentation, for it to be defamiliarized. An act of interpretation has initially taken place, in the sense that we now understand the "defamiliarized" object as not being what we had previously taken it to be.

Similarly, French Structuralism can be seen to be no less contradictory. Structuralism shares with Formalism Saussure's 'foundational distinction between *langue* and *parole*' (PH, 101) but whereas Russian Formalism concentrated on the individual artefact, structuralism attempted to describe the overall organisation of the sign system itself. Structuralism, suggests Jameson, 'can best be grasped as a philosophical formalism' (PH, 195), it rejects notions of substantive thought and insists on the bracketing of the referent: there is no one-to-one correspondence between a sign and its referent. But this raises something of a dilemma for structuralists as most do presuppose beyond the sign itself some ultimate ground or reality as referent. So whilst 'its concept of the sign forbids any research into the reality beyond it' Structuralism maintains the notion of 'some ultimate ground' by considering the signified as a concept "of" something' (PH, 106). Structuralism, then, initially rejects any pretence to interpretation, rather 'proposing ... to replace the substance (or the substantive) with relations and purely relational perceptions'.<sup>74</sup> But once it has mapped these relations as a set, or series, of binary oppositions it invariably sets out (as with Lévi-Strauss' analysis of myth<sup>75</sup>) to interpret these patterns of oppositions:

The most characteristic feature of structuralist criticism lies precisely in a kind

of transformation of form into content, in which the form of structuralist research ... turns into a proposition about content. (PH, 198-9)

Thus we find that stories are about stories, narration about the act of narration and ultimately the content of a given work is nothing but language itself. We are then, according to Jameson, in the situation of being forced to interpret at the very moment we show most reluctance to do so.

For Jameson, though, the question of whether or not to interpret a given work is not really the issue. It is more a matter of history, what is required is to historicize the cultural artefact, to lay bare its conditions of possibility. It is not a case of making value judgements about the work or attempting to resolve its contradictions but of historically situating the work so that those contradictions become meaningful in themselves. For Jameson every commentary must at the same time be a metacommentary, it must include a commentary on its own conditions of existence:

Thus genuine interpretation directs the attention back to history itself, and to the historical situation of the commentator as well as of the work.<sup>76</sup>

Structuralism, therefore, can be seen to fall short of a genuine metacommentary to the degree that it is not self-reflexive and does not contain a commentary on its own procedure and conceptual instruments. Jameson likens metacommentary to the Freudian hermeneutic in that it is based upon the 'distinction between symptom and repressed idea, between manifest and latent content, between the disguise and the message disguised'.<sup>77</sup> Such a distinction he suggests answers our initial question "why does a work need interpreting in the first place?" because what is implicit in the latent-manifest distinction is the function of a Censor of some kind. Jameson does not directly spell out what this censor may be, or may entail, but a brief consideration of his concluding analysis of Sontag's essay 'The Imagination of Disaster' reveals the direction in which Jameson's thought is developing. Sontag analysed 1950s and 60s science fiction films as an expression of "the deepest anxieties about contemporary

existence".<sup>78</sup> Jameson agrees with this analysis as far as it goes but argues that it only considers the films on their own terms, at the level of their manifest content and not in relation to their form. According to Jameson, this manifest content masks a deeper, or latent, content which is markedly different from Sontag's existential anxieties. For Jameson, 1950s and 60s science fiction films are more to do with unconscious fantasies about the nature of work, in other words, with the alienation of labour in advanced capitalist societies. This notion of a repressed fantasy structure and in particular the effacing of any traces of labour from the surface of cultural artefacts provides the thesis behind *The Political Unconscious* and will be the subject of the following chapter.

For Jameson, then, it is not the content of works of art that need to be interpreted but rather their form. Indeed, the content of a given work, is 'already meaningful from the outset, being nothing more nor less than the very components of our concrete social life: words, thoughts, objects, desires, people, places, activities'.<sup>79</sup> A work of art does not confer meaning on these materials so much as transform the meaning they already possess. For metacommentary, therefore:

the process of criticism is not so much an interpretation of content as it is a revealing of it, a laying bare, a restoration of the original message, the original experience, from beneath the distortions of the censor: and this revelation takes the form of an explanation why the content was so distorted; it is inseparable from a description of the mechanism of censorship itself.<sup>80</sup>

### **Jameson: Hegel, Marx and Marxism.**

Jameson gives a much fuller exposition of dialectical criticism in the concluding chapter of *Marxism and Form*, whilst at the same time asserting the primacy of Marxist analyses. Marxism, he suggests, is not just one more theory of history, or theoretical discourse, but is the most theoretically complete and satisfying discourse available to us today. For Jameson Marxism includes Hegelianism, in that it was Hegel who identified the principle at work in

dialectical analyses as the adequation of subject to object, individual to universal, or part to whole, but it was Marx who regrounded the dialectic in concrete history. 'Towards Dialectical Criticism' can be seen to take that familiar Hegelian form of moving through a series of stages or steps each logically opening out onto the next. The 'ever-widening net of exposition, in which each topic seems to recapitulate the previous one in a different context and on a higher plane' bringing us ever closer to what Jameson sees as the 'ultimate object of all dialectical thought which is the concrete itself (MF, 309). Thus we move from an exposition of the dialectical model itself to the dialectics of content, from the relationship between form and content to the distinction between Hegelian and Marxist dialectics, through to the regrounding of the work and the nature of social class until finally we emerge into history.

For Jameson the very principle of the dialectical reversal, the passing over of a given phenomenon into its opposite, is a diachronic process, indeed dialectical relationships presuppose a diachronic framework as a condition of their articulation. Any analysis presupposes the isolation of limited groups or series, the "Historical novel" or the "Romantics" for instance, but each of these categories presupposes a larger background against which they are defined. The initial problem for any dialectical theory of literature will be 'the unity of the literary work itself, its existence as a complete thing' (MF, 313). Following the Russian Formalists, Jameson observes how every individual work is perceived against a generic background and thus the autonomy of the work is itself a dialectical phenomenon in which

it is read as a work *in* a given form, or *against* a given form, in a context in which the various genres are felt to coexist at the fixed distances from each other in relatively systematic complexes which can themselves form the object of study in their historical coexistence or succession. (MF, 313)

Our perception of a given work or author is always a differential one; a given phenomenon's position in a determinate sequence not only connects to the other phenomena but also affirms

its own specificity. What then becomes of more interest, suggests Jameson, is the original terms and categories by which the sequence is constituted and the limits which frame it, forcing us to consider not only what is included in a given sequence or model but also what is excluded from it. The problem of categorisation, then, is that it has to impose limits, a beginning and an end, on what is in fact a process, a continuum. The strength of the various formalisms of the twentieth-century have been their ability to give 'an account of the total *style* of a culture and of the profound unity of each of the moments of cultural history as they succeed each other' (MF, 324). The weaknesses of such synchronic and ahistorical methods though is their 'inability to project diachrony or to operate successfully in anything but a single *instant* or vertical cross section of time' (MF, 325). In other words they are unable to satisfactorily account for historical change. What distinguishes the Hegelian model is the relative transparency of its diachronic constructs, which are 'clearly identified not as empirical realities but as ideal *constructs* only.' (MF, 326) which must be reimmersed in history to be completed. Thus the Hegelian model permits work in time but 'is distinguished by that ultimate and inevitable, structurally inherent movement toward its own dissolution, in which it projects the Marxist model out of itself as its own concrete realization and fulfillment.' (MF, 326)

The distinction between Marxist and Hegelian dialectics, according to Jameson, is not one of method but of the type of self-consciousness involved. For Hegel this is a logical self-consciousness which remains at the level of thought whilst:

the Marxist dialectic, on the other hand, the self-consciousness aimed at is the awareness of the thinker's position in society and in history itself, and of the limits imposed on this awareness by his class position - in short of the ideological and situational nature of all thought and of the initial invention of the problems themselves. (MF, 340)

In other words, the Marxist dialectic insists on the material and historical nature of all

thought. Thus suggests Jameson:

philosophical thinking, if pursued far enough, turns into historical thinking, and the understanding of abstract thought ultimately resolves itself back into an awareness of the content of that thought, which is to say, of the basic historical situation in which it took place. (MF, 346)

Hegel retained a position 'outside of history for the philosopher of history himself, and was to that extent unable to grasp the notion of being-in-situation in its most paradoxical dimensions.' (MF, 365) This movement then back into history is the hermeneutic dimension of dialectical thinking, that point, as in 'Metacommentary', in which the original latent meaning stands revealed. Dialectical thinking involves a shift from the abstract and conceptual level to the concrete and historical in which thought is reconnected to lived experience and stands judged insofar as it is placed in historical perspective:

Thus such dialectical judgements enable us to realize a momentary synthesis of the inside and the outside, of intrinsic and extrinsic, of existence and history: but it is a synthesis which we pay for by an objective historical judgement on ourselves. (MF, 348)

We must finally confront at this juncture, then, the problem of historical determinism. For Jameson, the whole problematic of Marxism's teleology is, in a sense, a false problem in that history is unlike any other object of scientific study; there cannot be a concept of law or scientific prediction for history in the manner in which we define laws for the physical sciences:

in history the hypothesis of identical or recurrent factors in different events is possible only at the price of increasing generalization, a movement away from the unique historical fact which permits us to see similarities as from over a great distance. (MF, 359)

It is precisely this indeterminacy of distance which marks history out from the other sciences but at the same time allows us to view it either from close-up or from a larger perspective.

Historical understanding, suggests Jameson, is a process of "specification" and "rectification" in that we specify particular historical events or phenomena and then undergo a process of rectifying our received images of that event. Thus, the notion of historical determinism may be more adequately understood in terms of historical necessity. Once we have moved through this process of specification and rectification we have a sense of not only how a particular event happened but how it could only happen in just that way and no other. Historical necessity operates after the fact, it is not so much predictive as something we only understand with hindsight:

The notion of historical necessity is therefore something like a historical trope, the very temporal figure of the process of historical understanding, and presupposes an ever closer approximation of the concrete, an ever greater enlargement of the context of the historical meditation, such that the alternative feeling of chance is not so much disproven as it is rendered inconceivable and meaningless. (MF, 361)

For Jameson the attempt to predict represents a failure to think in a situational manner and it is just such a failure of thought that Marxism seeks to rectify. Jameson characterises Marxism's mental operation as 'a kind of inner "permanent revolution"' (MF, 362) for which every systematic presentation of it will falsify it to the degree that it freezes it into a system:

Insofar as Marxism is a critical rather than a systematic philosophy ... we would expect the materialism of Marx to be not a coherent position in itself but rather a correction of other positions - a rectification in dialectical fashion of some preexisting phenomenon, rather than a doctrine of a positivistic variety existing in its own right. (MF, 365)

For Jameson the mark of a "genuine" Marxist criticism will be its apprehension of the concrete, which takes place in the realm of the synchronic and in this respect Marxism shares a terrain with sociological criticism. What distinguishes Marxism from sociology, though, is its "subjective" element, that is to say its understanding of the concept of "class". Sociological studies tend to identify and then isolate their particular object of study, in this case a particular

class. For Marxism on the other hand class is a differential and relational concept, the very notion of a class implicitly designates other classes and can only be understood in relation to those other social classes. So, for Marxism the analysis of class does not involve the movement from one distinct area to another so much as ways of relating distinctive positions together. Just as the analysis of a given work is seen to be incomplete unless we can begin to understand the conditions in which it was made and against whom it was directed or designed to correct. In this sense Marxist criticism does not involve the movement from one specialised area to another - from literature to economics, say - but rather the movement from specialisation to the concrete, from the isolated literary text to history itself. The introduction of socio-economic material into Marxist criticism is not simply a gratuitous act to enable critics to talk about external issues but 'an enlargement structurally inherent in such criticism, as an intrinsic and indispensable moment in Marxist literary criticism seen as a "form" of understanding' (MF, 378). If the individual cultural artefact can be said to "reflect" its social and historical moment, which for Jameson it certainly does, then 'what it reflects is not so much the class in itself as some autonomous cultural configuration, but rather the situation of that class, or, in short, class conflict' (MF, 381-2).

With the concept of class we begin to emerge into history, for within Marxism class not only has this synchronic dimension, its differential and relational character, but also a diachronic dimension, that is to say its place in the historical process itself, 'its participation in a given and determinate stage in historical evolution' (MF, 385). The difficulty of our relationship to the past, to historical events, is that it is not static and fixed but constantly changing due to our own distance from the given moment and also the perspective we take on our own situation:

History is indeed precisely this obligation to multiply the horizons in which the object is maintained, to multiply the perspectives from which it is seen;

(MF, 390)



Thus Marxism has the advantage of a multiplicity of codes with which to view a given phenomenon. We have just discussed the possibility of reuniting the object with its class affiliations but we could also see it in terms of the economic code: that is to say to view the work of art as a thing given but also as a product, an object that has been produced, a commodity in other words and this will entail not only an analysis of the mode of production but also of its distribution and consumption. What we consume suggests Jameson is not only the product itself but also the idea of the thing, the pleasure principle as the very essence of the distinction between use-value and exchange-value. But it is:

the profound vocation of the work of art in a commodity society: *not* to be a commodity, *not* to be consumed, to be *unpleasurable* in the commodity sense.  
(MF, 395)

Thus we return to Adorno whereby the evolution of artistic forms is not seen as in some way parallel to, or homologous with, the changes in social reality but as internal to the work itself, as distortions and contradictions in the raw material itself by the commodity form which finds its expression in the formal properties of the work itself. This is what Jameson calls the inner form, defining it as a hermeneutic concept, although not in the sense of some universal essence or law, but as the reaffirmation of the interpretative operation itself:

The overall movement of a Marxist criticism is, of course, just such a passage from the surface to an underlying reality, from an apparently autonomous object to a vaster ground of which this object proves a part or articulation.

(MF, 402)

The literary work then can be seen to have a symbolic function in which it is not so much the story or content which gives satisfaction but the form itself without which the story could not have been articulated. The inner form of modern texts can be said to be production as such or "literary" production in particular, the writing of particular kinds of sentences. The function of dialectical criticism then will be the laying bare of this inner form which is at once a disguise and a revelation of the concrete. As Jameson outlined in

his essay on Metacommentary it will be a process of removing the censorship and bringing to the surface the repressed of the work.

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#### Notes.

- 1 Fredric Jameson, 'Introduction to T.W. Adorno', in *Salmagundi*, nos. 10-11 (1969), p. 141.
- 2 Terry Eagleton, 'Fredric Jameson: The Politics of Style', in *Against The Grain: Essays 1975-1985* (London: Verso, 1986), p. 66.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 65.
- 4 I shall return to the question of stylistic practice and theoretical weaknesses in the final chapter.
- 5 The content of the Absolute Idea, the goal of the dialectic, is simply said to be "the system of which we have been hitherto studying the development," i.e., the dialectic itself, where the end of the journey is simply seen to be the journey itself, and the method that has been followed on [it].  
J.N. Findlay, *Ascent to the Absolute* quoted in *Hegel: The Essential Writings*, ed. Frederick G. Weiss (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974), p. 16.
- 6 An example of Hegel's immanent critique can be given from his criticism of empiricism or sense-certainty. Hegel takes the basic category of sense-certainty, the This, in its dual form of, the *Now* and the *Here*, and poses the question:  
What is Now? we reply, for example, the Now is night-time. To test the truth of this certainty of sense, a simple experiment is all we need: write that truth down. A truth cannot lose anything by being written down, and just as little by our preserving and keeping it. If we look again at the truth we have written down, look at it, *now, at this noon time*, we shall have to say it has turned stale and become out of date.  
  
The same will be the case when we take the *Here*, the other form of the This. The Here is, e.g., the tree. I turn about and this truth has disappeared and has changed round into its opposite: the Here is not a tree but a house. The Here itself does not disappear; it is and remains in the disappearance of the house, tree, and so on, and is indifferently house, tree. The This is shown thus again to be *mediated simplicity*, in other words, to be *universality*.  
*Hegel: The Essential Writings*, pp. 56, 57.
- 7 Hegel's "aufheben" has three distinct but related meanings, which the English verb "develop" does as much justice to as any. It means (1) to cancel or suspend, (2) to raise up, and (3) to preserve or maintain. The key to this triadic development, however, is what Hegel calls the negativity of the finite, a fact which defines and so pervades the

experienced world that we take it for granted, and the "three" moments actually resolve themselves into a two-fold negation. The finite is itself the first negation, and the process of cancelling or abrogating this negativity is the second. Hegel also speaks of "absolute negativity" by which he means the resultant (but not therefore static) truth which is this double negation itself.

*Hegel: The Essential Writings*, p. 8.

8 Green, L., Culler, J. & Klein, R. 'Interview with Fredric Jameson', in *Diacritics*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1982), p. 88.

9 See 'Metacommentary', in Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971-1986: Vol. 1 Situations of Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988).

10 The distinction between the Hegelian and the Marxian notions of "self-consciousness" will be examined at greater length in the concluding section of this chapter.

11 In *Marxism and Form* Jameson describes the collected essays of *Notes To Literature* as 'perhaps Adorno's masterpiece' (MF, 51), whilst *Negative Dialectics* is seen as 'in the long run a massive failure' (MF, 58). However, in *Late Marxism, Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic* this position is considerably revised:

the stress, particularly in the essay on 'The Essay as Form',<sup>19</sup> on the repudiation of system and the commitment to the fragmentary and the occasional, to a freedom in the instant that eschewed the traditional Germanic longing for the Hauptwerk and the architectonic truth. This particular rhetoric ... does not strike me as particularly convincing in Adorno, p. 247.

The footnote observes:

What one misses in the 'Essay as Form' is any consideration of the generic and institutional infrastructure of the 'essay' in cultural journalism, the feuilleton, etc. determinants which considerably reduce and demystify the putative 'freedom' of the genre. p. 261.

One could note that many of these mediations are also missing from Jameson's own work, a point I will return to in my final chapter. In the present chapter I will restrict myself to Jameson's early assessment of Adorno and my own reading of 'The Essay as Form'.

12 Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', trans. B. Hullot-Kentor, & F. Will, in *New German Critique*, no. 32 (1984), p. 152.

13 Ibid., p. 159.

14 Ibid., p. 171.

15 Fredric Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture', in *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 14.

16 Ibid., p. 14.

17 Jameson, 'Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture', p. 10. Here and in the subsequent section of this chapter I shall work with Jameson's own definitions of reification. A fuller critique of his use of the concept will be given in the final chapter.

18 Ibid., p. 10.

19 Ibid., p. 10.

20 Ibid., p. 12.

- 21 Ibid., p. 23.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 25-6.
- 23 Ibid., p. 29.
- 24 I shall discuss the notion of a "Utopian impulse" in greater detail in part III of section 2 of the present chapter.
- 25 Adorno, 'The Essay as Form', p. 160.
- 26 Ibid., p. 170.
- 27 Within the Marxist tradition itself G.A. Cohen's text *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), the inaugural work of what has become known as analytical Marxism, provides an example of an alternative to Hegelian Marxism which is both accessible and clear without denying the complexity of the issues involved.
- 28 'Interview with Fredric Jameson', in *Diacritics*, vol. 12, no. 3 (1982), p. 73.
- 29 Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States*, p. 239.
- 30 Ibid., p. 229.
- 31 Ibid., p. 230.
- 32 Ibid., p. 233.
- 33 Neil Larsen, 'Fredric Jameson and the Fate of Dialectical Criticism', Foreword to *The Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971-1986: Vol. 1 Situations of Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. ix.
- 34 The designation "Western Marxism" and its relationship to "Hegelian Marxism" is itself a controversial and contested issue. In his now canonical study, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, Perry Anderson does not include British Marxists such as Williams and Thompson but does include the stridently anti-Hegelian Althusser. For an excellent short discussion of these issues see Martin Jay 'Introduction: The Topography of Western Marxism' from *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984). As I shall argue in my final chapter, I see Jameson and his work as very much in the tradition of Western Marxism in certain key characteristics: his isolation from any mass political movement, a consequent complexity and inaccessibility of style, an emphasis on philosophy rather than economics or politics and a central concern with totality and reification.
- 35 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 349.
- 36 Ibid., p. 352.
- 37 Frank Lentricchia, *After The New Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 6.
- 38 Ibid., p. 6.
- 39 Ibid., p. 7.
- 40 Ibid., p. 7.
- 41 Ibid., p. 7.
- 42 Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Hertfordshire: Philip Allen, 1990), p. 1.
- 43 Perry Anderson, *Arguments Within English Marxism* (London: Verso, 1980), p. 167.
- 44 Ibid., p. 167.
- 45 These questions will be considered at greater length in chapter 3.
- 46 Fredric Jameson, 'On Politics and Literature' in *Salmagundi*, nos. 2-3 (1968), p. 17.
- 47 Ibid., p. 18.

- 48 Ibid., p. 19.
- 49 Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, p. 86.
- 50 Theodor W. Adorno 'Ernst Bloch's Spuren', in *Notes To Literature*, Vol. 1, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), p. 200.
- 51 Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*, p. 87.
- 52 Ibid., p. 88.
- 53 Ibid., p. 88.
- 54 See 'Fredric Jameson: The Politics of Style', p. 71.
- 55 I have already alluded to Jameson's insistence on the need for a conception of totality in the preceding section and I will return to consider his use of the concept in greater detail in the final chapter. Here I am primarily concerned with Jameson's understanding and use of the concept of reification.
- 56 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. R. Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), p. 128.
- 57 Ibid., p. 142.
- 58 Ibid., p. 204.
- 59 Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, p. 34.
- 60 Ibid., p. 54.
- 61 Ibid., p. 61.
- 62 Tom Bottomore, Laurence Harris, Victor G. Kiernan & Ralph Miliband, eds., *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, Second Edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 463-65.
- 63 Lukács *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 83.
- 64 Ibid., p. 83.
- 65 Ibid., p. 96.
- 66 Ibid., p. 100.
- 67 Jameson, 'Metacommentary', p. 4.
- 68 Ibid., p. 5.
- 69 Ibid., p. 5.
- 70 Ibid., p. 6.
- 71 Ibid., p. 7.
- 72 Ibid., p. 7.
- 73 Ibid., p. 7.
- 74 Ibid., p. 11.
- 75 Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth', in *Structural Anthropology*, trans. C. Jacobson, & B.G. Schoepf (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).  
After breaking down the Theban myth into its constituent "mythemes" and relations Lévi-Strauss proceeds to interpret his data, concluding that 'the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction (an impossible achievement if, as it happens, the contradiction is real)', p. 229.
- 76 Jameson, 'Metacommentary', p. 5.
- 77 Ibid., p. 13.
- 78 Ibid., p. 14.
- 79 Ibid., p. 14.
- 80 Ibid., p. 14.

## HISTORY: THE POLITICAL UNCONSCIOUS

History as a totality (universal history) is neither the mechanical aggregate of individual historical events, nor is it a transcendent heuristic principle opposed to the events of history, a principle that could only become effective with the aid of a special discipline, the philosophy of history. The totality of history is itself a real historical power - even though one that has not hitherto become conscious and has therefore gone unrecognised - a power which is not to be separated from the reality (and hence the knowledge) of the individual facts without at the same time annulling their reality and their factual existence. It is the real, ultimate ground of their reality and their factual existence and hence also of their knowability even as individual facts.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout *Marxism and Form*, Jameson consistently recapitulates and enacts the movement of the dialectic from the intrinsic to the extrinsic, from the isolated, individual artefact to its ultimate ground in history. With its opening exhortation "Always historicize!" *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* unequivocally announces itself as a continuation and a deepening of this project. In many ways *The Political Unconscious* completes and subsumes the work of *Marxism and Form* and *The Prison House of Language* as Jameson, for the first time, moved beyond the critical surveys of his earlier work and offers a synthesis of his own ideas, ideas which were initially sketched in a different form in texts such as 'Metacommentary' and 'Toward a Dialectical Criticism'. The publication of *The Political Unconscious* also signalled Jameson's most ambitious engagement with contemporary theoretical debates up to this point in time<sup>2</sup> and his emergence as a major theoretician in his own right. As Terry Eagleton writes in his short survey of North American criticism, 'The Idealism of American Criticism',<sup>3</sup> *The Political Unconscious* established Jameson 'as without question the foremost American Marxist critic, and one of the leading literary theorists of the Anglophone world'.<sup>4</sup>

However, the critical reception of *The Political Unconscious* was by no means unanimous; in the United States Jameson's text was extremely influential, whereas in Britain its reception was rather muted. Following the publication of *The Political Unconscious* in 1981 there was a flurry of interest in Jameson's work in the USA: the Miami University of Ohio held a symposium on his work in 1982, the proceedings of which were subsequently published in a special issue of *Critical Exchange*. *Diacritics* also devoted an issue to Jameson's work, as did the *New Orleans Review*.<sup>5</sup> James Kavanagh's opening panegyric sets the tone for many of the subsequent articles from the Ohio symposium; reflecting on the transformation of the American critical scene from the heyday of New Criticism to the present centrality of Marxist criticism, Kavanagh suggests that this has largely been brought about through the work of Fredric Jameson:

I want to mark this transformation, this reopening, of a field of theoretical and ideological practice as a nontrivial *political* accomplishment of which this "special issue" is but one more result. Yes, we must recognize the historical conditions of possibility - the constant irruption of revolution from Vietnam to Central America, the re-emergence of capitalism's social and economic crisis, etc. - that set the stage for the discursive subject "Fredric Jameson" to be the bearer of a *possible* ideological project; and we must also recognize that this project was so effectively realized only because a lived subject (however fictional and precarious) made a disciplined, comprehensive, and immanent appropriation-critique of virtually every critical language issuing from the crevices of the Western ideological apparatus, persuasively turning the attention of each to Marxism, such that it is becoming almost unimaginable to do literary theory without taking Marxism sympathetically into account.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast Eagleton concludes his review of the Jameson's work with the wry comment:

For the question irresistibly raised for the Marxist reader of Jameson is simply this: how is a Marxist-structuralist analysis of a minor novel of Balzac to help shake the foundations of capitalism?<sup>7</sup>

How then can we account for such a disparity in the text's reception, from equally

sympathetic Marxist critics? Robert Young has identified three principal reasons for the extreme variance in the American and British receptions of the text: firstly, *The Political Unconscious* appeared 'at a time when the tide of deconstruction seemed virtually unstoppable,'<sup>8</sup> yet Jameson's Marxism could at once appropriate Derrida's insights and at the same time supersede Deconstruction itself.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, Jameson's Marxist criticism offered a return to a kind of ethical criticism which Structuralism and Deconstruction appeared to have ruled out of debate. As Young writes 'this appealed to a traditional understanding of criticism's value, as well as to male critics who felt increasingly upstaged by the forceful politics that feminism had made available to women'.<sup>10</sup> Finally, and perhaps most significantly for the text's reception in Britain and Europe,<sup>11</sup> *The Political Unconscious* was seen to herald, what Jameson called, the 'Althusserian Revolution' (PU, 37). Indeed *The Political Unconscious* seemed to announce Althusser as 'a great discovery',<sup>12</sup> as the latest thing in a rapidly changing theoretical field. Yet, as Young points out, the text was appearing in Britain in 'a post-Althusserian context'.<sup>13</sup> Jameson's British readership was already familiar with Althusser's work, and more specifically the Althusserian influence on literary theory through the work of Macherey and Eagleton's Althusserian phase.<sup>14</sup> In other words, Jameson was heralding a theoretical revolution that had already passed by and of which the critique was now firmly established within British Marxism.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, by the end of the 1970s, the impetus behind the Althusserian reconstruction of Marxism, and its impact, was already on the wane.<sup>16</sup>

Jameson's theoretical wager was to present a version of Marxism which was at once open to the plurality of the new theoretical climate but at the same time insisted upon the priority of Marxist interpretation. This is a paradox, I shall argue, that not even Jameson's great rhetorical skills could ultimately, successfully, achieve. In a long and closely argued opening chapter, entitled 'On Interpretation', Jameson offers a sustained defence of his Hegelian-Marxist position, a critique of the limitations and ideologies of post-structuralism



and a reinvigorated method of Marxist interpretation. As with his earlier work, Jameson's theoretical strategy remains one of inclusion and co-option, rather than exclusion and rejection, seeking to retain the positive and useful elements of contemporary theoretical discourse whilst simultaneously revealing its inconsistencies and aporias; which, as we observed in the previous chapter, can only achieve coherence in the context of an overriding Marxist analysis. However, contrary to the emphasis of *Marxism and Form* upon the diversity of Marxism, *The Political Unconscious* proposes the primacy of Marxism from a more global and totalizing perspective, as a final untranscendable horizon; 'the absolute horizon of all reading and interpretation' (PU, 17). Marxism is no longer conceived of as a situationally specific discourse but rather the one mode of thought which subsumes all other interpretative systems within its own historical narrative and assumes priority over other, secondary, methodologies by its very density and semantic yield.

In this chapter I shall examine Jameson's historicizing and incorporative strategy. I shall initially consider the relationship between Marxism and historicism, outlining Jameson's formulation of what he terms "structural historicism" before examining this concept in more detail with respect to *The Political Unconscious*. My consideration of this text will take the form of an analysis of the two major propositions behind its title *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, that is: History as a political unconscious, and History as narrative. The former will reconsider the sense in which we are to understand the political as "unconscious" or alternatively the unconscious as "political". The latter will consider the suggestiveness of Jameson's reformulation of the Althusserian problematic of structural causality. This analysis will focus upon Jameson's reading of the work of Jacques Lacan and Louis Althusser respectively. Whilst the work of these two figures clearly facilitates Jameson's project and the formulation of the concept of *structural historicism* their work also defines the limitations of his strategy of subsuming diverse philosophical positions within his own Hegelian Marxist narrative. In

the following chapter I shall return to the efficacy of Jameson's attempt to subsume, what would appear to be, radically heterogeneous discourses within his own overarching Marxist historical narrative, by focussing on his attempt to co-opt the work of Deleuze and Guattari into his own problematic.

### **Marxism and Historicism**

In the essay 'Marxism and Historicism'<sup>17</sup> Jameson highlights four traditional solutions to the problem of historicism (that is to say 'our relationship to the past, and of our possibility of understanding the latter's monuments, artifacts and traces'<sup>18</sup>): Antiquarianism, Existential historicism, Structural typology and Nietzschean antihistoricism and argues that Marxism as an absolute historicism is superior to these more limited and ideological options. The first and last of these solutions are the least satisfactory, as essentially they both amount to a refusal of the problem itself, albeit from opposing directions. Antiquarianism seeks to solve the problem by in effect abolishing the present and dwelling in the past, whilst Nietzschean antihistoricism with its notion of necessary forgetting or forgetfulness valorizes the present at the expense of any knowledge of the past. I shall not, therefore, be considering these options in any detail as Jameson is much more interested in the possibilities offered by the second and third of our solutions.

Existential historicism has its theoretical origins in the conception that 'every culture is immanently comprehensible in its own terms',<sup>19</sup> it does not, suggests Jameson, seek to reconstruct a linear, evolutionary or genetic history (immediately susceptible to charges of teleology) but rather designates a "transhistorical event":

by which *historicity* as such is manifested, by means of the contact between

the historian's mind in the present and a given synchronic cultural complex from the past.<sup>20</sup>

Existential historicism, therefore, finds its practitioners in the realms of cultural studies and aesthetics, or what is more broadly defined as the "humanities". It essentially views 'the experience of history [as] a contact between an individual subject in the present and a cultural object in the past',<sup>21</sup> that is to say, an aesthetic experience. For Jameson, the strength and value of existential historicism lies in 'quality of rapt attention that [it] brings to the objects of its study',<sup>22</sup> but herein also lies its central flaw or weakness. The dilemma for existential historicism is that both the subject and object poles of this experience are open to infinite relativization, and in order to contain or restrict this process it must rely upon certain ideological presuppositions about human nature. If it is not to collapse into mere chronology, the simple succession of one thing after another, it must, *a priori*, posit a notion of unity:

This principle of unity, or, in other words, the ideological underpinning of existential historicism, is then derived from German *Lebensphilosophie*, in which the infinite multiplicity of human symbolic acts is the expression of the infinite potentialities of a nonalienated human nature.<sup>23</sup>

Our experience of history can thus be seen to restore something of this richness which is so lacking in today's alienated and reified world. However, there is clearly a 'fundamental imbalance of such views of historical experience, which oppose the response of an individual subject to the collective realities of any moment of the past',<sup>24</sup> and we must look elsewhere to restore this balance.

The final solution we have yet to consider is that of structural typology, which I shall only briefly discuss here as it will be the subject of the final section of this chapter. Structural typology provides us with the dialectical counterpoint to our previous position: whereas

existential historicism follows the path of subjective experience as it orientates our relationship to the past, structuralist historiography follows the path of the object, focussing on the forces and events of history as the determinate reality of an objective historical process, and organising this data around various forms of patterning or typologies. In other words, Structuralist Historiography is not concerned with our subjective experience or interpretations of history but with the "deep" structures or patterns embedded within texts and which construct or constitute both that history and our experience of it. Structuralist historiography does not seek to articulate a sequence of events as causally related but rather the "conditions of possibility" for the emergence of given phenomena. By privileging the synchronic system over diachronic constructs Structuralist historiography repudiates two 'related and essentially *narrative* forms of analysis';<sup>25</sup> what can be termed the *teleological*, or Enlightenment sense of progress, and the *genetic*, or imaginary construction of a past term as the evolutionary precursor of a fuller term that has historical existence. Therefore, Structuralist historiography does not reconstruct the past as the precursor or cause of the present but rather builds 'a model of "transition" from one to the other, and this is no longer then a genetic hypothesis but rather an investigation of structural transformations'.<sup>26</sup> Thus contrary to existential historicism we have a greater sense of the vast and impersonal movement of history, of processes beyond the control and influence of individual subjects, but we have also lost that vital and urgent sense of contact with the past that was the great virtue of existential historicism. What structuralist typologies lack, suggests Jameson, is reflexivity, that dialectical self-consciousness which would raise structuralism to a consideration of its own historical moment.

For Jameson, Marxism, as an absolute historicism, provides the only solution to this dilemma, uniting the urgency and intensity of existential historicism with the articulation of collective forces in the manner of Structural typologies. Indeed, Jameson goes so far as to

suggest that structural historiography is not necessarily radically different from or incommensurable with existential historicism:

On the contrary, semiotic analysis of such texts generally discloses the operation of "deep" semic oppositions - a kind of historical *pensée sauvage* - which can usually be found to project a whole structural typology of cultures imperceptible at the surface of the text and disguised or displaced by the emphasis on the sensitivity of the individual historian-subject.<sup>27</sup>

Equally, all "deep" structures can be rewritten in "something like" a narrative or teleological vision of history. Jameson's aim, therefore, is to formulate what he terms a *structural historicism*, which would do justice to both the insights of existential historicism and structural typology; which would also accommodate both the subject and object poles of historical experience and provide a solution to the 'seemingly unresolvable alternation between Identity and Difference'<sup>28</sup> as the rock upon which all historicisms come to founder. The use of the Marxian concept of "mode of production" facilitates just such a squaring of the circle in that it functions not as a narrative of emergence but genealogically. That is to say as 'the narrative reconstruction of the conditions of possibility of any full synchronic form'.<sup>29</sup> For Jameson, mode of production is a *differential* concept in that any given mode of production (for example, capitalism) presupposes all previous modes of production (feudalism, Asiatic mode, primitive communism etc.), as well as anticipating a future mode of production. In this sense no mode of production exists in isolation or a "pure" state but coexists, at any given moment, with all the other modes of production. To borrow Raymond Williams' distinctions: at present capitalism represents the *dominant* mode of production but sedimented within this are the *residual* forms of previous modes of production as well as the *emergent* form of a properly socialist mode of production. We are still in need, however, of a concept or category with which to think this *structural coexistence* of various distinct modes of production, as well as the process of transition from one mode to another: Jameson

suggests the term *cultural revolution* (again, I shall return to this concept in greater detail below).

Mode of production would, therefore, appear to meet the requirements of the object pole, articulating the unity and identity of given historical periods whilst simultaneously acknowledging their difference from previous as well as subsequent historical moments and their intrinsic diversity. But we still need to identify the position of the subject and for this Jameson suggests the present formulation allows him to re-ground the subject in history in three distinct ways. Firstly, a subject's relationship to the past is no longer to be seen as a relationship between an individual subject and an isolated cultural artifact but as a mediation for a non-individual and collective process: 'the confrontation of two distinct social forms or modes of production' whereby individual acts of reading and interpretation are seen as 'allegorical figures for this essentially collective confrontation of two social forms'.<sup>30</sup> This in turn enables the second movement of re-grounding to take place as history now retains the urgency of the past in the sense that 'the past will itself become an active agent in this process and will begin to come before us as a radically different life form which rises up to call our own form of life into question'.<sup>31</sup> Finally, in that mode of production structurally implies a future just as fully as a past it allows for the articulation of the utopian impulse: 'the sense of a hermeneutic relationship to the past which is able to grasp its own present as history only on condition it manages to keep the idea of the future, and of radical and utopian transformation, alive'.<sup>32</sup> I will now consider more fully Jameson's conception of History and his mediation between existential and structural historicism, suggesting that a number of theoretical problems arise from his attempted synthesis of a synchronic model, mode of production, and diachronic process, the unending narrative of class struggle.

## History as Political Unconscious

For Jameson the problems of historicism enumerated above can only be resolved by Marxism because Marxism alone grasps the 'essential *mystery* of the past' as a single great human adventure:

These matters [the events of the past] can recover their original urgency for us only if they are retold within the unity of a single great collective story; only if, in however disguised and symbolic a form, they are seen as sharing a single fundamental theme - for Marxism, the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity; only if they are grasped as the vital episodes in a single vast unfinished plot: (PU, 19-20)

The dilemma for Jameson is how to restore these faint murmurings of the past and recover this single great story? It is this task that Jameson sets himself in *The Political Unconscious*, or more specifically, the attempt 'to restructure the problematics of ideology, of the unconscious and of desire, of representation, of history, and of cultural production, around the all-informing process of *narrative*' (PU, 13). What is required, suggests Jameson, is a mode of interpretation which can accommodate the notion of structural causality: in other words, a mode of interpretation which lays bare the "conditions of possibility" rather than the "causal" determinates of texts. We will see just how successful Jameson is in formulating such a mode of interpretation below.

The operation of historicizing, notes Jameson, can take either of two paths, that of the object (the things themselves, the objective structures of a given cultural text), or, the subject (the concepts and categories by which we attempt to understand those things, the interpretative categories and codes through which we receive and decipher the text). *The Political Unconscious* follows the second of these paths but it does so with the proviso

that we can never confront a text immediately 'in all its freshness as a thing-in-itself', all texts come to us mediated by prior interpretations; thus Jameson's 'object of study is less the text itself than the interpretations through which we attempt to confront and appropriate it' (PU, 9-10). The political or historical interpretation of texts is not merely some extrinsic or supplementary method but, for Jameson, provides the ultimate horizon for all interpretation and reading, because ultimately everything *is* political and social in character: to distinguish between political and nonpolitical texts is itself a symptom of the reification of the contemporary world. Marxism's claim to theoretical primacy rests on just such a recognition of the political nature of our everyday lifeworld and the final determination not by economics or class struggle but by History itself and:

It is in detecting the traces of that uninterrupted narrative, in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of this fundamental history, that the doctrine of a political unconscious finds its function and its necessity. (PU, 20)

For Jameson, interpretation or the hermeneutic operation is essentially an allegorical act; allegory, as it has been stigmatized in recent theoretical discourses, is usually understood as the rewriting of a given text in terms of some master-narrative or code which provides the key to the understanding of that text. This has rightly been seen as a reductive operation in which the plurality of narratives and semantic possibilities is reduced to mere variations on a single theme, reducing the heterogeneity of narratives to a homogenous Ur-narrative. Jameson, on the other hand, suggests that allegory should be seen as an exemplary method, not for reducing diversity but for resisting the reduction of the collective to the individual and:

the opening up of the text to multiple meanings, to successive rewritings and overwritings which are generated as so many levels and so many supplementary interpretations. (PU, 29)



Indeed, for Jameson, the allegorical operation or moment is unavoidable as every formal method can be said implicitly to contain and project a philosophy of history. Ethical criticism, for example, which for Jameson remains the hegemonic discourse in literary and cultural studies, rests on certain presuppositions about human nature and experience, accepting these as eternally given rather than historically and culturally specific. Even the most stridently anti-interpretative Structuralism can be said to project a master code in which everything is to be rewritten, that is to say, language itself. We are then, in a position in which interpretation is unavoidable and 'all of the original philosophical systems or positions in recent times have in one way or another projected a hermeneutic which is specific to them' (PU, 61). Jameson, therefore, argues that we should not simply abandon the laborious work of interpretation in favour of the more recent celebrations of immanence, materiality and schizoid texts; on the contrary, we should more rigorously work through it. As in *Marxism and Form*, Jameson highlights the medieval system of the four levels as a 'particularly suggestive' (PU, 31) system for making connections between what now appear to be the incommensurable realms of: the public and the private, the psychological and the social, the poetic and the political. However his real interests, in the present text, clearly lie elsewhere, indeed the "strong" rewritings that Jameson proposes themselves presuppose another analytic system:

if not a conception of the unconscious itself, then at least some mechanism of mystification or repression in terms of which it would make sense to seek a latent meaning behind a manifest one, or to rewrite the surface categories of a text in the stronger language of a more fundamental interpretive code. (PU, 60)

For Jameson, psychoanalysis is 'the only really new and original hermeneutic' (PU, 61) since the medieval system alluded to above, although psychoanalysis is to be understood not as the study of sexuality as such but as the study of "desire". Jameson also insists on the need to historicize psychoanalysis, emphasizing that the discovery of desire 'as the

very dynamic of our being as individual subjects' (PU, 65) and the possibility or precondition for its articulation and analysis, its dynamics and the mechanisms of repression, is dependent on an initial isolation of sexuality as an object of study. Therefore, the discovery of psychoanalysis is itself dependent on, or a consequence of, the increasing abstraction of experience in modern society. In other words, it presupposes, as a condition of its possibility, the processes of "rationalization" and "reification" that are associated with the emergence of capitalism. The limitation of the Freudian model, at least for Jameson's conception of a political unconscious, is that it remains locked within the problematic of the individual subject and individual psyche, whilst Jameson's notion is unequivocally "collective". Therefore, Jameson shifts 'from the Freudian hermeneutic to a quite different interpretative system, comparable only to the psychoanalytic one in the persistence of just such a valorization of desire' (PU, 68), that is to say, the archetypal system of Northrop Frye.

For Jameson, Frye's greatness lies in his willingness to raise issues of community and collective representation, seeing literature as the 'symbolic meditation on the destiny of community' (PU, 70). In his appropriation of the medieval system of the four levels Frye reversed the third and fourth levels, the moral and the anagogic respectively, so that the system's:

**figural and political momentum is broken, and the collective content of the image has been reprivatized in the henceforth purely individual terms of the isolated body and the merely personal ecstasy. (PU, 73)**

Jameson, on the other hand, insists on the need to keep faith with the medieval model in which this final anagogic level rewrites or transforms the third subjective level into a meditation on 'the destiny of the human race as a whole' (PU, 31). The system that Jameson proposes then for the political and historical interpretation of texts draws on the

insights of both the previous systems, relying on the Freudian conception of the unconscious and the dynamics of desire and from Frye the conception of bodily transfiguration as a figure for the perfected community and collective life.

I shall return to the question of the efficacy of Jameson's attempt to draw together these diverse systems of interpretation: medieval allegory, Freudian unconscious and Frye's archetypes, below. Initially, though, I shall outline Jameson's own version of political hermeneutics from what is perhaps the most theoretically dense and intricately argued chapters of Jameson's *oeuvre*, 'On Interpretation'.

Jameson's interpretative system proposes a series of concentric circles, or "semantic horizons", of interpretation, what he designates: the political, the social and the historical. The first horizon coincides with the individual text itself, which following the work of Levi-Strauss on the structural analysis of myth, is to be read as a *symbolic act*: 'the individual narrative, or individual formal structure, is to be grasped as the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction' (PU, 77). The value of such a formulation is that it inscribes a movement beyond the purely formal properties of the work itself, not in the sense of a movement to some abstract extrinsic criteria but 'rather immanently, by construing purely formal patterns as a symbolic enactment of the social within the formal and the aesthetic' (PU, 77). The act of interpretation then, must grasp the text as a "determinate contradiction". In Jameson's earlier work the presence of the "dialectical shock" was seen as the mark of genuinely Marxist criticism. In *The Political Unconscious* that role falls to the notion of "contradiction" as the central category of any Marxist analysis:

The methodological requirement to articulate a text's fundamental contradiction may then be seen as a test of the completeness of the analysis: (PU, 80)

The shift of registers from the text to the real is inscribed in the very ambiguity of the notion of a "symbolic act". Depending on which half of the term is emphasised the operation is merely a *symbolic* act and its solutions imaginary, or, it is a genuine *act*, albeit on the symbolic level. For Jameson, the ambiguity of this notion is fortuitous in that it not only dramatizes the situation (and dilemma) of art and culture in contemporary society but it also dramatizes the present status of the Real itself. The ambiguity, however, does not only exist within the concept of the symbolic act but also within Jameson's text. Jameson borrows this concept from the work of Kenneth Burke (PU, 81) and when discussing the notion in relation to Burke uses a lower case "r" in relation to the "real". We may surmise, therefore, as there is no definition of the term, that "real" designates a realist conception of reality as independent of human perception and activity. However, in the following paragraph there is a significant change in register:

The literary or aesthetic act therefore always entertains some active relationship with the Real; yet in order to do so, it cannot simply allow "reality" to persevere inertly in its own being, outside the text and at a distance. (PU, 81)

The lower case "real" has now been replaced by a capitalized Real, whilst the use of the semi-colon links this capitalized Real with the "reality" in quotation marks in the second half of the sentence. Yet the notion of the Real (capital R) derives from the work of Jacques Lacan and does not refer to reality (in quotation marks or otherwise). I shall examine Lacan's conception of the Real in greater detail below specifically in relation to the parallels Jameson's draws between it and Althusser's notion of "absent cause". For the present I shall just highlight the slippage that has taken place in Jameson's text between: real - reality - Real, as these terms do not designate the same phenomena and the conflation of these terms will produce serious theoretical confusions within Jameson's hermeneutic. For my own purposes of exposition I shall continue to use the capitalized

Real when Jameson does so in his text and in relation to Lacan's notion of the Real, at all other times I shall use the more conventional real.

As we shall see in the following chapter contemporary attacks on representation have effectively discredited notions of reality, or the real, as some ultimate ground or locus of meaning. Just as Saussurean and post-Saussurean semiotics have unremittingly bracketed the referent as an object of knowledge susceptible to veridical criteria, literary theory has bracketed history. Jameson, on the contrary, insists that 'one does not have to argue the reality of History', although this is by no means the common-sense empirical reality one might at first assume. History, here, is not so much the "context" within which literary texts are then reinserted, as was the emphasis in *Marxism and Form*, but rather a "subtext", whereby the text itself is seen as a rewriting or 'restructuration of a prior historical or ideological *subtext*'. This subtext, however, is nowhere immanently available to us as a thing-in-itself as it must always be '(re)constructed after the fact' (PU, 81). Therefore, the literary text is always in an active relationship with the Real, not in the sense that its content "reflects" reality but in the way that the Real is drawn into its own formal structures:

The whole paradox of what we have here called the subtext may be summed up in this, that the literary work or cultural object, as though for the first time, brings into being that very situation to which it is also, at one and the same time, a reaction. (PU, 81-2)

History, according to this formula, may not need to be argued for as it is not a text and is both non-narrative and nonrepresentable but it must be qualified in the sense that history is only accessible to us in textual form, that is to say 'it can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization' (PU, 82). Jameson also distinguishes between two forms that this historical subtext can take: the primary form is that which we have already indicated as a

social contradiction, the secondary one is the place of ideology and takes the form of an *aporia* or *antinomy*.

As we have seen the function of contradiction is central to Jameson's Marxist hermeneutic and is here accorded priority, in the form of a "real social contradiction", over the "ideological antinomy". However, the precise nature of dialectical contradiction implied by Marxist theory is itself contested, as we shall see below Althusser grounded his distinction between the Hegelian dialectic and the materialist dialectic in a distinction between a "simple" contradiction (Hegelian) and a "complex" contradiction (Marxist). Equally the status of dialectical contradiction in relation to the social reality and the ideological nature of an antinomy or opposition is problematic. In his essay 'Marxism and the Dialectic'<sup>33</sup> Lucio Colletti draws the distinction between an antinomy and a contradiction as between two forms of opposition: real opposition and dialectical opposition. Colletti writes:

'Real opposition' (or 'contrariety' of incompatible opposites) is an opposition 'without contradiction' ... It does not violate the principles of identity and (non)contradiction, and hence is compatible with formal logic. The second form of opposition, on the contrary, is 'contradictory' ... and gives rise to a dialectical opposition. <sup>34</sup>

Drawing on Kant's definition of a real opposition, Colletti argues that the two elements of the opposition are real and positive in their own right. That is, they do not need the contrary element with which to define themselves, thus the opposition is exclusive, constituting 'a relation of mutual repulsion'.<sup>35</sup> Dialectical opposition, on the other hand, is an 'instance in which one opposite cannot stand without the other and vice-versa', neither of the elements is 'anything in itself or for itself'.<sup>36</sup> Both elements in a dialectical opposition, therefore, are negative and the dialectical relation is a negative relation, a mutual attraction of opposites. Thus the dialectical relation, unlike the real opposition, is

an inclusive relation, each element only has meaning in relation to the other:

Each term therefore, to be itself, implies a relation to the other term; the result is a unity (the unity of opposites). Only *within* this unity is each term the negation of the other.<sup>37</sup>

As Colletti points out, there do not exist phenomena which in-themselves are negative, that is, are "non-being," as that which negates is itself the result of a positive cause. Thus:

What we are dealing with in fact is oppositions which, precisely because they are *real*, are 'devoid of contradiction' and hence have nothing to do with *dialectical contradiction*.<sup>38</sup>

In short, reality can be said to contain real oppositions but it is non-contradictory. According to his own definitions, then, Colletti concedes that the dialectical contradictions of capitalism, of which the conflict between capital and wage-labour stands as the foremost, are not contradictions as such but in fact real oppositions. Insofar as the conflict between capital and wage-labour can be said to be real it cannot be said to be contradictory. However, this would appear to contradict Marx himself, for whom the conflicts of capitalism 'are *dialectical contradictions* in the full sense of the word'.<sup>39</sup>

How, then, can we reconcile this position with Jameson's assertion that opposition is ideological and contradiction is in fact real, insofar as what Jameson calls the social is real. Colletti insists that it is an error to see contradiction as the precondition for any possible reality, as certain forms of dialectical materialism have contended. On the contrary:

In [Marx's] view the contradictions of capitalism do not derive from the fact that capitalism too is a 'reality'. ... in Marx's view, capitalism is contradictory because it is a reality that is upside-down, that is 'stood on its head'.<sup>40</sup>

Following Marx's theory of surplus value, Colletti argues that separation appears as the

normal relation in capitalist society. Separation, through the division of labour and the severance of use-value from exchange-value, creates an 'an inverted situation, in which what is essential ... becomes accidental, and what is accidental becomes the norm'.<sup>41</sup> In other words, it is the very unreality of the commodity structure that is now the reality. Thus, suggests Colletti, the Marxist theories of fetishism and alienation 'draws very close to the theory of contradiction'.<sup>42</sup> In short, it is the very structure of capitalist society that determines its contradictory nature, a contradiction deriving from the heart of the commodity itself. The contradictory nature of capitalism does not arise from the reality of capitalism but rather from its very "unreality"; from its inverted relations between use-value and exchange-value and capital and labour. It is this historical contradiction that Jameson seeks to prioritize over the now ideological oppositions; as they refer to a reality that, for Jameson at least, no longer exists within the capitalist mode of production.

To return to Jameson's hermeneutic model, his second horizon of interpretation moves beyond the text itself and operates at the level of class discourse. Jameson follows E.P. Thompson's definition of class as a relational concept; in other words, the notion of class represents an 'historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness'.<sup>43</sup> For Thompson, such a definition of class is incompatible with the notion of "structure", or indeed, even with the sense of class as a "category"; rather it entails an historical relationship, whereby class experience is determined by the productive relations into which persons are born. Class-consciousness, according to this definition, designates 'the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms'.<sup>44</sup> As in his earlier work, therefore, Jameson emphasises the relational characteristics of class, whereby each class can only be defined in its relationship with other social classes; and insists on the differential nature of class ideology or class-consciousness, that is to say, that its values, ideas and traditions are not



fixed and immutable but active and fluid in opposition to other class discourses. For Thompson, however, the notion of class as one of historical process is incommensurable with the notion of structure, and whilst Jameson retains this definition of class in terms of an historical phenomenon, he also rewrites class discourse, the textual realization of the historical phenomenon, as a structure. I shall return to the dialectic of process and structure at the end of the present chapter.

This relational and oppositional conception of class discourse facilitates Jameson's rewriting of the categories and terms in which the text is understood as a "dialogical structure", in the sense that the dialogical relationship is understood as antagonistic. The object of study at this level is what Jameson calls the *ideologeme* or 'the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourse of social classes' (PU, 76). However, Jameson's reading of the Bakhtinian notion of dialogism as essentially antagonistic is somewhat at variance with the general tenor of the Anglo-American domestication of Bakhtinian ideas. For example, in her preface to *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Caryl Emerson writes:

In place of the comfortable patterns of synthesis and *Aufhebung*, Bakhtin posits a dualistic universe of *permanent* dialogue'.<sup>45</sup>

Whilst accepting that dialogism is not dialectics (Hegelian, Marxist or otherwise), neither is it the "comfortable" world of pluralistic dialogue. For Bakhtin, language in its concrete form of the 'living utterance'<sup>46</sup> is in a constant state of struggle with other utterances in its specific historical and social moment. Thus, contrary to the tradition of Saussurean linguistics Bakhtin does not treat language as an abstract system but as first and foremost a social phenomenon:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up

against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue.<sup>47</sup>

For Bakhtin, the word participates in a social dialogue but this is distinct from dialogism which is internal to the word itself; it is precisely, writes Bakhtin, 'this internal dialogism of the word, which does not assume any external compositional forms of dialogue'<sup>48</sup> which gives the word its enormous power. Language, therefore, can be a dialogue, or indeed a monologue, but it is also at all times, be it in a dialogue or a monologue, dialogical. The base condition of language, argues Bakhtin is dialogised heteroglossia, that is to say, linguistic meaning is the result of a struggle between two contending forces: the centripetal forces which attempt to unify a given language and fix meaning and the centrifugal forces which constantly disrupt this unitary tendency and create new meanings. No language can be either one or the other, that is unitary or heteroglot, as both forces are necessary to keep a language alive; every utterance, writes Bahktin, 'participates in the "unitary language" ... and at the same time partakes of social and historical heteroglossia'.<sup>49</sup> In this sense, then, we can agree with Jameson that the dialogic nature of language is essentially "antagonistic".

But Jameson is proposing more than simply the antagonistic nature of language, he is also suggesting that language embodies the "contadictory" positions of social classes:

Within this new horizon, then, the basic formal requirement of dialectical analysis is maintained, and its elements are still restructured in terms of *contradiction*... contradiction here appears in the form of the dialogical as the irreconcilable demands and positions of antagonistic classes. (PU, 85)

In the terms of the definitions of contradiction and opposition given by Colletti we can say that dialogism is contradictory rather than oppositional in the sense that both elements in

the dialogical relation are mutually dependant. Neither of the structuring forces of language can exist in its own right and for itself. In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* Volosinov describes the inclusive relation of dialogism, the:

*word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant. As word, it is precisely the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee. Each and every word expresses the "one" in relation to the "other." I give myself verbal shape from another's point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong.*<sup>50</sup>

The word is always at least double, its meaning the result of a verbal interaction between addresser and addressee. However, this interaction does not take place between two isolated individuals but between two subjects within a specific historical and social context. The language each uses does not simply express their individual points of view but rather the points of view of the communities from which each derives. For Bakhtin and Volosinov it is always the context rather than the text that defines a given utterance's meaning. Volosinov writes:

*The immediate social situation and the broader social milieu wholly determine - and determine from within, so to speak - the structure of an utterance.*<sup>51</sup>

Language cannot be divorced from its conditions of possibility, furthermore, it is those very conditions of possibility which structure any given utterance, which structure it internally. We do not need to fully endorse Volosinov's sociologism to accept the primacy of context over text and that ideology (Volosinov's community view and Bakhtin's "world view") is not an extrinsic doctrine propogated through language but is internal to language itself. Language, writes Bakhtin, is 'ideologically saturated'<sup>52</sup> it is 'shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgements and accents'.<sup>53</sup> With each utterance the previous usage of words remain sedimented within them and is carried into

the current usage. Language is not an homogenous and unitary system but rather a "stratified" complex of languages, in conflict with each other and embodying a specific ideological perspective in its very structure. Each and every word, according to Volosinov, 'is ideological and each and every application of language involves ideological change'.<sup>54</sup>

It is in this sense that we must understand Jameson's term *ideologeme*, not as some kind of ideological slogan but as intrinsic to the form of the text, and in the structure of its language. Whereas the first level saw the text as an enactment, the imaginary resolution of a real social contradiction, immanent in the formal patterning and structure of the text, the second level treats the text as the *parole*, or individual utterance, of the *langue* of class discourse. The emphasis on the dialogic nature of class discourse entails that we not only listen to the hegemonic discourse - Bakhtin's centripetal or unificatory force - but we also attempt to retrieve the silent and repressed voices - the centrifugal, decentralizing, disruptive forces Bakhtin associated with carnival and low-life and for Jameson of class struggle - against which dominant discourses struggle and define themselves. For Jameson, the value of the concept of the ideologeme resides in its 'amphibious nature' (PU, 87); which can manifest itself either as a pseudoidea, in the sense of a belief system or abstract value, or 'as a protonarrative, a kind of ultimate class fantasy about the "collective characters" which are classes in opposition' (PU, 87). But herein also lies the problem with Jameson's concept, he writes 'as a construct it must be susceptible to both a conceptual description and a narrative manifestation all at once' (PU, 87). One could well ask: Why must it? Particularly as Jameson goes on to say that ideologemes can be elaborated in either direction independently. As with so many of Jameson's formulations, its very flexibility, which in Jameson's own hands facilitates frequently brilliant and insightful readings of texts, makes it difficult to define and even more difficult to utilize.<sup>55</sup>

The final horizon of interpretation situates the cultural text in relation to 'history as a whole' whereby a given text is read in terms of the *ideology of form*. The previous horizon emphasised the distinctive and antagonistic nature of class discourses, drawing attention to the polyphonic rather than the monological character of discourse. But, suggests Jameson, the inverse operation is equally feasible in that:

such concrete semantic differences can on the contrary be focused in such a way that what emerges is rather the all-embracing unity of a single code which they must share and which thus characterizes the larger unity of the social system. (PU, 88)

This single code provides a new object of study which transcends the previous two levels and can be designated as mode of production: 'the symbolic messages transmitted to us by the coexistence of various sign systems which are themselves traces or anticipations of modes of production' (PU, 76). I have already indicated how Jameson fends off accusations of linearity and teleology with regard to the notion of mode of production through a conception of structural co-existence and I should now like to consider this in more detail. For Jameson, even the most schematic and mechanistic conceptions of historical "stages" entail a conception of a cultural dominant, an ideological form specific to a given mode of production, but he goes on to argue this does not imply that mode of production designates a synchronic system. The problem with synchronicity, he observes, is that it has become synonymous with notions of the "total system" and as such implicitly excludes the function of the negative:

In particular, everything about class struggle that was anticipatory in the older dialectical framework, and seen as an emergent space for radically new social relations, would seem, in the synchronic model to reduce itself to practices that in fact tend to reinforce the very system that foresaw and dictated their specific limits. (PU, 91)

At the level of cultural production, any antisystemic or oppositional tendencies ostensibly

inscribed within the work would also be seen as ultimately deriving from and reinforcing the system itself. This dilemma can only be resolved if we respect the various levels of historical abstraction as, for instance, with Jameson's series of enlarging theoretical horizons. Such a system allows one to respect the specificity of individual texts and also conduct a synchronic analysis in terms of the mode of production; whilst at the same time the system's projection of a longer view of history avoids the structural limitations imposed by notions of a total system. A second problem that arises with the notion of historical stages or periods is that the system tends to result in a purely typological or classificatory operation, whereby texts are simply slotted into their appropriate historical moment. Jameson argues that his system of expanding horizons avoids this pitfall through its insistence on the role of "contradiction" at each stage of the process:

we can effectively validate the horizon of the mode of production by showing the form contradiction takes on this level, and the relationship of the cultural object to it. (PU, 94)

In the previous section, I suggested that no mode of production exists in a pure form but always co-exists with other modes of production. For Jameson, the implication of this is that whilst the concept of mode of production may be said to be synchronic, the actual moment of the co-existence of several distinct modes is not, on the contrary, it is dialectically open to history. Any attempt to thereby classify texts according to their respective modes of production will inevitably be forestalled as all texts will be seen to be 'crisscrossed and intersected by a variety of impulses from contradictory modes of cultural production all at once' (PU, 95). The object of study for this third horizon will be what Jameson terms "cultural revolution"; this designation has its most immediate resonance with the Chinese experience of the 1960s and indeed Jameson does not dismiss or foreclose on such associations, particularly in the sense of revivifying the revolutionary process from the bottom-up; however, the concept has much wider connotations. In its broadest terms cultural revolution defines the process of transition from one mode of

production to another and as every concrete historical society is a coexistence of several distinct modes of production:

Cultural revolution will therefore be a moment of "nonsynchronous development" ... a moment of overlap, of the struggle in coexistence between several modes of production at once.<sup>56</sup>

The Western Enlightenment can be seen as just such a moment of struggle and as part of the bourgeois cultural revolution. In other words, cultural revolution designates the process through which social formations retrain or reprogramme subjects for new modes of social life, the process through which subjects acquire new habits, new modes of consciousness and transform human practices. In terms of literary and cultural studies, Jameson sees the notion of cultural revolution opening up 'a whole new framework for the humanities',<sup>57</sup> in the sense that the cultural practice of a given mode of production 'has as its essential function to recreate at every moment the life world of that particular mode and to keep it in being at every moment'.<sup>58</sup> This process of cultural reproduction, however, is not merely a secondary, superstructural, activity dependent upon the primary process of material production but rather 'a single immense process on all these levels'.<sup>59</sup> Thus, for Jameson, cultural producers are "ideologues", although ideologues of a very special sort, and all cultural texts are the sites for class struggle through the confrontation of their various ideologies:

The task of cultural and social analysis thus construed within this final horizon will then clearly be the rewriting of its materials in such a way that this perpetual cultural revolution can be apprehended and read as the deeper and more permanent constitutive structure in which the empirical textual objects know intelligibility. (PU, 97)

In this sense cultural revolution designates the "nonsynchronous development" of culture and social life, it is, suggests Jameson, beyond the synchronic/diachronic dichotomy. The ideology of form therefore defines 'the determinate contradiction of the specific messages

emitted by the varied sign systems which co-exist in a given artistic process as well as in its general social formation' (PU, 98-9). We should note though that at this level a dialectical reversal has taken place and "form" must now be apprehended as "content" in the sense that the formal processes are now grasped as sedimented content in their own right, in other words they carry 'ideological messages of their own, distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the works' (PU, 99). For example, through literary genre. I should now like to examine in greater detail some of the presuppositions that underlie Jameson's system of dialectically expanding horizons.

The notion of a *political* unconscious clearly involves an initial broadening of the concept beyond its conventional usage. For Jameson, the political unconscious is a "collective" unconscious rather than a site of repressed desires and drives associated with an individual psyche. However, Jameson's collective unconscious is not a Jungian one in the sense of a repository for mythical archetypes but rather Walter Benjamin's nightmare of history:

As in all previous history, whoever emerges as victor still participates in that triumph in which today's rulers march over the prostrate bodies of their victims. As is customary, the spoils are borne aloft in that triumphal parade. These are generally called the cultural heritage. ... There has never been a document of culture which was not at one and the same time a document of barbarism.<sup>60</sup>

For Jameson, this heritage of violence and barbarism remains sedimented within our cultural texts, not in their content, in the sense of proletarian novels or socialist realist art, but rather through the form, through what we have identified as the various levels of "contradiction" within the text. Jameson's key mechanism, or mediation, between cultural texts and their social and historical situation is the Marxian category of reification. As we shall see in the final chapter, one problem with Jameson's use of reification is his uncritical acceptance of Lukács' use of the term. A second, and more symptomatic, problem with



Jameson's usage is any clear definition of the sense in which he is using the term. Indeed, his longest consideration of reification comes within a consideration of rationalization:

For the dynamic of *rationalization* - Weber's term, which Lukács will strategically retranslate as *reification* in *History and Class Consciousness* - is a complex one in which the traditional or "natural" ... unities, social forms, human relations, cultural events, even religious systems, are systematically broken up in order to be reconstructed more efficiently, in the form of new post-natural processes or mechanisms; but in which, at the same time, these now isolated broken bits and pieces of older unities acquire a certain autonomy of their own, a semi-autonomous coherence which, not merely a reflex of capitalist reification and rationalization, also in some measure serves to compensate for the dehumanization of experience reification brings with it, and to rectify the otherwise intolerable effects of the new process. (PU, 62-3)

With a characteristic Jamesonian sentence one is overwhelmed with the density and complexity of the sentence itself, as the seemingly relentless and ruthless process of rationalization - or is it reification? - as described by Jameson suddenly turns back upon itself and provides its own compensation, Jameson's semicolon making the link between the historical process and the psychical effect. However, what exactly are 'post-natural processes or mechanisms'? And what is the status of a "certain" autonomy or "some measure" of compensation? How far does autonomy stretch here and what exactly is becoming autonomous from what? Jameson's description appears to simultaneously explain all and nothing, as becomes clear in a later proposition:

the crisis of the social totality is the result of the same phenomena -  
reification, social fragmentation, the division of labour, Taylorization -  
(PU, 190)

To say that the crisis of social totality is the result of social fragmentation seems to be rather tautologous. Furthermore, is Jameson suggesting that the reification is the same as social fragmentation, the division of labour and Taylorization or are these all different

aspects of the same phenomenon - the crisis of social totality?

To summarize the position, then, whilst it remains unclear exactly what Jameson means by reification, its mediatory function is reasonably clear. Reification at once accounts for the historical processes of differentiation, separation and division under capitalism and at the same time for the psychic fragmentation at the individual experiential level. For Jameson, the traces of human labour are gradually effaced from the products of commodity production as the levels of specialization and division increase. However, these traces can never be completely erased as all commodities remain, in the last instance, produced. Using the analogy of Freudian psychoanalysis Jameson suggests that these traces have been repressed through the processes of commodity production and the structure of commodity fetishism. Pursuing the analogy further, if we analyse the mechanisms by which this repression takes place, it will be possible to retrieve and restore those latent traces of production to the manifest content of the text. Jameson finds textual justification for this semantic expansion of the concepts of the unconscious and repression through Levi-Strauss' analysis of myths as imaginary resolutions of real social contradictions and Northrop Frye's conception of literature as a symbolic meditation on the destiny of community. There is, however, a more significant presupposition in *The Political Unconscious* upon which this widening of the concept of the unconscious would seem to rest and which Jameson never fully elucidates: that is to say, the equivalence between Jameson's conception of History and the Lacanian conception of the "Real". Jameson uses Lacan's capitalised Real consistently throughout his text, associating it directly with Althusser's notion of "absent cause" and consequently aligning it with his own conception of History.<sup>61</sup> I shall discuss Althusser's notion of structural causality in greater detail in the following section. Here I shall restrict myself to an analysis of the Lacanian notion of the Real, arguing that whilst the Lacanian and Althusserian systems appear to share certain concepts and terms, they in fact remain incommensurable.

In his essay 'Imagining the Real: Jameson's use of Lacan' Michael Clark writes:

Following Lacan's argument that the Real is inaccessible except through the traces of its effects upon the symbolic, Jameson claims that History, too, can never be perceived or experienced except through its effects upon the various devices by which we mask its ultimate priority - most notably, the narratives that encapsulate and dramatize the various ideological fantasies operating at any particular period.<sup>62</sup>

Following Jameson, Clark further states:

Lacan's transposing the ground of consciousness from what Freud calls the "other scene" of the unconscious to the mechanisms of symbolic structures opens the unconscious to the determination of history as it functions at the material and social levels on which symbolic structures exist for Marxism.<sup>63</sup>

Clark's claim is essentially that Lacan's reformulation of the concept of the unconscious and its relation to the Real enables Jameson to ground the text in History and retain access to History without recourse to a naive realism or vulgar materialism, and at the same time to formulate a conception of the unconscious and subjectivity which does not fall into the errors of either humanism or anti-humanism but allows for the articulation of the relationship between individual experience and trans-individual processes. The problem is whether or not such a claim is sustainable.

Firstly, we must dismiss the notion that Lacan's conception of the Real has anything to do with empirical reality. For Lacan, reality 'is perfectly knowable'<sup>64</sup> but the Real is unknowable, it is, according to Lacan, that which resists symbolization absolutely. As a concept it is also inextricably entwined with Lacan's notion of the three orders or registers: the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. The capitalization of these terms distinguishes them from Lacan's early uses and also from more traditional conceptions of the symbol and symbolization.<sup>65</sup> The Imaginary order is the realm of the mother-child dyad, it is the pre-linguistic realm of sense-perception, of identifications and an illusory unity and

coherence, illusory in the sense that the child has not yet individuated itself. Between the ages of six and eighteen months the child begins to recognize its own image and to identify with that image, gradually formulating the conception of itself as that image. This is Lacan's well known Mirror stage. However, according to Lacan, what the child recognizes in the mirror is not so much itself as an ideal image, what Lacan calls the specular self. The child sees in this specular image an ideal image of wholeness and coherence that the child itself lacks through its, as yet, underdeveloped motor control and linguistic competence. In this illusory, specular world, then, the child:

seeks to provide himself or herself with consolation by identifying with chosen fragments of the world, by finding an imagined wholeness of the ego reflected in the seeming wholeness of the perceived thing.<sup>66</sup>

The mirror is a metaphor for any reflexive surface, the mother's face for example, in which the child sees its image reflected back and bestows upon that image a unity and coherence that the child herself or himself lacks. The Imaginary, therefore, is the birth place of the narcissistic "ideal ego," a realm of identification, mirror reflection and an illusory sense of wholeness. Malcom Bowie writes:

By way of the Imaginary the original identificatory procedures which brought the ego into being are repeated and reinforced by the individual in his relationship with the external world of people and things.<sup>67</sup>

As the child formulates the concept of I, of the specular I, of the image, it also suffers its first moment of alienation as it realizes the ideal I of the image is not itself, the child realizes that it has "mis"-recognized itself in the mirror. The realization of its mis-recognition, for Lacan, leads to a profound "splitting" in the child, the realization that it is not complete or whole but essentially "lacking" in coherence and unity. The emergence of the split-subject is the moment for Lacan of 'the deflection of the specular I into the social

I.<sup>68</sup> That is the moment in which the child emerges from the Imaginary realm of the mother-child dyad into the Symbolic Order and, what Lacan calls, the Law of the Father.

The Symbolic is the realm of language and the signifier, the child emerges into the Symbolic through the acquisition of language - the ability to formulate and articulate the concept "that is I". It is in the realm of the Symbolic that the child is fully constituted as a subject, but a subject that is doubly alienated. The first moment of alienation came about through the realization of its mis-recognition of the ideal image, the second moment comes about through language itself. At the very moment at which the subject can be represented in the Symbolic it is displaced through the substitution of the "I". In other words, through the process of naming itself the subject becomes a representation of itself in the Symbolic order. It is now the subject's position within the Symbolic order, in Lacan's chain of signification,<sup>69</sup> that constitutes it as a subject.

It is language that marks the barrier between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, neither realm is reducible to the other but each is deeply implicated in the other. There is no area of the Symbolic upon which the imaginary does not impinge, in the sense that it defines a limit to the Symbolic. Equally the Symbolic delineates the terrain of the Imaginary, indeed the acquisition of language in the Symbolic is the precondition for any articulation of Imaginary experience. In this sense the Symbolic determines and structures Imaginary material. The Symbolic, then, is coextensive with the social field in its broadest sense; it is the realm of language, of differentiation and above all desire. It is with the emergence into the Symbolic that the unconscious comes into being: for Lacan, it is only through language that we can have access to unconscious material. Language, therefore, can be said to structure the unconscious material, or in Lacan's famous slogan "the unconscious is structured like a language". This is not to say that the unconscious "is" language but only that as unconscious desires must be mediated through language, the linguistic structures

will be imposed upon those desires and condition the form they take.

Finally, we come to the last of Lacan's orders, the Real. I have already insisted that the Real is not to be taken as reality as Lacan's notion of the Real is essentially that which resists mirror reflection and symbolization, it is beyond representation and linguistic expression. Not surprisingly, therefore, it is an area of Lacan's work that exponents say least about, for example, in his influential essay 'The Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan'<sup>70</sup> Jameson commences his discussion of the three orders with the observation:

If the notion of the Real is the most problematical of the three - since it can never be experienced immediately, but only by way of the mediation of the other two - it is also the easiest to bracket for the purposes of this presentation.<sup>71</sup>

However, for my purposes it is necessary to say a little more than this. The Real functions as the limit of the Symbolic and Imaginary, it cannot be assimilated to either of the other two orders but acts, as Malcom Bowie puts it, as 'a permanent agent of disharmony between the two'.<sup>72</sup> Bowie contrasts Lacan's conception of the Real with Freud's conception of reality:

For Freud "reality" is the world external to the human mind, and the "reality principle" lies in the individual's recognition that this world places limitations upon him as he pursues his pleasures. For Lacan, on the other hand, the Real is that which lies outside the symbolic process and is found in the mental as well as in the material world: a trauma, for example, is as intractable and unsymbolizable as objects in their materiality.<sup>73</sup>

The Real of trauma, therefore, is that which is impossible to assimilate, the Real of repression is that which is impossible to say, and the Real of a symptom is that which is impossible to bear.<sup>74</sup> The Real, for Lacan, therefore is that which it is impossible for the subject to bear and:

which can be known only through the effect of a shock and about which nothing can be said, which is why the characteristics of the Real are all negative. The Real is a limit you run up against; it is the void, the impossible, an impasse.<sup>75</sup>

This negative conception of the Real would not appear to square with Jameson's positive conception of History as the final untranscendable horizon of all interpretation and the terrain of class struggle. However, as we shall see below, History for Jameson also has its negative side as that which refuses desire. It would also not appear to be how Jameson understands the concept of the Real: 'it is not terribly difficult to say what is meant by the Real in Lacan,' he writes, 'It is simply History itself.'<sup>76</sup> However, Jameson does acknowledge that for psychoanalysis the history in question is the history of the subject, which is not quite the same thing as Jameson's more elusive "History itself". Indeed, it is rather 'the resonance of the word' that suggests to Jameson that a 'confrontation'<sup>77</sup> between the materialism of psychoanalysis and historical materialism is long overdue. Lacan's reintroduction of the Real, argues Jameson, once more raises the question of the "referent," long thought to have been banished by structuralist and poststructuralist theory. The introduction of the referent immediately raises accusations that one is positing a naive form of "identity theory", in the sense that there is an identity, or presupposed unity, between the concept of a phenomenon and the phenomenon itself. Lacan's conception of the decentred or split subject however annuls such charges as the subject 'can know union neither with language nor with the Real and ... is structurally at a distance from both in its very being'.<sup>78</sup> Equally, Lacan's conception of the Real also avoids the suggestion that History is simply a text like any other. The Real is not only that which resists symbolization absolutely but also acts as a "term-limit" upon the Symbolic, the very function of History in Jameson's schema. Thus for Jameson the study of the referent is not so much the study of the meaning of a given text but 'of the limits of its meaning and of

their historical preconditions, and of what is and must remain incommensurable with individual expression'.<sup>79</sup>

As we have already observed what makes Jameson's system dynamic rather than typological or classificatory is his insistence on the role of contradiction, the presence of History in a particular text and at each horizon of interpretation manifests itself in the form of a contradiction. Clark notes that contradiction in Jameson's work 'as the measure of the effect of History on its "narrativization" functions in a same way as that of desire for Lacan, that is to say as 'an "anchoring point" that orients the symbolic toward the Real'.<sup>80</sup> This parallel between the functions of desire and contradiction is further reinforced through Jameson's identification of the relationship between desire and the Real and his own conception of the relationship between desire and history, in the sense that History is that which resists desire:

So in addition to marking the effect of the Real on the Symbolic, desire also marks the threshold between the individual and the social, a connection that suggests an extension of desire beyond the individual subject - the very task that Jameson says must be achieved if the Freudian model of the unconscious is to function within a Marxian perspective.<sup>81</sup>

Just as for Lacan the Real is that which is impossible to bear, History for Jameson is 'what hurts' (PU, 102). According to Clark, Jameson's text marks 'a significant advance over prior efforts to adapt Lacan to Marxism';<sup>82</sup> however, in a previous essay<sup>83</sup> he also highlighted a number of difficulties with the text. There are obvious parallels, suggests Clark, between Lacan's three Orders, or registers: the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real and Jameson's three horizons of interpretation: text, society and History, or to put it another way, text as: imaginary resolution, socially symbolic act and History as non-representable. But this parallel between Jameson's three horizons and Lacan's three registers is never made explicit in *The Political Unconscious*. Indeed, there is a certain



incompatibility between the Lacanian notion of the relationship between the Real and the Symbolic and Jameson's relationship between text and History, in the sense that the text simultaneously articulates and textualizes its own situation, as though it did not exist prior to that textualization. This, suggests Clark, is to confuse two ontologies and simply to insist that we must grasp both these incommensurable dimensions of the symbolic act does not solve the problem or tell us how to do so. On the other hand, the refusal to make explicit the parallels with Lacan could be approached from the opposite direction as an indication that we should not be too ready to assimilate one system to the other, respecting the specificity of the object of both: desire for Lacan and History for Jameson.

On the one hand, Jameson insists that Marxism and psychoanalysis, whilst presenting 'striking analogies of structure',<sup>84</sup> are not superimposable upon each other, and we must respect the specificity of each discourse and its distinct object of study. On the other hand, Jameson writes as if the concepts of Marxism and psychoanalysis are interchangeable and, indeed, the same thing. This confusion can be traced to the work of Althusser himself, who liberally appropriated terminology from psychoanalysis, his most familiar appropriation being the Freudian concept of "overdetermination". He used Lacanian concepts in his reformulation of the concept of ideology:

Ideology, then, is the expression of the relation between men and their "world", that is, the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence. In ideology the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation.<sup>85</sup>

For Althusser the subject is constituted through ideology by a process of interpellation or hailing.<sup>86</sup> Through the process of interpellation 'the subject is both positioned in ideology and confirmed in his own recognition of himself.'<sup>87</sup> Very briefly and schematically this process, according to Althusser, is a specular or mirroring process whereby ideology hails 'individuals as subjects' who thereby recognize themselves in the image of the dominant

ideological 'Subject' which in turn enables 'the mutual recognition of subjects and Subject' and finally 'the subjects recognition of himself'.<sup>88</sup> Althusser's use of psychoanalytic theory for his own theory of ideology is stated explicitly in the conclusion to his short essay 'Freud and Lacan' in which he writes:

Freud has discovered for us that the real subject, the individual in his unique essence, has not the form of an ego, centred on the 'ego', on 'consciousness' or on 'existence - whether this is the existence of the for-itself, of the body-proper or of 'behaviour' - that the human subject is de-centred, constituted by a structure which has no 'centre' either, except in the imaginary misrecognition of the 'ego', i.e. in the ideological formations in which it 'recognizes' itself.<sup>89</sup>

Althusser goes on to say that this '*structure of misrecognition*' is the concern for 'all investigations into ideology'.<sup>90</sup> As Michèle Barrett points out Althusser's vocabulary trails 'Lacanian resonances'<sup>91</sup> but he does not reproduce Lacan's theories in a precise way and indeed uses Lacan's concepts in very different senses. For example, Althusser's use of the term imaginary 'might be reduced to "lived": it is the domain of emotion, affect, will and experience'.<sup>92</sup> This is not an everyday usage of the term, writes Barrett, but neither is it Lacan's. Similarly, Althusser's specular theory of ideology speaks of misrecognition but as my overly schematic description of the process above makes clear 'his entire approach is cast in terms of the process of recognition as the means by which the subject is constituted to itself and to others'.<sup>93</sup> As I outlined in my discussion of the Lacan's Imaginary order, the very corner stone on which Lacan's theory of the Subject rests is that initial, fundamental, mis-recognition by the child of its own image in the mirror. Althusser's theory of ideology, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with how subjects recognize themselves through ideological systems of representation.

As Barrett suggests this is not simply a question of emphasis or whether or not Althusser

understood Lacan properly but 'whether he (or anyone else, indeed) could integrate such an argument into an account whose backdrop was the Marxist theory of reproduction of the relations of production'.<sup>94</sup> Reflecting on Althusser's conclusion to the essay 'Freud and Lacan' which I quoted above, Barrett acknowledges that here Althusser comes closer to Lacan than in any of his other writings. But when Althusser comes to investigate ideology the social categories through which subjects recognize themselves 'may fit the Marxist framework in which Althusser was operating ... but they do not correspond at any meaningful level with the content of Lacan's arguments about the ego and its identifications'.<sup>95</sup> Barrett concludes 'with the advantage of hindsight, the gulf between Althusser and Lacan appears now as completely unbridgeable'.<sup>96</sup> I shall, therefore, conclude this discussion of Lacan with a final insistence that what Lacan meant by the Real and Althusser by structure or absent cause is emphatically not the same thing. Jameson's horizons of interpretation may trail resonances of Lacan's three orders but there is no correspondence between them in any meaningful sense.

Similarly, Jameson describes his horizons of interpretation as dialectically equivalent to Northrop Frye's conception of levels or phases: the literal or descriptive, the formal, the archetypal and the anagogic; but the actual nature of this equivalence is left unsaid. This still leaves the problem of what is the relationship between these three horizons and what is the mechanism of transition from one to another. Jameson's own practice does little to resolve the dilemma as he focuses on each particular object of study: the symbolic act, the ideologeme and the ideology of form, individually and each in relation to a different text suggesting that Jameson himself may remain uncertain on this point. As James Iffland puts it:

I do not wish to suggest that the text cannot be all three of these differently formulated objects of study. Rather my question is *how* is it all three?<sup>97</sup>

A number of critics<sup>98</sup> have also questioned the notion that History is repressed and operates as a textual unconscious. In the concluding chapter I will suggest that this results from Jameson's over-reliance on the concept of reification at the expense of other forms of mediation; here I would like to propose that contrary to Jameson, History may be emphatically present in our cultural texts. Jonathan Arac foregrounds the dilemma of the political (un)consciousness in Jameson's text through a critique of Jameson's reading of Conrad. Arac does not offer an alternative reading but rather through a juxtapositioning of Jameson's text with that of a previous generation of left criticism (Irving Howe's reading of *Nostromo* in *Politics and the Novel*) highlights what Jameson actually leaves out, that is to say, 'the historical-political consciousness actually available in the work'.<sup>99</sup> Taking the opening paragraph of *Nostromo*, Arac reveals a scene not absent of people but, on the contrary, replete with traces of human presence, human labour and an 'historical consciousness wholly suppressed by Jameson's reading'<sup>100</sup> In other words, in order for the geiger-counter of the political unconscious to unveil the repressed and buried reality of history it must first repress and bury it. I should now like to consider at greater length the status of History itself and in what sense we can say that History is a narrative.

### History as Narrative

As I indicated above Marxism is for Jameson an "absolute historicism" in the sense that it simultaneously historicizes its object of study and its own conditions of possibility. In other words it constantly underscores the historicity of its own conceptual operations and categories, thus:

Marx's method ... excludes from the outset any possibility for theory to *alienate itself speculatively* in its own ideational products by presenting them either as ideal realities without a history of their own or as idealities that refer to a reality that would itself be nonhistorical.<sup>101</sup>

However, the view that Marxism is an historicism, "absolute" or otherwise, received its most stringent critique from the work of Louis Althusser in his seminal work *Reading Capital*.<sup>102</sup> Althusser's critique of historicism revolves around two central theses which he sees as the inevitable outcome of reading Marxism as an historicism: the first is that it tends to conflate the various distinct levels of society (the economic, the political, the ideological etc.) thus reducing and flattening the concept of totality into a version of the Hegelian conception of totality. Secondly, the process of mediation tends to posit an identity between specific and distinct levels thus eliding their real differences. The index of this theoretical lapse is that it 'precipitates the theory of history into real history; reduces the (theoretical) object of the science of history to real history; and therefore confuses the object of knowledge with the real object'.<sup>103</sup>

In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson subjects Althusser's three forms of historical causality or *effectivity* - mechanical, expressive and structural - to a thorough reexamination, arguing that Marxism is not only an historicism but as an absolute historicism it can accommodate the Althusserian critique. The first form of historical causality, mechanical causality, or the billiard-ball effect, would appear to have been conclusively refuted by modern physics, and for Althusser it lacks the capacity to think the effectivity of the whole on its parts. Jameson, however, suggests that concept has a "local validity", citing the example of 'the crisis in late nineteenth-century publishing, during which the dominant three-decker lending library novel was replaced by a cheaper one-volume format, and the modification of the "inner form" of the novel itself' (PU, 25), as just one instance where it retains a certain explanatory force. Although, on balance, it remains an inadequate and unsatisfactory category for a greater understanding of the historical process, mechanical causality can be said to have a provisional value in cultural analysis through its assertion that material and contingent accidents can have an effect on the structure and tone of our narrative paradigms. For Jameson, therefore, mechanical

causality is less a concept that can be 'evaluated on its own terms, than one of the various laws and subsystems of our peculiarly reified social and cultural life' (PU, 26). The heart of Althusser's attack on historicism is reserved for the second category of expressive causality which he identifies with an Hegelian conception of history. History, for Hegel, 'is mind clothing itself with the form of events or the immediate actuality of nature'.<sup>104</sup> In other words, history is mind, or spirit, as it manifests itself in nature, in the external world. As with the philosophy of mind, Hegel's philosophy of history can be seen in terms of the growth and progress of "world-spirit" as it attains ever greater self-realization, or self-awareness. The progress of world-spirit therefore can be described as an historical narrative in which the journey of world-spirit is divided into chapters or historical periods as the 'world spirit passes through stages at each of which it possesses a more adequate awareness of what it is'.<sup>105</sup> What "spirit" is, in the sense of full self-awareness, is "freedom": the idea of spirit, according to Cohen, and freedom are two ways of describing the same thing: 'the idea of spirit *is* freedom'.<sup>106</sup> In short 'history is spirit's biography'<sup>107</sup> with freedom as its telos. However, suggests Jameson, we should not view the attainment of "Absolute Spirit" as the final stage of history but rather, as with absolute knowledge, it 'is meant to describe the historian's mind as it contemplates the variety of human histories and cultural forms'.<sup>108</sup>

For Althusser, the two essential characteristics, or errors, of the Hegelian conception of history are its positing of *homogenous continuity* of time and its *contemporaneity*. The former is a direct consequence of the 'the continuity of the dialectical development of the Idea'.<sup>109</sup> In other words, just as the growth of consciousness is punctuated by stages as consciousness dialectically transcends unsatisfactory and inadequate levels of awareness, 'the science of history would consist of the division of this continuum according to a *periodization* corresponding to the succession of one dialectical totality after another'.<sup>110</sup> As we shall see in a moment this would effectively rule out the possibility for and the

specificity of, the coexistence of distinct historical times. The latter characteristic is the precondition for the former in the sense that 'the structure of historical existence is such that all the elements of the whole always co-exist in one and the same time, one and the same present, and are therefore contemporaneous with one another in one and the same present'.<sup>111</sup> The contemporaneous nature of the Hegelian social totality allows for the isolation of what Althusser calls the *essential section* or *vertical break*, that is to say 'a break in the present such that all the elements of the whole revealed by this section are in immediate relationship with one another, a relationship that immediately expresses their internal essence'.<sup>112</sup> For Althusser, the Hegelian conception of history also constitutes itself as the *absolute horizon* of all knowing, knowledge can never be anything but 'the existence in knowing of the internal principle of the whole'.<sup>113</sup> Thus the anticipation of an alternative future, which Marxism's capacity to entertain sets it apart from other theories of history, is effectively ruled out. The Hegelian model also leads us to a fallacious separation of synchrony and diachrony, whereby:

The synchronic ... presupposes the ideological conception of a continuous - homogeneous time. It follows that the diachronic is merely the development of this present in the sequence of a temporal continuity in which the 'events' to which 'history' in the strict sense can be reduced ... are merely successive contingent presents in the time continuum. <sup>114</sup>

According to Althusser, the most serious misconception deriving from Hegel's view of history is its formulation of the social whole, or totality, as an *expressive whole*, in the sense that 'it presupposes in principle that the whole in question be reducible to an *inner essence*, of which the elements of the whole are then no more than phenomenal forms of expression, the inner principle of the essence being present at each point in the whole'.<sup>115</sup> In other words, the notion of an inner essence and outer phenomena presupposes that the totality, if it is to be applicable everywhere and at every moment to each of the phenomena arising in the totality, must have a certain nature, which the parts are merely the outer

expression of. This reduces the heterogeneity of historical time to an homogeneous continuum and the specificity and relative autonomy of the distinct levels of the social totality to a contemporaneous or homogeneous present. Therefore, contrary to mechanical causality, expressive causality allows us to think the determination of the whole on the parts but it does so only if we conceive of the whole as totality in a spiritual or metaphysical sense.

The Hegelian or Western Marxist tradition saw Marx as preserving Hegel's structure of historical periods, but, in the well known formula of "standing Hegel back on his feet", endowing the form with a new content. For Marx it is not man's consciousness that shapes the world but his material conditions. Althusser, on the other hand, rejects the notion of a continuity between Marx and Hegel insisting on an "epistemological break" or "rupture" between the mature Marx of *Capital* and previous modes of thought, including Marx's own earlier writings. Althusser insists that Marx's "epistemological break" was to reject the empiricist conception of history, whereby history is simply given, and to replace this givenness with the "concept" of his object of study. In other words, to replace the knowledge of the thing-itself with the knowledge of its concepts:

every scientific discipline is based *at a certain level*, precisely that level at which *its concepts find a content* ... Such is the level of Marx's *historical theory*: the level of the concepts of *structure, superstructure and all their specifications*.<sup>116</sup>

We must therefore, according to Althusser, reject any conception of history as the "science of the concrete", or that the theory of history '*as theory*', could be subject to the 'concrete' determinations of 'historical time'.<sup>117</sup> We must construct the object of history as a knowledge of history by producing the concept of history, that is to say, the *historical fact*: which 'as opposed to all the other phenomena that occur in historical existence, can be defined as *a fact which causes a mutation in the existing structural relations*'.<sup>118</sup> For



Althusser the object of history, as a science, has the same kind of theoretical existence and occupies the same theoretical level as the object of Marx's political economy. Indeed, Marx's theory of political economy entails, or presupposes, a theory of history in the sense that the theory of political economy only considers one level of the social totality whilst the theory of history takes the totality as a whole as its object of study.

Althusser's conception of totality is that of a structure within which exist subordinate or regional structures. Thus, the economic structure exists as one level or region of the structure as a whole:

the economic cannot have the qualities of a *given* (of the immediately visible and observable, etc.), because its identification requires the concept of the structure of the economic, which in turn requires the concepts of the structure of the mode of production (its different levels and specific articulations) - because its identification therefore presupposes the construction of its *concept*.<sup>119</sup>

In other words, the economic structure must be seen as a regional structure embedded within a global structure, or, to use a spatial metaphor, 'a complex and deep space, itself inscribed in another complex and deep space'.<sup>120</sup> The Marxian conception of the social totality, therefore:

is constituted by a certain type of *complexity*, the unity of a *structural whole* containing what can be called levels or instances which are distinct and 'relatively autonomous', and co-exist within this complex structural unity, articulated with one another according to specific determinations, fixed in the last instance by the level or instance of the economy.<sup>121</sup>

This formulation, however, poses a number of problems, for we as yet lack the concepts with which to think the determination of phenomena by a structure and the determination of one structure upon a subordinate one, or the relations that exist between structures; in other words, 'how is it possible to define the concept of structural causality?'<sup>122</sup>

Althusser accounts for the determination of subordinate structures by *determinate* ones with the concept of "overdetermination", or multiple causality. Althusser's insistence on the distinction between the Hegelian and the Marxian dialectic is of paramount importance in this respect. Althusser writes:

If we clearly perceive the *intimate and close relation* that the Hegelian structure of dialectic has with Hegel's 'world outlook', that is, with his speculative philosophy, this 'world outlook' cannot really be cast aside *without our being obliged to transform profoundly the structures* of that dialectic.<sup>123</sup>

For Althusser, the structure of the Hegelian dialectic cannot be separated from Hegel's philosophy of history, which reduces the complex and contradictory nature of the historical process to a "simple" contradiction, internal to the dialectic itself. Thus, writes Althusser, the 'simplicity of the Hegelian contradiction is made possible *only* by the simplicity of the *internal principle* that constitutes the essence of any historical period'.<sup>124</sup> In other words, the diversity and heterogeneity of history is reduced to the singular principle of dialectical development. If we carry this principle over into Marxism, argues Althusser, through the temptation to invert Hegel or stand the Hegelian dialectic back on its feet; it:

results in the radical reduction of the dialectic of history to the dialectic generating the successive *modes of production*, that is, in last analysis, the different production *techniques*. There are names for these temptations in the history of Marxism: *economism* and even *technologism*.<sup>125</sup>

As Jameson points out, Althusser's critique of Hegelianism is in fact a coded critique of Stalinism within the French Communist party (PU, 37) and Stalin's version of dialectical materialism, or diamat, which produced 'a unilinear vision of history as the evolution in fixed sequence of progressive modes of production'.<sup>126</sup> Althusser opposed to the simple contradiction of the Hegelian dialectic and its Marxian variant, in the form of the reduction

of all, what we may call, contingent contradictions to the general contradiction between the forces and relations of production, the new concept of complex contradiction and overdetermination. Althusser argues that:

If ... a vast accumulation of 'contradictions' comes into play *in the same court*, some of which are radically heterogeneous - of different origins, different sense, different *levels* and *points* of application - but which nevertheless 'merge' into a ruptural unity, we can no longer talk of the sole, unique power of the general 'contradiction'.<sup>127</sup>

In Althusserian terminology, the contradictions at different levels of society will have a relative autonomy and cannot be reduced to a simple principle of dialectical contradiction. The social structure is a complex unity of different and distinct but interrelated levels and regions, each level has its own internal contradictions and these contradictions are determinate upon the social structure and not simply the product of a general contradiction.

The problem for Althusser is how to think this new concept of structure and for this he borrows the category of *Darstellung* (or, presentation). For Althusser the concept of *Darstellung* designates 'the mode of *presence* of the structure in its *effects*, and therefore to designate structural causality itself'.<sup>128</sup> In other words:

the structure is immanent in its effects, a cause immanent in its effects in the Spinozist sense of the term, that *the whole existence of the structure consists of its effects*, in short that the structure, which is merely a specific combination of its peculiar elements, is nothing outside its effects.<sup>129</sup>

History, therefore, is what Althusser calls an "absent cause", something that we know, not as the thing-in-itself, but through its effects; indeed the very notion of the concrete is the product of thought and not empirical existence itself. We cannot know history itself, in

the sense that my opening quotation from Lukács implies, but only have knowledge of it as the concept of history, and must therefore maintain at all times the distinction between the object of Knowledge (the concept of history) and the real object (the empirical events of history).

Jameson concedes that on its own terms the Althusserian critique is 'quite unanswerable' (PU, 27), but in a characteristic gesture suggests that this is to miss the point: Althusser is not attacking historicism as such. What is really at issue here, suggests Jameson, is a dual problem around the nature of periodization and the representation of History. Firstly, there is a synchronic dimension to the problem in which the concept of an historical period presents everything as 'a seamless web of phenomena each of which, in its own way, "expresses" some unified inner truth' (PU, 27). And secondly, a diachronic dimension 'in which history is seen in some "linear" way as the succession of such periods, stages, or moments' (PU, 28). For Jameson the second problem represents the prior one, for the reason:

that individual period formulations always secretly imply or project narratives or "stories" - narrative representations - of the historical sequence in which such individual periods take their place and from which they derive their significance. (PU, 28)

What Althusser is really attacking under the rubric of expressive causality, and historicism generally, suggests Jameson, is in fact allegorical interpretations which seek to rewrite given sequences or periods in terms of a hidden master-narrative. Althusser's critique of historicism, in other words, can be read as code for the critique of vulgar Marxism or economism, and in place of Hegel we should read Stalin. However, if we understand allegory not as the reduction of the heterogeneity of historical sequences to a predetermined narrative but in the way outlined above<sup>130</sup> then the concept of an historical narrative can be rehabilitated. Indeed, Jameson proposes that his conception of the

political unconscious can resolve this dilemma, of accommodating the Althusserian critique within a teleological, or more accurately *narrative*, vision of history, by relocating it in the object. This would then allow for a defense of expressive causality along the lines of the case made for mechanical causality in that it has a local validity:

if interpretation in terms of expressive causality or of allegorical master narratives remains a constant temptation, this is because such master narratives have inscribed themselves in the texts as well as in thinking about them; such allegorical narrative signifieds are a persistent dimension of literary and cultural texts precisely because they reflect a fundamental dimension of our collective thinking and our collective fantasies about history and reality. (PU, 34)

Our task as critics is not to abolish these faint murmurings of history and reality from texts but to retain them, and open ourselves up once more to the reception of history through our cultural texts. When Althusser underlined the absolute distinction between our knowledge of the Real and the Real itself, he did not thereafter abolish the Real, in the sense of a reality independent of our conceptualizations and symbolization of it. Thus, suggests Jameson, we can reformulate Althusser's conception of history which at once takes account of his critique of expressive causality and of interpretation generally but at the same time retains a place for these operations:

history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious. (PU, 35)

Like the Althusserian conception of structure, History is not immediately present, not graspable in itself but is something we know through its effects or textualizations.

However, Althusserianism has posed something of a paradox in that it has 'effectively discredited the Marxian versions of a properly teleological history' whilst at the same time

restoring 'the problematic of mode of production as the central organizing category of Marxism' (PU, 33). Jameson observes that if Althusserian Marxism is to be classified as a structuralism then it must be with the proviso 'that it is a structuralism for which only *one* structure exists' (PU, 36) that is to say the mode of production. For Althusser, the mode of production is identified with the structure as a whole, with the total system of social relations and relationships between levels. Thus on the one hand the concept of mode of production takes on something of an eternal nature, whilst on the other the emphasis of the semi-, or relative, autonomy of distinct levels has legitimated 'a renewed defense of the reified specializations of the bourgeois academic disciplines' (PU, 38). This ambiguity, according to Jameson, is a consequence of Althusser's rejection of "mediation". Mediation, or as Jameson now terms it transcoding, is the traditional way in which Marxism makes connections between disparate phenomena and social life generally:

Mediation is the classical dialectical term for the establishment of relationships between, say, the formal analysis of a work of art and its social ground, or between the internal dynamics of the political state and its economic base. (PU, 39)

Althusser rejected mediation on the grounds that it posited an identity between phenomena and conflated distinct levels. However, Jameson argues that Althusser's notion of semi-autonomy *relates* just as much as it *separates* and if we are to define *difference*, then we need a prior concept of *identity* which to define it against. Mediation is just such a process in that it 'undertakes to establish [an] initial identity against which then - but only then - local identification or differentiation can be registered' (PU, 42). This is not to affirm an identity between the phenomena concerned but register a *relationship* between them and for Jameson:

Such momentary reunification would remain purely symbolic, a mere methodological fiction, were it not understood that social life is in its fundamental reality one and indivisible, a seamless web, a single inconceivable and transindividual process, in which there is no need to invent ways of linking language events and social up-heavals or economic

contradictions because on that level they were never separate from one another. (PU, 40)

Just as historicism was not Althusser's real target, Jameson insists that neither is the concept of mediation for which we should rather read "Homologies" of the type practised by Lucien Goldmann, which tended to posit all too easy solutions whilst forestalling the laborious work of theory, and also the productionist ideologies which make fatuous equations between manual and intellectual labour.

At this point Jameson is ready to reappraise the work of Althusser, drawing the conclusion that structural Marxism is not so much a radical break with traditional Marxisms but a modification within the dialectical tradition:

Althusserian structural causality is therefore just as fundamentally a practice of mediation as is the "expressive causality" to which it is opposed.  
(PU, 41)

Indeed, not only do we discover that Althusser is in accord with Hegel but also with Lukács. According to Jameson, Lukács' notion of totality is one of a methodological standard, 'an essentially critical and negative, demystifying operation' (PU, 52) and as such is "non-representational". Thus, it can be seen to rejoin Althusser's notion of "absent cause".<sup>131</sup> Jameson's appraisal and reformulation of Althusserian Marxism is nothing less than a virtuoso performance of dialectical subtlety and ingenuity; however, his assimilation of Structural Marxism back into his own Hegelian paradigm seems just a little too neat, everything falls into place a little too readily. Reading Althusser, and whilst acknowledging the criticism that Jameson and others have made of this "one-dimensional Marxism", one still feels that Althusserianism and Hegelianism remain radically incommensurable. According to Robert Young, what Jameson is attempting to bring about is:

something which from a perspective of European Marxism is truly

scandalous, namely a rapprochement between the two antithetical traditions of Sartre and Althusser, incorporated within a larger Lukácsian totality. <sup>132</sup>

Jameson's recourse to Lukács and Sartre is less pronounced in *The Political Unconscious* than in his earlier texts but it remains there through his conception of History. However, argues Young, it is this very question of history that so divides the two figures and they cannot be simply synthesized together as Jameson attempts to do. As we have seen Jameson's key categories are: narrative, mediation and totality. Following Lukács, Jameson insists that narrative is not merely a literary category but a central function of the human mind, one of our main organizational categories for ordering the world around us. But as Young persuasively argues:

Narrative thus articulates the subject and the objective, and this reconciliation apparently enables Jameson to dispense with the problem of the subject altogether. <sup>133</sup>

The locus of Jameson's dialectical recuperation of expressive causality is to relocate the problematic in the object, situating the traces of an historical master narrative in the texts themselves. Yet this would seem to contradict Jameson's opening assertion of following the path of the subject; it also does not resolve the problematic but simply relocates it. Young suggests that Jameson's synthesizing strategy completely misses the substance of Althusser's critique of Sartre, namely that for Sartre, 'consciousness remains the basis for the structure of the totality'.<sup>134</sup> The very real differences between Althusser's and Sartre's respective views of history are simply elided as Jameson's synthesizing involves 'more of the persuasive rhetoric of a rough argument than a theory whose logical premises and moves have been demonstrated in detail'.<sup>135</sup> Such a synthesizing strategy, which consistently eradicates theoretical differences, observes Young would be impermissible in a European intellectual climate strongly influenced by post-structuralism and deconstruction. Jameson's sweeping, all-inclusive, theoretical gestures can be seen as a consequence of his position as a Marxist within the United States and more specifically as



an academic Marxist. As Young indicates '*The Political Unconscious* remains noticeably circumspect in spelling out the politico-theoretical implications of what it is trying to do'<sup>136</sup> indeed, the one reflection on the kind of politics Jameson's theorizing implies is a footnote on alliance politics (PU, 54). As I shall argue below, Jameson's strategy and view of History as a single great adventure appears to be a particularly North American perspective of history which tends to over hastily assimilate cultural and historical diversity to a single master narrative.

Althusser forcefully argues that the 'inversion' of a problematic retains the same structure as that problematic:

If it is true that the 'inversion' of a problematic retains the same structure as that problematic, it is not surprising that the relationship of direct expression (given all the necessary 'mediations') between real history and philosophy conceived by Hegel and Croce recurs in the inverted theory.<sup>137</sup>

It will therefore not be surprising, in what Jameson would call a return of the repressed, to find the same dilemmas arising in Jameson's inversion of expressive causality that he wished to banish in the first place. Thus his defence of mediation against the overhasty positing of an identity between phenomena and the conflation of distinct structural levels finds its theoretical justification in just such a conflation, in the sense that mediations will remain purely a fiction unless we grasp social life as 'in its fundamental reality one and indivisible, a seamless web, a single inconceivable and transindividual process' (PU, 34). Equally Jameson's strenuous efforts to define History as a single great adventure, as the great unfinished narrative of the collective struggle to wrest the realm of freedom from the realm of necessity, rest on the positing of a single unified and homogenous time. For Jameson, this is the time of class struggle, or rather of North American capitalism. In a series of contentious essays on "Third World" literature<sup>138</sup> Jameson proposed that:

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 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.*<sup>139</sup>

To substantiate this claim Jameson offers a reading of a work by 'China's greatest writer, Lu Xun'<sup>140</sup> and *Xala* by the Senegalese writer Ousmane Sembene. Jameson's readings, are as always illuminating and provocative, but can we really reduce the diversity and heterogeneity of "all" third-world literature to the examples of two writers and on the basis of such a reduction can we seriously argue that third-world literature *always* constitutes national allegories? The unease one feels with such a sweeping, over generalizing, statement is only heightened by the insertion of a clause on 'a properly libidinal dynamic'; what would be an "improper" libidinal dynamic? And who is to decide what is proper and improper in such a case: the writer, the indigenous critic or the first-world cultural theorist? Reflecting on his increasing discomfort upon reading Jameson's essay Aijaz Ahmad writes:

when I was on the fifth page of this text (specifically, on the the sentence starting with "All third-world texts are necessarily ..." etc.), I realized that what was being theorised was, among many other things, myself. Now, I was born in India and I am a Pakistani citizen; I write poetry in Urdu, a language not commonly understood among US intellectuals. So, I said to myself: "*All? ... necessarily?*" It felt odd. Matters got much more curious, however. For, the farther I read the more I realized, with no little chargin, that the man whom I had for so long, so affectionately, even though from a physical distance, taken as a comrade was, in his own opinion, my civilizational Other.<sup>141</sup>

Jameson's totalizing logic treats the whole "third-world", a problematic concept in itself as Ahmad points out, as a homogenous entity in which the Other is constituted as the same. In Jameson's text, the third-world is defined 'solely in terms of its experience of

colonialism'.<sup>142</sup> It therefore reduplicates the history of European colonialism. For Jameson, the third-world provided the dialectical contrary to first world multi-national capitalism, which as we see in chapter 4, will increasingly be eroded by the globalization of postmodern culture. In terms of *The Political Unconscious* we are now in a position to answer that recurrent question what is "History itself"? and whose single great adventure is it? As Young writes:

No one apparently is allowed a history outside of 'us' - that is Western civilization and the Western point of view, which for Jameson seems to mean the USA.<sup>143</sup>

Jameson would not appear to have accommodated the Althusserian notion of structural causality within his own conception of structural historicism so much as to have annulled the former through a revamped Hegelianism in the shape of the latter.

However the Althusserian conception of structural causality cannot be folded back quite so easily into a narrative vision of history with its continuum of time, for Jameson the time of class struggle. For Althusser there is no single continuum of time but different times deriving from the possibility of different histories corresponding to the different levels of the social whole:

Each of these different 'levels' does not have the same type of historical existence. On the contrary, we have to assign to each level a *peculiar time*, relatively autonomous and hence relatively independent, even in its dependence, of the 'times' of the other levels. We can and must say: for each mode of production there is a peculiar time and history, punctuated in a specific way by the development of the productive forces;<sup>144</sup>

However, this does not seem to be the lesson that Jameson draws from Althusser. Criticizing Jameson's Eurocentrism, which would perhaps be more appropriate to describe as US-centrism, Young writes:

Such an arrogant and arrogating narrative means that the story of "world history" not only involves what Fredric Jameson describes as the wrestling of freedom from the realm of necessity but always also the creation, subjection, and final appropriation of Europe's "others".<sup>145</sup>

Before considering Jameson's politics of desire in the next chapter, I shall briefly examine two more aspects of his political unconscious, that is: the nature of the relationship between history and text or narrative and Jameson's "solution" to the problem of diachrony through the non-synchronous development of modes of production.

Jameson emphasises that History, in the sense that he aligns it with Althusser's "absent cause" or Lacan's "Real", is fundamentally non-narrative and nonrepresentable; equally it is not a text but it remains inaccessible except through its prior (re)textualizations. However, as John Frow points out:

If history is accessible only through discursive or epistemological categories, is there not a real sense in which it therefore has only a discursive existence?<sup>146</sup>

Jameson is at pains to avoid such a conclusion as this would lead down the post-structuralist and postmodernist path that there is nothing outside the text. Such arguments, according to Roy Bhaskar, rest on a confusion between ontological and epistemological categories, what he calls the "epistemic fallacy"<sup>147</sup> or the reduction of "being" to "knowing". Unfortunately, Jameson's defence of an independent reality seems to amount to no more than a single sentence:

One does not have to argue the reality of history: necessity, like Dr. Johnson's stone, does that for us. (PU, 82)

History, for Jameson, is the experience of necessity, it is not a narrative in the sense that it represents the content of a story but rather the form through which we experience

necessity; the formal effects of an absent, nonrepresentational cause. We find ourselves then in the paradoxical situation that Jameson's justification for History as a 'properly narrative political unconscious' (PU, 102) is that it needs no justification:

Conceived in this sense, History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its "ruses" turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention. But this History can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force. This is indeed the ultimate sense in which History as ground and untranscendable horizon needs no particular theoretical justification: we may be sure that its alienating necessities will not forget us, however much we might prefer to ignore them. (PU, 102)

History is not so much a thing, or a process we can know, as a structural limit upon consciousness, a limit we constantly come up against whether we intend it or not. It would seem, though, that after having painstakingly worked through the Althusserian strictures against historicism we are back where we started, that is to say, the precipitation of the theory of history into real history, or the conflation of the object of Knowledge with the real object. In other words, the reduction of the theory or science of history to history itself and which, as Michael Sprinker has pointed out, 'risks collapsing into empiricism'.<sup>148</sup>

However, we need not completely abandon the concept of history as essentially narrative, or more specifically the narrative of class struggle. According to Paul Ricoeur 'if history were to sever its links with narrative it would cease to be historical'<sup>149</sup> but the insistence on the essential narrative character of history is not to be confused with the defense of narrative history. What Jameson appears to overlook in his conception of a political unconscious is the gap inscribed between the historical narrative and history itself by the very act of narration; 'the distance introduced by narrative between itself and lived experience ... Between living and recounting, a gap - however small it may be - is opened up. Life is lived, history is recounted'.<sup>150</sup> For Ricoeur, narrative's particular value and

fruitfulness lies in its "intelligibility", in its ability to organize the bewildering mass of historical data into a form that is readily understandable. As Louis Mink writes:

narrative is a primary cognitive instrument - an instrument rivaled, in fact, only by theory and by metaphor as irreducible ways of making the flux of experience comprehensible.<sup>151</sup>

Ricoeur observes that both human experience and narrative share a fundamental quality in that they are both temporal in character; temporality does not in itself constitute a narrative. Thus according to Mink 'our experience of life does not itself necessarily have the form of narrative, except as we give it that form by making it a subject of stories'.<sup>152</sup> This process by which we select and organize the various events and actions that we wish to recount is what is known as "emplotment". The notion of emplotment has the advantage of foregrounding the inherent ideological component of history. Our historical narratives are not neutral or scientifically objective but contain and project certain presuppositions. For instance, the notion of the plot is that it has a beginning a middle and an end, yet history is necessarily selective, not only in the events and actions it chooses to recount but where it chooses to begin and end and the point it decides that a given narrative is coherent and complete. This does not necessarily imply that history is anything we choose it to be; one can still put a case for an independent reality subject to veridical criteria, whilst acknowledging the mode of presentation as itself an important signifier of meaning. We can therefore perhaps reformulate Jameson's conception of History and Narrative to take account of both Althusser's notion of the specificity of historical times and the recent reflections of historiography and suggest that: History is not a narrative, master or otherwise, but remains inaccessible to us except through its prior (re)narrativizations, which always presuppose an implicit political unconscious.

If Jameson's project exhibits a tendency towards an overly homogenous conception of

time, it also falls prey to the charge of "contemporaneity". Jameson's use of mode of production as the final determining instance seeks to avoid the charge of economism or vulgar Marxism by designating it as the unity of the forces of production and the relations of production. He then identifies the mode of production, following Althusser and Balibar, with the social totality as a structure.<sup>153</sup> Gregory Elliott summarizes Balibar's thesis thus:

As a conceptual object, a mode of production was conceived by Balibar as a self-reproducing totality which reproduced both the relations and the forces of production and the non-economic conditions of existence, i.e. the requisite conditions of the other instances.<sup>154</sup>

The problem with such a definition, Elliott points out is that it cannot account for the transition from one mode of production to another, as each mode of production becomes a self-enclosed totality. Aware of this problem, Balibar first proposed a general law of transition based upon the postulate of transitional modes of production 'characterized by a 'dislocation' between the forces and relations of production'.<sup>155</sup> According to Elliott, this solution is ruled out on at least three accounts: firstly, it requires a distinction between the synchronic and the diachronic which Althusser's epistemology rules out. Secondly it restores the very teleological representation of history Althusser's strictures ruled out. And finally it still cannot account for the transition between a transitional and a non-transitional mode of production. Balibar, therefore, proposed a second solution to the problem of transition from one mode of production to another:

Periods of transition, he conjectured, are 'characterized by the *coexistence* of several modes of production'. The noncorrespondence between the two connexions of the economic structure and between the different social levels during them, 'merely reflects *the coexistence of two (or more) modes of production in a single "simultaneity", and the dominance of one of them over the other*'.<sup>156</sup>

This would certainly appear to accord with Jameson's theorization of dominant, residual

and emergent modes of production and nonsynchronous development as I outlined it above. However, Elliott identifies a number of presuppositions, again not all of which are consistent with Althusserian epistemology, but of 'greatest salience here was the distinction made ... between *mode of production* and *social formation*'<sup>157</sup> According to Elliott the fruitfulness of this distinction:

is to differentiate between the theoretical Marxist concepts (themselves of different degrees of abstraction) employed in the analysis of any given historical/social reality and the particular realities ... under analysis.<sup>158</sup>

However, it is precisely such a distinction which Jameson's theorization wishes to forestall, arguing that it is inadequate and misleading 'to the degree that it encourages the very empirical thinking which it was concerned to denounce, in other words, subsuming a particular or an empirical "fact" under this or that corresponding "abstraction" (PU, 95). For Jameson, what we can take from the notion of social formation is the concept of the structural coexistence of several modes of production simultaneously and this 'at one stroke' resolves the problem of the synchronic and diachrony. Jameson writes:

What is synchronic is the "concept" of the mode of production; the moment of the historical coexistence of several modes of production is not synchronic in this sense, but open to history in a dialectical way. (PU, 95)

However, it takes more than an act of fiat to resolve this dilemma, and Jameson's response does not really seem to be a solution. Firstly, Jameson insists that there can only be one totality which he identifies with the mode of production but if there is a structural coexistence of more than one mode of production would not this imply the structural coexistence of more than one totality? For Balibar, this indeed was one of the logical outcomes of his theory of transitional modes of production.<sup>159</sup> Secondly, Jameson argues the necessity of a structural dominant, so that we can distinguish between the various



historical modes of production, and the transition between these various dominants he accounts for with the concept of cultural revolution. But is there not a sense in which, if no mode of production exists in a pure state but always in coexistence with other modes of production, history can thus be said to be in a state of permanent cultural revolution? If we take Jameson's example of the Enlightenment, there is a sense as Habermas argues that this is an unfinished project,<sup>160</sup> that postmodernism, far from signalling the end of the Enlightenment, signals that it has yet to be completed. This in itself does not undermine Jameson's thesis but it does raise series questions about the explanatory force of the concept. At which point can one particular cultural revolution be said to be the dominant one and how does one define this dominance? Furthermore, if the transition between modes of production is defined in terms of cultural revolution and as I have stated this appears to be the permanent state of affairs. Are we not in exactly the same position as Balibar whereby all modes of production thus appear to be transitional modes and how do we therefore explain the transition between these transitional modes? Alternatively how do we explain the transition from one cultural revolution to the next?

In *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* G.A. Cohen writes, as Balibar also acknowledges, that *mode* refers to a *way* or a *manner* and not a set of relations.<sup>161</sup> The economic structure, insists Cohen, is just that: a *structure*, 'a framework of power in which producing occurs' whilst the mode of production is a process, 'a way of producing'.<sup>162</sup> Following Cohen we can distinguish three senses in which Marx used the concept of mode of production: firstly, in the sense of the material mode, or the way in which men work with their productive forces. Secondly, the social mode as the social properties of the productive processes and finally, the mixed mode as the designation of both the material and social properties of the way production proceeds. It is in this final sense that Jameson uses the term but although every structure is subject to process, this

does not make it a process itself:

The economic structure is ... variously implicated in movement and process, but to represent the structure as itself a process is to violate both the concept of structure and the intent of historical materialism. <sup>163</sup>

As with Jameson's definition of class, as at once structural and an historical process, Jameson wishes to have it both ways, but as E.P. Thompson states these two positions remain incommensurable. Similarly, contra Jameson, we cannot equate the mode of production with the social totality and which is at once a structure and a process.

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#### Notes.

- 1 Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. R. Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1971), pp. 151-2.
- 2 Jameson, it is true to say, had engaged with contemporary theoretical positions in previous essays, notably in 'Marxism and Historicism' and 'Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan' as well as in his book on Wyndham Lewis (which was originally conceived as a part of *The Political Unconscious*). However, *The Political Unconscious* does seem to present the culmination of these earlier interventions.
- 3 Terry Eagleton, 'The Idealism of American Criticism', in *Against The Grain: Selected Essays 1975 - 1985* (London: Verso, 1986).
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 57.
- 5 *Critical Exchange*, no.14 (1983), *Diacritics*, vol.12, no. 3 (1982), *New Orleans Review*, vol.11, no. 1 (1984).
- 6 James H. Kavanagh, 'The Jameson-Effect', in *Critical Exchange*, no.14 (1983) and *New Orleans Review*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1984), p. 20.
- 7 Eagleton, 'The Idealism of American Criticism', p. 64.
- 8 Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 91.
- 9 I shall return to Jameson's relation to Derrida and Deconstruction in the following chapter.
- 10 Young, *White Mythologies*, p. 91.
- 11 Young notes that *The Political Unconscious* was translated into German in 1988 but as yet has not been translated into any other language.
- 12 Young, *White Mythologies*, p. 92.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 92.
- 14 Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. G. Wall (London:

- Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (London: Verso, 1976). See also Eagleton's own assessment on the Althusserian moment in the Introduction to *Against The Grain*.
- 15 See Edward, P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), Simon Clarke, et al, *One-Dimensional Marxism: Althusser and the Politics of Culture* (London: Allison & Busby, 1980) and Perry Anderson, *Arguments Within English Marxism* (London: Verso, 1980).
- 16 See Gregory Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (London: Verso, 1987) especially ch. 6. The divergent fortunes of Althusserianism in the United States and Great Britain are interestingly dramatized through the contributions to a conference held at the State University of New York, in 1988, entitled "The Althusserian Legacy". The first three contributions from Etienne Balibar, Gregory Elliott and Alex Calinicos all start from the premise that the Althusserian moment is well and truly over. What is now at stake, for these contributors at least, is what is now redeemable from the Althusserian project. The contribution from the two American academics, Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff, on the other hand, offer a much more up-beat assessment of Althusserianism as a living and vibrant reasearch programme, providing radical and new departures for social theory even in the late 1980s. See E. Ann Kaplan, & Michael Sprinker, *The Althusserian Legacy* (London: Verso, 1993).
- 17 Fredric Jameson, 'Marxism and Historicism', in *The Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971-1985: Vol. 2 The Syntax of History* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 148-77.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 150.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 156.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- 21 *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 163.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 153.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 155.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 165.
- 28 *Ibid.*, p. 150.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 172.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 175.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. 175.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 177.
- 33 Lucio Colletti, 'Marxism and the Dialectic', trans. J. Matthews, in *New Left Review*, no. 93 (1993).
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

- 40 Ibid., p. 26.
- 41 Ibid., p. 27.
- 42 Ibid., p. 27.
- 43 Edward, P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1968), p. 8.
- 44 Ibid., p. 9.
- 45 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. C. Emerson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. xxxii.
- 46 Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. C. Emerson & M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 276.
- 47 Ibid., p. 276.
- 48 Ibid., p. 279.
- 49 Ibid., p. 272.
- 50 V.N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. L. Matejka, & I.R. Titunik (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 86, emphasis in the original.
- 51 Ibid., p. 86.
- 52 Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 271.
- 53 Ibid., p. 276.
- 54 Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 94
- 55 I shall return to these criticisms in my final chapter.
- 56 Fredric Jameson, 'The Ideological Analysis of Space', in *Critical Exchange*, no. 14 (1983), pp. 3-4.
- 57 Ibid., p. 4.
- 58 Ibid., p. 5.
- 59 Ibid., p. 5.
- 60 Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), p. 248. The quotation here is Jameson's translation in *The Political Unconscious*, p. 281.
- 61 See *The Political Unconscious*, pp. 35 and 55.
- 62 Michael Clark, 'Imagining the Real: Jameson's use of Lacan', in *New Orleans Review*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1984), p. 67.
- 63 Ibid., p. 67.
- 64 Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. A. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1977), p. x.
- 65 Freud, for example, understood symbols as having 'frozen meanings that had grown from fundamental human experiences, and they were to a large extent transportable from one individual, or culture, to the next'. Lacan, on the other hand, used the term in a much looser sense, the Symbolic 'was important to Lacan precisely because it was versatile and inclusive and referred in a single gesture to an entire range of separate signifying practices. It linked, in what promised to be a coherent and durable fashion the world of unconscious mental processes to that of speech, and both of them to the larger worlds of social and kinship structure'. Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (London: Fontana, 1991), pp. 57-8.
- 66 Bowie, *Lacan*, p. 10.

- 67 Ibid., p. 92.
- 68 Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage', in *Ecrits*, p. 5.
- 69 I shall return to the notion of the chain of signification and the question of symbolic determination in the following chapter.
- 70 Fredric Jameson, 'Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan', in *The Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971-1986: Vol. 1 Situations of Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988).
- 71 Ibid., p. 82.
- 72 Bowie, *Lacan*, p. 94.
- 73 Ibid., p. 94.
- 74 From a seminar given by the Lacanian analyst Bernard Burgoyne at the Centre for Psychotherapeutic Studies, University of Sheffield (1994).
- 75 François Roustang, *The Lacanian Delusion*, trans. G. Sims (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 130.
- 76 Jameson, 'Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan', p. 104.
- 77 Ibid., p. 104.
- 78 Ibid., p. 107.
- 79 Ibid., p. 108.
- 80 Clark, 'Imagining the Real: Jameson's use of Lacan', p. 68.
- 81 Ibid., p. 69.
- 82 Ibid., p. 72.
- 83 Michael Clark, 'Putting Humpty Together Again: Essays Toward Integrative Analysis', in *Poetics Today*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1982), pp. 159-170.
- 84 Jameson, 'The Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan', p. 106.
- 85 Louis Althusser, 'Marxism and Humanism', in *For Marx*, trans. B. Brewster (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), pp. 233-4.
- 86 Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus', in *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984).
- 87 Michèle Barrett, 'Althusser's Marx, Althusser's Lacan', in *The Althusserian Legacy*, p. 174.
- 88 Althusser, 'Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus', p. 55.
- 89 Louis Althusser, 'Freud and Lacan', in *Essays on Ideology*, p. 170-1.
- 90 Ibid., p. 171.
- 91 Barrett, 'Althusser's Marx, Althusser's Lacan', p. 175.
- 92 Ibid., p. 175.
- 93 Ibid., p. 175.
- 94 Ibid., p. 176.
- 95 Ibid., p. 176.
- 96 Ibid., p. 177.
- 97 James Iffland, 'The Political Unconscious of Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*', in *New Orleans Review*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1984), p. 39.
- 98 Carol P. James, 'Does Jameson Have Any Use for Allegory', in *New Orleans Review*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1984), pp. 59-66, J. Fischer-Solomon, 'Marxism and the Categories of Historical Presentation', in *Discourse and Reference in the Nuclear Age* (London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), Jonathan Arac, 'Fredric Jameson and Marxism', in *Critical Genealogies: Historical Situations for*

- Postmodern Literary Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).
- 99 Arac, *Critical Genealogies*, p. 276.
- 100 Ibid., p. 277.
- 101 Jameson, 'Marxism and Historicism', p. 164.
- 102 Louis Althusser & Etienne Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. B. Brewster (London: Verso, 1970), p. 133.
- 103 Ibid., p. 133.
- 104 Frederick G. Weiss, *Hegel: The Essential Writings* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974).
- 105 G.A. Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 9.
- 106 Ibid., p. 12.
- 107 Ibid., p. 18.
- 108 Jameson, 'Marxism and Historicism', p. 157.
- 109 Althusser & Balibar, *Reading Capital*, p. 94.
- 110 Ibid., p. 94.
- 111 Ibid., p. 94.
- 112 Ibid., p. 94.
- 113 Ibid., p. 95.
- 114 Ibid., p. 96.
- 115 Ibid., p. 186.
- 116 Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 127.
- 117 Althusser & Balibar, *Reading Capital*, pp. 105-6.
- 118 Ibid., p. 102.
- 119 Ibid., p. 183.
- 120 Ibid., p. 182.
- 121 Ibid., p. 97.
- 122 Ibid., p. 186.
- 123 Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 104.
- 124 Ibid., p. 103.
- 125 Ibid., p. 108.
- 126 Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*, p. 145.
- 127 Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 100.
- 128 Althusser & Balibar, *Reading Capital*, p. 188.
- 129 Ibid., p. 189.
- 130 See above pp. 10-11.
- 131 Etienne Balibar makes interesting comparisons between *For Marx* and *History and Class Consciousness* but far from conflating the ideas in the two he suggests 'These two great books can indeed be viewed as the extremities of communist theory in 20th century Marxism' See 'The Noncontemporaneity of Althusser' in *The Althusserian Legacy*, pp. 5-6, n. 7.
- Martin Jay quotes Barry Hindess in asserting that there is also a sense in which structural causality rejoins expressive causality if one holds on to the determination by the economic "in the last instance" - even accepting Althusser's rider that "the last instance never comes" - Hindess argues that Althusser's 'concept involves an

essentialism that is little different in principle from that of expressive causality', quoted in Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, p. 409. Jay also acknowledges Jameson's attempt to "salvage" structural causality as in some sense compatible with expressive causality, p. 409, n. 97.

- 132 Young, *White Mythologies*, p. 92.  
133 Ibid., p. 95.  
134 Ibid., p. 96.  
135 Ibid., p. 96.  
136 Ibid., p. 93.  
137 Althusser & Balibar, *Reading Capital*, p. 134.  
138 'Literary Innovation and Modes of Production: A Commentary', in *Modern Chinese Literature*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1984), pp. 67-77, 'Third World Literature in an Era of Multinational Capitalism', in *Social Text*, no. 15 (1986), pp. 65-88 and 'World Literature in an Age of Multinational Capitalism', in *The Current in Criticism: Essays on the Present and Future in Literary Theory*, ed. C. Koeld (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1987), pp. 139-58.  
139 Fredric Jameson, 'Third World Literature in an Era of Multinational Capitalism', p. 69.  
140 Ibid., p. 69.  
141 Aijaz Ahmad, 'Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the "National Allegory"', in *Social Text*, no. 17 (1987), pp. 3-4.  
142 Young, *White Mythologies*, p. 113.  
143 Ibid., p. 113.  
144 Althusser & Balibar, *Reading Capital*, p. 99.  
145 Young, *White Mythologies*, p. 2.  
146 John Frow, 'Marxism After Structuralism', in *Southern Review Adelaide*, vol. 17, no. 1 (1984), pp. 33-50, p. 39.  
147 Roy Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1989), see ch. 1.  
148 Michael Sprinker, *Imaginary Relations: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Theory of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 159.  
149 Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative Vol. 1* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 91.  
150 Paul Ricoeur, 'On Interpretation', in *Philosophy In France Today*, ed. A. Montefiore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 179.

However, the situation with Jameson is not quite as simple as I have indicated here and the emphasis he places on "narrative" and the act of "narration" has significantly changed over the last decade. The privileging of narrative in *The Political Unconscious* retains strong resonances of the Lukácsian position outlined in *Marxism and Form*:

where indeed narration is valorized in that it presupposes neither the transcendence of the object (as in science) nor that of the subject (as in ethics), but rather a neutralization of the two, their mutual reconciliation, which thus anticipates the life experience of a Utopian world in its very structure. (MF, 190)

- Whereas in 'The Existence of Italy' the value of narrative is not its utopian potential of a subject-object unity but precisely the gap that it inscribes between subject (through the act of narration) and object (history itself). See *Signatures of the Visible*, pp. 165-67 and chapter 4 above pp. 70-1.
- 151 Louis O. Mink, 'Narrative Form as a Cognitive Instrument', in *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding*, eds. R.H. Canary & H. Kozicki (Wisconsin:University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), p. 131.
- 152 Ibid., p. 133.
- 153 See *The Political Unconscious*, p. 32 and p. 36, also pp. 94-100.
- 154 Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*, p. 106.
- 155 Ibid., p. 167.
- 156 Ibid., p. 169.
- 157 Ibid., p. 169.
- 158 Ibid., p. 158.
- 159 Ibid., p. 169.
- 160 Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity - An Incomplete Project', in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. H. Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985).
- 161 Cohen, *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, p. 79.
- 162 Ibid., p. 79.
- 163 Ibid., p. 86.



## THE POLITICS OF DESIRE

An entire minor mythology would have us believe that pleasure (and singularly the pleasure of the text) is a rightist notion. On the right, with the same movement, everything abstract, boring, political, is shoved over to the left and pleasure is kept for oneself: welcome to our side, you who are finally coming to the pleasure of literature!<sup>1</sup>

The relationship between pleasure and politics, and indeed the question of pleasure itself, has always been a problematic one for the left. As the quotation from Roland Barthes illustrates, the left is traditionally portrayed as puritanical and aridly intellectual whilst the right is seen as hedonistic and decadent. In his essay 'Pleasure: A Political Issue'<sup>2</sup> Jameson examines this resistance on the part of the left (if indeed there is such a resistance) to issues of pleasure and in particular he highlights the "class" dimension of sexual politics:

The conception of the primacy of class issues and class consciousness suggests that from a working-class perspective, issues of sexual liberation may be grasped, not on their own terms, but rather as so many class ideologies and as the collective expression of groups (such as middle-class youth) that working-class people identify as the class enemy<sup>3</sup>

Similarly for women the politics of pleasure is by no means simply an existential issue, (or, as I shall suggest below merely an ethical concern of one's relationship to one's own body) but is rather 'a matter of group struggle'<sup>4</sup> and is inextricably bound-up with issues of male power and domination. Thus in Laura Mulvey's influential essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'<sup>5</sup> an interesting reversal takes place whereby it is now the destruction of pleasure that is seen as the radical and liberating solution. Therefore writes Jameson:

if it begins to turn out that the value of "pleasure" as a political slogan is not merely unattractive to working-class people but also to women, then its ideological effectivity is evidently a rather diminished one.<sup>6</sup>

However, Jameson is not advocating that the left should simply resign itself to the situation, accepting the mythology that surrounds pleasure and in effect abandoning the terrain to the right. On the contrary, Jameson insists on the need to reformulate our conception of pleasure and define, what he terms, its "proper" political use. Jameson notes that there is no such thing as pleasure in its own right, 'only pleasurable activities, or something like a fading effect of pleasure after the fact'<sup>7</sup> and what is really at stake in the polemics over pleasure is not so much the experience itself but rather the 'idea of pleasure, the ideologies of pleasure'<sup>8</sup>.

Therefore, in this chapter I will very briefly examine the contemporary ideology of pleasure through the work of Foucault and Barthes as a contrast to the ideology of desire expounded by Deleuze and Guattari in the *Anti-Oedipus*. In order to assess this notoriously difficult text I shall initially contextualize Deleuze and Guattari's work in the politics of post-May '68. I shall also outline Freud's conception of desire and at greater length Lacan's notion of desire and the role of the phallus. The justification for such an extended exposition, in the case of Lacan, is that while Deleuze and Guattari stridently reject the Lacanian structural model it is also Lacan's theorisation of desire and signification which initially facilitates the thinking behind *Anti-Oedipus*. I shall then consider Jameson's own politics of Desire; initially examining his endorsement of, and claims of affinity with, Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*. I shall also consider this text as an example of Jameson's method of subsuming other discourses within his own Marxist horizon and analyse how satisfactory this operation is. Secondly, I shall give an exposition of Jameson's own formulation of a libidinal apparatus before finally examining the relationship between desire and Utopia through Jameson's dialectic of ideology and Utopia.

## Ideologies of Pleasure

As Foucault's work on the history of sexuality shows, the very notion of pleasure constitutes a *problématique*, that is to say, a word that must be considered in relation to its overall conceptual framework, the set of relations or theoretical conjuncture in which it exists. Foucault traces a genealogy of this *problématique* from the Greco-Roman period to the present, concluding that the Greeks provide an 'ethical experience which implied a very strong connection between pleasure and desire'<sup>9</sup> which stands in stark contrast to contemporary experience 'where everybody - the philosopher or the psychoanalyst - explains that what is important is desire, and pleasure is nothing at all'.<sup>10</sup> For Foucault, pleasure is essentially an ethical problem, in the sense of the way 'we constitute ourselves as moral agents',<sup>11</sup> in other words, it is a relation of one to one's self, to one's own body. Pleasure is thus characterised as a practice of the self. Desire, on the other hand, is not simply a question of personal ethics, it is not reducible to the subject in the sense that it is a practice of the self but is rather at the very heart of our constructions of subjectivity. We think of ourselves not merely as subjects that desire but as desiring subjects; desire is what drives us forward, and is part of the unconscious structures of society, the social nexus within which our subjectivity is constructed and reconstructed. In short, desire is a force or drive that is greater than its individual manifestations, it is also a collective concern.<sup>12</sup>

Foucault acknowledges that the Greek ethics he outlines are far from perfect, providing only a male ethics of domination and virility, and never taking into account the pleasure of the other. However, he contends that the great virtue of Greek ethics is that they maintained a relationship between desires, acts and pleasures, whilst:

The dissociation - or partial dissociation at least - of this ensemble would later become one of the basic features of the ethics of the flesh [Christianity] and the notion of sexuality [theorised through

psychoanalysis].<sup>13</sup>

This dissociation of pleasure and desire within contemporary discourse is clearly visible in the publication of two seminal texts in the early 1970s: Roland Barthes' *The Pleasure of the Text* (1973) and Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (1972). As his title indicates Barthes is concerned with "pleasure" and he shares with Foucault a certain antipathy to the theoretical value attributed to desire: 'we are always being told about Desire', writes Barthes 'never about Pleasure; Desire has an epistemic dignity, Pleasure does not'.<sup>14</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, on the other hand, focus upon "desire" and have nothing substantial to say about pleasure at all. Whilst the terminus of both *The Pleasure of the Text* and *Anti-Oedipus* will be seen to be the celebration of immanence and the intensity of the moment, each text reaches this terminus by a very different route and correspondingly projects its own ideology of pleasure and desire.

The Barthesian ideology of pleasure renounces all political commitment in favour of an individualistic hedonism of the text, or as Barthes so eloquently puts it, the 'text is (should be) that uninhibited person who shows his behind to the *Political Father*'.<sup>15</sup> For Barthes the pleasure of the text consists of an erotics of reading, a surrendering of oneself to the flux of language, its contradiction and difference, to its plurality of voices or what Barthes calls a "sanctioned Babel". The precondition for such an eroticism of the text is essentially its excess: its repetition to excess and its unexpectedness, in the sense that it is "succulently new". In other words, the pleasurable text is that which goes beyond representation, that undoes nomination through its excess; it is something we can say nothing about and only surrender ourselves to the polymorphous perversity of *jouissance*:

With the writer of bliss (and his reader) begins the untenable text, the impossible text. This text is outside pleasure, outside criticism, *unless it is reached through another text of bliss*: you cannot speak "on" such a text, you can only speak "in" it, *in its fashion*, enter into a desperate plagiarism,

hysterically affirm the void of bliss (and no longer obsessively repeat the letter of pleasure).<sup>16</sup>

Jameson, on the other hand, insists on the need to move beyond concepts of pleasure in this 'narrow, culinary, bourgeois sense'<sup>17</sup> to reflect upon, what he calls, the "deeper subject", the libidinal body itself. This, I shall argue, is to move from the terrain of "pleasure" to "desire" and to see that pleasure, or more precisely what I will now define as desire, is a figure, an allegory, for a larger process of transformation:

the thematization of a particular pleasure as a political issue ... must always involve a dual focus, in which the local issue is meaningful and desirable in and of itself, but is also *at one and the same time* taken as the *figure* for Utopia in general, and for the systematic revolutionary transformation of society as a whole.<sup>18</sup>

### Ideologies of Desire

The *Anti-Oedipus* emerged from that period of 'euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and dissipation, carnival and catastrophe'<sup>19</sup> we now know as May '68. For a brief and dramatic moment in the spring of 1968, writes Terry Eagleton, it appeared that the combined forces of the French student protests and worker's strikes would rock the French state to its very foundations. As the protests collapsed in disarray and the working-class movement was betrayed by its "supine Stalinist leaders" the French state re-established order. After the defeats of 1968 Deleuze and Guattari, like many others on the left, sought to redefine the terms of political struggle and to formulate a conception of "molecular" politics; that is to say the politics of small autonomous groups which tended to fight around single issue campaigns and more localised struggles. The rationale behind such a strategy was that the traditional working-class organisations, the PCF and the Unions, had been revealed to be complicit in the maintenance of the existing social structure at the very moment when revolutionary change appeared to be imminent. Indeed, no less a figure than the arch-Marxist Louis Althusser himself has provided

probably the most eloquent and succinct analysis of this situation.

Although Althusser did not break with the Communist party after May '68 his critique of the party apparatus and the party machine, when it finally came a decade later, was devastating. In a tone markedly different from that of his path-breaking works two decades earlier Althusser now writes:

Behind [the] view of a scientific theory produced by bourgeois intellectuals, and 'introduced ... from without' into the working-class movement, lies a whole conception of the relations between theory and practice, between the Party and the mass movement, and between party leaders and simple militants, which reproduces bourgeois forms of knowledge and power in their separation.<sup>20</sup>

According to Althusser, Marxist theory had regressed somewhat from the work of Marx himself and more specifically, Marxism was still lacking in fully developed theories of the state, of superstructures and of political organisations. Historically this has meant that the working-class movement has tended to reproduce bourgeois structures of power and organisation. Such a situation, suggests Althusser, has led to tragic consequences for the working-class: from the horrors of Stalinism to the contemporary policies of the PCF. Every organisation, argues Althusser, needs an apparatus, it needs a structure, but the influence of bourgeois ideology alone is insufficient to explain the reproduction of bourgeois divisions of power within the working-class movement. Rather, the Party itself can be seen to reproduce the dominant ideology through its own structure and organisation and in particular through 'the difference between its leaders and its militants' which replicates 'the structures of the bourgeois State'.<sup>21</sup> The problem of reproducing a reactionary ideology is not merely a question of the level of class consciousness, of inadequate theory or deviating from the party line but is inherent in the materiality of the organisational structure, specifically in the separation between the party hierarchy and its

rank and file. In his final, and as Gregory Elliott states 'in some respects his finest,'<sup>22</sup> essay Althusser observes that the Communist party's 'structure and mode of functioning were closely modelled at once on the bourgeois State apparatus and military apparatus'.<sup>23</sup> In tones that echo Althusser's old adversary Sartre, he notes that in this situation the maintenance of the party structure takes precedence over the revolutionary struggle itself; as Sartre would say, the revolutionary group begins to ossify. Communist parties have traditionally been modelled on a vertical structure with each party cell being accountable to the next level in the hierarchy rather than horizontally, to the broad base of the party. Again, notes Althusser, there have been good historical reasons for this, particularly when Communist parties have had to organise clandestinely. However, in terms of a capitalist and politically social democratic state this form of organisation only serves to isolate the rank and file of any mass movement from each other and to draw a line between the leadership and the militants. That is to say decisions are made at the top and in secret and then passed down rather than openly and democratically discussed at the bottom and passed up. Thus, the party rather than being an instrument or vehicle for change becomes a barrier to change:

In so combining the military model of partitioning with the model of parliamentary democracy, the Party cannot but reproduce and strengthen *the bourgeois mode of politics*.<sup>24</sup>

For the generation of French intellectuals that emerged out of the events of May '68 the urgent political tasks no longer appeared to centre upon the struggle for power, as this only appeared to reproduce the existing order. The emphasis shifted from an attack on coercive and repressive state structures to an analysis of the way in which the ostensibly repressed subjects invest and maintain those very structures and to the reconceptualization of non-repressive forms of political organisations and activities. As Peter Dews states:

Social systems are both imposed by force from above - they embody

relations of *power* - and are adhered to or rejected from below - they are invested or disinvested with *desire*.<sup>25</sup>

In short, through our own support and investment in the existing political structures and organisations we are complicit in our own subjugation. We therefore, as Foucault says, need to rid ourselves of that 'fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour'.<sup>26</sup>

Terry Eagleton, however, has given a rather more sober analysis of the situation. From a position of defeat and disillusion, he argues, evolved the post-structuralist critique of totalizing thought and the rejection of 'all forms of political theory and organization which sought to analyze, and act upon, the structures of society as a whole'.<sup>27</sup> Unable 'to break the structures of state power, post-structuralism found it possible instead to subvert the structures of language'.<sup>28</sup> From the subversion of political structures to the subversion of structure *per se* seems to have been a very short step and the project of molecular politics to disinvest traditional forms of oppositional politics and formulate new political structures migrated into a general disinvestment of all forms of structure.

Unlike Barthes's retreat into a non-discursive hedonism of the text, Deleuze and Guattari's politics of desire seeks to redefine some form of collective subject or historical agency. As Jameson points out their principal theoretical antagonistic is not so much Marx as Freud and those 'poor technicians of desire'<sup>29</sup> the psychoanalysts and semiologists. For Deleuze and Guattari, Freud is at once the discoverer of that realm of free synthesis where anything is possible and is subject only to the motivation of desire - the polymorphous perversity of the pleasure principle - but at the same time he sought to restrict this liberating force through the law of Oedipus Complex. According to Deleuze and Guattari, then, the Oedipus complex is not so much a psychic crisis as it is a structure imposed on unconscious desire by social forces, channelling the free flows of desire into a



predetermined structure. Deleuze and Guattari ask:

what does it mean to say that Freud discovered Oedipus in his own self-analysis? Was it in his self-analysis, or rather in his Goethian classical culture?<sup>30</sup>

A materialist psychiatry interprets Oedipus as an "ideological form," it provides a referential axis, the invariant - 'daddy- mommy-me' - around which desire is orientated, channelled and above all domesticated. But for Deleuze and Guattari desire is not reducible to a given structure, it constitutes 'the Real in itself, beyond or beneath the Symbolic as well as the Imaginary'<sup>31</sup> and remains a fundamentally transgressive force. Freud's Oedipalization of unconscious desire served to restrict an essentially orphan unconscious to the endless repetition of a Greek tragedy. Therefore Deleuze and Guattari pose the question: Was it the desire that begat the prohibition or the prohibition that begat the desire? This is perhaps the most fundamental question posed by the *Anti-Oedipus* and concerns the nature of desire itself, as well as the relationship between desire and the socio-symbolic realm. For if Deleuze and Guattari's desiring-production is not the incestuous desires of the Oedipus complex then neither is it the Lacanian desire as lack. I shall briefly outline the Freudian and Lacanian conceptions of desire before defining Deleuze and Guattari's more positive and productive conception of desire.

In their dictionary of psychoanalysis Laplanche and Pontalis write that the 'Freudian conception of desire refers above all to unconscious wishes, bound to indestructible infantile signs'.<sup>32</sup> Signs in this context refers to the memory traces of early experiences of excitation and satisfaction. Thus, write Laplanche and Pontalis, 'unconscious wishes tend to be fulfilled through the restoration of signs which are bound to the earliest experiences of satisfaction'<sup>33</sup> and which are governed by the primary process. In Freud's distinction between the two modes of functioning of the psychical apparatus,<sup>34</sup> the primary processes

designates the unconscious mental processes and the secondary processes refers to the conscious and pre-conscious system. The former functions according to what Freud called the pleasure principle and the latter by the reality principle. Laplanche and Pontalis summarise the primary process as the process whereby 'psychical energy flows freely, passing unhindered, by means of the mechanisms of condensation and displacement, from one idea to another and which are at the root of unconscious wishes'.<sup>35</sup> For Freud, this psychical energy is what he termed libido or the sexual instincts, and which he opposed to the self-preservative instincts of the reality principle. In his 1905 paper 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality' Freud offers this definition of libido:

We have defined the concept of 'libido' as a quantitatively variable force which could serve as a measure of processes and transformations occurring in the field of sexual excitation.<sup>36</sup>

In a paragraph added in 1920 Freud rejects Jung's attempt to 'water down the meaning of the concept of libido itself by equating it with psychical instinctual force in general'.<sup>37</sup> Freud insists on the need to distinguish 'sexual instinctual impulses'<sup>38</sup> from other psychical forces and to restrict the notion of libido to designating sexual instincts. As is well known, Freud gave primacy to sexual desires in unconscious mental processes and in particular one specific sexual formation:

the Oedipus complex is the nuclear complex of the neuroses, and constitutes the essential part of their content. It represents the peak of infantile sexuality, which, through its after-effects, exercises a decisive influence on the sexuality of adults. Every new arrival on this planet is faced by the task of mastering the Oedipus complex; anyone who fails to do so falls a victim to neurosis.<sup>39</sup>

At this stage in his thinking then, desire for Freud was essentially sexual in nature and incestuous, governed by the universal principle of the Oedipus complex. In 'Totem and Taboo' Freud greatly extended the significance of the Oedipus complex, insisting that the

incest taboo was both trans-historical and trans-cultural. Furthermore, developing Darwin's theory of the primal horde Freud saw 'the beginnings of religion, morals, society and art converge in the Oedipus complex'.<sup>40</sup> For Freud, then, the Oedipus complex delineates the structure of desire, setting out a complex set of interconnected relations.

However, in the late text 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' Freud developed a broader conception of desire. Reflecting upon the primacy he had always accorded to the pleasure principle Freud proposed a more archaic instinct beyond the pleasure principle in the form of the death drive and to which he now opposes Eros, or the life instincts. Freud writes:

the libido of our sexual instincts would coincide with the Eros of the poets and philosophers which holds all living things together.<sup>41</sup>

In fact Freud's conception of Eros as that which 'combine organic substances into ever larger unities'<sup>42</sup> would appear to include the sexual instincts rather than coincide with them and therefore to be proposing something larger and more inclusive than his original conception of libido. In consideration of the life instincts Freud writes:

The repressed instinct never ceases to strive for complete satisfaction, which would consist in the repetition of a primary experience of satisfaction.<sup>43</sup>

Desire, for Freud, is not to be confused with need, as needs derive from somatic sources which can be satisfied through attainment of the specific object required, nourishment, sleep etc. Desire, as Laplanche and Pontalis make clear, is rather connected to wishes which 'are indissolubly bound to 'memory-traces', and they are fulfilled ... through the hallucinatory reproduction of the perceptions which have become signs of this satisfaction'.<sup>44</sup> And in a formulation that will be picked up by Lacan, Freud notes that 'it is the difference in amount between the pleasure of satisfaction which is *demandé* and that which is actually *achieved* that provides the driving factor which will permit no

halting at any position attained'.<sup>45</sup> The unfulfilled wish or desire is what keeps driving us forward as it can never be fully satisfied.

In his influential essay 'The Signification of the Phallus' Lacan picks up this conception of desire but significantly modifies it in his well known formulation:

desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting'<sup>46</sup>

Desire, according to Lacan, results from the subtraction of the satisfaction achieved from the demand made, to put it another way, desire is that which separates need and demand. As I shall make clear below, it is important for Lacan to distinguish desire from need because, as Freud pointed out, a need is object-directed and thus can be satisfied through the attainment of that object, whilst desire can never be satisfied. However, neither can desire be reduced to demand because desire 'seeks to impose itself without taking the language or the unconscious of the other into account, and insists upon absolute recognition from him',<sup>47</sup> whereas a demand always presupposes an addressee; therefore must take the language of the other into account and, again as I shall argue below, no absolute recognition can be achieved through language.

According to Lacan, a need must be articulated in the form of a demand; essentially Lacan is talking here about a demand for love. With respect to desire therefore the starting point for Lacan is not a need but the demand through which that need is articulated and which annuls the need by transposing it in the intersubjective realm of the Symbolic: that is symbolising the need as language and language for Lacan is always intersubjective. A demand presupposes an "other", the other whom the demand is being made of, thus desire is no longer a subjective concern (a question of need) but exists in the intersubjective

realm in the relation between subject and other. As Lacan puts it:

Demand constitutes the Other as already possessing the 'privilege' of satisfying needs, that is to say, the power of depriving them of that alone by which they are satisfied. This privilege of the Other thus outlines the radical form of the gift of that which the Other does not have, namely, its love.<sup>48</sup>

In other words, by making a demand upon the other (I shall limit myself to the lower case in order to indicate that I am not using the term in a Lacanian technical sense) we also make the assumption that the other can meet that demand. Thus, following Lacan's line of argument, the intersubjective, or linguistic, relation in the form of the demand for love constitutes the other but at the same time bestows upon the other the ability to meet a demand which they do not possess. That is to say, an essential mis-perception, or mis-recognition, takes place. I shall return to this below but first I will briefly say something about Lacan's use of the term "Other".

The distinction between the lower case and upper case "O" in other is significant for Lacan, although he never gives a clear and definitive definition of what the distinction entails, rather allowing the distinction to emerge through its usage. According to Peter Dews:

Lacan's distinction between the 'other' and the 'Other' is based on the assumption that, in the relation between subjects, each will attempt to discover a confirming image, a reinforcement of his or her own ego in the response of the other.<sup>49</sup>

In other words, in any intersubjective relation each subject seeks an affirmation of his or her own self-image, the other merely becomes an echo of the self as one's own ego is projected, or imposed, upon the other.<sup>50</sup> If such a complete recognition were attainable, then each subject would be locked into a process of infinite regress as he or she seeks confirmation of their own image in the other. As both subject and other are seeking the

self-recognition regardless of the other the process would also entail the mutual cancellation of the other. That is to say, at the moment at which the subject achieved absolute confirmation of its image in the other, the other would be annulled to the extent that it could not be recognised by the first subject. Similarly, the subject, to the extent that it must recognise the other in order to have its own image confirmed by the other must at the same time negate its own subjectivity. Therefore, Lacan needs to avoid the possibility of mutual self-recognition, or as Dews puts it 'a possible coincidence of self-conception'.<sup>51</sup> Lacan achieves this through the related concepts of the Other and the *objet petit a*, or the object of desire. Dews suggests that 'what Lacan wishes to signal by his distinction between the 'other' and 'Other' is that our preconceptions can never be replaced by a definitive grasp of who the other subject truly is'.<sup>52</sup> The absolute Other is always unattainable, separated from the subject by language, which as we saw in the previous chapter always alienates the subject from itself.

For Lacan, desire exists in the realm of the Other, in the sense that it is articulated as a demand for love, at the same time the Other only comes into being in the Symbolic, through language, the Other is constituted insofar as a demand is articulated. As Lacan writes:

It is the demand of a presence or of an absence - which is what is manifested in the primordial relation to the mother, pregnant with that Other to be situated *within* the needs that it can satisfy.<sup>53</sup>

Whilst I remain unclear what the final clause of this sentence means, the first half is clear enough. The demand for love is that demand for recognition which I defined in the previous chapter in terms of the mirror stage. This process was characterised by the essential mis-recognition of the Ideal-ego and marks the transition from the Imaginary into the Symbolic realm. It also inaugurates the process of desire in the Symbolic, that is the

desire for the illusory unattainable sense of coherence and completion which the infant knew in the Imaginary. The lynch-pin between these two systems is what Lacan terms the phallus; somewhat perversely Lacan insists on the term phallus to signify the gender neutrality of his system. The phallus does not refer to the male genital organ but rather to a signifier:

For the phallus is a signifier, a signifier whose function, in the intrasubjective economy of the analysis, lifts the veil perhaps from the function it performed in the mysteries. For it is the signifier intended to designate as a whole the effects of the signified, in that, the signifier conditions them by its presence as a signifier.<sup>54</sup>

The phallus is not so much the signifier of a thing but of a process, as it can only operate as a signifier insofar as it is absent, or as Lacan says "veiled". It is this *aufhebung*, this presence as absence, writes Lacan that the phallus signifies and 'inaugurates (initiates) by its disappearance'.<sup>55</sup> Lacan theorises the movement from the Imaginary into the Symbolic as one of castration, or rather symbolic castration. As the child emerges into the Symbolic, the mother/child dyad which constituted the relationship of the mirror phase is disrupted by the intervention of a third term, the father. The child discovers that it is not sole object of the mother's desire and does not fully satisfy that desire. Thus, according to Lacan, the child undergoes a series of identifications in which he (note that Lacan, as did Freud, only considers the male child here) attempts to complete the mother and fulfil her desire. However:

the child will be obliged to accept the paradoxical nature of these efforts, and to come to terms with its own symbolic castration, with the loss of the imaginary phallus. This castration, equivalent to full entry into the symbolic order, takes place by means of what Lacan terms the 'paternal metaphor' or the 'Name-of-the-Father'.<sup>56</sup>

The normal development of the child and transition into the Symbolic realm is predicated on the acceptance of the loss of the phallus. The notion of the phallus provides Lacan

with the cross over point between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, between the specular I and subject as constituted by the Symbolic. Lacan writes:

The phallus is the privileged signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire.<sup>57</sup>

The phallus only functions as a sign, or signifier, and more importantly as a signifier that is always absent but desired, the phallus *is* the object of desire.

The desire to possess the phallus, deriving from the illusory unity of the Imaginary stage prior to ascension into the Symbolic, provides Lacan with his model of signification. In his essay 'The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud' Lacan challenged the prevailing Saussurean conception of the linguistic sign and the process of signification. For Saussure the diadic sign, the signifier/signified couple was indivisible, it cannot be separated, the two halves of the sign are as two sides to a single sheet of paper, or a moebious strip, always inextricably bound together. However, it was this very indivisibility of the sign that Lacan was to challenge and for some irrevocably split. Lacan dismissed the usual Saussurian illustration of the functioning of the sign, a picture of a tree, and replaced it with a picture of two doors with the word Ladies written above one and Gentleman written above the other. Then he tells his tale of two children pulling into a train station:

'Look', says the brother, 'we're at Ladies!'; 'Idiot!' replies his sister, 'Can't you see we're at Gentlemen'.<sup>58</sup>

What this illustration shows, argues Lacan, is the priority of the Signifier (which he now capitalises) "Ladies" and "Gentlemen" respectively, over the signified, that these doors lead to public toilets. In short, it is the context in which any given signifier is deployed that will determine its meaning rather than a specific signified or referent. What Lacan is in



effect proposing is a reversal of the priority Saussure bestowed upon the signified in the signifier/signified relation, whereby the signified is placed over the signifier. Lacan's reformulation now reads Signifier/signified whereby a capitalised signifier takes precedence over a lower case signified. At the same time Saussure's "bar", that indivisible link between signifier and signified, in Lacan's reformulation becomes a fundamental barrier to meaning. As Lacan writes in 'The agency of the letter':

the primordial position of the signifier and the signified as being distinct orders separated initially by a barrier resisting signification.<sup>59</sup>

He goes on, 'no signification can be sustained other than by reference to another signification'.<sup>60</sup> In other words, for Lacan, what a signifier refers to is not a signified, as there is always this barrier between them, but rather to another signifier. One must rid oneself, writes Lacan, of 'the illusion that the signifier answers to the function of representing the signified, or better, that the signifier has to answer for its existence in the name of any signification whatever'.<sup>61</sup> A signifier, then, refers us not to a referent, not to a signified, but to another signifier, which in turn refers us to another signifier in an almost endless chain of signification. Only, argues Lacan, in the correlations between signifier and signifier does meaning reside as 'the signifier, by its very nature, always anticipates a meaning by unfolding its dimension before it' - 'it is in the chain of the signifier that the meaning 'insists' but that none of its elements 'consists' in the signification of which it is at the moment capable'.<sup>62</sup> As with Derrida's theory of *Différance*, meaning is always anticipated and indefinitely deferred. In Lacan's famous slogan, there is 'an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier'.<sup>63</sup>

The Lacanian capitalised Signifier dominates all his other terms, and above all, it is the Signifier and the continual displacements of the Signifier that determines the subject:

"The subject" is no longer a substance endowed with qualities, or a fixed shape possessing dimensions, or a container awaiting the multifarious contents that experience provides: it is a series of events within language, a procession of turns, tropes and inflections.<sup>64</sup>

The problem for Lacan is what inaugurates this process of signification and what drives it forward. As I have already indicated, the phallus only operates insofar as it is a sign and moreover a sign that is present only in its absence. The phallus, for Lacan, is the one sign that is indivisible, in which signifier and signified are unified, a unity that one desires but can never obtain. The phallus provides the anchor for the signifying chain, the point at which it commences and comes to rest, except that it is always "veiled". As Malcolm Bowie puts it the phallus is the one 'signifier that holds all signifieds in thrall'.<sup>65</sup> It is the notion of the phallus that maintains Lacan's structure, that originary moment, or structure from which all other structures grow. The phallus is, what we might call, a transcendental signifier, it is outside the signifying chain and pre-exists structure. One could well ask how it is possible for there to be a position outside the signifying chain, or pre-existing all structures, except insofar as it is necessary to give a semblance of coherence to Lacan's system? As Peter Dews points out such a signifier is impossible 'so that the phallus is destined to appear to the subject as eternally lost'.<sup>66</sup>

Whereas for Freud, desire was inextricably bound up with the restoration of unconscious signs, of unconscious wishes, these were signs of infantile experiences of satisfaction. For Lacan on the other hand, everything starts from an initial premise of a primary loss, what Lacan will theorise as *manque-à-être*.<sup>67</sup> This is the ultimate tragedy of the Lacanian subject, irretrievable, split, alienated and for ever in the thrall of an insatiable desire at the very heart of its being:

The fact that the phallus is a signifier means that it is in the place of the Other that the subject has access to it. But since this signifier is only veiled, as the ratio of the Other's desire, it is this desire of the Other as such that

the subject must recognize, that is to say, the other in so far as he is himself a subject divided by the signifying *Spaltung* [splitting].<sup>68</sup>

I shall now try to summarise this rather complex argument. The emergence into the Symbolic is marked by the lack of self-coincidence between the subject and language, that alienating experience whereby the subject objectifies him/herself through symbolising themselves in language. For Lacan this process is equivalent to a symbolic castration whereby the child recognises itself as no longer being the object of its mother's desires and as lacking the object of desire. The object of desire is the phallus which is knowable for Lacan only in the Symbolic realm once it has been lost and only in so far as we recognise that it is lost and cannot be found but it is what we desire to find. This for Lacan is the process of signification: the continual attempt to find unity with that ultimate signifier but always frustrated and deferred. Thus it is desire that drives the signifying chain, the desire for the lost object, the *objet petit a*, the phallus. As Bowie states, desire:

is what keeps the chain of signifiers moving. It is the dynamo, everywhere in motion and no where at rest, that propels all acts of speech, all refusals to speak and all conscious and unconscious mental representations.<sup>69</sup>

It is this two fold law of Oedipal structure and phallic lack that *Anti-Oedipus* unequivocally rejects along with the primacy that Lacan accords to the Signifier (Phallus) and the Symbolic. Before considering Deleuze and Guattari's more positive conception of desire I shall just make two observations. Firstly, if desire is in everything and is everywhere then the term ceases to have a great deal of theoretical value, its meaning is evacuated and it becomes too generalised a term to have any use beyond sloganeering. Secondly, if Jameson so strongly endorses Deleuze and Guattari's conception of desire which I will outline below, how is he to reconcile this with his equally strong endorsement of Lacan and his conception of History as that which refuses desire?

## The Production of Desire

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's work *Anti-Oedipus* has been celebrated and disparaged in equal measure, Perry Anderson has described it as 'the expression of a dejected post-lapsarian anarchism'.<sup>70</sup> Subtitled *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* it provides, claim its authors, the first genuinely materialist form of psychiatry; what they term "Schizoanalysis":

Schizoanalysis foregoes all interpretation because it foregoes discovering an unconscious material: the unconscious does not mean anything. On the other hand the unconscious constructs machines, which are machines of desire, whose use and functioning schizoanalysis discovers in their immanent relationship with social machines.<sup>71</sup>

With this unambiguous rejection of interpretation, latent unconscious material and mediation in favour of an immanent relationship between desire and the social field, it would seem therefore a little strange, if not perverse, for Jameson to claim in *The Political Unconscious* that the 'thrust of the argument of the *Anti-Oedipus* is, to be sure, very much in the spirit of the present work' (PU, 22). Indeed, with the torrents of neologisms that stream across its pages, the scandalous abuse it makes of a multiplicity of discourses (Psychoanalytic, political, scientific, historiographic, literary and anthropological to name just a few) and its subversion of traditional academic proprieties, this most transgressive and fluid of texts would appear to resolutely resist just the kind of co-optive strategy that Jameson's text proposes.

For Jameson the usefulness of the *Anti-Oedipus* lies initially in its reintroduction of questions of history into those otherwise resolutely anti- or ahistorical moments of structuralism and poststructuralism. However, in *The Political Unconscious*, he is more specific in identifying particular affinities between his own doctrine of a political unconscious and the work of Deleuze and Guattari:

to reassert the specificity of the political content of everyday life and of individual fantasy-experience and to reclaim it from that reduction to the merely subjective and to the status of psychological projection which is even more characteristic of American culture and ideological life today than it is of a still politicized France. (PU, 22)

Jameson claims a threefold kinship with the *Anti-Oedipus*: firstly, that it reinstates the political nature of our everyday experience, secondly, that it reasserts the collective or political dimension of our fantasy-experience, and finally, that the situation Deleuze and Guattari are describing is even more characteristic of the experience of the subject within North American culture than it is of the more politicised climate of contemporary France. I shall initially examine the first two of these propositions before suggesting that the third is instrumental for Jameson's attempt to recite the *Anti-Oedipus* as a second-degree, critical philosophy in relation to his own Marxist discourse.

The radicalism of Deleuze and Guattari's project derives from their attempt to reformulate the relationship between unconscious desire and the social field, or that nexus of forces, structures and sign systems that all subjects inhabit and traverse. According to Deleuze and Guattari, social repression not only presupposes psychic repression but social liberation can only be achieved when it is accompanied by psychic liberation, when we realise our own desire rather than accepting its prohibition. The failure of previous Marxist-Freudian syntheses, such as those of Wilhelm Reich or Herbert Marcuse, were that they retained a separation between the rational world of social production and the irrational domain of desire, therefore desire remained a fundamentally negative and subterranean force. Deleuze and Guattari on the other hand argue that both forms of repression are linked in a single process, thus their central concept of desiring-production encapsulates both the Freudian conception of desire and the Marxian emphasis on social production. *Anti-Oedipus* rejects any notion of desire as a negative force or as derivative of a primal lack: the authors insist on the contrary that desire is always positive and

productive. For Deleuze and Guattari desire is never the desire for something lacking but the object of desire is desire itself; in a kind of Nietzschean eternal return, as an endless cycle and return of the positive, desire seeks only its own affirmation and reproduction in a continual process of desiring-production.

However, this is not to suggest that desiring-production and social production are the same thing, they are rather two poles of the same process: that is to say at one end of the process we find the "molecular" processes of desiring-production and at the other the "molar" formations, or aggregates, of social production. The unconscious, write Deleuze and Guattari, is not a classical theatre but a factory of production and there is only one kind of production - 'the production of the real'<sup>72</sup>:

If desire produces, its product is the real. If desire is productive, it can be productive only in the real world and can produce only reality. <sup>73</sup>

Schizophrenic desire is the universe of production in the "real" world and acts as the absolute 'limit of social production'.<sup>74</sup> In other words, there is '*only desire and the social, and nothing else*'<sup>75</sup> coextensive in a single process of desiring-production, each directly investing the other without mediation. And according to Deleuze and Guattari to encourage the free-flow of desire is to encourage it to surpass, to overflow the final limits and constraints of the Capitalist order.

Deleuze and Guattari's conception of productive desire, as *hylé* or a material flow, <sup>76</sup> is clearly at odds with the Lacanian notion of desire as lack, and would seem to be more in the spirit of Freud's Eros as that life giving force which combines organic substances into ever greater unities. At the same time the unmediated, according to Deleuze and Guattari, nature of desiring-production directly challenges the secondary and subordinate role Lacan assigns desire in relation to the Symbolic as that which keeps the signifying chain moving.

For Lacan, the Symbolic is the dominant organisational category, it at once 'relentlessly pre-ordains and organises human experience' and at the same time 'cancels experience'.<sup>77</sup> The pre-eminence that Lacan accords to the Symbolic and in particular to language is, as is well known, influenced by the work of the structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss; however, it is equally the result of his own discipline psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is above all else concerned with language and how unconscious wishes or desires manifest themselves in language, through such mechanisms as dreams, jokes and parapraxis. So Lacan was justified in his celebrated slogan "return to Freud" in stressing the centrality of language in psychoanalytic theory and practice. But as Malcolm Bowie has pointed out this was only to pick up one strain of Freud's thought:

For Freud, language had as its crowning capacity that of ushering the theorist and the therapist to the threshold of another world, and that world - for which "the unconscious" was an appropriate shorthand designation - mattered because it was the mute, unstoppable and unappeasable inwardness of human desire.<sup>78</sup>

Language takes us up to the threshold of the unconscious but it does not cross that threshold, the unconscious is "mute," it is, as Freud said a world without syntax or grammar. For Lacan, on the other hand, we not only have access to the unconscious only through language but there can be no unconscious outside of language. The unconscious comes into being for Lacan as the subject is formed in the Symbolic, it is only through language that we can articulate unconscious desires and wishes and as language pre-exists the subject it can be seen to have a determining role on the form of that articulation. The unconscious only has meaning in so far as we can symbolise it. In his 1915 paper on 'The Unconscious' Freud addressed this question of desire and representation insisting that:

An instinct [drive] can never become an object of consciousness - only the idea that represents the instinct can. Even in the unconscious, moreover, an instinct cannot be represented otherwise than by an idea.<sup>79</sup>

This appears clear enough and to support Lacan's thesis of the primacy of the Symbolic processes over unconscious processes. However, Freud then went on to distinguish between conscious and unconscious presentations or ideas:

the conscious presentation comprises the presentation of the thing plus the presentation of the word belonging to it, while the unconscious presentation is the presentation of the thing alone.<sup>80</sup>

In other words, consciousness consists of "word-presentations" and the unconscious consists of "thing-presentations". Freud goes on:

A presentation which is not put into words, or a psychical act which is not hypercathected, remains thereafter in the *Ucs* [unconscious] in a state of repression.<sup>81</sup>

Again this would appear to support Lacan's thesis that one only has access to the unconscious through language and that language structures the content, the thing-presentations, of the unconscious, otherwise these thing-presentations remain repressed and therefore unknown. However, this is not the whole story. Freud writes:

It is a very remarkable thing that the *Ucs.* of one human being can react upon that of another, without passing through the *Cs.* This deserves closer investigation, especially with a view to finding out whether preconscious activity can be excluded as playing a part in it; but, descriptively speaking, the fact is incontestable.<sup>82</sup>

The unconscious is not only open to external excitation and perception but it can also affect another unconscious without, argues Freud, going through the systems pre-conscious/conscious, that is to say, without being hypercathected through language or what Lacan terms the Symbolic. Before rushing headlong into an endorsement of Deleuze and Guattari's unmediated desiring-production, however, we should note that Freud is talking here about the mutual affect between two "unconscious" systems and for unconscious desires to break through to consciousness they would still be mediated by



language.

I will just say one more thing about the relationship between desire and the Symbolic and to once more question the prevailing Lacanian orthodoxy before returning to Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*. Drawing on the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, Anthony Elliott argues that Lacan's theorisation of the relationship between the Imaginary and the Symbolic is, in short, the wrong way around. For Castoriadis, 'the production of images and forms actually *is* the work of the imaginary'<sup>83</sup> and it is upon the basis of the psyche's ability for representation, identification and affect that the subject gains its capacity for language. Furthermore, 'it is the psyche which *invests* the "mirror" with desire',<sup>84</sup> desire is not the product of an ontological lack as this presupposes that the object was already present and invested by desire for it now to be a desired absent object. Essentially, Elliott is arguing for a more creative role to be ascribed to the imaginary:

the imaginary comprises a good deal more than just specular images, illusions, traps. As a psychic mode of elaborating self and objects, the imaginary is a constitutive feature of human subjectivity. It is the creation of a certain relation of the individual subject to itself, forged through phantasy, drives and affects.<sup>85</sup>

The transition from the Imaginary to the Symbolic does not simply take place through some supra-individual superego, some all encompassing notion of the Symbolic or uniform law but 'rather through the psychical investment in social conditions (which are external) deriving from the representational capacity of the psyche - each of which is irreducible to the other'.<sup>86</sup> The Symbolic is not simply imposed upon the Imaginary, but argues Elliott, is more an 'enabling medium through which a shared reality is experienced'.<sup>87</sup> The:

imaginary investment in shared symbolic forms is important since it highlights that the human subject is not merely an "effect" of the signifier, but actively engages with and transforms the social field.<sup>88</sup>

This view ascribes to the unconscious and the imaginary a more active and a more creative role, something that is very different from but more in the spirit of Deleuze and Guattari's positive and productive desire. Essentially, what Deleuze and Guattari are opposed to in the Freudian model is the allegorical reductionism of the Oedipal myth; thus whatever the analysand says, Freud always reads Oedipus. The authors cite the case of Dr. Schreber, a paranoid-schizophrenic whom Freud diagnosed as being a repressed passive homosexual. In his analysis Freud dwelt heavily on two of Schreber's delusions: that he was being persecuted by his Doctor, Dr. Flechsig, and that he had been transformed into a woman and then impregnated by celestial rays. Freud concludes that:

If the persecutor Flechsig was originally a person whom Schreber loved, then God must also simply be the reappearance of some one else whom he loved, and probably some one of greater importance. ... we shall be driven to the conclusion that this other person must have been his father; this makes it all the clearer that Flechsig must have stood for his brother,<sup>89</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari argue that such an interpretation can only be achieved through a very selective reading of the Schreber case:

From the enormous political, social, and historical content of Schreber's delirium, *not one word is retained*, as though the libido did not bother itself with such things.<sup>90</sup>

The price of Oedipus is the suppression of the historical, the social and the racial; in other words the suppression of the collective fantasy experience that is a part of all delusions. Deleuze and Guattari do not deny the significance of familial investments - families are after all part of the social nexus - but insist that these investments are secondary in relation to, what they call, the world-historical dimension of all fantasy experience. Whatever the content of a given fantasy, its social and historical resonances, the number of times one encounters a Napoleon or a God, Freud always invokes the individual sexual fantasy and confines this fantasy within the Oedipal structure. Deleuze and Guattari reject the

privileging of individual fantasy-experience, insisting that all fantasies are first and foremost "group fantasies".

However, if desire directly invests the social field without mediation then it invests both repressive and liberatory structures, which raises the dilemma of how do we distinguish between reactionary and revolutionary investments, or fascistic and non-fascistic desire. According to Deleuze and Guattari we must first distinguish between two forms of groups, the "subject group" and the "subjugated group". Whereas the subject group seeks to impose its fantasy on the social field, the subjugated group internalises the social structures and imposes them on its own fantasy. The definition of a particular form of group fantasy will depend on the kind of investment involved. For example, the individual fantasy experience rests on assumptions of the "self" and the "ego" which then enacts its own particular drama; what it fails to recognise is that the ego is itself institutionally determined. Thus in taking the ego as a given, it at the same time assumes the givenness of the institutional structures that determine it. The individual fantasy, in effect, ascribes to existing social structures 'a kind of transcendence or immortality'<sup>91</sup> within which the subject enacts its own isolated drama. Far from testifying to the individual ego's integrity and autonomy, the individual fantasy highlights one's subjugation to apparently unalterable social and psychic structures. The individual fantasy experience, that of the subjugated group, is therefore always reactionary and repressive in that it confers legitimacy on the existing social order and carries over to the unconscious the mechanisms of social repression, in turn legitimating them as forms of psychic repression.

The subject group on the other hand does not internalise the existing social formations, in the sense of defining itself against a series of prohibitions and repressions, but rather reveals the mortality of the existing institutions through the possibilities to 'change them according to the articulations of desire'.<sup>92</sup> Through its recognition of the direct investment

of the social field by desire the subject group is not institutionally determined but determines its own institutions and social formations. Herein lies the revolutionary, or emancipatory, potential of the collective fantasy experience for Deleuze and Guattari: through a recognition of our own libidinal investments in the structures of repression we will be able to disinvest these structures, and indeed all structures, and redefine the social field.

For Deleuze and Guattari the ultimate fallacy of the individual fantasy resides in its adherence to a conception of the ego or subject as retaining an integrity or centredness, what they describe as the "global subject". According to Deleuze and Guattari we are first and foremost social beings:

Private persons are ... images of the second order, images of images - that is, *simulacra* that are thus endowed with an aptitude for representing the first order images of social persons.<sup>93</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari, therefore, do not endorse the now commonplace structural and poststructural dissolution of the subject but propose a conception of the subject that will be permanently displaced and decentred, what they call the residual or nomadic subject. The authors borrow from Kleinian theory the notion of "partial" objects; they use the term "partial" rather than "part of" or "part objects" as they insist there is no original unity to be part of. Partial also has the connotation of "partiality" or the sense of being partial towards something. The partial subject, therefore, represents a certain balance of forces, the partiality or bias of desire at any given moment in time and as desire is constantly in flux, the partiality of the subject will be constantly changing from moment to moment. We should be clear though that desire is not something *in* the subject. As I shall discuss below in relation to Nietzsche, the subject is a by-product of the process itself, nomadic subjects are the products of desiring-production, the secretions of desire as it intersects, couples

and decouples with other forces of desire. The question that arises for an avowedly revolutionary and emancipatory politics is precisely what kind of subject is being liberated here? And can we say it is a subject in any meaningful sense of the term?

This partial or nomadic subject is more commonly referred to as the schizophrenic subject, a subject whose identity changes from moment to moment as it lives in a series of intensive states of becoming. The authors' conception of schizophrenia is heavily indebted to Lacan's notion of Schizophrenia as a break-down in the signifying chain and a failure of the subject to fully accede into language. For Lacan, our experience of temporality is itself an effect of language:

It is because language has a past and a future, because the sentence moves in time, that we can have what seems to us a concrete or lived experience of time.<sup>94</sup>

The schizophrenic, suggests Lacan, does not have this experience of language, he/she also does not have a sense of temporality but is condemned to live in a perpetual present:

schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence.<sup>95</sup>

Our sense of having a personal identity is also contingent on our experience of temporality, on our sense of the "I" or "me" which persists over time. Therefore the schizophrenic will lack a sense of identity, as their identity will be renewed at any given moment. As a consequence of this unstable, transitory identity and living in a discontinuous and perpetual present the schizophrenic's experience of that present, of the world which they inhabit, will be very different from our own. According to Jameson, our sense of any given moment, 'our own present is always part of some larger set of projects which force us selectively to focus our perceptions'.<sup>96</sup> We do not simply absorb the whole

as an undifferentiated mass of data but prioritise and order those perceptions. The schizophrenic on the other hand not only lacks a sense of identity but they will also be unable to focus selectively their perceptions as the sense of having a project (in a non-Sartrean sense) presupposes a commitment over time and if not exactly a teleology then at least a provisional perception of some purpose or goal. Thus the schizophrenic will lack a sense of continuity over time and goal orientated behaviour but will have a greater sense of immediacy, the present will be far more intense:

as temporal continuities break down, the experience of the present becomes powerfully, overwhelmingly vivid and "material": the world comes before the schizophrenic with heightened intensity, bearing a mysterious and oppressive charge of affect, glowing with hallucinatory energy.<sup>97</sup>

As Jameson states, whether or not this description is clinically accurate is besides the point, what it offers us is a good description of the position of the subject in what we will designate in the following chapter as Late Capitalism or Postmodernism. Deleuze and Guattari are also aware of this problem and contra to Jameson's persistent claims that they celebrate the 'schizophrenic as the true hero of desire', they insist that they have no interest whatsoever in schizophrenics as such, it is rather the process that they are concerned with. The schizophrenic, write Deleuze and Guattari, is not a revolutionary but the schizophrenic process 'is the potential for revolution'<sup>98</sup>:

schizophrenia is the universe of productive and reproductive desiring-machines, universal primary production as "the essential reality of man and nature."<sup>99</sup>

More specifically *Anti-Oedipus* equates the schizophrenic process with Capitalist production, in the sense of Capitalism's inexorable drive towards universalization and its accompanying appearance of fragmentation and dispersion. As Marx pointed out Capitalism is caught in a double-bind, what Deleuze and Guattari call the "counteracted

tendency": in order to survive Capitalism must continually expand and reproduce itself at ever greater levels of production, but at the same time there is a tendency of the rate of profit to fall as the proportion of value creating capital (variable capital invested in human labour) falls in relation to non-value creating capital (constant capital invested in the means of production). To counteract this counteractive tendency it is not enough simply to expand, profits must be increased by the establishment of internal limits such as wage reduction or increased productivity. Capitalism, therefore, must continually expand but in order to do so must define certain limits which it subsequently sets about surpassing. For Deleuze and Guattari schizophrenic desire marks the absolute limit of this process, as it is the force that goes beyond all limits. However, according to Deleuze and Guattari the imperative is not to constrain the process but to encourage it to follow its own logic to its ultimate conclusion, in other words to allow capitalism to go over the edge:

To go still further, that is, in the movement of the market, of decoding and deterritorialization? For perhaps the flows are not yet deterritorialized enough, not decoded enough, from the viewpoint of a theory and a practice of a highly schizophrenic character.<sup>100</sup>

In other words, what Peter Dews describes as *enragé* politics: the anarchistic 'determination to intensify contradictions rather than to resolve them and the refusal of any knowledge which would permit (the movement) to say in advance what it wants and what will happen'.<sup>101</sup> It would appear to be difficult to reconcile these voluntaristic and gesture politics with Jameson's systematic Hegelianism. Indeed Deleuze and Guattari's whole view of history as an essentially aleatory, contingent and heterogeneous series of intensive states experienced by partial, nomadic subjects secreted by schizophrenic desiring-production would seem to be totally incommensurable with Jameson's own conception of a single great adventure of class struggle. Jameson's capacity to incorporate such a Nietzschean and detotalizing text into his own Marxist discourse hinges on two principal manoeuvres: firstly to reveal how the former is a second-order philosophical

system and secondly to show how this ostensibly anti-interpretative text projects its own theory of interpretation.

Jameson describes *Anti-Oedipus* as a second-degree or critical philosophy in the sense that it rests on prior, although unstated, assumptions and presuppositions. For example, the authors reject the concept of "totality" in favour of a theory of singularity, that is to say, the flux and pure multiplicity of desire. Deleuze and Guattari assert that they 'no longer believe in a primordial totality that once existed, or in a final totality that awaits us at a future date'.<sup>102</sup> The authors propose instead the notion of "peripheral totalities" which are produced alongside the process of desiring-production and are themselves subject to flux; that is to say not totalization in the conventional and accepted sense but a totality that encompasses a set of forces at a given moment before once more dissolving into process. According to Jameson any assertion of heterogeneity or difference rests on a prior conceptualisation of homogeneity and identity. Thus Deleuze and Guattari's claims of partiality and "nomadism" rest on prior conceptions of unity or totality and a fixed structure. The *Anti-Oedipus* can be read as a reaction against overly totalizing thought and the inflexibility of our social and psychic structures but in reacting against them they paradoxically ratify and legitimate just these structures. Foucault encapsulates the problem well when he observes that 'if everything were absolute diversity, thought would be doomed to singularity, ... it would be doomed to absolute dispersion and absolute monotony'.<sup>103</sup> In true dialectical fashion absolute diversity and singularity passes over into its opposite to become a totalizing conformity and endless repetition of the same as real difference is erased. Deleuze and Guattari's celebration of the pure multiplicity and flux of schizophrenic desiring-production only has meaning when it is defined against a background of enduring structures and an initial totality.

Jameson continually insists on the need to maintain a distinction between different levels of



abstraction. In the present instance we must distinguish between *Anti-Oedipus* as a "theory of history" and History itself. According to Jameson, theories of history:

merely offer alternate ways to "punctuate" the rise of the middle-class world itself and the various cultural and psychic metamorphoses or "coupures épistémologiques" which accompanied it. (MF, 321)

For Jameson, the strength of such theories and also their weakness is their limitation to a single cultural sphere. They therefore provide invaluable synchronic analyses of their given sphere but lack the conceptual framework with which to give a full diachronic account of historical development. As a consequence theories of history tend to identify their own object of study as the actual motor of social and historical change. In the case of the *Anti-Oedipus*, the identification of the schizophrenic tendency of capitalism comes to be seen as an ideological absolute, schizophrenia, the authors tell us, 'as a process is the only universal'<sup>104</sup> and desire is not simply seen as a force co-extensive with other forces but becomes the ultimate determining instant: 'desire is always constitutive of a social field'.<sup>105</sup> Jameson reflects on the current proliferation of theories of history as a sign of some deeper cultural malaise, as 'an attempt to outsmart the present, first of all, to think your way behind history to the point where even the present itself can be seen as a completed historical instant' (MF, 320). It will come as no surprise therefore to discover Deleuze and Guattari proclaiming schizoanalysis as the end of history:

It is our very own "malady," modern man's sickness. The end of history has no other meaning.<sup>106</sup>

Jameson's second gesture is to reveal how Deleuze and Guattari's anti-interpretative position can be seen implicitly to conceal, and rest upon, an initial act of interpretation. The authors claim to be developing an immanent and transcendent, although non-transcendental, form of criticism which is founded upon a shift from the old interpretative operation: "what does it mean?" to an immanent analysis: "how does it work?". Immanent

criticism is concerned with the analysis of what is immediately present in a given text, it therefore brackets all extrinsic information such as the biographical, historical or sociological and concentrates on what is verifiable within the limits of a given text. Criticism, for Deleuze and Guattari, will no longer be the search for an absent signified or the imposition of pre-existing structures of meaning but a question of "use": at the molecular level, how does a specific sign work within the text, what function does it perform, and at a molar level, what forces come into play, or use a particular text, and for what purposes at any given moment in time. Immanent criticism therefore will not be so much an interpretation of the text but a laying bare of its complex operations and functions. However, if this is not to be a purely descriptive exercise, there will be an implicit purpose behind this interrogation, a prior interpretative decision that there is something in the text to be extracted. According to Deleuze and Guattari the 'schizoid exercise ... extracts from the text its revolutionary force',<sup>107</sup> in other words it uncovers the libidinal investments that are always present in social production. Thus, suggests Jameson, *Anti-Oedipus* projects a new hermeneutic whereby:

the object of commentary is effectively transformed into an allegory whose master narrative is the story of repressed desire itself, as it struggles against repressive reality. (PU, 67)

As Jameson writes elsewhere the schizophrenic process of productive desire provides Deleuze and Guattari with a degree zero, their bottom line against which all other forms of social and psychic production can be judged.<sup>108</sup> Desire provides the hermeneutic key with which we can reinterpret history and judge other forms of production. At such a juncture it may be worthwhile to recall Marx's remark on Hegel's doctrine of the state 'Hegel should not be blamed for describing the essence of the modern state as it is' writes Marx 'but for identifying what is with the *essence of the state*'.<sup>109</sup>

The *Anti-Oedipus* may itself be one more symptom of our fragmented sensibility in what appears to be an increasingly confusing and disorientating reality<sup>110</sup> but therein also lies its value, as an attempt to articulate the existential experience of the subject within advanced capitalism. Deleuze and Guattari have not so much discovered the absolute contradiction and conclusive death of capitalism but rather have described our fractured and dislocated experience of it, or as Jameson puts it 'the realm of separation, of fragmentation, of the explosion of codes and the multiplicity of disciplines is merely the reality of the appearance' (PU, 40). The political unconscious of *Anti-Oedipus* is nothing less than the englobing and totalizing force of North American capitalism itself:

the more [the social machine] breaks down, the more it schizophrenizes, the better it works, the American way.<sup>111</sup>

It would appear that Jameson is correct to assign *Anti-Oedipus* a secondary position with respect to more totalizing and holistic modes of thought. However, it remains difficult to see exactly how *Anti-Oedipus* is very much in the spirit of Jameson's text, especially with regard to its detotalizing and schizophrenic impulse. For Jameson, Marxism's ability to subsume other theoretical discourses assigns a priority to Marxism both through its "semantic richness" or sheer capacity to deal with other theoretical material and the legitimation of its own primary concerns as other discourses are seen as essentially reactive. This being said, *Anti-Oedipus* still appears to be reacting in the opposite direction to Jameson's totalizing and interpretative method. Thus, I would suggest that Jameson can only reconcile his text with that of the *Anti-Oedipus* through a very selective reading of the latter and further suggest that the degree of selectivity Jameson uses in his reading potentially undermines his whole project.

In a stringent critique of *Anti-Oedipus* Manfred Frank reflects upon its claims to 'proffer a theory of liberation', noting that 'one cannot revolutionise existing relations without

referring to a "value" in the name of which what exists is negated'.<sup>112</sup> As observed above this value for Deleuze and Guattari is desire. However, argues Frank, Deleuze and Guattari's insistence on the immanent presence of desire in the social field would appear to negate its ethical value:

Such identification robs wish [desire] of the contra-factual character that would make possible its virtualization, i.e., guarantee its displacement on the level of representation, and would make the fictions - constantly quoted by the authors - into a quasi-ethical authority as opposed to existing repression. Wishes transposed into the imaginary act against the happiness that real society has left behind. By emphatically denying the counter-real character of those phantasies, Deleuze and Guattari condemn wish production to a frenzied approval of existing power.<sup>113</sup>

In other words, desire acquires its disruptive force and ethical value precisely by being "other"; by not being an element of the real and thus being able to project, at the level of representation, an alternative to the real. Without such an alternative or counter-factual character desire will only be able to endorse, albeit in a reactive and critical fashion, existing power structures. However, Deleuze and Guattari's conception of immanent desire raises an even greater dilemma. Their appeal to the liberation of desire from all restrictions and prescriptions of structure and code implicitly conceals a conception of the subject who is to be liberated. However, 'through the categorical and epistemological framework of their investigation [Deleuze and Guattari] destroy the conditions under which a free subject can be considered'.<sup>114</sup> Deleuze and Guattari insist that the unconscious is an orphan, it has no parents, therefore the productions of the unconscious or desiring-production are autoproductions; desire produces under its own momentum and seeks its own affirmation, it is a molecular phenomenon 'devoid of any goal or intention'.<sup>115</sup> Clearly there is no necessity for a subject in this process, not even as a by-product of the process, Deleuze and Guattari's residual or nomadic subject, as the process has its own logic and momentum. A subject requires a degree of consistency and

continuity over time if it is to be able to resist rather than be subjugated to existing repressive structures at each discontinuous moment. According to Frank subjectivity can 'be constituted only on the level of reflection and the latter presupposes representation'.<sup>116</sup> In destroying the conditions of possibility for a renewal of the subject it would be appropriate to ask in whose name liberation is called for.

Jameson's doctrine of a political unconscious as the uninterrupted narrative of collective or class struggle to wrest the realm of freedom from the realm of necessity also requires this kind of commitment and identification over time: that is to say, the ability to conceptualise oneself as not merely an isolated and fragmented identity subjugated to the autoproduction of external forces but as a subject, determined by social and historical forces, who at the same time through filiation with other subjects can actively transform and change those material forces. Deleuze and Guattari, though, reject any notion of class affiliation, for them 'there is only one class',<sup>117</sup> those that accept the axiomatics of capitalist society, be that positively or negatively. They insist that the theoretical problem is not the struggle between classes but the struggle 'between the class and those who are outside the class'.<sup>118</sup> Indeed they go so far as to endorse Sartre's notion of "seriality", which they identify with the state and the party, and the "fused group". Thus, Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between class interests that are merely preconscious and group desires that are unconscious, or as Freud defines the distinction: ideas that are latent but can emerge into consciousness as they increase in strength and ideas 'which do not penetrate into consciousness, however strong they may become'.<sup>119</sup> So just as Reich pointed out the masses were not fooled into believing in fascism but actively desired it, Deleuze and Guattari declare that:

It happens that one desires against one's own interests: capitalism profits from this, but so does socialism, the party, and the party leadership.<sup>120</sup>

It would appear therefore that the *Anti-Oedipus* while offering a description of our present predicament does not provide real answers. Indeed, while the projection of a new molecular politics of autonomous groups may bear superficial resemblance to Jameson's endorsement of "alliance politics" (PU, 54), the *Anti-Oedipus* undermines the very conditions on which such alliances could be forged and one can only conclude that a full conception of the schizophrenic subject has nothing in common with Jameson's project of a retheorization of the collective subject, or what we used to call "class".

The problem here is of a dual nature: firstly, the use Jameson makes of other discourses and secondly, the claim for the theoretical primacy of Marxism. To take the latter first, clearly one text cannot say everything, or cover every aspect of its area of study: thus to criticise Jameson for not addressing particular concerns would seem to be rather overly scrupulous. On the other hand Jameson's claim for Marxism's priority on the grounds of "semantic richness" and that final untranscendable horizon, as well as his eclectic method leaves him open to accusations of selectivity. In other words Jameson leaves out those areas of other discourses that do not fit quite so comfortably with his own perspective and narrative. Kenneth Burke has made just such claims with Jameson's reading of his own work.<sup>121</sup> However a more telling example is Jameson's use of Nietzsche.

Throughout the 1970s and 80s poststructuralism in general trod a path through and beyond both Marx and Freud with the guidance of Nietzsche. *Anti-Oedipus* was no exception to this trend, although Deleuze's previous emphasis on the "will-to-power" in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*<sup>122</sup> had now been replaced by self-affirmative desire as the quality of the strong. *The Political Unconscious* is also sensitive to the pervasive cultural presence of Nietzsche. More than any other of Jameson's texts, it is suffused with Nietzschean overtones. As Jonathan Arac has pointed out, the presence of Nietzsche plays an important strategic role for Jameson in that it enables him to build bridges with

poststructuralist theory: 'Nietzsche [is] a way of maintaining contact with contemporary poststructuralism, while shifting the grounds of argument'.<sup>123</sup> In particular Jameson uses Nietzsche to offer a critique of the binary opposition and to transcend ethics:

To move from Derrida to Nietzsche is to glimpse the possibility of a rather different interpretation of the binary opposition, according to which its positive and negative terms are ultimately assimilated by the mind as a distinction between good and evil. Not metaphysics but ethics is the informing ideology of the binary opposition; and we have forgotten the thrust of Nietzsche's thought and lost everything scandalous and virulent about it if we cannot understand how it is ethics itself which is the ideological vehicle and the legitimation of concrete structures of power and domination. (PU, 114)

Jameson goes on to say that the concept of good and evil is itself "positional" and as Nietzsche taught us evil is associated with "Otherness" and radical difference which 'seems to constitute a real and urgent threat to my existence' (PU, 115). However, this reading of Nietzsche is by no means uncontentious and Arac identifies two specific problems with it: firstly, for Nietzsche ethics 'even as a means of legitimating domination, ... was not imposed from above',<sup>124</sup> ethics are in fact a tool of the slaves and not masters. Secondly, 'the positional analysis in the original situation did not for Nietzsche depend upon a fallacious "seems." ... the masters did unquestionably threaten the existence of the slaves'.<sup>125</sup>

The critique of ethics, suggests Jameson, is inextricably tied up with the problem of the individual subject, in the sense that if we are to transcend the categories of the individual subject then we must go "beyond good and evil":

as Nietzsche taught us, the judgmental habit of ethical thinking, of ranging everything in the antagonistic categories of good and evil (or their other binary equivalents), is not merely an error but is objectively rooted in the inevitable and inescapable centredness of every individual consciousness or individual subject: what is good is what belongs to me, what is bad is what

belongs to the Other. (PU, 234)

For Jameson we can only resolve this ethical double bind by historicizing both the ethical categories and our categories of the individual subject: in other words, to transcode the ethical categories of good and evil to the political and historical categories of "regressive" and "progressive" or as I shall discuss below by the terms "ideological" and "utopian". However, according to Arac, Nietzsche did not define all binary oppositions as ethical but in the first essay of *The Genealogy of Morals* considered 'the difference between two binary systems, that of good/bad and that of good/evil',<sup>126</sup> only the second being considered ethical. On the other hand, both of these opposition were considered by Nietzsche to be "class-positional", that is to say they were "political" notions, deriving from the domination or subjugation of one group by another<sup>127</sup> and in this sense ethics constitutes a class weapon of the slaves against the masters. As in the *Anti-Oedipus* the place of the subject in relation to this "ethical class warfare" is as a by-product of the process, a fiction added after the fact:

The notion of individual responsibility allowed for blame to be accorded to the activity of the strong and praise to the impotence of the weak: "The subject ... has perhaps been believed in hitherto more firmly than anything else on earth because it makes possible to the majority of mortals, the weak and oppressed of every kind, the sublime self-deception that interprets weakness as freedom".<sup>128</sup>

In other words Arac's reading of Nietzsche runs counter to Jameson's and whilst he acknowledges Nietzsche's revulsion for the herd he goes on to suggest that Nietzsche's 'genealogical analyses demonstrated precisely the "transindividual" concerns desired by Jameson'.<sup>129</sup> As with Jameson's tendency to suppress the presence of history and human-labour in texts, we once more, suggests Arac, find in Jameson that tendency to repress the political in order to find it somewhere else. Thus it would appear that taken on its own terms Jameson's strategy of co-option works but that it can do so only through the elision



of real differences: just as Deleuze and Guattari leave no space for the reconceptualization of the subject, of class or Socialism, 'Nietzsche disrupts every "totality"'<sup>130</sup> and cannot be reincorporated into a new form of totalizing thought. These are more than simple inconsistencies, they signify an incoherence in Jameson's text which I believe to be irresolvable.

### Versions of a Libidinal Apparatus

So far I have concentrated on two uses to which Jameson puts *Anti-Oedipus*: the historicization of poststructuralism and the formulation of a concept of group fantasy. However, there is a third way in which Jameson reads *Anti-Oedipus*, that is as an aesthetic. Deleuze and Guattari reject orthodox barriers and distinctions between academic disciplines, drawing freely on literature to substantiate their ideas and insights, particularly writers such as Antonin Artaud, Henry Miller, Malcolm Lowry and D.H. Lawrence. They see in such writers 'a violence against syntax, a concerted destruction of the signifier'<sup>131</sup> as they attempt to break with accepted codes and conventions, facilitating an uninhibited flow and circulation of desire. Deleuze and Guattari are concerned not with the text as expression, in terms of what it signifies, but how it works, what is motivating the text. In this sense they suggest literature is inherently schizophrenic, it is 'a process and not a goal, a production and not an expression'.<sup>132</sup> Literature though is not only a process of production but also an object of consumption and as such conforms to certain conventions and established practices. Deleuze and Guattari attribute to the commodification of literature the tendency towards ossification, or oedipalization, of the texts' libidinal investments:

It is not a question here of the personal oedipalization of the author and his readers, but of the *Oedipal form* to which one attempts to enslave the work itself, to make it this minor expressive activity that secretes ideology

according to dominant codes.<sup>133</sup>

In other words a text's "form" attempts to check and restrain the free flow of desire, imposing upon the multiplicity of libidinal investments a structure which is inherently ideological.

Jameson further develops Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between the molecular and molar levels of form production. Thus for Jameson: 'the molecular level designates the here-and-now of immediate perception or of local desire, the production-time of the individual sentence, the electrifying shock of the individual word or the individual brush-stroke,' whilst the molar level 'designates all those large, abstract, mediate, and perhaps even empty and imaginary forms by which we seek to recontain the molecular: the mirage of the continuity of personal identity, the organising unity of the psyche or the personality, the concept of society itself, and, not least, the notion of the organic unity of the work of art' (FA, 8). Particularly since the advent of Modernism, suggests Jameson, a gap has emerged between individual styles and the narrative systems or generic structures within which the isolated words and sentences are recontained. Thus we are able to read texts and view paintings from two distinct perspectives: either focusing upon sentence construction and individual brush strokes or standing back and reading or viewing from a distance in terms of narrative and generic conventions or the painting as itself one element in a history of forms. According to Jameson, Deleuze and Guattari's distinction allows one to respect the specificity of both levels of the text whilst at the same time subjecting them to different kinds of analysis, in particular psychoanalytic and ideological analysis. Indeed, psychoanalysis provides a good model for this process whereby we shift from the molecular properties of an individual style to larger, molar, formal unities:

I would rather see its enlargement as a process that drives the personal beyond itself, in much the same way that the x-ray process of psychoanalysis blows your private thoughts and fantasies up to the point at

which they become impersonal again, the algebra or syntax of the unconscious.<sup>134</sup>

Jameson's recourse to psychoanalysis is by no means a purely arbitrary gesture, the incorporation of yet one more discourse in Jameson's own will-to-style. On the contrary, the various antitheses which psychoanalysis projects between the sexual and the political, between childhood and society, archaic fantasy and ideological commitment, for Jameson, reflect 'an objective dissociation in contemporary experience' (FA, 9). This dissociation finds cultural expression through the modernist emphasis on individual style and in particular the fragmentation of the surface of the canvas or the narrative structure. We experience, suggests Jameson, 'a kind of psychic "division of labour," the advanced form of which can be observed in just this reification and autonomization of the various senses from one another'.<sup>135</sup> However, psychoanalysis has also been used to legitimate forms of psychologizing and subjectivizing ideology which seek to explain all forms of political commitment and engagement as merely psychological projections. Jameson wishes to avoid this kind of psychological reductionism and at the same time not to go down the path of *Anti-Oedipus* and simply repudiate the findings of psychoanalysis. Therefore contrary to the whole thrust of *Anti-Oedipus* Jameson proposes to isolate from the psychoanalytic material proper an autonomous narrative moment with its own specificity and dynamism, the function of which 'in psychic life is then to win some distance from the ruses by which the unconscious can be seen to make use of it' (FA, 9). What Jameson is proposing is, following Jean-François Lyotard, the formulation of a "libidinal apparatus," or:

an empty form or structural matrix in which a charge of free-floating and inchoate fantasy - both ideological and psychoanalytic - can suddenly crystallize, and find the articulated figuration essential for its social actuality and psychic effectivity. (FA, 95)

For Jameson, this "empty form" or "structural matrix" is essentially a narrative structure

and in particular an outmoded narrative structure which allows for the articulation of desire, or libido, through the reinvestment of the symbolically empty co-ordinates of a now redundant narrative system. Such a model, suggests Jameson, marks an advance over previous psychologizing approaches to literature in that 'it endows a private fantasy-structure with a quasi-material inertness' (FA, 10) which can then be seen to have its own logic and dynamism. This would also serve to restore the counter-factual dimension to desire and the unconscious that *Anti-Oedipus* would erase. However, Jameson's use of the libidinal apparatus diverges from Lyotard's in one important sense:

For Lyotard the "dispositif" is what captures and immobilises desire, rather than as in my use, what allows it investment and articulation. Lyotard's emphasis is on the ways in which "desire" breaks through such "dispositifs," rather than on the social and historical conditions of possibility of the libidinal apparatus. (FA, 10,n8)

There is no adequate translation for *dispositif*, Geoffrey Bennington translates it as a "set-up" in the sense of the structures and representations through which libidinal energy is channelled and regulated, although it is not a particular "set-up" which defines a given desire 'but a certain desire which produces a set-up'.<sup>136</sup> Libidinal analysis is not the same as psychological or psychoanalytic analysis, in the sense that 'libidinal investments are essentially matters of shifting relationships, whose content is not fixed: the representational frame, however ... seeks to freeze this mobility and to endow it with some more permanent, quasi-material symbolic value'.<sup>137</sup> Thus the libidinal apparatus can be seen as an independent structure for which we can write a history and in terms of a given fantasy, it structures its various permutations, forms of closure and internal limits. The process of libidinal analysis will therefore entail the mapping of these relationships as they find figuration in the text. This, suggests Jameson, would 'allow us to reverse the traditional priorities of psychoanalytic and psychologizing interpretation' (FA, 11), in that one is no longer reducing textual material to a particular psyche or psychic structure but

rather analysing the way in which certain relationships, impulses and responses can achieve figuration through the text. As with other of Jameson's formulations, most notably the notion of "national allegory" and "cognitive mapping", it is difficult, beyond the immediate examples he himself gives, to apply these notions. There is an inherent imprecision in the concepts themselves, for example, the notion of a libidinal apparatus explicitly draws upon Lyotard's conception of a libidinal economy but at the same time Jameson does not use the term in Lyotard's sense. Also, is it only narrative structures that can be invested in the way Jameson outlines? And is it only particular outmoded narrative paradigms that are open to libidinal investment? Surely all narratives are invested with desire and not just redundant forms?<sup>138</sup> These are recurrent questions with Jameson's work and appear to be symptomatic of his particular methodology, I shall leave these questions in abeyance for the present and give an exposition of two versions of Jameson's libidinal analysis, the first which he describes as a libidinal apparatus, the second he does not.

Jameson sees in the narrative system of Wyndham Lewis' 1918 novel *Tarr* a formal break from which a whole new libidinal apparatus and ideological dynamic of Lewis' later work will emerge. According to Jameson, Lewis, unlike the other modernists - Pound, Eliot, Joyce and Yeats - was 'essentially a *political* novelist' (FA, 87). However, writes Jameson, unlike that other great political writer - George Bernard Shaw - 'Lewis was an internationalist, the most European and least insular of all the great contemporary British writers' (FA, 88). Lewis was acutely aware of, and responsive to, not only Parisian and Mediterranean culture but also Russian and German culture and this internationalism forms the background for Lewis' early work, constituting what Jameson calls a national allegory:

Lewis is indeed so keenly aware of these various national traditions that they constitute the very backdrop and organizational framework of the works written before World War I: the stories of *The Wild Body* and *Tarr*

itself, with its portrait gallery of international Bohemia in the pre-war City of Light. (FA, 90)

What Jameson is referring to as a national allegory is that 'the use of national types projects an essentially allegorical mode of representation, in which the individual characters figure those more abstract national characteristics which are read as their inner essence' (FA, 90). Such a narrative system though will have certain preconditions, in the sense that I have previously designated as "the logic of content," that is to say conditions which are not causal in a crudely deterministic way but which must exist prior to the text and without which the emergence of the text is inconceivable. Thus *Tarr* can be said to 'presuppose not merely the nation-state itself as the basic functional unit of world politics, but also the objective existence of a system of nation-states, the international diplomatic machinery of pre-World-War-I Europe' (FA, 94). However, it is precisely this system of nation-states which the first World War marks the end of; after World War I the subjects of history were no longer nation-states as such but the transnational forces of Communism and Fascism and the emergence of the Superstate. Thus suggests Jameson, the national allegory can be seen as a formal attempt to bridge the gap between existential experience and the tendency of monopoly Capitalism to develop on a global, transnational scale. With the decline of the older diplomatic and political system the form itself will become redundant thus freeing-up the older narrative system for new ideological and libidinal investments:

the empty matrix of national allegory is then immediately seized on by hitherto unformulable impulses which invest its structural positions and, transforming the whole narrative system into a virtual allegory of the fragmented psyche itself, now reach back to overdetermine the resonance of this now increasingly layered text. (FA, 96)

In this second-level allegory, the characters which previously stood as figures for national types will now be seen as figures for the psyche, its impulses and drives, and project a

whole new sexual ideology. However, Lewis' sexual ideology is peculiar in the sense that 'while openly misogynist, and sexist in the obvious senses of the word, it is not for all that phallogentric' (FA, 97). Whilst women clearly denote negative terms in Lewis' narrative system the corresponding positive term is not, as one would expect, the male but rather "art," 'which is not the place of a subject, masculine or otherwise, but rather impersonal and inhuman, or, ... "dead," spatial rather than temporal and existential' (FA, 97). This dichotomy will present obvious difficulties for any form of resolution of the narrative, for its success will be the effacement of the narrative itself. Jameson suggests the male axis of the text is similarly incomplete in that it is split between the German Kreisler, who 'is clearly enough the place of the instincts' (FA, 98) or id and the Briton Tarr, who fulfils the structural position of the ego. What is lacking from this topology however is the position of the superego without which no psychic resolution can be achieved. Thus suggests Jameson *Tarr* is locked into a series of static binary oppositions from which no resolution can be achieved, be that in terms of a national allegory or libidinal apparatus. Lewis offers but one version of a libidinal apparatus: for each artist and writer it would be possible to map in their formal systems and mode of representation similar libidinal investments. Jameson's own analyses range from Flaubert to the paintings of De Kooning and Cézanne, but I should now like to consider how libidinal analysis works on a pre-modern author. In a series of brilliant studies<sup>139</sup> Jameson argues that the motivating device behind Honoré, de Balzac's narrative production is not so much the desire for money or wealth but "desire" itself. However, Jameson insists that this is not so much a psychological insight as recognition of a formal convention that enables Balzac to construct his narratives:

the novelistic creation of Balzac rests in general on the premise that human existence is at all times motivated by *appetency*, that is, by a clear desire that always poses a precise object before itself.<sup>140</sup>

In *The Political Unconscious* Jameson examines two of Balzac's texts, *The Old Maid* and

*The Black Sheep*, specifically in terms of the relationship between desire and Realism, and the problems that consequently arise with the positing of an object of desire in relation to the status of the "subject" within classical realist narrative structures. Classical Realism is irredeemably associated with the notion of an "omniscient narrator;" for Jameson, the significance of this form of narration lies in fact that it operates posthumously, after the fact. In other words, it is an after-effect of classical narration, signifying a closure of the narrative. This sense of closure thus 'projects something like an ideological mirage in the form of notions of fortune, destiny, and providence' (PU, 154). It is this narrative structure which Balzac inherits and at the same time invests with new forms of libidinal energy.

If the constitutive features of Balzac's narratives are libidinal investment or authorial wish-fulfilment, then the positing of an 'object of desire' will present a particular dilemma for his narrative system, in the sense that:

the signifying value of such objects is determined by their narrative position: a narrative element becomes desirable whenever a character is observed to desire it. (PU, 156)

However Balzac's texts, writes Jameson, predate notions of the centred subject, thus we are not presented with a single privileged perspective but a multiplicity of perspectives. Balzac's narratives lack an identifiable hero as such and therefore the subject is decentred through 'a rotation of character centres which deprives each of them in turn of any privileged status' (PU, 161), or what Jameson calls a "character system". Thus in Balzac a structural reversal takes place whereby an object becomes desirable not because it is desired by a particular character but because it is desirable in its own right. Balzac must 'validate or accredit the object as desirable, before the narrative process can function properly' (PU, 156). This is clearly evident in Balzac's short story *The Old Maid* where



the narrative centres around the struggle between two suitors for the hand of an unwed heiress, and in particular for her property, the Cormon townhouse. The townhouse, suggests Jameson, is 'quintessentially an object of desire' but it is an object of desire that we cannot attribute to any one character in particular, or indeed to the author, implied or biographical. According to Jameson the desire 'here comes before us in a peculiarly anonymous state which makes a strangely absolute claim on us' (PU, 156). In this sense the desire for a particular object is not so much an individual psychological matter but can be seen as a figure for desire in general and in particular for what Jameson calls the "Utopian Impulse". However, the peculiarity of this particular desire is all too evident when we shift from its landed manifestation to its actantial figuration in the character of Mademoiselle Cormon herself, who is 'comic, grotesque, and desirable all at once' (PU, 158). Therefore, suggests Jameson:

to insist on the Utopian dimension of this particular desire is evidently to imply that this particular comic narrative is also an *allegorical* structure, in which the sexual "letter" of the farce must itself be read as a figure for the longing for landed retreat and personal fulfilment as well as for the resolution of social and historical contradiction. (PU, 158)

In other words the wish-fulfilling fantasy or daydream functions at two levels simultaneously: as the imaginary resolution of the specific individual fantasy as well as the symbolic resolution of a real social and historical contradiction. As noted above, *The Old Maid* is structured around a specific binary opposition, or agon. At the first level of interpretation the two suitors, Du Bousquier and Chevalier, represent Napoleonic energy and aristocratic elegance respectively, whereas at the second level they figure the struggle between the new bourgeoisie and the Ancien regime. As Jameson points out, such a character system (which, for reasons of space, I am unable to outline in full) does not exhaust the political and ideological possibilities objectively present at the time of the Restoration, but should rather be understood 'as the structure of a particular political

fantasy, as a mapping of that particular "libidinal apparatus" in which Balzac's political thinking becomes invested' (PU, 48). Jameson's formulation of the libidinal apparatus does not imply that a separation exists between such wish-fulfilling fantasies or narrative structures and the Real but rather that the narrativization provides 'the vehicle for our experience of the real' (PU, 48). Balzac's dual allegory of sexual comedy and political struggle can be seen to correspond to Jameson's first two horizons of interpretation: the text as a symbolic act or imaginary resolution and at the same time the *parole* of a class discourse. I have as yet though to define the position of that third and final horizon, the Real, or History itself.

As I suggested at the end of the last chapter, Jameson nowhere gives a clear exposition of the nature of the relations between his three horizons or how to read a text as all three at once. His analysis of Balzac however does suggest how a text can be read in terms of all three horizons simultaneously, although Jameson's inconsistent use of terminology makes this a rather difficult and oblique route to follow. Jameson's defence of his use of biographical material in the formulation of libidinal apparatuses does serve to make the situation a little clearer though. Jameson distinguishes his use of biography from previous forms of biographical criticism, that is to say: the genetic and the existential psychobiography. The former, writes Jameson, treated the authors biography as essentially an archive within which to discover 'the source, model, or original of this or that character, event, or situation', whilst the latter saw the "life" as 'yet one more text by the same author, no more, but no less privileged than his other works' (PU, 179). Jameson, on the other hand, uses the "life" as 'the traces and symptoms of a fundamental family situation which is at one and the same time a fantasy master narrative' (PU, 180). This unconscious master narrative is not a fixed form but an unstable and contradictory structure which will constantly be re-enacted in the author's narratives as he/she attempts to find some form of resolution. The biographical details therefore provide the matrix or

set of co-ordinates within which the narrative will be produced and positioned. However, as Deleuze and Guattari insisted, the familial situation is not merely a private, psychoanalytic or psychological, affair but also a social one and we must grasp 'the family situation as the mediation of class relationships in society at large, and ... the parental functions as socially coded or symbolic positions as well' (PU, 180). Thus the fantasy master narrative can be seen to function as a symbolic act in the same way as other cultural artefacts and requiring the same kind of imaginary resolution. However, such imaginary resolutions are only the first stage whereby the unconscious master narrative seeks its impossible resolution through the production of an ideology, in the sense that Althusser defined it as 'the imaginary representation of the subject's relationship to his or her real conditions of existence'<sup>141</sup> - that is to say at Jameson's second horizon. However Jameson then insists on the need to refine Althusser's definition of ideology by distinguishing between the "imaginary representation" itself (the wish-fulfilling texts of Balzac as fragments of the underlying fantasy master narrative) and its narrative conditions of possibility (the empirical preconditions which must exist, or one must believe in, to enable one to desire such things in the first place). Thus, according to Jameson it 'becomes a significant political "principle," [that] the production of the fantasy-text knows a peculiar "unconscious" reflexivity, as, in the process of generating itself, it must simultaneously secure its own ideological positions' (PU, 182). In other words, a text must produce, or presuppose, a complex ideological system in order to indulge its own specific wish-fulfilling fantasy or daydream. Jameson goes on to suggest that the former provides something like a reality principle or censor for the latter, whereby the text must first enumerate the obstacles to fulfilment before that fulfilment can be realised. Jameson describes this situation as the first level of wish-fulfilment, in the sense that, 'the subject wishes for the realization of the ideological axiomatic in order to be able then to wish the fantasy narrative' (PU, 183). At the second level, the desiring subject attempts to move beyond the contingent desires of a specific wish-fulfilling fantasy in order to satisfy the

reality principle or censor itself. Jameson designates this second level narrative, as he says according to his earlier distinction: "Symbolic texts". However this is not consistent with his earlier formulation of the three horizons and indeed he has shifted completely into a Lacanian terminology, describing the three levels as: Imaginary, Symbolic and Real. As Jameson is concerned with the analysis of literary texts, one could insist that all three of his horizons of interpretation only exist at the level of the Symbolic, but the whole point of Jameson's methodology was to distinguish between different interpretative operations, and distinct objects of study. Thus he designates his object of study at the first level, Lacan's Imaginary, the text as "symbolic act" and according to his initial formulation the second level narrative is not read as a symbolic act but as an "ideologeme," which:

it is true, exists nowhere as such: part of the "objective spirit" or the cultural Symbolic order of its period, it vanishes into the past along with the latter, leaving only its traces - material signifiers, lexemes, enigmatic words and phrases - behind it. (PU, 201)

At this level the narrative is read in terms of its conceptual antinomy or aporia, its ideological production, rather than as either a symbolic act or a determinate historical contradiction. However, at the third level the text is confronted by far greater obstacles to its fulfilment and resolution:

The Real is thus - virtually by definition in the fallen world of capitalism - that which resists desire, that bedrock against which the desiring subject knows the breakup of hope and can finally measure everything that refuses its fulfilment. Yet it also follows that this Real ... can be disclosed only by Desire itself, whose wish-fulfilling mechanisms are the instruments through which this resistant surface must be scanned. (PU, 183-4)

Which, as I argued in the previous chapter, is a position that is inconsistent with his Althusserianism and in this chapter as being inconsistent with his endorsement of Deleuze and Guattari's conception of desire.

## The Dialectic of Utopia and Ideology

As I suggested in the previous chapter Jameson's formulation of the role of "contradiction" in his interpretative system is very similar to Lacan's formulation of "desire". So in conclusion I will now re-examine this correlation, specifically in relation to Jameson's conception of "ideology" and the status of the subject. Michael Clark writes that:

For Lacan, desire is born in the imaginary relation between the self and the other that constitutes the illusion of the autonomous ego, and it is the catalytic factor in the oedipal drama by which the individual is constituted as a subject within the Law of the Symbolic at the same time that the signifier is cut off from the signified and the Real banished from signification.<sup>142</sup>

Thus for Lacan desire operates as a "term limit" marking the threshold of the Real upon the Symbolic and the threshold between the individual subject and the social. For Jameson, the value of Lacan's doctrine of the decentred subject is that it provides a model, not for the renunciation or repression of the subject, but rather for the realisation of desire. According to Jameson, human consciousness is situationally specific and historically produced, the notion of an autonomous centred subject is not merely a fiction or mirage but has a 'quasi-institutional status' (PU, 153) as well as performing particular ideological functions. Jameson argues that the logic of reification, with its relentless drive towards fragmentation and specification, provides us with the conceptual instrument with which to understand 'the emergence of the ego or centred subject' (PU, 153). Jameson compares the figuration of desire in Balzac with a modern writer 'whose commodity lust and authorial investments' (PU, 159) are most reminiscent of Balzac, that is to say Theodore Dreiser:

Commodification is not the only "event" which separates Dreiser's text from Balzac's: the charges it has wrought in the object world of late capitalism have evidently been accompanied by a decisive development in

the construction of the subject as well, by the constitution of the latter into a closed monad, henceforth governed by the laws of "psychology." (PU, 160)

Dreiser's texts present us with a "point of view," an object is no longer desirable in-itself but desirable because it is an object of a particular desiring-subject, 'and the Utopian impulse itself, now reified, is driven back inside the monad, where it assumes the status of some merely psychological experience, private feeling, or relativized value' (PU, 160). Jameson suggests that the only way beyond the aporias of the bourgeois subject or the anarchism of the schizoid-subject lies:

in the renewal of Utopian thinking, of creative speculation as to the place of the subject at the other end of historical time, in a social order which has put behind it class organization, commodity production and the market, alienated labor, and the implacable determinism of an historical logic beyond the control of humanity.<sup>143</sup>

Such a situation would allow for the current fetishization of the subject to be placed in its proper historical perspective but this in turn, writes Jameson requires the formulation of a 'properly Marxist "ideology"'<sup>144</sup>

The place of ideology in Jameson's interpretative system is within his second horizon, that point whereby one moves beyond the isolated cultural artefact as a symbolic act to grasp it as a fragment of a larger class discourse: in other words that threshold between the individual and the social which for Lacan is the realm of desire. In the first version and reprints of Jameson's essay on Lacan, 'Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism and the Problem of the Subject', the correspondence between Jameson's three horizons and Lacan's three registers is quite explicit:

Ideology conceived in this sense is therefore the place of the insertion of the subject in those realms or orders - the Symbolic (or in other words the synchronic network of society itself, with its Kinship-type system of places

and roles), and the Real (or in other words the diachronic evolution of History itself, the realm of time and death) both of which radically transcend individual experience in their very structure. But if this is how ideology is understood, then it is clear that it has a function to play in every conceivable social order, and not merely those of what Marx called "pre-history" or class societies: the ideological representation must rather be seen as that indispensable mapping fantasy or narrative by which the individual subject invents a "lived" relationship with collective systems which otherwise by definition exclude him insofar as he or she is born into a pre-existent social form and its pre-existent language.<sup>145</sup>

As Michael Clark points out this conception of ideology is 'entirely consonant with the traditional concept of ideology as mystification' and an 'instrumental notion of culture as a superstructure designed and used to further the ends of that social unity'.<sup>146</sup> However, as I pointed out in the last chapter, this conflation of Althusserian and Lacanian ideas is radically inconsistent, and although Althusser and Jameson may trail Lacanian resonances they are talking about entirely different processes.<sup>147</sup> Indeed for Jameson, Marxism's conception of ideology as "false consciousness" or as "structural limitation," is the historical originality of its negative dialectic, that is to say its negative demystifying hermeneutic. But at the same time Marxism also has a tradition of a positive or redemptive hermeneutic and it is, suggests Jameson, within this arena that 'some non-instrumental conception of culture may be tested' (PU, 286). Jameson identifies in this tradition Bakhtin's notions of dialogism and the carnivalesque, and the Frankfurt School's concept of "strong memory", but what he is particularly concerned with is Ernst Bloch's ideal of hope or "Utopian Impulse". According to Jameson, we must grasp that the ideological is at one and the same time the Utopian. If this seems somewhat paradoxical, Jameson cites the ethical dilemma of good and evil to which he has had frequent recourse in his text. Jameson argued that the only way to resolve this dilemma was dialectically to transcend both categories in the form of a collective logic that was beyond good and evil. Thus if we grasp dialectical thought as the anticipation of a new form of collective logic:

In this sense, to project an imperative to thought in which the ideological

would be grasped as somehow at one with the Utopian, and the Utopian at one with the ideological, is to formulate a question to which a collective dialectic is the only conceivable answer. (PU, 286-7)

At its most basic level this paradox operates as a "compensatory exchange." For instance, if one considers the widespread theories of the manipulatory aspects of the media and of "mass" culture in general, unless these theories posit a completely passive addressee then the addresser must offer some form of gratification in return for the addressee's acquiescence. In other words, ideological manipulation and some form of Utopian gratification are inseparable aspects of any cultural text. The problem however remains, how can this be so? For Jameson there is only one solution:

it is the proposition that *all* class consciousness - or in other words, all ideology in the strongest sense, including the most exclusive forms of ruling-class consciousness just as much as that of oppositional or oppressed classes - is in its very nature Utopian. (PU, 289)

This proposition rests on the central notion that class consciousness emerges from the struggle between various groups or classes and therefore, class consciousness is always defined in relation to another class. In this sense class consciousness, of whatever class, is Utopian to the extent that it expresses the unity of a collectivity. However, Jameson insists that this proposition is allegorical as 'all such collectivities are themselves *figures* for the ultimate concrete collective life of an achieved Utopian or classless society' (PU, 291).

Now we are in a better position to understand how even hegemonic or ruling-class culture and ideology are Utopian, not in spite of their instrumental function to secure and perpetuate class privilege and power, but rather precisely because that function is also in and of itself the affirmation of collective solidarity. (PU, 291)

Terry Eagleton argues that 'Jameson's startling claim to discern a proleptic image of utopia in any human collectivity whatsoever, which would presumably encompass racist



rallies',<sup>148</sup> is ridiculously gullible or faintly perverse. Whilst Jameson would insist that a racist rally is indeed Utopian to the extent that it projects a [white] collectivity, this must be seen as a compensatory projection rather than an "anticipatory" one. In other words, racism could be said to offer forms of compensation and gratification for present social problems: unemployment, bad housing, lack of services etc., but insofar as it does not project a fully classless society it is not a positive anticipation of Utopia. The problem of distinguishing between compensatory and anticipatory projections though, as Ruth Levitas points out, is that it eventually comes down to questions of content. Bloch's notion of Utopia as "anticipatory consciousness" rests on the definition of Utopia as a function rather than a matter of a particular form or content. However, the distinction between what is an anticipatory and what is a compensatory projection of Utopia can only be made by reference to its content. As Ruth Levitas suggests:

The abandonment of form as a criterion leads to a broadening of the field of study - which is narrowed again by the distinction between abstract and concrete utopia. This distinction, while ostensibly made in terms of function, in practice relies upon content.<sup>149</sup>

With the elision of the functional property of Utopian thought, one can easily conceive of a situation whereby Jameson may interpret a racist rally as compensatory, but the racists themselves would see it as being anticipatory.

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#### Notes.

- 1 Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. R. Miller (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 22.
- 2 Fredric Jameson, 'Pleasure: A Political Issue', in *The Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971-1986: Vol. 2 The Syntax of History* (London: Routledge, 1988).
- 3 Ibid., p. 66.
- 4 Ibid., p. 67.
- 5 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', in *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1976), pp. 6-18.

- 6 Jameson, 'Pleasure: A Political Issue', p. 68.
- 7 Ibid., p. 62.
- 8 Ibid., p. 62.
- 9 Michel Foucault, 'On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress', in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1986), p. 347.
- 10 Ibid., p. 347.
- 11 Ibid., p. 351.
- 12 I shall examine and define a number of the differing conceptions of desire below.
- 13 Michel Foucault, *The Uses of Pleasure: A History of Sexuality*, Vol. 2, trans. R. Hurley (Harmondsworth: Peregrine, 1986), p. 42.
- 14 Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, p. 57.
- 15 Ibid., p. 53.
- 16 Ibid., p. 22.
- 17 Jameson, 'Pleasure: A Political Issue', p. 69.
- 18 Ibid., p. 73.
- 19 Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 142.
- 20 Louis Althusser, 'Marxism Today', trans. J.H. Kavanagh, in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists & Other Essays*, ed. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 1990), p. 270.
- 21 Ibid., p. 278.
- 22 Gregory Elliott, 'Introduction', to *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, p. xx.
- 23 Louis Althusser, 'What Must Change in the Party', trans. P. Camiller, in *New Left Review*, no. 109 (1978), p. 30.
- 24 Ibid., pp. 31-2.
- 25 Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration: Post-Structuralist Thought and the Claims of Critical Theory* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 110-1.
- 26 Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* Vol. 1, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem & H.R. Lane (London: Athlone Press, 1984), p. xiii.
- 27 Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, p. 142.
- 28 Ibid., p. 142.
- 29 Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. xiii.
- 30 Ibid., p. 55.
- 31 Ibid., p. 53.
- 32 Jean Laplanche & Jean-Bertand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books, 1988), p. 482.
- 33 Ibid., p. 481.
- 34 Sigmund Freud, 'Two Principle of Mental Functioning', in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, Vol. 11, The Pelican Freud Library, trans. J. Strachey (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1984).
- 35 Laplanche & Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p. 339.
- 36 Sigmund Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', in *On Sexuality*, Vol.

- 7, The Penguin Freud Library, trans. J. Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 138.
- 37 Ibid., p. 140.
- 38 Ibid., p. 140.
- 39 Ibid., p. 149.
- 40 Sigmund Freud, 'Totem and Taboo', in *The Origins of Religion*, Vol. 13, The Penguin Freud Library, trans. J. Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 219.
- 41 Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *On Metapsychology*, p. 323.
- 42 Ibid., p. 315.
- 43 Ibid., p. 315.
- 44 Laplanche & Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p. 482.
- 45 Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', p. 315.
- 46 Jacques Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus', in *Ecrits: A Selection*, trans. A. Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1977), p. 287.
- 47 Laplanche & Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p.483
- 48 Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus', p. 286.
- 49 Dews, *The Logics of Disintegration*, p. 78.
- 50 Probably the best and fullest exposition of Lacan's dialectic of desire and its relation to Hegel's master/slave dialectic is given by Peter Dews *The Logics of Disintegration*, ch. 2. I draw heavily on Dews' work in what follows.
- 51 Dews, *The Logics of Disintegration*, p. 78.
- 52 Ibid., p. 78.
- 53 Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus', p. 286.
- 54 Ibid., p. 285.
- 55 Ibid., p. 288.
- 56 Dews, *The Logics of Disintegration*, p. 85.
- 57 Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus', p. 287.
- 58 Jacques Lacan, 'The agency of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud', in *Ecrits: A Selection*, p. 152.
- 59 Ibid., p. 149.
- 60 Ibid., p. 150.
- 61 Ibid., p. 150.
- 62 Ibid., p. 153.
- 63 Ibid., p. 154.
- 64 Malcolm Bowie, *Lacan* (London: Fontana, 1991), p. 76.
- 65 Ibid., p. 124.
- 66 Dews, *The Logics of Disintegration*, p. 84.
- 67 Lacan proposed the English neologism for this concept as 'want-to-be' but it is more generally translated as 'lack-in-being'.
- 68 Lacan, 'The Signification of the Phallus', p. 288.
- 69 Bowie, *Lacan*, p. 122.
- 70 Perry Anderson, *Arguments Within English Marxism* (London: Verso, 1980), p. 161.
- 71 Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 180.

- 72 Ibid., p. 32.
- 73 Ibid., p. 26.
- 74 Ibid., p. 35.
- 75 Ibid., p. 29.
- 76 'The term *hylé*, in fact designates the pure continuity that any one sort of matter ideally possesses'. *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 36.
- 77 Bowie, *Lacan*, p. 87.
- 78 Ibid., p. 49.
- 79 Sigmund Freud, 'The Unconscious', in *On Metapsychology*, p. 179.
- 80 Ibid., p. 207.
- 81 Ibid., p. 207.
- 82 Ibid., pp. 198-9.
- 83 Anthony Elliott, *Social Theory & Psychoanalysis in Transition: Self and Society from Freud to Kristeva* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 140.
- 84 Ibid., p. 140.
- 85 Ibid., p. 146.
- 86 Ibid., p. 156.
- 87 Ibid., p. 157.
- 88 Ibid., p. 157.
- 89 Sigmund Freud, *Case Histories II*, Vol. 9, The Pelican Freud Library, trans. A. Strachey & J. Strachey (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1979), p. 185.
- 90 Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 57.
- 91 Ibid., p. 62.
- 92 Ibid., p. 63.
- 93 Ibid., p. 264.
- 94 I follow Jameson's exposition of Lacan here, see: Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', in *Postmodern Culture*, ed. H. Foster (London: Pluto Press, 1985), p. 119.
- 95 Ibid., p. 119.
- 96 Ibid., p. 119.
- 97 Ibid., p. 120.
- 98 Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 341.
- 99 Ibid., p. 5.
- 100 Ibid., p. 239.
- 101 Dews, *The Logics of Disintegration*, p. 130.
- 102 Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 42.
- 103 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1970).
- 104 Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 136.
- 105 Ibid., p. 348.
- 106 Ibid., p. 130.
- 107 Ibid., p. 106.
- 108 Fredric Jameson, 'Beyond the Cave: Demystifying the Ideology of Modernism', in *The Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971-1986: Vol. 2 The Syntax of History* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 124.

- 109 Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans. R. Livingstone & G. Benton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p. 127.
- 110 In the following chapter I will return to this question of experiential disorientation and query exactly whose experience is being described here, that is, is there a wide spread sense of disorientation and fragmentation or is it a more limited experience of a particular group of theorists and intellectuals? For example, the situation in Eastern Europe and the former Yugoslavia can be interpreted as part of the process of global instability and fragmentation, on the other hand, this situation also points to the fact that certain identities are indeed very stable and enduring, that is "national" or ethnic identities.
- 111 Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 151.
- 112 Manfred Frank, 'The World as Will and Representation: Deleuze and Guattari's Critique of Capitalism as Schizo-Analysis and Schizo-Discourse', trans. D. Berger, in *Telos*, no. 64 (1983), p. 173.
- 113 *Ibid.*, p. 174.
- 114 *Ibid.*, p. 173.
- 115 Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 342.
- 116 Frank, 'The World as Will and Representation', p. 173.
- 117 Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 255.
- 118 *Ibid.*, p. 255.
- 119 Sigmund Freud, 'A Note on the Unconscious', in *On Metapsychology*, p. 53.
- 120 Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 257.
- 121 See for example the exchange between Jameson and Kenneth Burke: Fredric Jameson, 'The Symbolic Inference; or, Kenneth Burke and Ideological Analysis', in *The Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971-1986: Vol. 1 Situations of Theory* (London: Routledge, 1988), Kenneth Burke, 'Methodological Repression and /or Strategies of Containment', in *Critical Inquiry*, no. 5 (1978) and Fredric Jameson, 'Ideology and Symbolic Action', in *Critical Inquiry*, no. 5 (1978).
- 122 Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (London: Athlone Press, 1983).
- 123 Jonathan Arac, 'Fredric Jameson and Marxism' in *Critical Genealogies: Historical Situations for Postmodern Literary Studies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p.165. The following section closely follows Arac's argument.
- 124 *Ibid.*, p. 266.
- 125 *Ibid.*, p. 266.
- 126 *Ibid.*, p. 267.
- 127 *Ibid.*, p. 267.
- 128 *Ibid.*, p. 267.
- 129 *Ibid.*, p. 268.
- 130 *Ibid.*, p. 271.
- 131 Deleuze & Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 133.
- 132 *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- 133 *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- 134 Fredric Jameson, 'Towards a Libidinal Economy of Three Modern Painters', in *Social Text*, vol. 1 (1979), p. 190.
- 135 *Ibid.*, p. 189.

- 136 Geoff Bennington, *Lyotard: Writing the Event* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 27.
- 137 Fredric Jameson, 'Flaubert's Libidinal Historicism: *Trois Contes*', in *Flaubert and Postmodernism*, ed. N. Schor (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), p.77.
- 138 See Peter Brooks, *Reading For the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Vintage, 1985).
- 139 See Fredric Jameson, 'La Cousine Bette and Allegorical Realism', in *PMLA*, no. 86 (1971), and 'Imaginary and Symbolic in *La Rabouilleuse*', in *Social Science Information*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1977).
- 140 Jameson, 'La Cousine Bette and Allegorical Realism', p. 244.
- 141 Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. B. Brewster (New York: Monthly Review, 1971), p. 162.
- 142 Michael Clark, 'Imagining the Real: Jameson's use of Lacan', in *New Orleans Review*, vol. 11, no. 1 (1984), p. 69.
- 143 Fredric Jameson, 'Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism and the Problem of the Subject', in *Literature and Psychoanalysis, The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. S. Felman (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982), p. 393. This is a reprint of the original version of the essay first published in *Yale French Studies*, nos. 55/56 (1977).
- 144 Ibid., p. 393.
- 145 Ibid., p. 394. This final section of the essay is deleted in Jameson's own later collected essays.
- 146 Clark, 'Imagining the Real: Jameson's use of Lacan', p. 70.
- 147 The fact that the above section is deleted from later versions of the essay may indeed signal Jameson's own acknowledgement of the problem.
- 148 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 404.
- 149 Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Hertfordshire: Philip Allen, 1990), p. 100.

## POSTMODERNISM, OR, THE CULTURAL LOGIC OF LATE CAPITALISM

particularly in 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. In existential terms, what this means is that our experience is no longer whole: we are no longer able to make any felt connection between the concerns of private life, as it follows its own course within the walls and confines of the affluent society, and the structural projections of the system in the outside world, in the form of neocolonialism, oppression, and counter insurgency warfare. In psychological terms, we may say that as a service economy we are henceforth so far removed from the realities of production and work on the world that we inhabit a dream world of artificial stimuli and televised experience: never in any previous civilization have the great metaphysical preoccupations, the fundamental questions of being and of the meaning of life, seemed so utterly remote and pointless.

(MF, xvii-xviii)

Reading the above quotation, one would be inclined to identify it as a description of what we now call postmodernism. Indeed, this description contains all the essential references that now characterise the postmodern debate: the development of the postindustrial society, the concealment of class structure through an expanded media, the fragmentation of the subject, the disjunction between our existential or quotidian experience and the global expansion of the capitalist system, the effacing of the final traces of production by an increasingly image-dominated society, and finally the decline and dissolution of metaphysics. However, this quotation was written in 1971, in the 'Preface' to *Marxism and Form*, a decade before the term postmodernism became such a focus for theoretical and cultural controversy. Thus it could be said to provide a description of the situation of postmodernism *avant la lettre*. Douglas Kellner gives just such a reading of this passage in his 'Introduction' to *Jameson, Postmodernism, Critique*,<sup>1</sup> suggesting that such

passages in Jameson's earlier work provide 'anticipations' of 'lacunae' in his theoretical project and of his later theoretical concerns. A strong case for such a reading can clearly be made. As we have already seen, *Marxism and Form* was essentially concerned with familiarising a North American academic readership with an unfamiliar tradition of European Marxist cultural theorists. *The Prison House of Language* provided a similar critical survey of an alternative tradition of Russian Formalism and French Structuralism. A decade later *The Political Unconscious* provided Jameson's most sustained intervention in contemporary theoretical debates; specifically the contemporary French theories of Althusserian Marxism, Poststructuralism and Deconstruction. What was missing from all these texts was the analysis of the contemporary situation which Jameson appeared to be calling for in his 'Preface' to *Marxism and Form*. In particular *The Political Unconscious* and *Fables of Aggression* could be seen, as Kellner writes to 'knock on the door of the present but neither crosses the threshold of our own historical milieu',<sup>2</sup> both texts being specifically concerned with literary Modernism. This is not to say that Jameson was unconcerned, at this juncture, with other forms of cultural practice or contemporary culture, as his continuing writings on film, painting and science-fiction testify. In short, until the early 1980s, the absent centre of Jameson's theoretical project was "modernism", whilst his political priority remained the need to establish Marxism as a viable, indeed pre-eminent, theoretical discourse in the American academy.

If we follow this intellectual and theoretical trajectory a little further it would be feasible to argue that with the publication of *The Political Unconscious* Jameson's aim of establishing a strong Marxist presence in the American academy had been achieved. Therefore, no longer needing to argue the very legitimacy of his own discourse, Jameson could pursue that long deferred project of theorising the contemporary cultural scene, as he did with characteristic bravura and style in his influential 1984 essay 'Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism'<sup>3</sup>. For Kellner, this text presents:



the culmination of a series of historical and theoretical studies which provide part of the methodology, framework, and theoretical analyses requisite for a theory of contemporary society which Jameson conceptualizes as a product of a specific historical trajectory: the transition from a discrete national system of state/monopoly capitalism to an interlocking system multinational corporate capitalism.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, far from being a radical departure for Jameson his conceptualisation of postmodernism, according to Kellner, represents the culmination of 'his efforts to introduce, defend, and develop the Marxian theory in a climate and situation often ignorant of or hostile to the radical tradition of which Marxism is a key component'.<sup>5</sup>

Kellner provides one narrative, and a persuasive one, of Jameson's theoretical evolution, I should like, however, to add another dimension to this story and to complicate it a little. A problem with any history of ideas is that all too often they leave out, what Jameson calls, History itself. Kellner writes:

to understand any of Jameson's texts one needs to grasp their place in the history of the Jamesonian *oeuvre*, as articulations of a relatively stable and coherent theoretical project.<sup>6</sup>

We should, however, make a distinction between a "relatively" stable and coherent intellectual project and the rather linear and continuous narrative that Kellner himself provides. Jameson's evolving project did not take place in isolation but also represents his response to changing theoretical, political and cultural demands. The 1971 'Preface' identifies the particular context within which *Marxism and Form* was written and at the same time what differentiates this particular situation from the pre-World War II era of class struggle and Popular Front cultural politics. Within this context, here defined as postindustrial rather than late capitalism, Jameson called for a revitalised form of Marxist criticism, a Marxism of which:

the great themes of Hegel's philosophy - the relationship of part to whole, the opposition between concrete and abstract, the concept of totality, the

dialectic of appearance and essence, the interaction between subject and object - are once again the order of the day. (MF, xix)

As we shall see below, those "great themes" that seemed so much the order of the day in 1971 no longer appear in the least appropriate for the analysis of postmodern culture. To put it another way, we no longer have recourse to that older language of the classical dialectic. Jameson himself acknowledges that to describe the dialectic in terms of self-consciousness or reflexivity, as he did in *Marxism and Form*, is one way of doing so; but:

its effectiveness depends very much on the freshness of this rhetoric of self-consciousness, which, at a time when 'consciousness' itself has been called back into question, as a concept or a category, has apparently ceased, to convey very much. Reflexivity ... is part of the baggage of a modernist thinking no longer very authoritative in the postmodernist era. (LM, 25)

Superficially, there may seem to be a certain symmetry, or continuity, to Jameson's return to Adorno and dialectical aesthetics after two decades of skirmishes with Structuralism, Poststructuralism and Postmodernism; but for Jameson the Adorno of the 90s is unambiguously not the Adorno of the 60s and 70s.<sup>7</sup> This is not merely a question of language or terminology but the *problematique* itself has radically altered. In his introduction to *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* Jameson enumerates the four principal themes of his book: 'interpretation, Utopia, survivals of the modern, and returns of the repressed of historicity' (PLLC, xv); these are all familiar Jamesonian themes, what is new is that they have now been, supposedly, invalidated by the very concept of the postmodern. It is not only Jameson's rhetoric but his very concepts and theoretical concerns that have been delegitimated by the new phenomena of postmodernism. Furthermore, if as Jean-François Lyotard has suggested:

The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation,<sup>8</sup>

the postmodern condition signals the end of Marxism's traditional historical narrative and throws into question not only Jameson's own theoretical project but the very status of

Marxism itself. In other words, the significance for Jameson of the encounter with postmodernism must not be understated or, indeed, be reduced to an individual intellectual project. The founding premise of many versions of postmodernism, that a structural break has taken place within the capitalist system, at a stroke invalidates or delegitimizes all the older modernist discourses such as the Enlightenment, Psychoanalysis and above all Marxism. Therefore, much of the Marxian analysis of postmodernism, from writers such as Jameson, David Harvey, Edward Soja, and the more occasional pieces by Terry Eagleton,<sup>9</sup> focuses upon the nature of the transition that has been said to have taken place in the capitalist system since the end of the second World War, and whether or not one can actually theorise this as a structural break, or systemic transformation. In short, if a structural break has taken place, the path seems to lead inexorably to postmarxism in one form or another; on the other hand, if no such break has taken place the Marxian critique of Capitalism and its emancipatory narrative retain their political and intellectual force. Jameson, characteristically, refuses both of these options, at once accepting that a structural transformation has taken place but one that does not invalidate the Marxian narrative.

### **The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism**

Jameson's 1984 essay on postmodernism was itself a montage of two previous essays: 'The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodern Debate' and 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society'.<sup>10</sup> In the first of these essays Jameson sought to map the various ideological positions that were emerging around the concept of postmodernism. For Jameson, the problem of postmodernism was seen from the outset as both an aesthetic and a political one. He argued that all positions adopted in relation to postmodernism could be shown to project particular visions of history:

Indeed, the very enabling premise of the debate turns on an initial,

strategic, presupposition about our social system: to grant some historic originality to a postmodernist culture is also implicitly to affirm some radical structural difference between what is sometimes called consumer society and earlier moments of the capitalism from which it emerged.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, defining a position on postmodernism necessarily involves one in taking a position on the modernism that preceded it as well as a conception of the nature of the relation between these moments and the transition from one to another. Jameson identified four principal positions to have emerged in the postmodern debate: the pro-postmodernist/anti-modernist stance associated with the architects Charles Jencks and Robert Venturi, as well as writers such as Tom Wolfe; the anti-postmodernist/pro-modernist stance associated with the American critic Hilton Kramer and the journal *New Criterion* and also the work of Jürgen Habermas; the pro-modernist/pro-postmodernist position articulated by Jean-Francois Lyotard; and finally the rather bleak and pessimistic anti-modernist/anti-postmodernist view exemplified by the work of the Venetian architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri. The first two of these positions, argues Jameson, are characterised by their acceptance, be it positively or negatively, of the new term, postmodernism, which is itself tantamount to an acceptance of a break between the moments of modernism and postmodernism. The latter two however call into question the category of postmodernism by repudiating any notion of an historical break and seeing the present moment as a continuation of modernism; or, in the case of Lyotard projecting postmodernism indefinitely backwards. At this juncture however Jameson eschews what he sees as these essentially moralising positions, either stigmatising postmodernism as corrupt and hedonistic, the latest form of cultural degeneration, or alternatively hailing it as a positive form of innovation and as culturally and aesthetically healthy. In place of such ahistorical moralising Jameson calls for a genuinely historical and dialectical analysis. He writes:

The point is that we are *within* the culture of postmodernism to the point where its facile repudiation is as impossible as any equally facile celebration

of it is complacent and corrupt. . . . it seems more appropriate to assess the new cultural production within the working hypothesis of a general modification of culture itself within the social restructuration of late capitalism as a system.<sup>12</sup>

Jameson defers such an analysis in the present context. However, Jameson's initial position raises two of the recurrent themes and persistent question marks over his theorisation of the postmodern. Taking into consideration that this essay was written in 1982, before the term "postmodernism" was quite as ubiquitous, and generally accepted, as it is today; one could legitimately ask to what extent are we already "within" the culture of postmodernism and how pervasive is this new cultural production? Or, to anticipate Jameson's later terminology, to what extent is postmodernism a cultural "dominant"? The second issue is the rather more difficult question of the nature of the relationship between this new cultural production and the general modification of culture and social restructuration of the capitalist system. I shall return to these questions below but for the present would note that Jameson's acceptance of the term postmodernism, following his own criteria, implicitly posits a 'a radical structural difference' from the preceding moment of capitalism.

Jameson's characterisation of the postmodern at this stage amounts to little more than a heterogeneous list of names, styles, and forms; a problem of definition, he notes, that is inherent to the very concept of the postmodern, of which there will be as many local variants as there were of modernism itself. His first, acknowledgedly limited, attempt at a description of key features of postmodernism is to be found in 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society'. For Jameson, the term postmodernism does not designate a particular style but it is a periodizing concept which serves to 'correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order'.<sup>13</sup> Jameson dates the emergence of this new economic order as post-World War II, that is to say, somewhere around the late 1940s or early 1950s for the

United States, and in the late 1950s for Europe. The key transitional decade though is seen to be the 1960s. Jameson substitutes for the actual analysis of this new economic order a list of epithets: 'modernization, postindustrial or consumer society, the society of the media or the spectacle, or multinational capitalism'.<sup>14</sup> However, as his title indicates, one of the strongest currents underlying Jameson's conception of a new economic order is Baudrillard's work on "consumer society", in particular his early texts: 'The System of Objects', 'Consumer Society' and 'For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign'.<sup>15</sup> In these texts Baudrillard developed a critique of Saussurean linguistics, more specifically Saussure's conception of the binary nature of the sign and its implicit assumption of a referent as the sign's ultimate ground or meaning. Baudrillard proceeded from this critique of Saussure to advance his own critique of the Marxian distinction between use value and exchange value. Baudrillard argued that such a distinction as that between use value and exchange value was based on a latent assumption of an anthropological conception of "need". However, such a conception of need is no longer appropriate for our understanding of contemporary consumer society, or an order of discourse in which the subject as an autonomous self-centred ego has been dissolved. According to Baudrillard, consumption - as it is understood in "consumer societies" - is nothing to do with the satisfaction of needs but is rather an 'active mode of relations ... a systematic mode of activity and a global response on which our whole cultural system is founded'.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the objects of consumption are not material goods but rather "signs". Consumption, writes Baudrillard, 'in so far as it is meaningful, is a systematic act of the manipulation of signs'.<sup>17</sup> The transformation of the object into the systematic status of signs entails a correlative transformation in human relations and it is this new relation, suggests Baudrillard, that is the relation of consumption. In this sense, the system of consumption functions like a language. Baudrillard, therefore, argues that the only way to move beyond a political economy which is grounded in need and to understand the commodity structure of consumer society is to see that use value no longer corresponds to

human need, indeed there is no longer use value as such, just exchange value. Jameson does not fully endorse this complete eclipse of use value but does suggest that postmodernism represents a further intensification of exchange value over use value. Jameson returns to this theme of a new economic order, or as he now says, moment, at the end of the present essay, including the new epithet of "late capitalism", but he gives no more than the same elliptical description of what this new order may entail or how this correlation between the cultural and the economic may be articulated.

The essay as a whole is much more concerned with the characterisation and description of postmodernism, emphasising postmodernism's new experience of space and time in relation to pastiche and schizophrenia. In the case of the former he contrasts modernism's use of parody and quotation with the postmodern practice of pastiche; parody he suggests plays on the uniqueness of a style; it 'seizes on [its] idiosyncrasies and eccentricities to produce an imitation which mocks the original'<sup>18</sup> but in doing so it retains an implicit linguistic norm against which the original is being judged: above all, parody retains a subversive "other" voice. As an imitation of a particular unique individual or personal style parody also rests on assumptions about the nature of the subject which, since the post-structural dissolution or decentering of the subject, are no longer held to be tenable. Pastiche, on the other hand, whilst sharing many of these features, is in a sense a neutral practice; it lacks parody's "ulterior motive", its satirical impulse and any sense of a norm against which the original is to be compared; language has now disintegrated into a proliferation of private languages and discourses. Postmodern literature, suggests Jameson, does not simply "quote" popular texts as a modernist such as Joyce may have done but rather it incorporates those texts within itself to the extent that the boundaries between them are effaced. This effacing of key boundaries between previously distinct cultural realms, specifically between "high art" and "mass" or "popular" culture is frequently cited as one of the most significant democratising and popularising features of

postmodernism. "De-differentiation", as the process has been called, can most explicitly be seen in the field of architecture, to which I will return below. For Jameson the full aesthetic realisation of postmodern pastiche is to be found in what he defines as "Nostalgia films". These are films that in the narrowest sense are about the past and specific generational pasts but more broadly would seem to comprise a whole range of metageneric films, remakes, and big budget glossy productions; the notion is as much to do with form and the quality of image as it is with any ostensible content:

the classical nostalgia film [according to Jameson] while evading its present altogether, registered its historicist deficiency by losing itself in mesmerized fascination in lavish images of specific generational pasts. (PLLC, 296)

The privileged generational moments are the 1930's and particularly at the moment the 1950's. Postmodernism's aesthetic of pastiche is then, for Jameson, symptomatic of a general loss of historicity, and our incapacity to achieve aesthetic 'representations of our own current experience' (PLLC, 21). Spatial disorientation and the inability of individual subjects to represent or place themselves in relation to the new global network of multinational capitalism is a key theme of Jameson's analysis of postmodernism; however, as I suggested in the previous chapter the problem that arises through such appeals to experience: is just "whose" experience is being appealed to here? From his analysis of postmodern cultural artefacts such as architecture, sculpture and literature Jameson is clearly describing his own experience of these works but, as I shall argue below, it is questionable just how generalisable this experience is.

The latter half of 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society' is concerned with our new experience of temporality, specifically in relation to Lacan's notion of schizophrenia. As we saw in the preceding chapter, Lacan sees schizophrenia as essentially a language disorder, a failure to accede fully into the symbolic order, the realm of speech and



language; it therefore represents a break in the chain of signification. For Lacan our experience of temporality is also an effect of language: as words and sentences move in time, they have a past and a future, as well as a present. The schizophrenic's failure to fully grasp language articulation will therefore affect their experience of temporality, or, more accurately they will experience a lack of temporal continuity. The schizophrenic is condemned to a perpetual present, an 'experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence'.<sup>19</sup> The schizophrenic's lack of temporal continuity has the corresponding effect of making the present more intense and vivid, the signifier in isolation becoming ever more material or "literal". This, suggests Jameson, is the condition we now culturally find ourselves in, a situation not dissimilar to Baudrillard's world of simulacra and free-floating signs:

the referent does not constitute an autonomous concrete reality at all; it is only the extrapolation of the excision ... established by the logic of the sign onto the world of things (onto the phenomenological universe of perception). It is the world such as it is seen and interpreted through the sign - that is, *virtually excised and excisable* at pleasure. The "real" table does not exist.<sup>20</sup>

According to Baudrillard, sign systems and textuality have now taken precedence over "real" objects and, what he calls, symbolic exchange is given priority over exchange value. Consumer society represents a system beyond the commodity law of value and therefore a realm in which our old terminology and methods of critique are no longer appropriate:

Today, the entire system is fluctuating in indeterminacy, all of reality absorbed by the hyperreality of the code and of simulation. It is now a principle of simulation and not reality, that regulates social life.<sup>21</sup>

However, to say that one only has access to phenomena through signs is not the same thing as saying that phenomena only exist as signs, that they have no independent existence beyond those signs. This is simply a category mistake, a confusion of epistemological and ontological issues and what I termed previously, following Roy

Bhaskar, the epistemic fallacy or the reduction of being to knowing. According to Bhaskar, the 'analysis of experimental activity shows that causal laws are ontologically distinct from patterns of events'<sup>22</sup> and from the experience of those events. Bhaskar writes:

The analysis of experimental activity shows, then, that the assertion of a causal law entails the possibility of a *non-human world*, that it would operate even if it were unknown, just as it continues to operate when its consequent is unrealised (or it is unperceived or undetected by human beings), that is, outside the conditions that permit its empirical identification.<sup>23</sup>

Bhaskar contends that it follows from this argument that statements about being cannot always be reduced to statements about knowledge, in other words, that ontological questions cannot always be reduced to questions about epistemology, or transposed into epistemological terms. It would seem therefore that Baudrillard's over-emphasis on the determining role of sign systems, that it is the sign systems themselves rather than a conception of an independent reality that regulates social life, rests upon a fundamental philosophical error. However, in a footnote to 'The Ecstasy of Communication' Baudrillard writes:

all this does not mean that the domestic universe - the home, its objects, etc. - is not still lived largely in a traditional way - social, psychological, differential etc. It means rather that the stakes are no longer there, that another arrangement or life-style is virtually in place, even if it is indicated only through a technological discourse which is often simply a political gadget.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, Baudrillard does not deny the existence of an independent reality beyond the immediate perception of signs and images, he is just not really interested in it. One could agree with Baudrillard to a certain extent that sign systems and image production now play a much greater role in our lives than previously. But to extrapolate from this and assign symbolic systems a determining role in relation to all forms of activity and

experience is an entirely different proposition. Equally Baudrillard's preference for opinion polls and advertising over other forms of empirical data provides far too general, unspecific and unsubstantiated material upon which to base a whole new theory of simulation and hyperreality. One could argue, therefore, that Baudrillard's analyses of postmodern consumer societies have a much more limited and local validity than the grand universalising claims of Baudrillard's own texts. This, I shall argue, is a recurrent problem for Jameson's own theorisation of the postmodern.

I shall return to the dilemmas of hyperreality and simulacra below. For the present we should note that the key features of these twin notions of pastiche and schizophrenia, are the flattening of space and the displacement of diachronic time with synchronic immanence. If we recall the questions left open at the end of the last essay and Jameson's call for a genuine historical and dialectical analysis, we must concede that whilst pointing us in this direction Jameson has once more deferred the analysis itself.

The third essay in this sequence 'Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' incorporates wholesale and largely unrevised the previous essay but it also assumes the work of 'The Politics of Theory'. However now Jameson wishes to propose something a little more than just a shift of debate from morality to politics or provide stylistic descriptions, rather he suggests that a fundamental mutation has taken place 'both in the object world itself - now become a set of texts or simulacra - and in the disposition of the subject' (PLLC, 9). This mutation can be characterised by what Jameson calls the "waning of affect", which is not to suggest that all affect, all emotion and feeling, or all subjectivity has vanished but that the old autonomous centred subject has now been displaced and fragmented and with it a shift has taken place in the emotional ground tone; such concepts as anxiety and "alienation" no longer seem appropriate to describe the psychic experience of the decentred and fragmented subject, experiences which can best

be described as schizophrenic intensities. In terms of the object world, postmodernism is now for Jameson essentially a culture of the image and simulacrum, that is to say it is essentially depthless. The theoretical correlative of this has been the discrediting of all the old depth models: the Hermeneutic of inside and outside, the Existential of authenticity and inauthenticity, and Freudian of latent and manifest, the Dialectic of essence and appearance, and more recently, that of the Semiotic signifier and signified. These older models have now been replaced by notions of textuality, which is not simply a movement from deep structure to surface but rather the play of multiple surfaces as well as the spaces that exist between surfaces or texts.

I have already noted postmodernism's perceived lack of historicity and its effacement through the practice of pastiche, but here again Jameson wants to propose something a little fundamental. Borrowing the term from the architectural debate, Jameson now identifies the project of "historicism", 'the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion, and in general . . . the increasing primacy of the "neo"' (PLLC, 18) with postmodernism in general. In this sense the past has become nothing but 'a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum'. Adopting Guy Debord's famous slogan "the image has become the final form of commodity reification" Jameson suggests that the past as "referent" has been gradually bracketed until all that we are left with now are texts. In other words Jameson has substituted a spatial metaphor for a temporal one.

We have still, as yet, to come to terms with the question of a structural break, or indeed, the theoretical underpinnings of Jameson's periodization. In this essay Jameson broadly defines postmodernism, using Raymond Williams' formulation, as a cultural dominant. The value of such a definition is that it allows for 'a range of very different, yet subordinate, features' (PLLC, 4); that is to say the residual characteristics of Modernism

as well as emergent characteristics of post-postmodern culture. It is a concept that allows for both continuity and difference. As we are repeatedly reminded postmodernism retains many of the features of high modernism - for example, its high level of self-consciousness, the disruption of narrative forms, its cultural eclecticism and sense of parody - but, argues Jameson, to see postmodernism simply as a continuation of modernism is to fail to grasp the restructuration that these features have undergone and above all to fail to take account of the social position of the older modernism. For Jameson postmodernism and modernism

remain utterly distinct in their meaning and social function, owing to the very different positioning of postmodernism in the economic system of late capital and, beyond that, to the transformation of the very sphere of culture in contemporary society. (PLLC, 5)

With modernism the sphere of culture was seen to have retained a degree of semi-autonomy; whether from the left or right, it retained an oppositional stance, and critical distance, toward capital. However, with postmodernism, culture has become fully integrated into commodity production in general, annulling oppositional stance whilst that pervasive flattening of the object world has abolished critical distance.

Jameson's claim has been inspired and, paradoxically, confirmed by the work of Ernest Mandel, in particular *Late Capitalism*, in which Mandel identifies three distinct moments of capitalism: market capitalism, imperialism or monopoly capitalism, and our present moment which is often misleadingly called postindustrial capitalism, but which is more properly defined as multinational or late capitalism. Mandel's periodization is based on a theory of "Kondratiev cycles"<sup>25</sup> or "long waves", each wave evolving through approximately a fifty year cycle and representing a dialectical expansion over the previous stage. Each of these long waves encompasses a number of "business cycles", that is to say the periodic expansion and contraction of commodity production, or, what is commonly

known as capitalism's cycle of Boom and Bust. According to Marxian economic theory, capitalism undergoes periodic "crises of over-production" every seven to ten years; these crises are by no means an unfortunate oversight or accident of the market but are necessary phases of capitalist production. As competition intensifies the average rate of profit has a tendency to decline as competitors attempt to undercut each other. Consequently, capitalists are unable to recuperate their full return on capital engaged in commodity production and there is a decline in investment and employment as commodities remain unsold. This crisis can only be overcome through an intensification of return on flexible capital, that is to say labour, by increased productivity, lay-offs and an erosion of working conditions, or through an increased return on fixed capital, that is machinery and buildings. Crises of over-production, therefore, are necessary in the sense that capitalism must continually revolutionise its own processes of production; must develop new forms of machinery and technology to increase productivity and restore profits, implying a renewal of fixed capital at a higher level of technology than previously realised. However, Mandel notes that:

Under 'normal' conditions of capitalist production the values set free at the end of *one* 7- or 10-year cycle are certainly sufficient for the acquisition of more and more expensive machines than were in use at the outset of this cycle. But they do not suffice for the acquisition of a fundamentally renewed productive technology, particularly in Department 1 [that is the branches of capitalist production producing means of production, such as raw materials, energy, machinery and tools, buildings], where such a renewal is generally linked to the creation of completely new productive installations.<sup>26</sup>

A complete renewal of fixed capital can only take place over a period of successive cycles, or long wave; each long wave or cycle of extended reproduction 'begins with different machines than the previous one'.<sup>27</sup> Thus, argues Mandel, the history of capitalism on a global scale can be seen as the succession of cyclical movements every seven to ten years and at the same time the succession of longer periods of approximately fifty years

duration, of which we have experienced four to date: the period from the end of the 18th century to 1847, from the crisis of 1847 to the early 1890s, from the 1890s to the second World War and finally our present moment from the second World War to the present. Each of these long waves can be characterised by the form of technology specific to it: the first wave was the period of the industrial revolution itself, characterised by the gradual spread of the '*handicraft-made or manufacture-made steam engine*' to all the most important branches of industry and industrial countries';<sup>28</sup> Mandel identifies this as the first technological revolution. The second long wave was characterised by the generalisation of the '*electric and combustion engines*'. Finally, our own moment can be characterised by the '*electronic apparatuses*' and nuclear power, and represents the third technological revolution.<sup>29</sup> It is these last three phases that Jameson is primarily interested in and which we will see in the following section that he identifies with the aesthetic moments of: Realism - Modernism - Postmodernism respectively.

I have dwelt on Mandel's theory of Long waves at some length as this remains the primary economic underpinning for Jameson's conception of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism.<sup>30</sup> The significance of Mandel's proposition is that late capitalism, far from invalidating Marx's analysis of capital, rather presents our current historical moment as a purer form of capitalism. Mandel writes:

late capitalism is necessarily defined by intensified competition among large concerns and between these and the non-monopolized sectors of industry. But on the whole, of course, this process is not qualitatively different from that of '*classical*' monopoly capitalism.<sup>31</sup>

According to Jameson, late capitalism also represents the final colonisation of the last enclaves of resistance to commodification: the third world, the unconscious and the aesthetic (at least in its modernist guise). Therefore, following the example of Lenin's identification of imperialism as a new stage in global development of capitalism, Jameson

can argue that a modification of the system has taken place, indeed even a structural transformation, but that fundamentally, the system itself remains the same. Consequently, for Jameson, the Marxist critique, adapted to meet the current historical situation, remains intact and unscathed by all Baudrillardian hyperbole of postmodernism and Lyotard's much heralded end of grand, universal, narratives.

Jameson's project is audacious but at the same time somewhat precarious. As one examines his periodization and phenomenology of postmodernism a little more closely, certain problems begin to recur which the initial bravura of the performance served to mask. Here I shall examine Jameson's periodization in more detail and in the following section analyse two specific examples of his characterisation of the postmodern cultural artefacts. One's initial uncertainty with Jameson's notion of postmodernism as a cultural logic arises from an apparent discrepancy between his own periodization and Mandel's. For Mandel, the term "late capitalism" designates that period of economic history 'which clearly began after the Second World War'.<sup>32</sup> As with the shorter business cycle, the long wave is characterised by a period of accelerated capital accumulation, over-accumulation and deceleration or recession. For Mandel the increasing frequency of recessionary periods in the advanced capitalist states since the mid-1960s confirms his thesis that we are now in the second phase of the present long wave, that is, the period of decelerating growth. Indeed, the end of the post-war boom can be identified with the OPEC oil crisis of 1973 and the world wide recession that followed thereafter. This raises the question, for Mandel, whether or not 'a new long wave can be predicted from the second half of the 1960s onwards - the ebb after the flow'.<sup>33</sup> As we have already seen, Jameson's periodization of postmodernism is somewhat equivocal: defining it both as the period Post-second World War - thus identifying it with Mandel's periodization of late capitalism - and the moment emerging from the late 1960s and early 1970s - thus identifying it with Mandel's second phase of decelerated accumulation or possibly a new long wave. In his



'Introduction' to *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* Jameson sought to clarify this situation:

Thus the economic preparation of postmodernism or late capitalism began in the 1950s, after the wartime shortages of consumer goods and spare parts had been made up, and new products and new technologies (not least those of the media) could be pioneered. On the other hand, the psychic *habitus* of the new age demands the absolute break, strengthened by a generational rupture, achieved more properly in the 1960s (PLLC, xx)

Jameson goes on to argue that the crystallising moment of crisis for both the economic and the cultural spheres was the oil crisis of 1973. In other words, Jameson is proposing that we respect the "semi-autonomy" of each distinct level: the economic, the psychic and the cultural. But if, as Jameson insists, late capitalism marks the final colonisation of our psyche, postmodernism represents the completion of the process of modernisation and the final erosion of aesthetic autonomy or distance as culture becomes fully integrated into the commodity system in general; then how does this economic, psychic and cultural autonomy persist? I am not suggesting that we return to a reductive form of mechanical causality but I am asking how, if the logic of postmodernism is as totalizing as Jameson argues, he is to achieve the non-synchronicity that his periodization requires.

This ambiguity in Jameson's periodization seems to arise from his use of the term "postmodernism" itself. As I outlined above, in his early essays Jameson argued that postmodernism was not a style, in the old modernist sense, but a "cultural dominant". The value of such a definition, for Jameson, is that while it does not rule out difference, in the sense that it presupposes the coexistence of residual and emergent forms of culture, it does stave off complete heterogeneity and relativism through privileging or prioritising one particular sphere of culture. Furthermore, it facilitates Jameson's use of the term postmodernism as a periodizing concept.<sup>34</sup> In this sense, then, postmodernism designates

a cultural rather than an economic category. However, as Peter Nicholls has pointed out,<sup>35</sup> Jameson also identifies postmodernism with 'capitalism itself' (PLLC, 343) and as a 'mode of production' (PLLC, 406). Clearly, the term "postmodernism" in these latter senses designates more than merely a cultural category, it is an historical, social and economic one. In short, Jameson uses the term postmodernism to designate both, what he calls a cultural logic, or the cultural expression of 'the inner truth of that newly emergent social order of late capitalism',<sup>36</sup> and that social order itself, that is to say, "late capitalism". One could also well ask how a phenomenon that lacks depth and for which the barrier between inside and outside have been dissolved can have an "inner truth"?

If it seems somewhat contradictory to use a single term to designate both a system and its cultural manifestation, Jameson once more reminds us of the necessity of respecting different levels of analysis and abstraction:

my own thoughts on "postmodernism" ... are therefore to be understood as an attempt to theorize the specific logic of the cultural production of that third stage [of capitalism], and not as yet another disembodied culture critique or diagnosis of the spirit of the age. (PLLC, 400)

Jameson is not simply concerned with cultural analysis but with how specific cultural artefacts and practices interrelated with a determinate historical moment, or stage of development. Jameson's approach to postmodernism, then, is a "totalizing" one, which for him, 'often means little more than the making of connections between various phenomena' (PLLC, 403). The defence of the concept of "totality" has constituted, perhaps, the most sustained polemic of Jameson's career, and as Douglas Kellner pointed out, its unifying theme.<sup>37</sup> For Jameson, the concept of totality does not designate a specific thing, in the sense that it is something we can know and grasp, but rather it is an abstract concept. Much of the confusion that arises around this concept, suggests Jameson, derives not so much from the notion of totality itself but from our aversion to abstract thinking, in other

words, the assumption that to name a phenomenon is at the same time to assert its concrete and empirically verifiable presence, or, to put it another way, to take its abstract representation for its substantive existence. Totality then comes to imply the nightmare scenarios of a Weberian "total system". For Jameson, on the other hand, the concept defines a problem, it marks the limit of thought, a boundary which thought constantly comes up against but cannot surpass. Totality is unrepresentable and as such defines that outer limit against which our representations and thoughts must define themselves. The crucial thing about the concept of totality, writes Jameson, is that there is only "one" - 'something otherwise often known as a "mode of production"' (PLLC, 403).

But clearly postmodernism is more tangible than this unrepresentable abstract category: indeed Jameson's own influential analyses of postmodern artefacts would suggest it is a slightly more concrete phenomenon than this. We must add, therefore, one more qualification to the concept of totality before we can fully understand Jameson's use of the term postmodernism: that is, Althusser's notion of structure (which Jameson equates with mode of production). As I outlined in chapter 2 Althusser's conception of structure as an absent cause posits that we can only know of the structure's existence, not empirically, but through its effects. Equally, the concept of totality is not something that we can know in-itself but only through its effects. At this level of abstraction, then, we can say that postmodernism is the system itself, that totality or mode of production Jameson designates late capitalism, but as such we can only know it through its discrete effects, in other words, its cultural manifestations.

However, Jameson's own formulation of the concept of mode of production insists that no mode of production exists in a "pure" state but always in co-existence with previous and newly forming modes of production. Therefore we cannot strictly say that there is just one mode of production but rather that there are a number of distinguishable modes of

production in existence at any given moment, whilst accepting that one of these modes will be the dominant mode. Thus, as Balibar argued, there may not simply be one social totality but 'two or more such totalities within one society'.<sup>38</sup> This, indeed, would appear to be the consistent conclusion of Jameson's formulation of mode of production, although a conclusion he does not draw.

However, it still does not resolve the discrepancies between Mandel's periodization and Jameson's own. The problem may become a little clearer if we briefly look at two other Marxist accounts of the transition from modernism to postmodernism: those of David Harvey in *The Condition of Postmodernity* and Edward Soja in *Postmodern Geographies*. Both writers share Jameson's analysis that significant structural transformations have taken place in the economic sphere over the last few decades but that these changes do not constitute a complete break with, or end of, the capitalist mode of production. Equally both writers subscribe to the economic consensus that the long post-war boom came to its final crashing halt with the oil crisis of 1973, at the very moment that postmodernism emerged as a full-blown concept. Harvey writes:

Somewhere between 1968 and 1972, therefore, we see postmodernism emerge as a full-blown though still incoherent movement out of the chrysalis of the anti-modern movement of the 1960s.<sup>39</sup>

For David Harvey the condition of postmodernity is not to be ascribed to developments in long waves of capitalist reproduction but rather through the transition in the nature of capital accumulation. That is in the transition from a system of "Fordist" production with its rather rigid and fixed system of capital accumulation to a more "flexible" system of accumulation in the 1970s and 1980s. In other words, postmodernism correlates with the ebb rather than the flow of Mandel's latest long wave.

Soja also locates the 'passage to postmodernity in the late 1960s and the series of explosive events which together marked the end of the long post-war boom in the capitalist world economy'.<sup>40</sup> Like Harvey, Soja defines the transition in the economic realm as postfordist and draws on Mandel's theory of long waves to support the thesis of economic transformation. However, unlike Jameson, Soja identifies postmodernity not with the third technological revolution but with the fourth modernisation and 'most recent phase of far-reaching socio-spatial restructuring that has followed the end of the long post-war economic boom'.<sup>41</sup>

What divides these otherwise mutually sympathetic analysts of postmodernism is essentially, which side of the economic crisis of the early to mid-70s they see as the economic pre-conditions for postmodernism itself. Jameson argues that it is the pre-1970s boom, Harvey and Soja, on the other hand, locate postmodernism's economic basis as Thatcherite monetarism and Reaganomics. Postmodernism may have emerged in the 1970s but it came of age in the 1980s and is now irredeemably associated with the conspicuous consumption of that decade, in other words, with the rise of that new breed of entrepreneurs and young high earning financial service workers, the so-called Yuppies. In criticising Jameson's notion of postmodernism as the cultural expression of the global logic of late capitalism, Frank Pfeil argues that postmodernism is much more of a local phenomenon, and more precisely the cultural practice of a specific group. Postmodernism is, Pfeil writes:

a cultural-aesthetic set of pleasures and practices created by and for a particular social group at a determinate moment in its collective history.<sup>42</sup>

That particular social group being the "P-M-Cs" or professional-managerial-class that were the children of the post-war baby boom and who, like postmodernism, came of age in the Thatcher/Reagan era. Jameson goes some way in endorsing this analysis:

one can also plausibly assert that "postmodernism" in the more limited sense of an ethos and a "life-style" ... is the expression of the "consciousness" of a whole new class fraction .... This larger and more abstract category has variously been labeled as a new petit bourgeoisie, a professional-managerial-class, or more succinctly as "the yuppies"

(PLLC, 407)

Or, again, Jameson acknowledges the repudiation of postmodernism's universalising tendencies by microgroups and various "minorities" as it 'is essentially a much narrower class-cultural operation serving white and male dominated elites in the advanced countries' (PLLC, 318). Jameson, even goes so far as to acknowledge that postmodernism is a specifically North American cultural phenomenon, but with the rider that it is the first truly "global" North American cultural phenomenon. Again, as with the discussion of Baudrillard above, I am suggesting that postmodernism may be a more limited phenomenon than Jameson suggests and that its status as a cultural dominant is seriously questionable.

Having said this, Jameson still insists on seeing postmodernism as the cultural expression of the deep structure of global capitalism and more precisely as the cultural expression of the third machine age; he writes, we may 'speak of our own period as the Third Machine Age' (PLLC, 36). As we shall see below this will prove essential for Jameson's reworking of the postmodern debate in terms of a ternary scheme of Realism - Modernism - Postmodernism. But if we reflect on Mandel's third machine age of electronic control, nuclear power and early generation computerised data processing systems, these hardly seem to characterise postmodern technology. Indeed postmodern technology is not thought of as electronic so much as computerised, the cumbersome and slow electronic machines associated with the sixties have given way to digital micro-technology, while the monolithic and megalomaniac visions of nuclear power have given way to privatised energy markets (it is worth remarking that since the mid-70s the development of nuclear

power for civilian uses, with the exception of India, has ground to a halt in all major industrial countries). As Baudrillard observes:

Something has changed, and the Faustian, Promethean, (perhaps Oedipal) period of production and consumption gives way to the "proteomic" era of networks, to the narcissistic and protean era of connections, contact, contiguity, feedback and generalized interface that goes with the universe of communication. With the television image - the television being the ultimate and perfect object for this new era - our own body and the whole surrounding universe become a control screen.<sup>43</sup>

What could be more Faustian or Promethean than those early utopian visions of the nuclear scientists, of unlimited, inexpensive power, of a whole new potential universe being opened before us, which have now degenerated into international squabbles over nuclear waste and, post-Chernobyl, the safety of nuclear installations. Baudrillard's ecstasy of communication represents the fourth technological revolution, the so-called information technology revolution, as the properly postmodern moment. This is the moment that Jameson so eloquently describes in his analyses of postmodern culture but it does not tie in with his Mandellian periodization. Indeed, such analyses as those of Jameson would seem to support Mandel's theory that late capitalism 'develops a permanent pressure to accelerate technological innovation'.<sup>44</sup> But at the same time, we should perhaps return to the question Mandel himself posed and ask whether or not the mid-70s signalled the emergence of a new long wave, characterised by the new technologies of the micro-chip and cyberspace. Whether or not we call it late capitalism or some other name is immaterial but postmodernism appears to be irrevocably the cultural logic of the fourth technological revolution and not Jameson's third.

### **The Phenomenology of Postmodernism**

As Jameson has observed there is something of a 'winner loses' logic to postmodernism: if one identifies one's object of study and then submits it to analysis, one runs the risk of

canonising and prioritising texts which it is the very rationale of postmodernism to disrupt and undermine. One also risks bringing to play upon those texts modernist assumptions of depth, truth, subjectivity etc. which are no longer appropriate in the discussion of postmodern phenomena. Postmodernism is inherently disparate, heterogeneous and eclectic, its impulse is to resist fixed categorisation through a perpetual dissolution of boundaries. So while the possibility of posing alternative individual readings of texts to those of Jameson's is feasible, these would not in themselves undermine his central thesis of postmodernism as a cultural logic, as it is in the nature of that logic itself to generate and sustain a multiplicity of readings. Faced with this theoretical dead-end, in which to pursue either option, of advancing a critique or abandoning the terrain altogether, ensnares one in the discourse of postmodernism, I shall take the former course. However, I shall not propose alternative or oppositional readings to individual texts but rather take generic categories and show how Jameson's own discourse is internally self-contradictory and begins to undermine his own thesis. The areas I intend to analyse in more detail are video and architecture, both of which are central forms in the postmodern debate.

As was briefly indicated above, the television screen has come to epitomise the new technology of the fourth technological revolution. According to Baudrillard it represents 'the ultimate and perfect object for this new era'.<sup>45</sup> Baudrillard argues that in the postmodern world the depth and reflexive transcendence which are irredeemably associated with the image and symbol, the mirror and the scene, have been replaced by the pure immanence of the unreflecting surface of the television screen. Today, the television, writes Baudrillard:

is the very space of habitation that is conceived as both receiver and distributor, as the space of both reception and operations, the control screen and the terminal which as such may be endowed with telematic power - that is, with the capability of regulating everything from a distance, including work in the home and, of course, consumption, play, social



relations and leisure.<sup>46</sup>

Television, suggests Baudrillard, provides the perfect figure for that new world of communication networks and cyberspace in which isolated individuals are plugged into their own control panels and divorced from any contact with reality except, and insofar as, it is simulated on the screen in front of them.

I have deliberately commenced this discussion of video with Baudrillard's reflections on television to foreground one of principal contradictions in postmodern theory, and particularly its universalising and totalizing discourse exemplified by Baudrillard above. That is the tendency, on the one hand, to celebrate heterogeneity and difference, whilst on the other, to refute determinate differentiation through an incessant dissolution of boundaries, reducing everything to a monotonous, homogenised plane. Although both video and television share the same channel of communication, and both come to us usually through a small screen in a black box and most frequently in our own homes, they are not the same thing. Furthermore, video itself is by no means a single unified form but designates a number of different activities and modes of reception. For example: the playing of video games, the renting of video films, what I will be examining here as more precisely called video art and most recently as interactive television. The dialectic of heterogeneity and homogeneity will persistently recur, in different forms, in the analyses that follow and would, I suggest, mark one of the unacknowledged limits, or inherent contradictions of postmodernism - a contradiction that Jameson's thesis wrestles with on a theoretical level but reduplicates in his own phenomenology.

For Jameson, video is the hegemonic cultural form today and 'is rigorously coterminous with postmodernism itself as a historical period' (PLLC, 73) - although one may well ask which historical period this is? Jameson does make the distinction between commercial television and experimental video or "video art" but he does not pursue this distinction any

further. Indeed, he immediately blurs the distinction by borrowing Raymond Williams' notion of television as "total flow" (PLLC, 70) whilst discussing experimental video for the rest of his chapter. Jameson sees video as characteristically postmodern in a number of key respects. Firstly, the concept of total flow seems to render obsolete any possibility of "critical distance", as the viewer is immersed in the continuous production of images. Secondly, according to Jameson, memory plays no role in video and therefore it can be said to lack historicity or a sense of history. The former claim, as I have said, rests on a proposition about television rather than video itself and thus, I would argue, has uncertain value for a theory of video. Whilst the latter claim, as I shall contend below, appears to be demonstrably wrong. For Jameson, though, these dual features produce that fundamental paradox for any theory of postmodernism with which I began this discussion, that is, that postmodernism is untheorisable. Jameson writes:

A description of the structural exclusion of memory, then, and of critical distance, might well lead on into the impossible, namely, a theory of video itself - how the thing blocks its own theorization becoming a theory in its own right. (PLLC, 71)

In other words, it is impossible to have a theory of video, except, and insofar as, we can theorise this impossibility of theorisation. I shall, therefore, follow Jameson's theorisation of this aporia in some detail. Jameson argues that the process of modernisation marks the end of the sacred and the spiritual and the ascendance of brute materiality:

Capitalism, and the modern age, is a period in which, with the extinction of the sacred and the "spiritual," the deep underlying materiality of all things has finally risen dripping and convulsive into the light of day; (PLLC, 67)

Culture has not suddenly become "material" in late capitalism but it always was so, only now we can recognise it as such. Video, according to Jameson, holds a privileged position in this respect because with long and repetitive experimental videos our traditional notions of deciphering and interpretation - of intention, meaning and message -

no longer seem to apply. What is foregrounded in contemporary video art and video installations, argues Jameson, is the machine and technology rather than an underlying hidden message.

Behind Jameson's insistence on the materiality of the medium lies a related but slightly different sub-text. For Jameson, post-structuralism, along with structuralism, deconstruction and literary theory in general have become grouped under the more general rubric of "theoretical discourse" and designated a postmodern phenomenon. That such disparate methodologies can simply be lumped together is by no means self-evident as it appears to elide fundamental differences of method as well as objects of study. At the same time, it would seem to suggest that postmodernism has become a catch-all term for any contemporary discourse and therefore its theoretical value is somewhat diminished. For Jameson, though, the subsumption of theoretical discourse into postmodernism allows him to draw on post-structuralist theory without addressing the contradictions of such a procedure. Specifically Jameson is drawing on the post-structuralist dissolution of the subject. I have already indicated in the previous chapter how, for Lacan, the subject is irredeemably split and fractured; whilst for Deleuze and Guattari the subject has become some kind of nomadic, schizoid process constantly remaking and renewing itself. Jameson accepts that, what he calls, the centred, autonomous, bourgeois subject has disappeared, that our sense of ourselves as subjects has become more fragmented and decentred. The correlative of the eclipse of the unified subject for cultural practice and production, argues Jameson, is that one can no longer see the "signature" of the individual artist upon given works. What Jameson means by this is that with modernism one could recognise a particular individual style, specific to the work of an individual artist, the works of a Joyce or a Wyndham Lewis, for example. With postmodernism, on the other hand, there is no longer a unified subject to articulate or give voice to that singular vision, to unify a particular style. Moreover the eclecticism of postmodernism seems to have led to a

blurring not only of the boundaries between high and low culture but also between the cultural artefacts of distinct artists. As I shall argue below this appears to be a peculiar and contradictory position for Jameson to maintain and, in terms of literature, one needs only to think of the very different styles of Thomas Pynchon and Toni Morrison to see that individual signatures are still very evident in contemporary cultural artefacts.

To return to video, though, Jameson argues, that it is no longer possible in video production to see the hand of the individual creative artist. Consequently, there can be no video canon as there will be no individual works which can be isolated, attributed to particular artists, and prioritised. There is only an intertextual video plane in which all texts exist in coextension with one another. Thus, Jameson asserts, there can be no great monuments of postmodern culture in the sense that we have the great monuments of modernism:

there are no video masterpieces, there can *never* be a video canon, and even an auteur theory of video (where signatures are still evidently present) becomes very problematical indeed. (PLLC, 78) [My italics]

Jameson follows these pronouncements with an analysis of a video text called '*Alien NATION*' and, somewhat perversely, after what he has just said, poses the question: what is the text about? Not surprisingly the question, or theme, of "alienation" arises but as this is a modernist rather than a postmodernist psychic experience, it proves too weak a candidate to carry the meaning of the text. Indeed the postmodern video text does not mean anything:

If interpretation is understood, in the thematic way, as the disengagement of a fundamental theme or meaning, then it seems clear that the postmodernist text - of which we have taken the videotape in question to be a privileged exemplar - is from that perspective defined as a structure or sign flow which resists meaning, whose fundamental inner logic is the exclusion of the emergence of themes as such in that sense, and which therefore systematically sets out to short-circuit traditional interpretative

temptations, (PLLC, 91-2)

Insofar as the interpretation of a postmodern text is possible, argues Jameson, that text must be considered bad or flawed.

One cannot help but feel that there is a certain self-fulfilling momentum to Jameson's analysis of postmodernist texts. Theoretically he rules out the possibility of their individuation or their possession of a latent meaning, through the contemporary fragmentation of the subject and the collapse of critical distance and depth. He then proceeds to analyse a text, the very title of which inscribes the kind of superficial interpretation that one immediately knows must be rejected and cannot provide (to use Baudrillard's term) the alibi for the text, only to discover that the text - which we have already been told cannot have a meaning - does not have a meaning and if it did it would not be good example to take in the first place. In short, if specific cultural artefacts are to be interpreted as the expression of a universal cultural logic, this would appear, *a priori*, to rule out certain aesthetic and interpretative possibilities.

In his essay 'Jameson's Complaint: video-art and the intertextual "time-wall"'<sup>47</sup> Nicholas Zurbrugg persuasively argues against Jameson's reading of video and in particular the meaningless anonymity which Jameson insists on as such a crucial feature of its aesthetic. The crux of Zurbrugg's argument is that Jameson is trapped behind an intertextual "time-wall", that is to say, his formative intellectual background is essentially that of a literary/printed culture and, in his analysis of visual and multi-media culture, he brings these literary/printed cultural assumptions with him. Thus Jameson's insistence that there can be no auteur theory of video because the signature of the creative artist is necessarily absent from video production, is nothing more than an extension of Barthes's thesis of the death of the author, reworked with a couple of metaphors from Raymond Williams and Baudrillard. As with many contemporary intellectuals, argues Zurbrugg, who are faced

with the debilitating situation in which their traditional interpretative practices are not appropriate, Jameson projects his own 'conceptual confusion'<sup>48</sup> onto the subject matter itself. In other words, it is not video art that is caught in a postmodern malaise of meaningless, depersonalised, self-referentiality but it is rather symptomatic of Jameson's inability to come to terms with a new form which he does not fully understand and cannot appreciate. In place of Jameson's ahistorical, non-canonical and impersonal perspective of video, Zurbrugg suggests an alternative perspective in which the work of Nam June Paik (whom Jameson also cites) and Robert Wilson, have now become canonical. Paik's work in particular contains a great deal more personal and biographical material than Jameson would deem permissible in video art, as well as having thematic content. Wilson's work similarly presents a much more "meaningful" version of postmodern multi-media performance than Jameson describes. Video art, argues Zurbrugg, 'requires at least partial contemplation in its own terms, rather than those of other more familiar prior discourse'.<sup>49</sup> Jameson's analysis of video, writes Zurbrugg, lacks that sense of 'renewed joy' before a significant discovery because he rules out the possibility of there being anything there beforehand.

As I said above, there is no advantage to be gained by merely opposing one set of postmodernist readings against another. However, Zurbrugg's article does raise two important issues with respect to Jameson's analysis of postmodern cultural artefacts. Firstly, the textual nature of his analyses, of which I will say more below. The second issue is Jameson's ambivalence towards postmodern culture in general. In the conclusion to *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* Jameson assures his readers that he is an 'enthusiastic consumer of postmodernism' (one cannot help but think, if he was that enthusiastic about it there would be no need for such a reminder). Jameson further assures us:

I like the architecture and a lot of the newer visual work, in particular the newer photography. The music is not bad to listen to, or the poetry to read; the novel is the weakest of the newer cultural areas and is considerably excelled by its narrative counterparts in film and video .... My sense is that this is essentially a visual culture, wired for sound - but one where the linguistic element ... is slack and flabby, and not to be made interesting without ingenuity, daring, and keen motivation.

(PLLC, 298 -9)

Perhaps with the exception of architecture, one does not sense that enthusiasm when reading Jameson's analyses of postmodern culture, much of which is derived from secondary sources, and certainly not the sheer joy of the language that one feels when reading a Jamesonian analysis of Balzac, or Flaubert, or indeed any modernist writer. Once again Jameson seems to be adrift between his totalizing theory of postmodernism and his own existential experience, or phenomenology of postmodernism. Theoretically Jameson emphasises the profoundly illiterate nature of late capitalism and the predominantly visual character of postmodern culture. This appears to preclude his enjoyment of postmodern fiction - with the exception of E.L. Doctorow and Michael Herr - but at the same time, his interpretative practice remains literary and textually bound which precludes any genuine appreciation or analysis of other cultural forms in their own terms. Jameson's judgement upon postmodern fiction itself appears rather peculiar; one need only mention a few postmodern novelists such as Angela Carter, Ishmael Reed and Italo Calvino, to rebuff the charge of slackness and flabbiness. What is more significant is the writers that Jameson's own definition of postmodernism excludes: writers such as Toni Morrison or Gloria Naylor, writers whose work explicitly deals with issues of history, memory and narrative, the very thematics which are supposedly absent from contemporary culture. Unless, along with Jameson, and with good reason, we exempt these writers from postmodernism, in which case does this not once more problematize Jameson's notion of postmodernism as a cultural dominant, as these latter writers surely represent the main current of contemporary North American literature.

Jameson's ambivalence towards postmodernism is succinctly expressed in a 1984 review of Don DeLillo's *The Names*. Jameson writes:

For many of us, Don DeLillo has been the most interesting and talented of American post-modernist novelists (which is to say finally, I suppose, of current white male novelists, although the category may also include a few individuals of other gender and racial specifications).<sup>50</sup>

However, as the notion of a postmodern masterpiece, or great work, is ruled out *a priori*, Jameson must qualify his assessment of DeLillo: 'you will be more satisfied if you read it as a determinedly minor work'.<sup>51</sup> In other words, this is a great book, as long as you do not try to think of it as great literature. This confusion as to whether or not postmodern fiction can constitute great literature is only heightened when Jameson poses the question as to whether *The Names* 'was to have been the "major novel" and the great modernist statement (or the Book of the World, a la Pynchon)'. But, Jameson asks, 'do post-modernists make major statements of that kind?'.<sup>52</sup> The answer is implicitly No! Postmodernist authors do not, or can no longer, make grand statements and monumental works. If this is the case what is the status of Pynchon in the above statement? If postmodernist writers can no longer make major statements in the modernist sense, is Jameson trying to suggest that Pynchon is a modernist writer, as he has written a Book of the World? One must either draw the conclusion that Pynchon is not a postmodernist writer or that he is a postmodernist writer and that postmodernists can produce monumental works in the modernist tradition - if not in the same way. Pynchon is assuredly a, if not "the," postmodernist author and the Book of the World in question (presumably *Gravity's Rainbow*) the paradigmatic postmodern work of fiction. Indeed *Gravity's Rainbow* stands in relation to postmodernism in general in much the same way that Joyce's *Ulysses* stands to modernism. Furthermore, *Gravity's Rainbow* would appear to be just the kind of text - one which attempts to map individual existential experience to the new spatial logic of post-second World War global capitalism - which Jameson is



calling for under the slogan of "cognitive mapping" but which he insists does not yet exist. On the one hand, Jameson's argues that postmodernism is utterly distinct from modernism with its individual styles and monumental character, but on the other, he persistently exhibits this non-monumentalism as a sign of postmodernism's political and aesthetic impoverishment.

The second area of Jameson's phenomenology I shall examine is his analysis of postmodern architecture. Jameson's analysis of the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles has proved to be one of the most persuasive aspects of his analysis of postmodernism in general, but once again we find a number of theoretical issues that seem to remain suspended in the analysis. Jameson writes:

I believe that, with a certain number of other characteristic postmodern buildings, such as the Beaubourg in Paris or the Eaton Centre in Toronto, the Bonaventure aspires to being a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city; to this new total space, meanwhile, corresponds a new collective practice, a new mode in which individuals move and congregate, something like the practice of a new and historically original kind of hypercrowd. (PLLC, 40)

Jameson endorses the Bonaventure's populism or "populist aspect": it is he informs us, tourist attraction. However, that other characteristic of postmodern architecture, the 'respect [for] the vernacular of the American city fabric' (PLLC, 39) is a little more difficult to substantiate: you actually enter the hotel around the back and three stories up, whilst its skin of reflective glass "repels" rather than embraces the surrounding environment. Jameson does not feel that this reading is incompatible with assertions of integration with the vernacular though, insisting that 'ideally the minicity of Portman's Bonaventure ought not to have entrances at all, since the entryway is always the seam that links the building to the rest of the city that surrounds it' (PLLC, 40). Jameson goes further to suggest that the Bonaventure does not want so much to be part of the city as its

'replacement or substitute' but he does not explain how such a substitution constitutes a respect for the vernacular of the city. What Jameson wishes to stress about the new sense of space encapsulated in the Bonaventure is its disorientation: the confusion of inside and outside, of front and back, of height and depth, that the Hotel creates.

The modernist overtones of Jameson's description are very clear and therefore he needs to make a distinction between modern and postmodern spatiality. Modernism's new utopian space, suggests Jameson, was radically separated from the degraded and fallen city fabric which it repudiated; it was like an alien form inserted into an environment which 'would fan out and eventually transform its surroundings by the very power of its new spatial language' (PLLC,41). Postmodern spatiality, on the other hand, 'is content to let the fallen city fabric continue to be in its being . . . no further effects, no larger protopolitical Utopian transformation, is either expected or desired'. This new sense of spatiality is what Jameson calls, borrowing the term from Baudrillard, "hyperspace". Hyperspace is a space for which no ordinary space exists, it is a simulation of a space; like its correlative "hyperreality", it is a space that is reproduced and reduplicated. But it is not simply something, a space or an object that can be reproduced, it is that which must be reproduced. Hyperspace and hyperreality is, so to speak, more real than Real, it conveys the sense of the thing, its thinginess, without the sordid materiality of the thing itself. We can therefore have the tropical "ness" of Hotel atriums in Los Angeles or Chicago without the inconvenience of the tropics, 1930 "ness" without the great depression.

This new sense of space is further developed in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* through an analysis of the postmodern architect Frank Gehry's house. This building explicitly plays with different kinds of space and materials, it collapses our sense of inside and outside and it exudes Californianness. The older parts of the building are, says Jameson, 'a present reality that has been transformed into a simulacrum by the

process of wrapping, or quotation, and has thereby become not historical but historicist - an allusion to a present out of real history which might just as well be a past removed from real history' (PLLC, 118). This building would seem to be exemplary of everything Jameson wishes to attribute to postmodern hyperspace. The dilemma is that Gehry's house is not only not exemplary of postmodern architecture generally, it is not even exemplary of Gehry's own architecture. Jameson is clearly aware of this - he notes 'the more original Gehry's building turns out to be, the less generalizable its features may be for postmodernism in general' (PLLC, 108) - but still he wishes to examine this building as 'one of the few postmodern buildings which does seem to have some powerful claim on revolutionary spatiality' (PLLC, 107). As I mentioned a moment ago postmodernism's inherent heterogeneity will always raise such problems of what can be said to be characteristic but this statement does seem to resonate within Jameson's texts. The opening sentence of Jameson's analysis of the Bonaventure Hotel describes it as:

a work which is in many ways uncharacteristic of that postmodern architecture whose principal proponents are Robert Venturi, Charles Moore, Michael Graves, and, more recently, Frank Gehry, but which to my mind offers some very striking lessons about the originality of postmodernist space. (PLLC, 38)

If Jameson's examples of postmodern architectural space are by his own acknowledgement not exactly representative of postmodernism, then what we could ask would be? David Shumway has pointed out that '[p]ostmodern architecture as defined by Jencks and Venturi does not fit any of Jameson's claims for postmodernism, except one: its historical reference, or historicism'<sup>53</sup> but, he adds, so does just about every other 'suburban dwelling above the economic level of Levitt's first developments of the 50s'. Even in this respect Jameson's choice of the Bonaventure would seem to be rather strange as it displays none of the historicism that is so characteristic of postmodernism. The Bonaventure is according to Shumway 'an almost perfect example of what Charles Jencks calls late

modernism',<sup>54</sup> and as for Jameson's description of hyperspace Shumway comments that it is simply wrong:

What the lobby of the Bonaventure contains is enormous depth; what it lacks are precisely the surfaces which are normally significant in hotel lobbies : walls which divide eating spaces from waiting spaces, which advertise services, or which display merchandise.<sup>55</sup>

Even Jameson's rhetoric, the sense of 'plummeting to splashdown' on the elevators is a classic modernist trope of the exhilaration of speed. The disorientation of space, of which Jameson makes so much, the concealed entrances and the Hotel's flat reflective skin of mirror glass, has as much to do with keeping out the populace - the indigenous downtown Angelenos, the poor, the homeless, the blacks and the hispanics - as it has with evading modernist utopian aspirations. Indeed, postmodern architecture's obsession with security and surveillance would seem to be as protopolitical as any modernist utopian vision. In *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future of Los Angeles* Mike Davis describes Frank Gehry as the Dirty Harry of postmodern architects, whose work 'clarifies the underlying relations of repression, surveillance and exclusion that characterize the fragmented, paranoid spatiality towards which Los Angeles seems to aspire'.<sup>56</sup> Whilst not wishing to endorse Davis' rather apocalyptic rhetoric and reductive assessment of Gehry's relationship to postmodernism, there does appear to me to be something rather paradoxical about a populist and democratic architecture, the basic design feature of which is based upon prisons.

This confusion in Jameson's analysis of postmodern architecture once more raises those questions I considered in relation to video; does Jameson's theory of postmodernism rule out, *a priori*, certain interpretative options? And here I would like to return to Zurbrugg's notion of an intertextual "time-wall", that is to say, Jameson's interpretative and analytic practice remains textually constrained and delineated. To give an example, Jameson

makes a strong distinction between modernist and postmodernist architecture. He writes:

[The newer buildings] no longer attempt, as did the masterworks and monuments of high modernism, to insert a different, a distinct, an elevated, a new Utopian language into the tawdry and commercial sign system of the surrounding city, but rather they seek to speak that very language, using its lexicon and syntax as that has been emblematically "learned from Las Vegas". (PLLC, 39)

Jameson reads space as a text and the semiotics of space as its grammar. Indeed, Jameson goes so far as to suggest that we read the urban cityscape as the text, rooms as its minimal units, buildings as sentences, corridors, doorways, staircases as adverbs and furniture, paintings etc. as adjectives (PLLC, 105). I shall examine in greater detail the representation of space in the following section; what I wish to emphasise here is once more the textual nature of Jameson's practice. I am not suggesting that Jameson has never seen the Bonaventure Hotel and has only read descriptions of it,<sup>57</sup> but that the disorientation of space that Jameson locates in his object of study is more to do with his own sense of confusion and disorientation than an inherent feature of postmodern spatiality. It would appear that Jameson has forgotten his own first lesson of dialectical criticism: that the critic attempts to think her/himself back into the process of criticism, that they account for their own historical situation. Theories of textuality are, according to Jameson, themselves a postmodern phenomenon and as such an aspect of Jameson's object of study. For Jameson, however, they also provide the method of analysis, as he reads all postmodern phenomena as a text in relation to an intertextual field. In short, there is an inherent circularity to Jameson's project.

### **The Spatial Logic of Late Capitalism**

As I outlined above, one of the principal characteristics of postmodernism, according to Jameson, is that it entails a new conception of space. For Jameson, this new postmodern space represents an 'alarming disjunction' between our sense and perception of our own

bodies and their immediate situation on the one hand and the built environment on the other. What is particularly distinctive about postmodern space, as opposed to modernist conceptions of space, is its apparent depthlessness and the disappearance of all forms of distance, be that critical, metaphysical, political or economic. Postmodern space is, therefore, in Baudrillard's terms, hyperspace: the space of simulacra and simulation, a space of pure immanence and multiple surfaces. What Jameson wishes to emphasise about this new sense of space is its disorientating and saturated quality. Thus writes Jameson, this new sense of space:

involves the suppression of distance ... and the relentless saturation of any remaining voids and empty places, to the point where the postmodern body ... is now exposed to a perpetual barrage of immediacy from which all sheltering layers and intervening mediations have been removed.<sup>58</sup>

In this realm of chaotic immediacy, argues Jameson, our bodies are 'bereft of spatial coordinates' and 'incapable of distantiation' while 'the prodigious new expansion of multinational capital ends up penetrating and colonizing those very precapitalist enclaves (Nature and the Unconscious) which offered extraterritorial and Archimedean footholds for critical effectivity' (PLLC, 49). In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* Jameson developed this spatial theme with analyses of video, film and television, as well as sculpture and architecture, media which particularly offer themselves to spatial analysis. Equally, the current lack of sophistication of video graphics lends itself to an analysis in terms of its depthlessness and surface play. At the same time, Jameson's book exhibited a marked decline of interest in literature, which, as I indicated above, Jameson sees as the least satisfactory component of postmodern culture. Narrative is, of course, a temporal medium which Jameson and other Postmodernists insist has had its day.

The overriding problem with postmodern hyperspace, for Jameson, is our inability, or

indeed the impossibility, to conceive of our situation as individual subjects within this new global network of multinational capital. This space has become unrepresentable and we are left with only the ability to grasp our most immediate surroundings. Therefore, suggests Jameson, what we require is a new form of political aesthetic or what he terms "cognitive mapping". The notion of cognitive mapping hinges on a dialectic of immediate perception and imaginative or imaginary conception: that is to say, our ability to extrapolate from the mental map we have of our immediate perceptible situation to a larger imaginary spatial context; in other words, from our immediate urban and city environment to 'that mental map of the social and global totality we all carry around in our heads in variously garbled forms'.<sup>59</sup> We all necessarily, writes Jameson, cognitively map our individual social relations locally and nationally but now must attempt to map them in terms of the 'totality of class relations on a global (or ... multinational) scale'.<sup>60</sup> The failure to achieve such cognitive maps, argues Jameson, will have crippling effects on political experience and any socialist project in the postmodern world.

Here again though, Jameson's spatial analysis is working on two levels simultaneously. On the one hand, he describes the existential experience of postmodern spatiality, and on the other, he wishes to correlate specific types of spatiality with particular modes of production. And as we shall see in the following section, each type of spatiality will engender its own aesthetic or specific regime of representation. Jameson writes:

I have tried to suggest that the three historical stages of capital have each generated a type of space unique to it, even though these three stages of capitalist space are obviously far more profoundly interrelated than are the spaces of other modes of production. The three types of space I have in mind are all the result of discontinuous expansions or quantum leaps in the enlargement of capital, in the latter's penetration and colonization of hitherto uncommodified areas.<sup>61</sup>

Jameson defines the first type of space, that generated by market capitalism, as the logic of

a grid, that is, a geometrical space of 'infinite equivalence and extension'. The second type of space corresponds to monopoly capitalism, or imperialism, and can be characterised as structural disjunction, that is, the increasing discrepancy between individual experience and 'a more properly structural model of the conditions of existence of that experience'.<sup>62</sup> The third type of space is the postmodern spatiality of late capitalism which has been our object of study here. What we have yet to determine, though, is what Jameson means by "space" itself and "spatiality"; indeed are the two terms synonymous as they appear to be in Jameson's own texts.

The authority and theoretical foundation for Jameson's conception of spatiality is the work Henri Lefebvre and in particular his seminal text *The Production of Space*.<sup>63</sup> The central thesis of *The Production of Space* is encapsulated in its title, that is to say, that space is not given but is produced. In other words, space is not a neutral category, an objective and innocent realm, but it is a social construct, constituted through social and material practices. However, the two halves of Lefebvre's central concept need further clarification for although space, and specifically social space as it will be defined below, may be produced, it cannot be said to be a product in the sense that we generally think of other commodities or products - that is to say, as a finite thing, the end result of a particular process or action. Lefebvre notes that Marx uses the term production in two distinct senses. Initially Marx maintained a very broad definition of production to indicate the ways in which 'human beings are said to produce their own life, their own consciousness, their own world'.<sup>64</sup> It was only in the later work that Marx came to narrow down his definition to refer to purely economic production. Lefebvre takes Marx's broad definition as his starting point and then seeks to further refine it through a distinction between "production" and "creation", "product" and work. For Lefebvre, a work is something that is irreplaceable and unique whilst a product 'can be reproduced exactly, and is in fact the result of repetitive acts and gestures'.<sup>65</sup> Thus nature could be said to create but not,



strictly speaking, to produce; production is the result of human agency which can impose order and repetition on aleatory processes. At the same time, human agency also creates works as well as producing products; the distinction between the two according to Lefebvre, is that labour is secondary in the former and predominant in the latter. It is possible therefore to posit the notion of natural space, a primordial nature that is given and not produced. Space is not a product in the sense that other objects of production are products because Space is not reducible to the status of an object, space is not a thing. Space can be reproducible and repetitious, indeed these will be central characteristics in the control of space and the perpetuation of particular social formations. But to reduce space solely to these terms is to see space only in terms of the representations of space. Space, argues Lefebvre, is not a thing amongst other things but 'it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships',<sup>66</sup> in other words, space is a set of relations between things. Lefebvre writes:

space is neither a 'subject' nor an 'object' but rather a social reality - that is to say, a set of relations and forms.<sup>67</sup>

More specifically, social space embodies the social relations of a given society and the forms which those relations take; to use Lefebvre's phrase: social space 'is at once a *work* and *product* - a materialization of "social being"'.<sup>68</sup>

But we have yet to define what we actually mean by space itself, or what Edward Soja calls "spatiality", that is, socially constructed space. Traditionally, argues Lefebvre, there have been two ways of perceiving space: Euclidean or geometric space and mental space. The discourse of Euclidean space and classical perspectivism, according to Lefebvre, prevailed from roughly the sixteenth century, or the Renaissance, through to the end of nineteenth century. Mental space, on the other hand, is the space of philosophers and epistemologists. Mental space is produced by theoretical practice and in turn becomes the

site of theoretical practice separated from real space:

The quasi-logical presupposition of an identity between mental space ... and real space creates an abyss between the mental sphere on one side and the physical and social spheres on the other.<sup>69</sup>

However, both of these conceptions of space rest upon a dual fallacy or illusion, that is to say, the illusion of opacity and transparency. The illusion of opaqueness sees space only in terms of immediate surface appearances, refusing to see beyond these appearances. In this sense space is 'comprehended only as objectively measurable appearances grasped through some combination of sensory-based perception'.<sup>70</sup> Space is reduced to physical objects and forms that then 'become susceptible to prevailing scientific explanation in the form of orderly, reproduceable description and the discovery of empirical regularities'.<sup>71</sup> We have, in other words, a neutral and depoliticised space which submerges any sense of social conflict. The illusion of transparency, on the other hand, obfuscates space not by focusing on appearances but by ignoring physical objects and concrete space altogether, reducing space to:

a mental construct alone, a way of thinking, an ideational process in which the 'image' of reality takes epistemological precedence over the tangible substance and appearance of the real world.<sup>72</sup>

Space is once more reduced to a depoliticised sphere in which social realities and social conflicts are erased. Traditional conceptions of space, therefore, either see space as objectively measurable and reducible to the objects and forms in space, or as an ideal construct, but both presuppose a conception of space as innocent and neutral. Lefebvre, on the other hand, argues that both conceptions are the product of a particular form of spatiality, what he terms "abstract space". Abstract space is coextensive with the rise of capitalism and is to be distinguished from "absolute space". Absolute space, space as given, is the space of primordial nature that I have already spoken of, it is also the space of all religions as it is a conception of space as an empty form that is filled with things.

Abstract space, according to Lefebvre, has three essential formants: the geometric formant, be that Euclidean space or a philosophical absolute; the optical or visual formant, that is the reduction of space to an image and finally what Lefebvre calls the phallic formant or the brutality of political power. Abstract space is essentially the product of the division and abstraction of labour and therefore the product of violence; it is a political space instituted and controlled by a state. Abstract space, then, is itself institutional and functions objectally, that is to say 'as a set of things/signs and their formal relationships'<sup>73</sup> and in this sense it is a space of political power that seeks to mask its power by an illusory transparency. Abstract space is contradictory in the sense that it is at once homogeneous and fragmentary, or to be more precise, it can be characterised by its drive towards homogeneity but it singularly fails to achieve this goal:

The dominant form of space [writes Lefebvre], that of the centres of wealth and power, endeavours to mould the spaces it dominates (i.e. peripheral spaces), and it seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there.<sup>74</sup>

Thus, abstract space seeks to eradicate difference and in so doing sows the seeds of a new conception of space, a space that emphasises difference rather than eradicates it. This differential space is what we would now call the space of the postmodern. It is worth noting at this point that Jameson appears to associate abstract space, not so much with the space of capitalism *per se* but more precisely with a specific stage of capitalism, that is the space of "late" capitalism.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, Jameson does not refer to the notion of differential space, although this clearly would have much in common with his conception of postmodern spatiality.

The problem with traditional, and many contemporary, conceptions of space is that they fail to conceive space in its full complexity, they reduce space either to a representation of space or to a transcendental absolute. That is, space as a text or mental representation and

space as simply given. However, as I have indicated, space is not simply given, it is not objective, neutral and empty but is produced, it is the product of a social practice. What is required, according to Lefebvre, is a "unitary theory" of space, a theory that encompasses physical space, mental space and social space, or what Lefebvre terms: the perceived, the conceived and the lived. Lefebvre returns time and again to this triad but never as a rigid formula or schema by which space can be divided up and partitioned off. For Lefebvre the production of space is always a process, each moment in that process feeding into and off the others. As soon as the perceived - conceived - lived triad is taken as an abstract model and imposed upon space it loses its explanatory force. Lefebvre transcodes this overly anthropological terminology into more properly spatial terms as: spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces. Spatial practice refers to the production, reproduction, particular locations and spatial sets characteristic of any given social formation. Representations of space refers to 'the relations of production and to the 'order' which those relations impose',<sup>76</sup> in other words to the regime of signification, the signs, codes and knowledge which a given formation utilises. Representational spaces, on the other hand, refers to the deep structures, the 'complex symbolisms, sometimes coded, sometimes not, linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life'.<sup>77</sup>

To return to Jameson after this rather lengthy digression, we could perhaps note that Jameson's typology of space shares a certain family resemblance with Lefebvre's but it would be unproductive to follow this train of thought any further. What I wish to come back to one more time, however, is the question of textuality, and the reading of space as a text.<sup>78</sup> Jameson makes the familiar defence of this transcoding operation, in that it throws a given problematic into a new light and opens up new perspectives upon the issues involved. Jameson writes '[s]uch a rewriting program may be useful in our present architectural context, provided it is not confused with a semiotics of architecture ... but rather to awaken the question of the conditions of possibility of this or that spatial form'

(PLLC, 105). Lefebvre argues to the contrary that this kind of transcoding operation can reveal nothing about the genesis of spatial forms:

the notions of message, code, information and so on cannot help us trace the genesis of a space; the fact remains, however, that an already produced space can be decoded, can be *read*.<sup>79</sup>

In other words, we can read space as a text in the way that Jameson is suggesting but we cannot derive from that reading the information he proposes for the justification of the operation in the first place. Linguistic and semiotic analysis of space can be made, but it can be made only on spaces that have already been produced; they are therefore limited to just one level of Lefebvre's unitary theory, that is: the conceived or representations of space. Indeed, space cannot be reduced to the language of texts because those signifying practices, themselves, exist within space. It is true to say that space signifies, but, argues Lefebvre, as to what it signifies is unclear, confused and jumbled, he writes: 'social space can in no way be compared to a blank page upon which a specific message has been inscribed',<sup>80</sup> because it is in fact over-inscribed, or over-determined. By transcoding his spatial analyses into linguistic and textual terms, Jameson has reduced the complexity of space to its representations, a position from which he will thus propose the depthlessness of this new spatial configuration. But as Lefebvre consistently reminds us:

It is clear, therefore, that a spatial code is not simply a means of reading or interpreting space: rather it is a means of living in that space, of understanding it, and of producing it.<sup>81</sup>

Once again, therefore, Jameson appears to be reduplicating problems in his phenomenological analysis which he has attempted to resolve through his theoretical framework. If we recall our first encounter with space, in 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', it was conceived as "a" feature of contemporary experience that had undergone restructuration with the advent of postmodernism, in conjunction with a corresponding change in our sense of temporality. When these notions were subsumed in the following

essay the formulation had been modified to the extent that it was now 'empirically arguable' that space was a cultural dominant. By the time we reach *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* the need for empirical verification and argument appears to have been abandoned, postmodernism is unequivocally spatial. Postmodernism, writes Jameson 'eschews temporality for space' and if temporality has any place left at all 'it would seem to be better to speak of the writing of it than of any lived experience'. The majority of Jameson's text, therefore, is devoted to spatial analysis with only one of the ten chapters concerned with time, and that concerned with an analysis of a *nouveau roman*, a form Jameson alone persists in describing as postmodern. The category of space would seem to have evolved from "a" feature of the postmodern, then, to the constitutive feature of it, 'an existential and cultural dominant' (PLLC, 365).

On the one hand, Jameson's concern to reassert the category of space has developed into what David Harvey calls "spatial fetishism". In a critique of Lefebvre, Harvey dissents from Lefebvre's insistence on the "decisive" and "pre-eminent" 'role of spatial structural forces in modern capitalist society'.<sup>82</sup> The problem essentially revolves around the status one accords to spatial determinants within specific social formations and more generally in the process of historical and social transformation. I have already noted how, for Lefebvre, space has a unique status, what he called the materialisation of social being. Everything exists "within" space and yet space does not exist without a subject or a body to live, perceive and conceive that space. Therefore space becomes a kind of social morphology: 'it is to lived experience [writes Lefebvre] what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure'.<sup>83</sup> Lefebvre frequently alludes to a spatio-temporal dialectic, in the sense that time can only be known and actualised in space and through spatial practice whilst, at the same time, space can only be known in and through time. However, Lefebvre never fully works through this dialectic and temporality is marginalised within his work in much the same way as space

was ignored in earlier social theory. Indeed, Lefebvre appears to suggest at one point, what Jameson terms, a new theory of history with space as the primary force behind social transformation:

The space of capitalist accumulation thus gradually came to life, and began to be fitted out. This process of animation is admiringly referred to as history, and its motor sought in all kinds of factors: dynastic interests, ideologies, the ambitions of the mighty, the formation of nation states, demographic pressures, and so on. This is the road to a ceaseless analysing of, and searching for, dates and chains of events. Inasmuch as space is the locus of all such chronologies, might it not constitute a principle of explanation at least as acceptable as any other?<sup>84</sup>

For critics like Harvey, Lefebvre goes too far in this direction and rather than seeing space as '*a separate structure* with its own laws of inner transformation and construction' it should be seen as '*the expression* of a set of relations embedded in some broader structure (such as the social relations of production)'.<sup>85</sup> I shall return to the question of the spatio-temporal dialectic in relation to Jameson's distinction between modernism and postmodernism in the following section. What I shall highlight here is the contradictory nature of Jameson's spatial fetishism.

Jameson's reassertion of the category of space must be seen in the wider context of the renewed interest in space in the social sciences, generated by the work of Lefebvre amongst others, and crystallising in debates within Marxist geography in the 1970s. Historically space has been accorded a subsidiary position within social theory, and has generally been taken to be a realm of stasis, a realm utterly opposed to time and in more sophisticated versions of this theory, a realm of closure in which meaning is fixed. Time, on the other hand, has been seen as dynamic, disruptive and transformative. Thus time and history has been considered of significance whilst space and geography are peripheral concerns. Edward Soja writes:

For at least the past century, time and history have occupied a privileged position in the practical and theoretical consciousness of Western Marxism and critical social science.<sup>86</sup>

Space has always been assumed to be a neutral objective category, in other words, space is simply given, a void in which phenomena exist and events take place. Quoting one of Foucault's occasional references to space, Soja notes that:

Space still tends to be treated as fixed, dead, undialectical; time as richness, life, dialectic, the revealing context for critical social theorization.<sup>87</sup>

The great appeal of the historical imagination has been its emancipatory potential, history is dynamic, it is about change and transformation. Historical explanation holds the seeds of a qualitatively different future, the utopian transformation of the present social conditions. Modern geography, on the other hand, was 'reduced primarily to the accumulation, classification, and theoretically innocent representation of factual material describing the areal differentiation of the earth's surface'.<sup>88</sup> The new Marxist geographers of the late 60s and early 70s focused upon the relation between space and society and how this relation should be conceptualised. The argument ran that all 'so-called spatial relations and spatial processes were actually social relations taking a particular geographical form'.<sup>89</sup> Geographical issues, therefore, 'could ... not be explained without a prior understanding of the economy and of wider social and political processes'.<sup>90</sup>

This, then, is the context in which Jameson's reassertion of the importance of spatial analysis has taken place. However, whilst Jameson appears on the one hand to be guilty of a spatial fetishism, on the other, he simply reduplicates the old problematic that the Marxist geographers were attempting to get away from. As we have seen, Jameson sees postmodernism as marked by a general loss of temporality, or more precisely by a waning of narrative and the historical imagination. But rather than seeing this as providing new possibilities for new forms of politics, Jameson appears to see the postmodern world as a realm in which no meaningful politics can exist. This situation is exacerbated by Jameson's



high level of abstraction, and broad generalisation, which has an inherent tendency to become overly schematic. Thus: temporality, narrative and historical thought have become almost exclusively associated with modernism, whilst space, free floating surfaces and an ahistorical imagination signify our postmodern experience. More importantly though they remain locked within a particular form of dualistic or dichotomous thought which, either overtly or covertly, stigmatises one side of the debate whilst valorising the other. In short, modernism, temporality, history are seen as positive terms whilst postmodernism, space, immanence are once more taken to be negative terms. I have already mentioned how Jameson finds postmodern space "alarming" and "disorientating", but more than this he sees it as essentially unrepresentable, as chaotic depthlessness. In her essay 'Politics and Space/Time' Doreen Massey argues that such a conception of space deprives it of any meaningful politics. Despite Jameson's ostensible intentions space has once more become defined negatively in relation to time. Space is defined as the absence of time, as stasis or atemporality, whilst time once more is defined positively as the realm of change and transformation. Massey notes how in Jameson this kind of dichotomous thinking clearly relates to another of Jameson's dualisms: that between transcendence and immanence, 'with the former connotationally associated with the temporal and immanence with the spatial.'<sup>91</sup> Consequently, Jameson's views on postmodernism and the possibility of any new cultural politics are extremely pessimistic. Faced with the 'horror of multiplicity' of postmodern space Jameson can only call for new forms of cognitive mapping. What is particularly strange about this situation though is the profoundly undialectical character of Jameson's thought. He also appears not to have learnt the lessons of Lefebvre and Soja whom he constantly invokes as the authority behind his spatial analysis. Jameson's conception of postmodern space as depthless, chaotic and atemporal is a far cry from Lefebvre's conception of social space as differential, contradictory and conflictual; as a space not reduced to its representations but a social reality occupied by bodies in a constant state of struggle. I shall, therefore, conclude this section with one of the salutary

lessons of *The Production of Space*, the need to constantly resist all forms of reductionism:

reductionism entails the reduction of time to space, the reduction of use value to exchange value, the reduction of objects to signs, and the reduction of 'reality' to the semiosphere; it also means that the movement of the dialectic is reduced to a logic, and social space to a purely formal mental space.<sup>92</sup>

### **Realism - Modernism - Postmodernism**

The second chapter of *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, is a slightly revised reprint of Jameson's early essay 'The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodern Debate'. As I outlined above, Jameson concluded this essay with an assertion of the need to eschew the adoption of moralising positions in favour of a fully dialectical and historical analysis of the contemporary cultural scene. Jameson argues that the only way to avoid that particular postmodern paradox - 'where all seemingly cultural positions turn out to be symbolic forms of political moralising, except for the single overtly political note [that is, postmodernism's "populism"], which suggests a slippage from politics back into culture again' - is to grasp the present as history.<sup>93</sup> However, this historical analysis remained deferred.

In the revised version of this essay Jameson extends these observations, noting that there is an inherent reversibility to postmodern theory whereby its various binary oppositions tend to fold back into each other and 'the position of the observer is turned inside out and the tabulation recontinued on some larger scale' (PLLC, 64). Consequently, to reflect upon the nature of postmodern political art in a situation which rules out its possibility beforehand may not be the best way of addressing the dilemma. A more productive approach is to reflect upon the conditions of possibility of the problem itself, that is, why is it no longer possible to conceive of political art in the older sense, of Brecht say, and in

what conditions would a renewed political art once more become possible. To stage the problem in this way is to begin to move away from the inherent circularity of postmodern theorising, or alternatively the static presentation of its various dichotomies. Jameson suggests that this can be achieved and the whole problem articulated by a more genuinely historical schema if modern/postmodern dualism is lifted onto a higher level of abstraction through the addition of a third term - realism - although, Jameson writes, this option remains 'absent from the present work'.<sup>94</sup>

In fact Jameson has hinted at this dialectic of realism - modernism - and as yet-to-be theorised post-second World War culture since his earliest writings. In 'On Politics and Literature' (1968) Jameson described the psychological fragmentation of the subject in post-war North American society, suggesting that 'I can best do this by suggesting three general stages that political literature has undergone'.<sup>95</sup> These three general stages are the realism of Balzac, the modernism of Brecht or Aragon and, what we would now call, the postmodern decentred subject of contemporary capitalism. Similarly, in 'On Raymond Chandler' (1970), Jameson sketches a loose version of this dialectic, and in his first discussion of "nostalgia" in film gives an early formulation of his later periodization of genre - auteur - nostalgia films, with the final term remaining a vacant slot:

This evolution in the movie industry parallels the movement in serious literature away from the fixed form of the nineteenth century towards the personally invented, style conscious individual forms of the twentieth.<sup>96</sup>

However, we should note that these reflections are situated in a particular national context, rather than the later global theorising on postmodernism and underwritten by the sociology of C. Wright Mills rather than Marxian economics.

The fullest exposition of Jameson's dialectic of realism - modernism - postmodernism is given in the long concluding chapter, 'The Existence of Italy' to Jameson's work,

*Signatures of the Visible*. Here, Jameson suggests that film history can be clarified by 'period theory,'<sup>97</sup> that is, that specific formal and aesthetic tendencies can be correlated to particular historical stages. The historical periodization in question is the familiar Mandellian one of: market, monopoly and late capitalism which Jameson proposes to correlate with the aesthetic moments of: realism, modernism and postmodernism respectively. However, Jameson immediately qualifies this periodization with the warning that:

These stages ... are not to be grasped exclusively in terms of the stylistic descriptions from which they have been appropriated; rather, their nomenclature sets us the technical problem of constructing a mediation between a formal or aesthetic concept and a periodizing or historiographic one.<sup>98</sup>

The cultural component of this historical schema must be considered not as a set of stylistic features or practices but as, what I have described above, a cultural "dominant". At the same time, the historical period designates a "mode of production" which Jameson defines in its broadest sense as the unity of both the forces and relations of production. Furthermore, such a periodization, with the qualifications just enumerated, does not represent a simple chronology, or linear narrative, in which each moment inevitably follows on from the previous one but rather a situation in which each moment dialectically presupposes all the others:

the three "stages" are not symmetrical, but dialectical in their relationship to each other: the later two now build on the accumulated cultural capital of the first and no longer "reflect" or "correspond to" a social public with the same immediacy, although clearly the various modernist and postmodernist moments in such a dialectic then reach back to create new publics in their own right.<sup>99</sup>

The initial problem that any discussion of realism and modernism now faces is our deeply embedded preconceptions of what each of these aesthetics entails.<sup>100</sup> We celebrate modernism, writes Jameson, 'as an active aesthetic praxis and invention, whose excitement

is demiurgic, along with its liberation from content; while realism is conventionally evoked in terms of passive reflection and copying, subordinate to some external reality'.<sup>101</sup> Jameson, therefore, proposes to "estrangle" these traditional views of modernism and realism respectively in order to throw the problematic, of an aesthetic moment's correlation to a specific historical period, into a whole new light: in other words, to view realism as a praxis and modernism as "scientific representation". However, such an experiment, writes Jameson:

at once confronts us with two fundamental methodological problems: what is the nature of the "world" thus produced by realism (it being understood that the very concept of world or worldness is itself a modernist, or phenomenological, one); and how, once we talk ourselves into a positive or productive concept of the realist aesthetic, are we to restore its negative and ideological dimension, its essential falseness and conventionality (as we have learned such structural lessons from the contemporary critique of representation)?<sup>102</sup>

According to Jameson, the way to resolve this dilemma is to conflate the two questions by providing a single answer, that is to say, we must at once acknowledge that the world produced by realism is false but at the same time insists that it is objectively false. The model for such a theoretical resolution, suggests Jameson, derives from Marx's analysis in *Capital*. In chapter 2, following Colletti's analysis of contradiction and opposition, I have already suggested how this paradoxical situation of the unreality, or objectively false nature of capitalism can be understood. To this analysis Jameson simply adds that 'the peculiar object of realism (and its situation of production) is ... the historically specific capitalist mode of production'.<sup>103</sup> The second stage in resolving this dilemma is to substitute the term "narrative" for "representation". For Jameson, the notion of narrative:

has the initial advantage of at once dispelling forever the temptations of the copy theory of art, and of problematizing beyond recognition many of the assumptions implicit in the notion of representation itself.<sup>104</sup>

Narrative, or rather the act of narration takes place after the event so to speak, it is a

retelling of events that have already taken place. In the act of retelling the gap between, to use the Russian Formalist terms, *fabula* and *szujet* is foregrounded. The act of narrating transforms and restructures the materials of the story and this suggests Jameson may be the ideological aspect of narrative. To speak of narrative, then, rather than representation avoids the debate over realism sliding into problems of reflection theories of art as well as questions of verisimilitude or realistic copying which seeks to identify the object in question with its representation. The negative ideological aspect of realism can then be restored, suggests Jameson, when the question of "populism," which he identifies with the "social realism" of Hollywood or the "socialist realism" of the Soviet Union, is brought into the discussion.

What Jameson is proposing, therefore, is that we can only begin to understand the significance of cultural production when we see it in terms of, what has been described in a previous chapter as, cultural revolution. In short, 'the function of any cultural revolution ... will be to invent the life habits of the new social world, to "de-program" subjects trained in the older one'.<sup>105</sup> Jameson's thesis proposes that all great transitions from one mode of production to another have entailed at one and the same time an equally momentous aesthetic transformation. This is not to suggest that cultural artefacts merely "reflect" changes in the economic base but as Jameson writes:

In a more general way, the relationship between art and its social context can be freed from inert conceptions of reflection by the proposition that the social context ... is to be grasped as the *situation* - the problem, the dilemma, the contradiction, the "question" - to which the work of art comes as an imaginary solution, resolution, or "answer."<sup>106</sup>

In other words, we have the formulation familiar from *The Political Unconscious*, that the work of art functions as myth does for Lévi-Strauss as the imaginary resolution to real social contradictions. However, in the present context Jameson cites not the work of Lévi-Strauss but the work of Sartre and Lukács' attack on reflection theory in *History and*

*Class Consciousness*.<sup>107</sup> Unfortunately, the precise nature of the relationship between the work of art and its social context remains in the most 'general way' as Jameson, rather than moving closer to a definition, moves further into abstraction and generalisation.

Each aesthetic moment, according to Jameson, will not only be seen to presuppose a particular economic stage of development but also a specific conception of the subject and the subject's relations to her/his life world. We are now in a position, therefore, to identify the situation to which realism provides the imaginary resolution and which I have already alluded to in the phenomenology of postmodernism above: that is to say, the materialisation and corresponding desacralisation of the life world under the process of modernisation. In other words, realism served to deprogram the older providential and sacred narratives and to construct new narrative paradigms of the subject's relations to 'what will now come to be thought of as reality'.<sup>108</sup> Realism's particularly privileged cultural position, for Jameson, derives not from its narrative structure, nor its acute representation and analysis of classical capitalism, but in its particular epistemological claim: that is, that we can have access to reality and that specific representations of reality can be said to represent the "truth" of that reality. However, as Jameson observes, the position is not quite as simple as contemporary debates over "representation" would suggest. On the contrary, realism is 'a peculiarly unstable concept owing to its simultaneous, yet incompatible, aesthetic and epistemological claims'.<sup>109</sup> Whichever side of the dualism we emphasise we simultaneously undermine the claims of the other side:

Thus, where the epistemological claim succeeds, it fails; and if realism validates its claim to be a correct or true representation of the world, it thereby ceases to be an *aesthetic* mode of representation and falls out of art altogether.<sup>110</sup>

Realism, according to Jameson, is unique in its epistemological claim. Whatever we assert as the 'truth content, or the "moment of truth," of modernism, or postmodernism, ... those

versions of aesthetic truth do not, except in very indirect or supplementary or mediated ways, imply the possibility of *knowledge*, as "realism" emphatically does'.<sup>111</sup> At the same time, argues Jameson, it is the very instability of realism's epistemological claim that endows the concept with its historic significance and facilitates the understanding of the situation in which such claims are no longer feasible. To put it another way, realism is 'a historical phenomenon, rather than an eternal formal possibility'.<sup>112</sup> Just as the social and historical conditions must exist in the first place for realism to emerge, argues Jameson, once those conditions have passed realism is no longer an aesthetic possibility. That is, its narrative structures will be seen to be outmoded and redundant, as no longer capable of adequately "representing" the world.

If realism, then, inscribes within itself its own conditions of impossibility, the conditions in which it can no longer provide the imaginary resolution to its social context, as much may be said for the concepts of modernism and postmodernism. As Jameson writes: 'most anti-realistic or anti-representational positions still do in some sense require a concept of realism, if only as an empty slot, a vacant preliminary historical "stage", or secondary (but essential) aesthetic counterposition'.<sup>113</sup> The schema here is the now familiar one of the reification of the sign and the commodification of the aesthetic, which is at one and the same time, the aestheticisation of the commodity. In these terms, realism's epistemological claims can be said to presuppose a correspondence, or, to use Baudrillard's term, a logic of equivalence between the sign and its ground or referent. So in a sense, the sign could be said to be "natural" and self-validating. As capitalism's modernising project evolved, with its corresponding intensification of the process of reification, the sign's self-validating quality was undermined, the real is bracketed as the arbitrary nature of the sign becomes visible. Modernism, then, will be seen to inscribe within its own form the separation of the sign and its referent, the real will be bracketed and the autonomy of the sign, or the work of art itself, will be emphasised.



What Jameson proposes, therefore, is that the concept of realism is estranged through the notion of praxis, and similarly that the concept of modernism is estranged through the notion of autonomy. Jameson writes:

Many of the now conventional descriptive features of modernism - such as style, plotlessness, irony, and subjectivity - can be productively rewritten or defamiliarized by rethinking them in terms of the problematic of artistic or aesthetic *autonomy*, provided this last is suitably enlarged.<sup>114</sup>

The concept must be suitably enlarged because the value of such a transcoding operation depends on what we mean by the concept of artistic autonomy in the first place: that is, the autonomy of the aesthetic experience, of the work of art or of culture in general. Indeed, just as structural linguistics presupposes a structure or system against which the isolated and arbitrary sign is differentiated, Saussure's *langue* to *parole*, the notion of artistic or aesthetic autonomy always turns out to mean *semi*-autonomy, in the Althusserian sense:

that is to say, the independence and self-sufficient internal coherence of the object or field in question is generally understood dialectically to be relative to some greater totality (in relation to which alone it makes sense to assert that it is autonomous in the first place).<sup>115</sup>

Just as with realism, therefore, what is of most interest to Jameson about modernism is not so much the solutions to the problem, the individual interpretations, or meaning-effects, generated by each text, but the conditions of possibility for those meaning-effects to exist in the first place. Thus, Jameson proposes a neologism, "autonomization", for an as yet untheorised theory of modernism which would seek to identify 'the traces of "autonomy" within the structural processes'<sup>116</sup> of modernist artefacts. In short, modernism can be characterised as 'the process of autonomization of the sign (and of culture itself)'.<sup>117</sup>

However, the full autonomy of the sign will not be achieved until the advent of postmodernism, when reification enters the sign itself; asserting, not only the arbitrary

relationship between the sign and referent but also between the signifier and the signified. Therefore, the differential logic of the various modernisms gives way to the complete dispersion and schizophrenic logic of postmodernism proper. The punctual or episodic elements of Joyce's texts or Hitchcock's films no longer have to be co-ordinated by some principle of totality but exist in their own right as free-floating material signifiers. The subject of this new cultural logic is no longer the centred ego posited by realism, or the alienated subject of modernism but the decentred fragmented subject celebrated in much poststructuralism. At the point at which the aesthetic is finally fully integrated into the commodity system in general, at the same time, it achieves 'genuine autonomy' in the form of the materiality of the signifier:

The concept of the autonomy of culture, therefore, allows us to witness with greater precision its historical dissolution, and at the same time to register the paradox of a thing that disappears by becoming universal, rather than by extinction.<sup>118</sup>

As I demonstrated above, one problem with Jameson's historicizing project is the nonsynchronicity of his own periodizations and Mandel's. In 'The Existence of Italy' Jameson tries to circumvent this problem through his use of the concept of a cultural dominant and insistence on the non-chronological, non-narrative, nature of his historical schema. Responding to the postmodern suspicion of "master narratives," Jameson writes:

I have come to feel that the Marxian sequence of modes of production is not a narrative of that kind, nor even a narrative at all; on the other hand, I have also come to feel that some deeper unconscious narrative does subtend a great many Marxian histories and discussions, and not only Marxian ones.<sup>119</sup>

That deeper unconscious narrative is none other than the transitional moment of "modernity" itself, the transition from feudalism to capitalism and the emergence of the modern world. This being said Jameson's periodization can be recapitulated at different levels and historical stages with a well nigh Hegelian obsession for ternary schema. Thus:

market capitalism, imperialism, and late capitalism can be correlated to the literary moments of Realism, Modernism and Postmodernism respectively; or, in the case of film, to the genre films of the 30's and 40's, the "auteurs" of the 50's and 60's, and the nostalgia and punk films of the 70's or 80's; or, even more recently with popular music we get the distinction between the old rhythm and blues, the auteurs of "classic" rock and the postmodern punk; or at even more "microchronological" levels of 'semi-autonomous sequences of cultural history such as American Black literature, where Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and Ishmael Reed can be taken as emblematic markers'.<sup>120</sup> At this level Jameson's periodization is at risk of collapsing into absurdity. Real difference and differentiation is conflated in overly abstract and generalised categories, but at the same time, continuity and identity must be understated in order to differentiate the larger categories themselves. Jameson appears to doing precisely what he proscribed in *The Political Unconscious*, that is, using the periodizing categories as slots to drop the particular cultural artefacts into. One has no sense of the "determinate contradiction" at the heart of the work or the schema which in Jameson's previous work provided the mark of a genuine Marxist criticism. If we return one last time to the question of temporality and space in the modern/postmodern debate this contradiction in Jameson's theorising will become clearer.

In his article 'Divergences: modernism, postmodernism, Jameson and Lyotard' Peter Nicholls argues that many of Jameson's confusions over postmodernism, and in particular over postmodern literature, derive from too rigid a demarcation between modernism and postmodernism, a demarcation which is grounded in the association of modernism with temporality, narrative and above all memory, whilst postmodernism is associated with space, non-narrative structures and immanence. Using Lyotard's distinction between "discourse" and "figure" Nicholls proposes a perspective on postmodernism that allows us to register continuities as well as divergences between the modern and the postmodern.

Nicholls writes:

Lyotard's proposals have the ... advantage that they do not suppose any 'retreat' of language in the postmodern but rather conceive of the postmodern as a disruption of the discursive systems on which modernity depends.<sup>121</sup>

For Lyotard then postmodernity is a "mode" and not an "epoch", although to be fair to Jameson, he would not dissent from this and his theorisation of postmodernity as a "mode of production" (PLLC, 408) explicitly allows for this, seeing postmodernity not as an epochal rupture but as a restructuration of a previous mode of production. At the same time, one must acknowledge that Lyotard's 'stylish reversal of the postmodern problematic',<sup>122</sup> as Nicholls describes it whereby the modern is that which is first postmodern simply avoids many of the issues of postmodernity which we have addressed with Jameson above and in particular the historical significance and ground of postmodernity. In other words, Lyotard's work presupposes some form of epochal break but by projecting the problem backwards, or reversing it, he avoids the necessity of theorising this break. In short, we are always-already in the postmodern.

But to return to Nicholls's criticism of Jameson's reading of modernism. Nicholls insists that Lyotard's distinction between discourse and figure does not propose a binary system in the sense that Scott Lash utilises them. For Lash, Lyotard's distinction represents "counterpositions"<sup>123</sup> which facilitates a distinction between modernism and postmodernism, along the lines of Jameson, according to differing regimes of signification. Thus, according to Lash, modernism signifies "discursively," giving priority to words over images, whilst postmodernism signifies "figurally," it is a predominantly visual rather than a literary sensibility.<sup>124</sup> As Nicholls points out, however, the figural and the discursive are not polar opposites but rather the figural represents 'the resistant or irreconcilable trace of a space or time that is radically incommensurable with that of discursive meaning'.<sup>125</sup>

Lyotard's categories, therefore, are not mutually exclusive, designating different regimes of signification but, dare one say it, operating dialectically within all regimes of signification. Nicholls writes:

it is not that the figural is absent from [modernist] writing - indeed it is characteristic of imagism and its derivatives (like the Hemingway style) to seek to make the reader 'feel' something which eludes understanding.<sup>126</sup>

In his analysis of Baudelaire, Pound and Eliot, Expressionist theatre, or, modernist painting Nicholls reveals this dialectic of discourse and figure to be at work, whereby the figural dimension constantly disrupts the order of discourse. Nicholls acknowledges that "textuality" provides the dominant view of postmodernism and that 'it seems to have some connection to the earlier "discursive" moments of modernism'.<sup>127</sup> However, Nicholls also proposes an alternative perspective on postmodernism:

the spatial model used by Baudrillard and Jameson is closely tied to the synchronic order of signification, to sign-systems. In contrast, another form of postmodernism has turned its attention very deliberately to questions of temporality and narrative, and specifically to what Lyotard has called the 'event', the singular moment which can be spoken about only after it is over, and which is composed of 'simultaneous and heterogeneous temporalities'.<sup>128</sup>

That is to say, in the contemporary literary work of those writers I have already mentioned, Toni Morrison, Gloria Naylor or indeed, E.L. Doctorow, but whom, with the exception of Doctorow, Jameson is compelled to exclude by his very definition of postmodernism. Commenting on these writers, Nicholls writes:

narrative becomes the medium in which a number of histories can be thought simultaneously. Here a lost history is literally unrepresentable and can be worked through only in the jarring moment when discourse, confronted by what [Jayne Anne] Phillips calls 'some lost place still existing alongside this one', is unable to give a full account.<sup>129</sup>

Postmodernism, in this sense, is not so much the loss of the historical imagination as its renewal and revitalisation in the attempt to retrieve the multiplicity of temporalities that

capitalism's modernising project seeks to flatten out. It also once more raises the issue that the problem of postmodernism is inextricably entwined with the problem of modernity itself.

In a recent article<sup>130</sup> Peter Osborne has reassessed the debate over Modernity's spatio-temporal dialectic, taking as his starting point the exchange between Perry Anderson and Marshal Berman. The occasion for the exchange was the publication of Berman's book *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*, in which Berman argued that modernity was essentially a mode of experience, a particular historical experience of space and time that mediated between modernisation as a socio-economic process and modernism as a cultural and aesthetic vision. Anderson criticised Berman's account of modernity as it rested on an essential "planar" conception of historical time, that is to say, as a continuous flow process in which each epoch succeeds the next without any real differentiation between them, except chronologically. Anderson argued, following Althusser, for a differential conception of historical time and conjunctural analysis. Anderson also finally drew the rather bleak conclusion that 'Modernism as a notion is the emptiest of all cultural categories. ... it designates no describable object in its own right at all: it is completely lacking in positive content ... its only referent is the blank passage of time itself.'<sup>131</sup>

Osborne, on the other hand, argues against both of these positions on the grounds that they take Modernity to designate an essentially chronological category:

The key to the matter will be seen to lie in the relation between the meaning of 'modernity' as a category of historical periodization and its meaning as a distinctive form or quality of social experience - that is to say, in the dialectics of a certain *temporalization of history*.<sup>132</sup>

According to Osborne what is unique about modernity as a category of historical periodization is that it is defined solely in terms of temporal determinants. For Osborne

postmodernism is not a new historical epoch but only the most recent transformation in a continuing process of modernity (a position Harvey, Soja and Jameson would all endorse). What is peculiarly unique to the temporality of modernity is its contemporaneity; modernity designates what is new and what is new must be distinguished from even the most recent past, which would appear to contrast with postmodernism's historicism, or eclecticism and pastiche, which takes the form of a raiding of previous aesthetic styles but lacks any real sense of history or future transformation. As a periodizing category modernity serves a dual function:

it designates the contemporaneity of an epoch to the time of its classification, but it registers this contemporaneity in terms of a qualitatively new, self-transcending temporality, which has the simultaneous effect of distancing the present from even that most recent past with which it is thus identified.<sup>133</sup>

In other words, "modernity is a qualitative and not a chronological category". Modernity can not be reduced to a simple opposition between homogenous (Berman) and differential (Anderson) historical time but must be grasped as a dialectic of homogenisation (its contemporaneity) and differentiation (its distancing of itself from other historical epochs). This dialectic is not only constitutive of the temporality of modernity but is inextricably tied to its *spatial* relations: that is to say, the geopolitics of modernity or the history of colonialism. As Osborne writes:

the concept of modernity was first universalized through the spatialization of its founding temporal difference, under colonialism; thereafter, the differential between itself and other 'times' was reduced to a difference within a single temporal scale of 'progress', 'modernization' and 'development'.<sup>134</sup>

Without pursuing this line of thought any further, if we accept that modernity is a particular form of spatio-temporal experience then we can begin to understand postmodernity as a further development or modification of this form of experience: what David Harvey describes as an acceleration of "time-space compression".<sup>135</sup>

What appears to be lacking in Jameson's conception of space is any real sense of this spatio-temporal dialectic. Harvey's conception of "time-space compression" provides an alternative way to theorise the transition from modernism to postmodernism and the changing relationship between time and space. For Harvey, 'the history of capitalism has been characterised by the speed-up in the pace of life' whilst simultaneously in 'overcoming spatial barriers the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us'.<sup>136</sup> What has taken place over the last two decades, argues Harvey, is that the pace of speed-up has once more accelerated, that is, production times have accelerated which have in turn brought about an acceleration in exchange and consumption. The throw-away society has increased to the extent that now not only are our commodities disposable but so too are our values. Whether we think in terms of art, music, fashion or life-styles in general, the turn over and built in obsolescence of particular commodities and styles seems to have increased considerably. In other words, writes Harvey, we have:

witnessed another fierce round in that process of annihilation of space through time that has always lain at the center of capitalism's dynamic.<sup>137</sup>

But does this not contradict the assertion that space is the new cultural dominant? On the contrary, the collapse of spatial barriers does not imply that the significance of space is decreasing but that its significance will increase. As the spatial barriers diminish we become increasingly sensitised to those spaces that remain and to what happens "to" and "within" those spaces. Therefore, writes Harvey, the struggle over and within space will become an increasingly important issue in future political struggles:

Superior command over space becomes an even more important weapon in class-struggle. It becomes one of the means to enforce speed-up and the redefinition of skills on recalcitrant work forces.<sup>138</sup>

The problem with Jameson's description of postmodern spatiality is his tendency to over-emphasise what is unique about this spatiality and exaggerate the significance of this new spatial experience over temporal concerns.



As we have seen Jameson's proposition that modernism and postmodernism are utterly distinct in their social position and function has led increasingly to his insistence on what distinguishes one from the other. Whilst he concedes that there is a great deal of continuity between modernist and postmodernist cultural practice, Jameson argues that these elements are restructured within the works themselves and have a distinct function. However, the problems of periodization that Jameson seeks to banish at the level of theory invariably appear to recapitulate themselves in his analysis of specific cultural artefacts. At its most abstract, therefore, Jameson has come to characterise modernism as dealing with themes of temporality, narrative and history, whilst postmodernism, despite all his professed enthusiasm for it, is defined negatively against this, as being concerned with space, the play of surfaces and immediacy.

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#### Notes.

- 1 Douglas Kellner, 'Jameson, Marxism and Postmodernism', in *Postmodernism, Jameson, Critique*, ed. D. Kellner (Washington: Mouton de Gruyter Press, 1989).
- 2 Ibid., p. 19.
- 3 Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', in *New Left Review*, no. 146 (1984), rpt. as the first chapter to *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991). All quotations in this chapter are from the 1991 edition.
- 4 Kellner, 'Jameson, Marxism and Postmodernism', pp. 2-3.
- 5 Ibid., p. 3.
- 6 Ibid., p. 5.
- 7 Whilst *Marxism and Form* focused upon the shorter essays contained in *Notes To Literature* alongside *The Philosophy of New Music* it had very little to say about *Negative Dialectics* or *Aesthetic Theory*, except to describe them as ambitious failures; *Late Marxism* on the other hand is devoted to precisely a rereading of these later works in relation to the current problematics of postmodernism.
- 8 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Condition of Postmodernity: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington & B. Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 37.
- 9 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989), Terry Eagleton, 'Capitalism, Modernism

- and Postmodernism', in *Against The Grain: Essays 1975-1985* (London: Verso, 1986).
- 10 'The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodern Debate', in *The Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971-1986: Vol. 2 The Syntax of History* (London: Routledge, 1988). This essay was first published in *New German Critique*, no. 33 (1984) but according to note 2, p. 215, of the collected essays this essay was written in the spring of 1982. It is, therefore, prior to, or contemporaneous with, Jameson's better known early essay 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society'. First published in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, ed. H. Foster (Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983) rpt. as *Postmodern Culture* (London: Pluto Press, 1985). This essay was originally delivered as a Whitney Museum lecture in the Autumn of 1982.
- 11 Jameson, 'The Politics of Theory', p. 103.
- 12 Ibid., p. 111.
- 13 Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', p. 113.
- 14 Ibid., p. 113.
- 15 Jean Baudrillard, 'The System of Objects' and 'Consumer Society', in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. M. Poster (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988).
- 16 Baudrillard, 'The System of Objects', in *Selected Writings*, p. 21.
- 17 Ibid., p. 22.
- 18 Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', p. 113.
- 19 Ibid., p. 119.
- 20 Jean Baudrillard, 'For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign', in *Selected Writings*, p. 87.
- 21 Jean Baudrillard, 'Symbolic Exchange and Death', in *Selected Writings*, p. 120.
- 22 Roy Bhaskar, *Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 17.
- 23 Ibid., p. 17.
- 24 Jean Baudrillard, 'The Ecstasy of Communication', in *Postmodern Culture*, p. 133, n. 4.
- 25 Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, trans. J. De Bres (London: Verso, 1975), see chapter 4.
- 26 Ibid., p. 114.
- 27 Ibid., p. 110.
- 28 Ibid., p. 120.
- 29 Ibid., pp. 120-1.
- 30 In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* the chapter on economics is not on "economics" as such but rather on the ideology of the market and Stuart Hall's contention that during the 1980s the fundamental level of struggle was fought over the legitimation of concepts, it was in other words, "discursive".
- 31 Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, p. 199.
- 32 Ibid., p. 23.
- 33 Ibid., p. 146.
- 34 See page 9 above.
- 35 Peter Nicholls, 'Divergences: modernism, postmodernism, Jameson and Lyotard', in *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 3 (1991), p. 1.

- 36 Jameson, 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society', p. 113.
- 37 Kellner, 'Jameson, Marxism and Postmodernism', pp. 4-5.
- 38 See Gregory Elliott *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (London: Verso, 1987), p.169. Balibar draws this conclusion from his distinction between mode of production and social formation but as I pointed out in chapter 2 Jameson refutes this distinction, retaining only the concept of mode of production and equating this with the social totality.
- 39 Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 38.
- 40 Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, pp. 60-1.
- 41 Ibid., p. 61.
- 42 Frank Pfeil, *Another Tale to Tell: Politics & Narrative in Postmodern Culture* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 98.
- 43 Baudrillard, 'The Ecstasy of Communication', in *Postmodern Culture*, p. 127.
- 44 Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, p. 192.
- 45 Baudrillard, 'The Ecstasy of Communication', in *Postmodern Culture*, p. 127.
- 46 Ibid., p. 128.
- 47 Nicholas Zurbrugg, 'Jameson's Complaint: video-art and the intertextual "time-wall"', in *Screen*, vol. 32, no. 1 (1991).
- 48 Ibid., p. 17.
- 49 Ibid., pp. 25-6.
- 50 Fredric Jameson, 'Review article of Don DeLillo', in *Minnesota Review*, vol. 22 (1984), p. 119.
- 51 Ibid., p. 119.
- 52 Ibid., p. 119.
- 53 David Shumway, 'Jameson/Hermeneutics/Postmodernism', in *Postmodernism, Jameson, Critique*, p. 195.
- 54 Ibid., p. 192.
- 55 Ibid., p. 193.
- 56 Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Verso, 1990), p. 238.
- 57 See Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, p. 63, n. 12.
- 58 Fredric Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 351.
- 59 Ibid., p. 353.
- 60 Ibid., p. 353.
- 61 Ibid., p. 348.
- 62 Ibid., p. 349.
- 63 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).
- 64 Ibid., p. 68.
- 65 Ibid., p. 70.
- 66 Ibid., p. 73.
- 67 Ibid., p. 116.
- 68 Ibid., pp. 101-2.
- 69 Ibid., p. 6.

- 70 Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, p. 122.
- 71 Ibid., p. 123.
- 72 Ibid., p. 125.
- 73 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 49.
- 74 Ibid., p. 49.
- 75 See 'Cognitive Mapping', p. 351.
- 76 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 33.
- 77 Ibid., p. 33.
- 78 See pp. 239-40 above.
- 79 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 17.
- 80 Ibid., p. 142.
- 81 Ibid., pp. 47-8.
- 82 David Harvey quoted in Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, p. 76.
- 83 Lefebvre, *The Production Of Space*, p. 94.
- 84 Ibid., p. 275.
- 85 David Harvey quoted in Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, p. 77.
- 86 Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, p. 1.
- 87 Ibid., p. 11.
- 88 Ibid., pp. 36-7.
- 89 Doreen Massey, 'Politics and Space/Time', in *New Left Review*, no. 196 (1992), p. 70.
- 90 Ibid., p. 70.
- 91 Ibid., p. 73.
- 92 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 296.
- 93 Jameson, 'The Politics of Theory', p. 113.
- 94 The full parenthesis reads - absent from the present work, but mobilised elsewhere in a related one (PLLC, 65) - however the accompanying note is also absent but I take the related essay to be 'The Existence of Italy' the concluding essay to Jameson's book on film *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 1990).
- 95 Fredric Jameson, 'On Politics and Literature', in *Salmagundi*, nos. 2-3 (1968), p. 23.
- 96 Fredric Jameson, 'On Raymond Chandler', in *Southern Review*, no. 6 (1970), p. 642.
- 97 Fredric Jameson, 'The Existence of Italy', in *Signatures of the Visible*, p. 155.
- 98 Ibid., p. 155.
- 99 Ibid., p. 157.
- 100 As I suggested in chapter 1, p.16, Jameson uses the category of the "aesthetic" without clarification or definition. On the one hand, this raises the problem of the sense in which Jameson is using the term and on the other, it also facilitates its use as a very flexible category. Jameson uses the term aesthetic to designate both broad cultural movements such as modernism and postmodernism and at the same time to refer to the experience of specific cultural artefacts. In the latter sense Jameson also uses the term in the dual sense of the aesthetic experience or act of producing works of art as well as the aesthetic experience of the works themselves. Once again it is the very imprecision of the term that affords it such

versatility and usefulness for Jameson. Jameson can be seen to use the term in this diversity of senses in what follows, it will also become clear that the flexibility of the category enables Jameson to avoid the complicated issue of mediation as he slides from the isolated work of art as the imaginary resolution to real social contradictions, to a more abstract discussion of the correlation between historical and cultural periodization.

- 101 Jameson, 'The Existence of Italy', p. 162.  
102 Ibid., p. 163.  
103 Ibid., p. 163.  
104 Ibid., p. 165.  
105 Ibid., p. 164.  
106 Ibid., p. 164.  
107 *Signatures of the Visible*, p. 240, n. 1, Jameson notes that the concept of "situation" is clearly Sartrean whilst the Lukácsian model 'is one of distinct, semi-autonomous loops in which the subject and object develop without "representing" each other in any way, and yet continue to be related ... by their participation in the social totality'. Lévi-Strauss' conception of imaginary resolution to a social contradiction is not referenced at all. Jameson compares his own procedure to "something like" the Lukácsian model. The problem is that Jameson once again simply conflates three distinct models for situating the cultural artefact in its social context but it is by no means self-evident that these three models are compatible or doing the same thing. Furthermore, simply to line up a series of potential solutions to a given problem is not the same as doing the work itself, it does not provide the solution to the problem.
- 108 Jameson, 'The Existence of Italy', p. 166.  
109 Ibid., p. 158.  
110 Ibid., p. 158.  
111 Ibid., p. 158.  
112 Ibid., p. 185.  
113 Ibid., pp. 158-9.  
114 Ibid., p. 201.  
115 Ibid., p. 201.  
116 Ibid., p. 205.  
117 Ibid., p. 214.  
118 Ibid., p. 202.  
119 Ibid., p. 226.  
120 Ibid., p. 156.  
121 Nicholls, 'Divergences: modernism, postmodernism, Jameson and Lyotard', p. 4.  
122 Ibid., p. 4.  
123 Scott Lash, 'Discourse or Figure? Postmodernism as a Regime of Signification', in *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 5, nos. 2-3, ed. M. Featherstone (London: Sage, 1988), p. 315.  
124 Ibid., pp. 313-4.  
125 Nicholls, 'Divergences: modernism, postmodernism, Jameson and Lyotard', p. 10.  
126 Ibid., p. 10.

- 127 Ibid., p. 14.  
128 Ibid., p. 14.  
129 Ibid., p. 15.  
130 Peter Osborne, 'Modernity is a Qualitative, Not a Chronological Category', in *New Left Review*, no. 192 (1992).  
131 Perry Anderson, 'Modernity and Revolution', in *New Left Review*, no. 144 (1984), pp. 17-8.  
132 Osborne, 'Modernity is a Qualitative, Not a Chronological Category', p. 66.  
133 Ibid., p. 73.  
134 Ibid., p. 78.  
135 Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, p. 240  
136 Ibid., p. 240.  
137 Ibid., p. 293.  
138 Ibid., p. 294.

## MARXISM, TOTALITY AND POLITICS.

It goes without saying that to teach Marxism and tirelessly to demonstrate the nature of capitalism and of its consequences is a political act which needs no apologies. <sup>1</sup>

the extreme difficulty of language characteristic of much of Western Marxism in the twentieth century was never controlled by the tension of a direct or active relationship to a proletarian audience. On the contrary, its very surplus above the necessary minimum quotient of verbal complexity was the sign of its divorce from any popular practice.<sup>2</sup>

Is the teaching of Marxism today self-evidently a political act which needs no justification? Indeed, why should students turn to Marxism rather than deconstruction, or Deleuze and Guattari neo-anarchist molecular politics, or Baudrillard's revolutionary quietism and radical otherness? What is it that distinguishes Marxism from the plethora of other, so called, radical theories today? To fully answer these questions is beyond the scope of this particular study but in concluding this critical analysis of the work of Fredric Jameson I will begin to suggest that, despite the theoretical problems I have raised, Marxism will continue to be a vital force in contemporary theoretical debates. It is, I believe, precisely as a result of the difficulty and complexity of the questions Marxism raises, that both opens Marxism up to criticism and at the same time testifies to its continuing relevance. That is, questions of the relationship between a cultural artefact and its socio-historical situation, of the relationship between individual and collective action, of agency and historical change. For, as Jameson writes, in a slightly different context in *The Political Unconscious*, however much we may like to forget these difficult problems they 'will not forget us' (PU, p.102).

In the preceding chapters I have argued that Jameson has made a sustained attempted over the last two and a half decades to assert the priority of Hegelian Marxism over other

competing forms of interpretation. Jameson's claim rests, in *Marxism and Form*, on Hegelian Marxism's ability to encompass more and, in *The Political Unconscious*, on the grounds of its semantic richness. I have analysed Jameson's claim in four key areas of his work: form, history, desire and postmodernism; and particularly in the last three areas I have argued that Jameson's ability to encompass a multiplicity of opposing discourses within his own Marxian framework frequently results in a tendency to erase fundamental differences and conflate distinct and specific theoretical positions - in short, to enforce identity and homogeneity over non-identity and heterogeneity.

What has been absent from the analysis so far is a direct engagement with probably the most contentious aspect of Jameson's work, that is, its holistic or totalizing character. In this concluding chapter I will examine Jameson's concept of totality and his claims for the necessity of totalizing thought. Related to the concept of totality is the notion of mediation. I will examine Jameson's key mediatory category of reification, arguing that Jameson has privileged this category at the expense of other forms of mediation. Finally, I will reflect upon the nature of the politics that Jameson's totalizing method entails and in the light of his more pessimistic conclusions with regard to radical politics in a postmodern age.

### **Jameson and Totality**

In the conclusion to *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* Jameson endorses Douglas Kellner's observation that it is the concept of totality that provides continuity between his earlier work on dialectical criticism and the later analysis of postmodernism (PLLC, 399). Indeed as Martin Jay points out in his exhaustive study of the concept of totality, *Marxism and Totality*, Jameson is one of the few major theorists writing today who wishes to retain the concept.<sup>3</sup> However, as I argued in the previous



chapter, Kellner's reading of Jameson's *oeuvre* presents an overly continuous and linear narrative which fails to account for the nuances and changes of emphasis in his work. It is certainly true, as I shall discuss below, that Jameson's commitment to the concept of totality and the necessity of totalizing thought is as strong today as it was in the early 1970s. Indeed, Jameson's most recently published work on contemporary film, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, presents a stunning attempt to map the totality, or, to put it another way, the global system of multinational capitalism through a discrete collection of films from world cinema. But, I shall contend, Jameson's conception of the totality, or rather the emphasis he places upon it, has been significantly modified.

There are four principal strands of totalizing thought evident in Jameson's work: firstly, that of Lukács and through Lukács that of Hegel; secondly Sartre's notion of "totalization"; thirdly Althusser's Spinozist formulation of history as an "absent cause"; and finally, Adorno's negative critique of identity theory and totality. Before examining each of these strands in turn I will briefly situate Jameson's insistence on the need to maintain the category of totality in relation to the post-structuralist and postmodernist critique of totalizing thought.

In the concluding chapter of *Marxism and Totality*, entitled 'The Challenge of Post-Structuralism', Martin Jay points out, that even on the Left there has 'been a general move away from the totalistic emphasis that marked the earlier Anglo-American reception of continental Marxism'<sup>4</sup> as many of the old New Left seek to accommodate the criticisms of post-structuralism. What is perhaps unique about Jameson's project has been his attempt simultaneously to accommodate the detotalizing critiques of post-structuralism, particularly through the work of Deleuze and Guattari, whilst retaining the concept of totality itself. We will see how successful this project has been below. According to Jay, the rejection of all forms of holism, or totalizing thought, is the one issue that appears to

unite the otherwise disparate group of figures that are generally lumped together as post-structuralist:

if one had to find one common denominator among the major figures normally included in the post-structuralist category ... it would have to be their unremitting hostility towards totality.<sup>5</sup>

Following Foucault, Jay writes:

Insofar as Marxism of whatever variety still insisted on the category of totality it was complicitous with the very system it claimed to oppose.<sup>6</sup>

Foucault maintains that the very idea of the "whole of society" is precisely that which should not be considered except as something to be destroyed.<sup>7</sup> For post-structuralists such as Foucault the concept of totality is irredeemably tainted with the concept of totalitarianism, a term first used to describe the fascist regime of Italy and then later extended to include the Nazis regime in Germany and the Stalinist regime in the USSR. All totalizing thought has now tended to become characterised, or rather caricatured, as a surreptitious form of will to power. Linda Hutcheon summarises the suspicion of totalizing thought well in *The Politics of Postmodernism*:

The function of the term totalizing, as I understand it, is to point to the *process* (hence the awkward 'ing' form) by which writers of history, fiction, or even theory render their materials coherent, continuous, unified - but always with an eye to the control and mastery of those materials, even at the risk of doing violence to them. It is this link to power, as well as process, that the adjective 'totalizing' is meant to suggest, and it is as such that the term has been used to characterize everything from liberal humanist ideals to the aims of historiography.<sup>8</sup>

However, what Jameson calls the 'war on totality' seems to be more specifically directed against Marxism rather than against liberal humanist views in general.<sup>9</sup> In short, totalizing thought was seen to eradicate difference and heterogeneity, if necessary through force and violence, and as Jameson writes 'in the memorable words of the *nouveaux philosophes* ... a direct line runs from Hegel's Absolute Spirit to Stalin's Gulag' (PU, 51). It is within this

context that the political and polemical thrust of Jameson's insistence on the need for totalizing thought must be understood. However, Jameson's attempt to co-opt certain aspects of post-structuralism have necessitated a change in his use of the term and a precarious balancing act of contradictory theoretical positions. It is to this development that I shall now turn.

In *Marxism and Form* Jameson works with an essentially Lukácsian conception of totality, that is to say, the totality is seen as the "concrete" whereas isolated experience is defined as the abstract. According to Martin Jay Lukács was indebted to Hegel for this particular conception of the concrete and its linkage with totality. Jay writes:

What from a positivist point of view would seem oxymoronic, linking concreteness with totality, was accepted by Lukács because of his Hegelian notion of the concrete. Instead of equating it with discrete entities or individual facts, he followed Marx's Hegelian usage: "The concrete is concrete because it is a synthesis of many particular determinants, i.e. a unity of elements." The totality could be concrete precisely because it included all of the mediations that linked the seemingly isolated facts.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, in his discussion of Lukács' conception of the concrete in art, Jameson writes, 'such work permits life and experience to be felt as a totality: all its events, all its partial facts and elements are immediately grasped as part of a total process' (MF, 169). The totality is the social whole in which 'everything depends on everything else' (MF, 188). But the concept of totality also functions as, what I called in a previous chapter, a term limit. Following Lukács, Jameson writes, 'the limits of middle-class philosophy are signalled by its incapacity or unwillingness to come to terms with the category of "totality" itself (MF, 184). Without once more rehearsing Lukács' views on the antinomies of bourgeois thought<sup>11</sup> I will just briefly state here what is necessary for the discussion of totality. Jameson writes, the

privileged nature of the worker's situation lies, paradoxically, in its narrow, inhuman limits: the worker is unable to know the outside world in a static, contemplative manner in one sense because he cannot know it at all,

because his situation does not give the leisure to intuit it in the middle-class sense; because, even before he posits elements of the outside world as *objects* of his thought, he feels *himself* to be an object, and this initial alienation within himself takes precedence over everything else.

(MF, 186-7)

It is this privileged position, according to Lukács, that enables proletarian thought to overcome the limits of bourgeois thought. The proletariat is both subject and object, and therefore permitted 'access to the totality or reality, to that totalizing knowledge which was the stumbling block of classical bourgeois philosophy' (MF, 186). According to Martin Jay, Lukács' conception of the proletariat as the first universal subject of history relied on Vico's *verum-factum* principle, that is, that 'the true and the made are interchangeable'.<sup>12</sup> However, for Lukács 'the *verum-factum* principle applied only when a universal totalizer made history in a deliberate and rational manner. To know the whole was thus dependent on the existence of a collective historical subject who could recognise itself in its objectifications'.<sup>13</sup> That is to say, the proletariat. Thus Lukács' conception of totality, as we saw in chapter 2 can be said to be expressive in the sense that 'the whole expresses the intentionality and praxis of a creator-subject, who recognises itself in the objective world around it'.<sup>14</sup>

The discussions of totality, within *Marxism and Form*, take place within the context of an exposition of Lukács' work and could therefore be said to be Lukács' conception rather than Jameson's. However, as this study has frequently had recourse to highlight, Jameson never gives simple definitions of his categories and concepts: the meaning of a word has to be derived from its context and use. Thus, we should note that Jameson does not offer a critique of Lukács' concept of totality. Furthermore, in his constant invocation of the dialectical imperative to move from the abstract to the concrete, and through his insistence that there is no content for dialectical thought 'but total content' (MF, 306) one must assume that Jameson endorses, and is working with, a Lukácsian/Hegelian conception of the concrete as the totality or (as Jameson puts it in the quotation above) reality.

Further support for the Lukácsian paradigm can be discerned from Jameson's consideration of Sartre. Discussing Sartre's concept of totalization, Jameson identifies it with, what Jay calls, Lukács' 'progressive longitudinal totality,' that is, a conception of history as 'a coherent and meaningful unity'.<sup>15</sup> Or as Jameson puts it, 'the concept of totalization enables Sartre to do away with the relativism inherent in the notion of the project ... It is only on this condition that history as a whole can have a meaning, or a single direction' (MF, 231). We find this progressive longitudinal totality re-emerging in *The Political Unconscious* in the form of Jameson's capitalised History as the single great adventure of class struggle to wrest the realm of freedom from the realm of necessity. However, the concept of totality invoked in this text is rather different from 'positive dialectics of Lukács' subject-object unity'<sup>16</sup> that Jameson worked with in *Marxism and Form*. Jameson now emphasises the second aspect of totality that I indicated above, that is to say, as a term limit, a methodological standard against which other forms of thought can be measured:

It has not been sufficiently grasped [writes Jameson] that Lukács' method of ideological critique - like the Hegelian dialectic itself and its Sartrean variant, in the methodological imperative of totalization proposed in the *Critique* - is an essentially critical and negative, demystifying operation.

(PU, 52)

Certainly Jameson's own stress upon the positive aspect of the adequation of subject to object in *Marxism and Form* has now been abandoned as has any appeal to an Hegelian conception of the concrete. Jameson now argues that:

Lukács' central analysis of the ideological character of classical German philosophy may from this perspective be seen as a creative and original variant on Marx's theory of ideology, which is not, as is widely thought, one of false consciousness, but rather one of structural limitation and ideological closure. (PU, 52)

Quoting Marx's analysis of petty bourgeois ideology in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* Jameson argues for a formulation of ideology as "strategies of containment": that is to say,

the limitation imposed upon our modes of thought by the specific historical situation from which such thinking emerges. It was Lukács' great achievement according to Jameson to reveal how such strategies of containment can 'be unmasked only by confrontation with the ideal of totality which they at once imply and repress' (PU, 53). What Jameson means by this can be seen in his exposition of the ideological nature of post-structuralist thought. Citing the example of Deleuze and Guattari's molecular politics and Derridean deconstruction, Jameson suggests that if such repudiations of totalization:

are to be celebrated in their intensity, they must be accompanied by some initial appearance of continuity, some ideology of unification already in place, which it is their mission to rebuke and shatter. The value of the molecular in Deleuze, for instance, depends structurally on the preexisting molar or unifying impulse against which its truth is read. (PU, 53)

The ideological aspect of post-structuralism is revealed in its inability to think beyond the immediate, disparate moments of intensity and flux; and to attempt to understand the historical conditions which produce such fragmented and isolated experience. In that they presuppose the existence of the totality which it is their aim to deconstruct the post-structural ideologies of *différance*, schizoid intensity and heterogeneity are, argues Jameson, second degree critical philosophies 'which reconfirm the status of the concept of totality by their very reaction against it' (PU, 53). However, the problem with this kind of dialectical thinking is that it could equally operate in the opposite direction. Thus, as Terry Eagleton observes, Jameson 'stubbornly refuses to contemplate the converse possibility, one flamboyantly entertained by Jacques Derrida, that our conceptions of totality may have been all along more parasitic upon some primordial movement of difference than we care to admit'.<sup>17</sup>

As we saw in chapter 2, in *The Political Unconscious* Jameson equates the notion of totality with the Althusserian conception of History as an absent cause. Jameson writes:

Totality is not available for representation, any more than it is accessible in the form of some ultimate truth (or moment of Absolute Spirit).  
(PU, 55)

The totality can only be represented through its absence, this allows Jameson 'without any great inconsistency to respect both the methodological imperative implicit in the concept of totality or totalization' (PU, 57) and the various kinds of 'symptomal' analysis demanded by post-structuralism. However, as I argued in chapters 2 and 3 the incompatibility of holding these two positions simultaneously can only be maintained at the expense of the specificity of each opposing conception of totality.

On the one hand, then, Jameson has attempted to accommodate the post-structuralist critique of totality by playing down the positive aspects of the concept with its Hegelian emphasis on the concrete, and stressing the concept's negative function as an unrealisable ideal against which our partial representations of the world can be judged. On the other hand, this then allows Jameson to rewrite the concept at a higher level of abstraction, as an absent cause, beyond representation, whereby the various critiques of totality can only be said to make sense in terms of a prior concept of totality. Thus, the concept can never be empirically verified but at the same time is confirmed through our very inability to realise or represent it, as the background against which our partial understanding and representations of the world make sense. Jameson further develops this understanding of totality in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.

In this later work Jameson insists on the need to distinguish between notions of totality and totalization:

if the word *totality* sometimes seems to suggest that some privileged bird's-eye view of the whole is available, which is the Truth, then the project of totalization implies exactly the opposite and takes as its premise the impossibility for individual and biological human subjects to conceive of such a position, let alone to adopt or achieve of it. (PLLC, 332)

Furthermore, we need to distinguish both of these concepts from any connection with totalitarianism. The term "totalization" derives from Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* and, suggests Jameson, marks that process of partial summing up that subjects must make in order to construct a meaningful narrative of their lives. In Sartre's usage the term tended to 'envelope and find a least common denominator for the twin human activities of perception and action' (PLLC, 332). The term therefore became synonymous with the more Marxian term of "praxis" and designated the 'unification inherent in human action' (PLLC, 333). In this sense argues Jameson it seems difficult to see how the subject in a postmodern era could avoid the experience of totalization:

Totalizing, in Sartre, is, strictly speaking, that process whereby, actively impelled by the project, an agent negates the specific object or item and reincorporates it into the larger project-in-course. Philosophically, and barring some genuine mutation of the species, it is hard to see how human activity under the third, or postmodern, stage of capitalism could elude or evade this very general formula, although some of postmodernism's ideal images - schizophrenia above all - are clearly calculated to rebuke it and to stand as unassimilable and unsubsumable under it. (PLLC, 333)

This continual process of partial summing up is distinct from the concept of totality itself, which for Jameson is linked to the notion of "mode of production". In the book on postmodernism Jameson reiterates the notion of mode of production he formulated in *The Political Unconscious*; insisting that if the concept of totality is to have any meaning then we must accept that, like the Althusserian notion of structure, there is only one totality, that is, the mode of production. Jameson further distinguishes his conception of totality from the Weberian notion of a "total system":

a mode of production is not a "total system" in that forbidding sense; it includes a variety of counterforces and new tendencies within itself, of "residual" as well as "emergent" forces, which it must attempt to manage or control, (PLLC, 406)



In short, Jameson's formulation of non-synchronicity and uneven development. As I pointed out in chapter 2 the problem with Jameson's position is that on one level he insists that there can only be one totality but the logical implication of non-synchronicity, or the co-existence of differing modes of production, is that there will be co-existence of differing totalities. What I wish to draw attention to in this particular discussion of mode of production though is Jameson's contention that what is at stake in the "wars on totality" is in fact the rejection of Utopian thought. For Jameson, the language of utopianism is code for 'the systematic transformation of contemporary society' (PLLC, 334). Consequently in rejecting the concept of totality, postmodernism is turning its back on that larger political project of transforming capitalism itself which is traditionally identified as Marxism's emancipatory narrative. As Jameson puts it, what 'is sometimes characterised as a nostalgia for class politics of some older type is generally more likely to be simply a "nostalgia" for politics *tout court* " (PLLC, 331).

As one follows Jameson's argument one becomes increasingly aware of the problems of this type of totalizing reasoning. In the above discussion I have slipped from an Hegelian concept of totality as the concrete, through Lukács' negative and demystifying function of totality to Sartre's totalization or partial summing up, through Althusser's notion of structure to mode of production and finally to Utopian thought and the collective transformation of capitalism. Each of these categories has become synonymous in Jameson's discourse and this allows him to slide from one register to another, from the philosophical implications of the concept to the need for renewed class struggle. This procedure, I would suggest, tends to elide the specificity of each differing conception of totality and enact precisely that denial of difference proposed by the post-structuralist and postmodernist criticisms of the concept of totality. This overly homogenising tendency of totalizing thought is most starkly revealed in Jameson's reading of Adorno.

In *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, The persistence of the Dialectic* Jameson maintains that Adorno's unique contribution to Marxist theory lies:

in his unique emphasis on the presence of late capitalism as a totality within the very forms of our concepts or of the works of art themselves.

(LM, 9)

As I suggested in the previous chapter Jameson's reading of Adorno in the 1990s is very different from his reading of Adorno in the early 1970s. In particular the emphasis Jameson placed on the reflexivity of dialectical thought in his early work must now be rejected as 'part of the baggage of a modernist thinking no longer very authoritative in the postmodernist era' (LM, 25). Therefore Jameson proposes an alternative view of the dialectical process, that is:

to think another side, an outside, an external face of the concept which, like that of the moon, can never be directly visible or accessible to us: but we must vigilantly remember and reckon that other face into our sense of the concept while remaining within it in the old way and continuing to use and think it. (LM, 25)

Jameson defines this process as that of thinking both with and against the concept simultaneously and it is here, he argues, that the concept of totality in Adorno comes into its own. According to Jameson, the notion of totality rises up as a solution to the problem of thinking both with and against the concept, in the sense that 'the concept can be retained and dereified all at once' through 'its reinsertion into totality or system' (LM, 26). Totality, maintains Jameson, 'plays a strategic role in freeing us from the "spell" of the concept' (LM, 26). In other words, there is a drive from the individual and isolated concept towards totality or unity. However, notes Jameson, there is, at the same time, in Adorno's work a sense in which totality has 'something illicit about it, expressing the idealism and the imperialism of the concept' (LM, 26). But to read this as a rejection of totality itself, or to stress its totalitarian aspect, argues Jameson, is a fundamental misunderstanding which:

lies in drawing the conclusion that philosophical emphasis on the indispensability of this category amounts either to a celebration of it or, in a stronger form of the anti-utopian argument, to its implicit perpetuation as a reality or a referent outside the philosophical realm. (LM, 27)

In other words, we should not confuse the use of abstract categories, such as mode of production or totality, with an actual belief in their substantive and empirically verifiable existence; that is a confusion between the 'concept and the thing itself' (PLLC, 401). The totality or system is precisely that outer face of the concept, I alluded to above, that is outside and 'forever inaccessible to us' (LM, 28).

Jameson's reading of Adorno, then, emphasises the critical and negative aspect of totality, it is neither immediately knowable nor representable but remains an absent presence against which our fragmented and isolated concepts stand judged. Furthermore the notion of totality, proposed in *Late Marxism*, is also synonymous or interchangeable with the categories of system, universal, concept, exchange system and history itself.<sup>18</sup> This reading of the notion of totality would appear to be very much in line with the negative conception developed in *The Political Unconscious*. I do not wish to suggest that Jameson's reading of Adorno is wrong as such,<sup>19</sup> as it would be consistent with both Jameson's and Adorno's work to be able to sustain very different and even incompatible readings,<sup>20</sup> but I do wish to raise what are essentially political implications of his reading.

As I indicated above, what appears to be lost in Jameson's totalizing approach is the specificity of the concepts themselves as they are folded back into the tradition of Marxist thought which Jameson adheres to. In *Marxism and Totality* Martin Jay stresses an alternative reading of Adorno's conception of totality and identity theory. Like Jameson, Jay focuses upon Adorno's negative conception of totality but unlike Jameson he emphasises that Adorno's negative dialectics are strongly opposed to Lukács' positive dialectics and in particular the *verum-factum* principle which posited a subject-object

unity, or, 'a symmetry between making and knowing'.<sup>21</sup> For Jay argues that Adorno's 'reluctance to link epistemological validity with social genesis'<sup>22</sup> rules out the expressive concept of totality advocated by Lukács. Indeed:

the very notion of a meta-subject capable of totalizing reality was an illegitimate hypostatisation taken over from idealism's notion of a transcendental subject.<sup>23</sup>

Adorno's particular animus against the concept of totality, according to Jay, was 'especially directed against its longitudinal form, the belief in universal history as a coherent whole',<sup>24</sup> that is to say, exactly the conception of history and totality that Jameson proposes in *The Political Unconscious*. Jay insists that Adorno's use of totality is 'an example of his general anti-realist use of concepts'<sup>25</sup> or, as Jameson highlights, the non-adequation of a concept to its real object or counterpart. There can, for Adorno, be no identity, as in the Hegelian-Lukácsian tradition, between subject and object, concept and referent. What all this amounts to, according to Jay, is that the concept of totality in Adorno's work is not simply a negative but is a "pejorative" term shorn of all positive connotations and 'almost a synonym for totalitarianism'.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, after Adorno, writes Jay:

No longer could a Western Marxist defend an expressive view of the whole in which a meta-subject was both the subject and object of history. No longer could history itself be seen as a coherent whole with a positive conclusion as its telos. No longer could totality ignore the non-identity of the historical and the natural and subordinate the latter to human domination. And no longer could the totalizing epistemology of the Hegelian tradition be invoked with confidence against the antinomies of bourgeois thought.<sup>27</sup>

The question, then, is how can Jameson apparently do just such a thing?

Firstly, it would be erroneous to suggest that Jameson would uncritically endorse any of the above positions. To speak of Jameson, as Terry Eagleton does, as a 'shamelessly unreconstructed Hegelian Marxist'<sup>28</sup> overshoots the mark to the extent that Jameson has

explicitly reconstructed his Hegelian Marxism. Jameson's practice of transcoding and, as I shall argue below, of qualification enables him to adopt a position that at once appears to endorse the views enumerated above and at the same time problematize them. So, for example, Jameson may not endorse the view of a Lukácsian totalizing meta-subject or that history has a positive telos but he would still maintain that history remains a single great adventure and that although the outcome remains to be decided there is a positive aspect in the form of the Utopian impulse. Similarly, the totalizing epistemology of the Hegelian tradition can still be invoked against the fragmentation and dispersion of late capitalism but only if we grasp that the problem of totalizing thought is first and foremost a problem of representation:

the very problem of representability now becomes in some sense its own solution - the thing being done, as it were, by showing it cannot be done in the first place. (GPA, 56)

Jameson, then, wishes to retain both the positive and negative, or critical, aspects of the Western Marxist tradition: a position he finds tenable as long as all concepts and problems are historicized. For instance, in a footnote to *The Political Unconscious* Jameson challenges Martin Jay's reading of the Frankfurt school:

by overstressing the leitmotif of non-identity theory, [Jay] ends up conveying the misleading impression that the fundamental target of "critical theory" was Marxism rather than capitalism. The non-identity between subject and object often means little more than a materialist and "decentering" approach to Knowledge. (PU, 52)

Jameson substantiates this view at much greater length in *Late Marxism* for which the opening sentences of the first chapter will suffice. Reflecting on the claims of Adorno's post-Marxism, Jameson insists that this misreading 'rests on a misunderstanding of one of Adorno's basic leitmotifs, namely 'non-identity' whilst in actual fact 'Adorno is ... the philosopher of Identity in a very special case' (LM, 15). Whether or not this is a philosophically sustainable position is not my concern here, rather I wish to highlight the

political consequences of Jameson's choice. By folding Adorno's non-identity theory back into identity theory, in whatever special sense, Jameson has diminished the polemical and critical force of Adorno's work. Adorno simply becomes one more figure in a long tradition of Marxist philosophy rather than a powerful and remorseless critic of both capitalism and the aporias of that very tradition of Marxist thought. I am not advocating a gradual slippage into post-Marxism here but I am suggesting that it may be more politically astute to retain a separation between certain ideas and concepts, even if they are philosophically reconcilable. In a postmodern era of micro-politics, *différance* and schizophrenic flux Jameson's reassertion of the concept of totality is both timely and to be welcomed. Although the language may change one has only to think of some of the more holistic approaches to Green politics to be acutely aware that totalizing thought can not be wished away. But at the same time, neither can we ignore the critique of totalizing thought, as Jay suggests:

there has been a growing fear in certain quarters on the left that the old argument linking the Marxist aspiration for normative totality and totalitarian politics made by earlier critics like Camus may have a certain legitimacy after all.<sup>29</sup>

We need to be sensitive to the need for totalizing thought and systematic change but that practice must not be coercive, eliminating difference and imposing a unilateral or unilinear perspective upon history, it can only ever be a partial totalization, always open to change.

### **Mediation, Reification and Agency**

In chapter 2 I showed how Jameson defended the concept of mediation against the Althusserian critique of expressive causality; insisting that mediation does not impose an *identity* between distinct phenomena but rather points to the existence of a *relationship* between different phenomena and social levels. I shall now consider Jameson's central

mediatory category, reification, in more detail. Reification is by no means the only mediation that Jameson has recourse to; one could also highlight his use of categories such as aesthetic, form, narrative and genre. Reification, though, 'that special bugbear of Hegelian Marxism'<sup>30</sup> as Martin Jay describes it, remains for Jameson perhaps his single most important theoretical, philosophical and political concern. This position is strongly reconfirmed in the concluding pages of *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, where he states:

that those doctrines of reification and commodification which played a secondary role in traditional or classical Marxian heritage, are now likely to come into their own and become the dominant instruments of analysis and struggle. (GPA, 212)

For Jameson, the logic of commodification and reification is relentless and unremitting. I have discussed in the preceding chapters how Jameson utilises the concept to account for the waning of historicity; the effacement of traces of labour from commodity production; the aesthetization of the commodity process; the fragmentation of our psyches and fracturing of our subjective identities; the colonisation those last enclaves of resistance to global capitalism, the aesthetic, the unconscious and the Third World; and finally the splitting of the signifier and signified couple.

As Terry Eagleton has pointed out, the 'power and versatility of insight that Jameson can generate from these twin notions [commodification and reification] is little short of staggering'<sup>31</sup> but such a degree of versatility has entailed a high political price, of which I will say more below. Firstly I shall consider the concept itself, for it has occasioned no small degree of controversy within Marxism, over its precise meaning and its significance for the Marxian theory of praxis. Andrew Arato points out that Lukács uses the term reification 'as a synonym for alienation, rationalization, atomisation and deactivation',<sup>32</sup> a position that Jameson, initially at least, would appear to endorse.<sup>33</sup> Many Marxists, on the other hand, insist on the need to distinguish between these distinct categories, for instance:

While some have regarded alienation as an 'idealist' concept to be replaced by the 'materialist' concept of 'reification', others have regarded 'alienation' as a philosophical concept whose sociological counterpart is 'reification'. According to the prevailing view alienation's a broader phenomenon, and reification one of its forms or aspects.<sup>34</sup>

Eagleton has described Jameson's equating of reification and rationalization as "spurious"<sup>35</sup> and Philip Wood in an article on Sartre and Anglo-American Marxism, has insisted upon the need to separate the concepts of rationalization and reification: the former designating the reorganisation of the work process and the latter defining 'a definite social relation between human beings'.<sup>36</sup> Clearly Jameson does not accept the "prevailing" view of reification as a specific form of alienation; on the contrary, for Jameson, alienation appears to designate a specific form of reification. In many of Jameson texts the categories of: reification, rationalization, alienation, commodification, specialisation and fragmentation frequently appear to be synonymous or identical. However, we should not be too hasty in assimilating these categories to each other, for Jameson, Lukács' theory of reification provides a synthesis of Marx and Weber rather than an identity between them. Reification is not identical to rationalization but "includes" it<sup>37</sup> providing the first systemic account of the logic of capitalism as:

it insists on extreme fragmentation as a social norm. It attempts to project a process which separates, compartmentalizes, specializes, and disperses: a force which at one and the same time operates uniformly over everything and makes heterogeneity a homogeneous and standardizing power.<sup>38</sup>

In an exemplary study of Lukács' theory of reification Andrew Arato has pointed to the inconsistencies in Lukács' formulation. 'The analysis of reification', writes Arato, 'moves through the moments of "alienated labour", of the reification of capitalist society as a whole, and of the reification of consciousness in bourgeois science and philosophy'.<sup>39</sup> Following this procedure, contends Arato, it is misleading to identify the concept of reification with alienation, and indeed objectification as Lukács desires to do. Starting from the initial premise that the 'theory of reification is an indispensable part of the



dialectical theory of society',<sup>40</sup> Arato can only conclude that without serious reformulation Lukács' theory proves to be inappropriate as a dialectical theory of society in the era of advanced capitalism:

Although Lukács' theory of reification was intended as a dialectical theory of capitalist society, it is *for us* "only" a fundamental work in the history of the philosophy of praxis.<sup>41</sup>

Unfortunately Jameson does not appear to have undertaken such a reformulation. Whilst his analysis of late capitalism is not limited to the theory of reification, the pre-eminence accorded to this category in Jameson's work and his tendency to conflate what I have suggested are distinct concepts results in significant and detrimental consequences. Eagleton summarises the problem well:

the 'question' to which the concept of reification is an 'answer' is not in the first place one of class struggle, but a dual query about the nature of capitalist economic production and the quality of lived experience within it. If reification returns a vital economic answer to the question of how we have come to experience as meagrely as we do, it promises to put cultural formation and mode of production back together only at the risk of displacing the political. If everything is mediated through the commodity, class struggle becomes an *answer* to this unhappy condition, rather than the first *question* of historical materialism.<sup>42</sup>

In other words, reification is not the primary problem, which then must be overcome through class struggle, but the actual conditions of possibility and need for class struggle in the first place is the principal concern of historical materialism. Indeed, following Arato's analysis of Lukács, we can locate this aporia in Jameson's work to a too uncritical endorsement of Lukács' original theory. As we have seen Lukács identified the proletariat as the universal subject of history through the principle of *verum-factum*. Arato highlights two problems with Lukács' position; firstly, Marx, he argues, reached the position of the proletariat as a universal subject through an understanding of human "needs" whereas Lukács bases his thesis of the proletariat as identical subject-object of history on a

proposition about "class consciousness". Arato maintains that 'the question of class consciousness can be related to the individual consciousness of members of the class only through the dialectics of human needs and constraints'<sup>43</sup> and not simply through a consideration of consciousness. Lukács does not consider the question of needs and constraints. Secondly, Lukács' attempt to find the identical subject-object of history proceeds entirely from 'the side of the potential subjectivity'<sup>44</sup> and does not take into account the objective conditions of possibility. Lukács' claim that the proletariat is the identical subject-object of history presupposes that the 'the historical process has become transparent to theory'.<sup>45</sup> According to Arato, there are two dialectics at work here: firstly the dialectic of the identical subject-object upon which the philosophy of praxis is based, and secondly, the dialectic of immediacy and mediation upon which all dialectical social theory is based. These, insists Arato, derive from different conceptual presuppositions which are not reconciled in Lukács' theory:

the subject-object dialectic (in what ever modified form) and the dialectic of immediacy and mediation remain two sides of a subject-object split within *History and Class Consciousness*, a split that appears most fundamentally as a methodological duality between philosophy of praxis and the dialectical social theory this philosophy of praxis is aiming at.<sup>46</sup>

Arato points out that the consideration of the identical subject-object at the expense of the dialectic of immediacy and mediation tends 'to exclude mediations between the collective subject and all individuals'.<sup>47</sup> As with Lukács Jameson focuses upon our subjective experience of capitalism which tends to supplant questions of politics with questions of consciousness and the need to overcome reification. Finally, as I shall argue below, Jameson tends to evade, or diminish the significance, of essential mediations, such as institutional practices and nation states, as he slides from individual and fragmented psyches to the global totality.

As we have seen, according to Jameson, the unremitting logic of reification and commodification has finally colonised the last areas of resistance: the unconscious, the aesthetic and the Third-World. I will take just the last of these areas to highlight the problems with Jameson's theory. In *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* Jameson restates his conviction that the Third-World and in particular Third-World culture has been co-opted by the global economic system:

Third-World cinema itself is rarely today defended as a space in which models for alternate cinema are to be sought. Indeed the very term Third World seems to have become an embarrassment in a period in which the realities of the economic have seemed to supplant the possibilities of collective struggle, in which human agency and politics seem to have been dissolved by the global corporate institutions we call late capitalism.

(GPA, 186)

As so often with Jameson there is the problem of the "we" whom he appeals to and generalises the experience of. For example, as I argued in a previous chapter,<sup>48</sup> the term "Third World" is not so much an "embarrassment" as a strategy to reduce a diversity of cultures to the single historical perspective of the West and in particular North America. Secondly, the term "late capitalism" is by no means as broadly acceptable as Jameson's statement implies; for many of us the term has unwelcome and unhelpful teleological implications, that we are somehow coming to the end of capitalism; which is by no means self-evident. To return to Jameson's assessment of Third-World culture:

Third-World 'culture', however, in the narrow sense, has been gratefully absorbed by the international entertainment industry, and has seemed to furnish vibrant but politically acceptable images of social pluralism for the late capitalist big city. (GPA, 187)

Jameson's view of the fate of Third-World culture is an extension of his general view of postmodernism as the first global (North American) cultural dominant, which as we know is underwritten by Ernest Mandel's thesis of late capitalism as a new stage in capitalist expansion and development. The problem with this is that, for Mandel, the expansion of

late capitalism is dependent upon those very areas of Third-World economic and technological underdevelopment that Jameson wishes to abolish. Mandel's theory of global capitalism is predicated upon a thesis of unequal and combined development, that is to say, that the different phases of capital accumulation - primitive accumulation and accumulation through the production of surplus value - are not successive or chronological phases of economic history but are also '*concurrent economic processes*'.<sup>49</sup> Mandel identifies a dialectical relation between three distinct moments: firstly, capital accumulation in the sphere capitalist production proper; secondly, the continuing primitive accumulation of capital outside this sphere of capitalist production, and finally, the constraint and limitation of the second moment by the first through competition and struggle. Each dialectical expansion or "long wave" of capitalist development marks a further penetration of capitalist modes of production into areas of under-development and primitive accumulation:

the capitalist world economy is an *articulated system of capitalist, semi-capitalist and pre-capitalist relations of production, linked to each other by capitalist relations of exchange and dominated by the capitalist world market*.<sup>50</sup>

On one level this argument would very much appear to support Jameson's view that late capitalism represents the final colonisation of the last enclaves of under or alternative development. However, Mandel poses exactly this question: does the continuing penetration of the capitalist mode of production into areas of under-development indicate a 'tendency towards a thorough industrialization of the Third World, a universalization of the capitalist mode of production and the eventual homogenisation of the world economy?'<sup>51</sup> Mandel responds that it emphatically does not! Indeed, he writes:

It simply means a change in the forms of juxtaposition of development and underdevelopment, or more correctly: new differential levels of capital accumulation, productivity, and surplus extraction are emerging, which although not of the same nature are still more pronounced than those of the 'classical' imperialist epoch.<sup>52</sup>

Capitalism according to Mandel's theory could not exist without this interrelation of development and underdevelopment and it requires for its continuing existence the survival of these semi and pre-capitalist enclaves. Indeed, Jameson's own emphasis upon the non-synchronicity of modes of production, that no mode of production exists in a pure state, would appear to allow for just such a co-existence of differing modes of accumulation. On the other hand, Jameson's insistence on the unremitting logic of reification would seem, at best, to contradict the non-synchronicity of different modes of production and, at worst, to rule it out all together. In terms of cultural production, the differing social relations of underdevelopment of pre-capitalist modes of accumulation may just as well facilitate the production of alternative representations of the system and alternative forms of cultural politics that Jameson's over totalizing view of postmodernism has ruled out.

Martin Jay identifies a problem with Adorno's usage of the concept of reification that I believe can be extended to Jameson, Jay writes:

Either the totality was completely watertight in its reifying power and resistance could only be co-opted, or the totality still contained negations and Adorno's descriptions of its Satanic "falseness" were exaggerations.<sup>53</sup>

For Jameson, the reifying power of late capitalism has become all encompassing, all attempts at resistance will be (one senses in Jameson's writing) "inevitably" co-opted and by implication hopeless. However, if Jameson is not exaggerating the totalizing logic of late capitalism and its reifying power, a whole series of questions arise: how can one resist such a ubiquitous force? If it has now penetrated every aspect of our lives and experience how can one achieve a position from which to provide a critique of reification? Is not the highly abstract and at times tortuously complex discourse of the Hegelian Marxist as much a product of reification as that of any other? If it is so all-pervasive, then where is resistance to come from?

Jameson identifies "theoretical discourse" as itself a postmodern phenomenon, so clearly Jameson is within postmodernism, indeed it would seem to be impossible following Jameson to be outside of it. How, therefore, can Jameson perform the totalizing and periodizing operation that he does without the critical distance that the theory itself has abolished? This problem is starkly demonstrated in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* where Jameson returns to the questions of religion and nationalism in the postmodern era (GPA, 188). Jameson, we should note, has already informed us it is 'axiomatic that what is now called fundamentalism is also a postmodern phenomenon' (PLLC, 388) and that belief is rather 'a casualty of a period in which otherness' (PLLC, 388) and depth still prevailed, that is modernism. So it is with some exasperation that Jameson finds he must once again return to the subject of resurgent fundamentalism and nationalism in Eastern Europe; 'may one in passing' he writes in a footnote to his essay on Russian film:

express exasperation with the various religious revivals in the East? The Roman Catholic wedding in *Man of Steel* (complete with Lech Walesa!) was already disgraceful; we have now seen the consequences. ... Surely an anti-foundational era is able to satisfy its aesthetic, philosophical and political needs without the trappings of superstition, and is at least in a position to jettison the baggage of the great monotheisms (the animisms and polytheisms might still be acceptable on other grounds; while Buddhism is in our sense atheistic). (GPA, 111)

The superior tone of this footnote is extraordinary as one senses Jameson's irritation that so many of us have not caught on to the schizophrenic logic of late capitalism to be beyond such regressive experience. There is more than a hint of the old intellectual Mandarin present here, the kind of universal intellectual stigmatised by Foucault, and which postmodernism itself was supposed to have consigned to history. One senses the exasperation of the theoretician who after painstakingly elaborating a global theory finds a world that refuses to conform to it. Whilst one may share Jameson's exasperation that Eastern Europe, and indeed many other parts of the globe, have turned to religious

fundamentalism and rampant nationalism rather than some socialist third way one cannot help but feel that Jameson's diatribe, to use his own term, represents a profoundly undialectical and unhistorical appreciation of the situation. Surely one of the many reasons why people are turning to fundamentalism and nationalism is that these social forces have provided a focus for collective opposition which in a different context Jameson may read as a positive Utopian impulse? Whilst Jameson is not suggesting that belief and nationalism have disappeared he does maintain that they have been 'threatened by postmodernity' (GPA, 117) and no longer have meaning in the old modernist sense. Resurgent nationalism and religious fundamentalism are political responses which need to be confronted on a political terrain which is at once local, institutional and national as well as multinational and corporate.

In an interview with Stuart Hall, Jameson concedes that he is today rather pessimistic about the opportunities for new political initiatives:

My feeling about politics, which may be an old-fashioned one, is that nothing really happens without the reconstruction of a certain basic unity among groups. My own sense of this may be too pessimistic, but from the perspective of a politics of solidarity, culture would not be a substitute for politics. ... I am more pessimistic about a purely cultural politics than I would obviously like to be.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed the privileged form of political activity remains for Jameson the possibility of alliance politics that he outlined in *The Political Unconscious* :

The privileged form in which the American Left can develop today must therefore necessarily be that of an *alliance politics*; and such a politics is the strict practical equivalent of the concept of totalization on the theoretical level. In practice, then, the attack on the concept of "totality" in the American framework means the undermining and repudiation of the only realistic perspective in which a genuine Left could come into being in this country. (PU, 54)

It is surely difficult to predict and debatable what conditions need to prevail in order for a genuine Left politics to emerge in North America. Indeed, there would probably be very little agreement over what constituted a "genuine" Left rather than less genuine form of Left politics. But what I want to highlight in Jameson's statement is its "all or nothing" quality: without totalizing theory alliance politics could easily be seen as purely opportunistic, without alliance politics "no" genuine Left politics can emerge. It has frequently been observed that in the divergent tradition of Western Marxism a profound sense of pessimism has been accompanied by equally strong sense of optimism.<sup>55</sup> Thus as Jameson's views on cultural politics become increasingly pessimistic, as I argued in the previous chapter, his new spatial awareness appears to explicitly exclude politics in any meaningful sense, his calls for renewed Utopian thinking have increased apace. What one misses in Jameson's work though is any real sense of who the new historical agents may be in a global multinational economy.

In a series of articles<sup>56</sup> the sociologist Mike Featherstone has criticized Jameson's theory of postmodernism for directing too little attention to the changing experiences of different groups, preferring, like many intellectuals, to generalise from his own experience. Featherstone insists on the need to focus upon the institutions which mediate our experience of this form of production and the practices involved in contemporary culture. Jameson's response is, understandably, that he is not a sociologist:

I [do not] see why any of those topics should be excluded, they are very interesting matters indeed. But it is hard to see how sociological inquiry at that level would become *explanatory*: rather, the phenomena he is concerned with tend at once to reform into their own semi-autonomous sociological level, one which then at once requires a diachronic narrative.<sup>57</sup>

So, although it may appear that concrete social agents once more emerge in Featherstone's work we still need to respect different levels of theoretical abstraction if we are not to fall back into the reified specialisations of academic disciplines. There is, however, more to be



said for Featherstone's position than Jameson allows. In particular Featherstone focuses our attention upon other forms of mediation between the individual subject and the social whole. Dominick LaCapra, in a review of *The Political Unconscious*, maintains that the major difficulties of Jameson's theoretical strategy 'cluster around the axial "dialectical" problem of mediation itself'.<sup>58</sup> For Jameson, mediation provides the mechanism to move beyond the specialisation and compartmentalisation of contemporary society. LaCapra, on the other hand, identifies the very complexity and density of Jameson's style and vocabulary as itself a symptom rather than a solution to the problem of reification:

[Jameson's] own comments on the problem of mediation reinforce the impression of an addiction to a highly hermetic approach that remains on a narrowly hermeneutic level in attempting to "break out of specialized compartments of (bourgeois) disciplines". A model-centred semiotics with its own proliferating lexicon of code words becomes Jameson's all-too-modern "political" answer to the problem.<sup>59</sup>

In short, and as I shall argue below, style has come to replace politics. According to LaCapra Jameson's highly restricted view of mediation is accompanied by 'an abstract and exaggerated conception of the role of codes in relation to actual usage',<sup>60</sup> a conception that is not specifically Marxist. However, the problem of mediation is not simply a question of the relations between various reified and specialised disciplines but also between these disciplines, with their esoteric languages, and other social spheres and what could be termed "ordinary language". As LaCapra writes:

This mutual questioning between the ordinary and the "esoteric" might help to create the "space" for an effective transformation of both.<sup>61</sup>

For LaCapra, Jameson's *oeuvreism* essentially evades the issue of working out mediations between different social spheres and in particular at institutional levels:

At the very least, it functions to divert attention from the problem of institutions. For it is the institution in the broad sense that mediates between individual and society as well as between various uses of language.<sup>62</sup>

A greater attention to institutional practices may also provide Jameson with a firmer ground for a new form of postmodern politics rather than the loose and ambivalent conception of alliance and group politics that he can only at present envisage. For even in terms of cultural practice it is now at the various institutional levels that political interventions are made. I am not suggesting that this can provide a substitute for more holistic and abstract forms of political thought but it will facilitate more concrete political objectives than Jameson's at present pessimistic and disabling "empty chair", his yet to be formulated properly postmodern politics.

### Politics and Style

I commenced this study with an analysis of Jameson's style of writing, maintaining that his particular dialectical style, always making unexpected connections, drawing together disparate phenomena, doubling back on itself and creating what Jameson called, "dialectical shocks", was to be seen as an enactment or embodiment of dialectical thought. With the development of Jameson's career the dialectic has played a less central role, although along with Hegel it is still very much in evidence, and has been replaced by notions of "transcoding" and "cognitive mapping". This has not, however, resulted in a discernible decrease in the density and complexity of Jameson's style, as is evident from the opening sentence of 'Conspiracy as Totality', the first essay in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* :

In the widespread paralysis of the collective or social imaginary, to which 'nothing occurs' (Karl Kraus) when confronted with the ambitious program of fantasizing an economic system on the scale of the globe itself, the older motif of conspiracy knows a fresh lease on life, as a narrative structure capable of reuniting the minimal basic components: a potentially infinite network, along with a plausible explanation of its invisibility; or in other words: the collective and the epistemological. (GPA, 9)

It is not that the sense of this sentence is particularly difficult to grasp or that one cannot follow through the idea. It is rather that one is left almost breathless as each subsequent clause is piled upon the preceding one. One is immediately immersed in the problem itself, the epistemological problem of knowing, and thus representing, the totality. Jameson's text makes no concessions to this difficulty, the impossibility of representing the totality, but rather like a helix returns upon itself time and again to pick up new threads and weave them into the global patchwork of multinational capitalism. With characteristic virtuosity Jameson slips from close textual analysis of specific films to a consideration of the global economy, finding traces of that absent presence, the totality, in the most unlikely of films.

As we read sentence after sentence of Jameson's spiralling prose we are taken up by the language itself, carried through a whirlwind tour of world cinema. One is astonished by the readings Jameson can generate from these films, some of them little known and others (like *Videodrome*) perhaps unusual choices. One is indeed confronted by an epistemological dilemma as one attempts to hold these disparate analyses together to follow the path from the particular to the universal and back again. Jameson's text seems to generate that spatial and cognitive disorientation that he is concerned to explicate. But to what extent is this disorientation the result of a paralysis of the collective imagination or as much a consequence of Jameson's own writing? For example, Jameson's opening statement concerning the paralysis of the collective imagination is the central premise of this whole book but it is given at the outset and will be elaborated with great style and panache throughout but in a sense it has never been argued for. One must accept the premise as "given". Throughout this study I have referred to the Jameson's work as an *oeuvre*, as a corpus or body of work that must be seen as a totality in its own right. To engage with any particular part of the corpus is to engage with work as a whole. Thus one assumes that the ground work has been done elsewhere, in the essays on cognitive mapping for example, but when one reads those essays one finds that the spatial

disorientation that Jameson is concerned with here is also assumed there. Without a closer analysis of the intermediary levels of mediation one must either accept Jameson's cognitive and experiential dilemma or not. Jameson's recent work on postmodernism, spatiality and cinema forces one to think the unthinkable, to attempt to map the global totality of late capitalism, but one could ask: is this really the most pressing political, theoretical and cultural dilemma for the Left today? Or does it not rather tell us something about Jameson's own social and historical position as a global theorist with a specifically North American perspective upon the world? As Martin Jay writes:

"totality," had a special place in the lexicon of all Western Marxists. In privileging it as they did, they betrayed their unmistakable status as intellectuals: throughout modern history, only "men of ideas" have combined the time (and economic support) to reflect on matters beyond their immediate material concerns with the hubris to believe they might know the whole of reality.<sup>63</sup>

According to Jameson, the 'first business of a Marxist teacher ... is clearly to teach Marxism itself<sup>64</sup> but is it the first business of Marxism simply to be taught? If there is still a sense in which Marxism can be argued *not* to be just like any other academic discourse, not to be just another theory of history, then it is surely in its notion of praxis. That is, the unity of theory and practice, not simply as a pious injunction or a slogan but as a necessary requirement to link theory and politics. From the outset Jameson's project has been explicitly theoretical. Within the United States, he wrote in *Marxism and Form*, 'there is no tactical or political question which is not first and foremost theoretical' (MF, xviii). Whilst I still believe Jameson to be correct in this assertion I believe it to be only half the problem, that is to say, there is also no theoretical problem that is not first and foremost tactical and political. In other words, Marxism is not just about making theoretical interventions, or interventions at "street" level,<sup>65</sup> but about attempting to create change at all levels of society: theoretical, political, cultural, economic and specifically within the arena of teaching, at an institutional level. If Marxism is to remain a vital theoretical and

political force it must contribute at the level of institutional practices. However, in the case of Jameson, there is not only a difficulty in understanding many of his texts there is also a difficulty in utilising them. Frequently, Jameson's most interesting ideas, for example the notion of a political unconscious, a libidinal apparatus, of national allegories and of cognitive mapping, are peculiarly difficult to get ahold of. One can superficially grasp the idea but one always has the sense that there is more to it than one thinks, if only one could work out how Jameson achieves his ends. I have suggested throughout this study that one way in which Jameson is able to move across such a large theoretical terrain and to draw together such disparate thinkers as Lukács, Althusser and Adorno is through the elision of their specific differences, an elision that tends to blunt the political cutting edge of the original positions. For example, LaCapra has highlighted Jameson's rather mystifying use of the Althusserian concept of "absent cause":

the 'absent cause' seems to designate an empty but paradoxically crowded space wherein a number of concepts meet or even fuse with one another: the Real, History, Utopia, totality and the "political unconscious" itself.<sup>66</sup>

It is difficult to work with concepts, let alone teach them, when they continually dissolve into one another. One can accept Jameson's argument that questions of culture are no more simple than scientific disciplines and should not therefore be made to appear simple, but at the same time ask for a higher degree of analytical rigour.

There is also a stylistic dimension to this problem. Jameson's texts are pervaded by lexical equivocations; most notably with such phrases as: "something like" and "kind of". In a review of *The Political Unconscious* Robert Scholes lists thirty such equivocations including: "something like", "would seem", "at some level", "virtual" and "one would imagine".<sup>67</sup> The difficulty such equivocations pose is that they indicate an equivalence is being posited but the exact nature of that equivalence remains unclear. As Scholes points out all writers occasionally fall back on the use of equivocal devices but with Jameson it is

in danger of becoming 'the dominant principle of discourse'.<sup>68</sup> It also helps to clarify the peculiar difficulty that one finds in utilising Jamesonian concepts. Scholes writes, the 'expression "something like" is not only the weakest possible form of comparison, it logically implicates its own contradiction (something *unlike*)'.<sup>69</sup> In other words, it simultaneously suggests an analogy or a relation and at the same time cancels it. Thus one hesitates to use a Jamesonian term or formulation because the precise nature of the formulation or the mechanisms by which it operates remain unclear or contradictory. Scholes notes that:

Jameson's text, which is full of serious thought and learning, is also astonishingly reluctant to emerge from its own web of textuality to make contact with the world.<sup>70</sup>

Thus, paradoxically, for all Jameson's assertions of the need to reground texts in their social and historical contexts his own texts remain strangely aloof. Eagleton has also identified the paradox of Jameson's style, observing that his prose has a tendency to escape 'even his own most strenuously analytical habits' and slip 'through the very dialectical forms it so persuasively delineates'.<sup>71</sup> For Jameson, the dialectical style is not only a political imperative but a pleasure in its own right and it is this, suggests Eagleton, Jameson's own style, that represents the utopian impulse of his work rather than the discussions of Ernest Bloch or Herbert Marcuse:

The duality of the Jamesonian sentence, at once political message and play of signifier, seems to me an eminently dialectical figure of the relation between desire and its historical deferment, opening a space between these options in which the reader is suspended.<sup>72</sup>

Ultimately style represents a political deferment, a compensation for pleasures historically postponed and unrealisable goals and to this extent foreshadows 'a bleak and politically instructive displacement'.<sup>73</sup>

Finally, it is necessary to underscore the extent to which the problems I have highlighted with Jameson's work are not merely the result of the individual intellectual failings but are as much consequences of the tradition of thought that Jameson is working within. In his short study of Western Marxism, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, Perry Anderson has pointed to the widening gap between theory and practice in Western Marxism from the end of the First World War to the late 1960s. From the 1930s onwards Western Marxism was to speak increasingly in its own esoteric language ever more removed from the class whose interests it was supposed to serve and further. The final severance between the two was definitively marked with the publication of Herbert Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*. In the gulf between theory and the practice and constraints of a mass movement, writes Anderson, socialist thought 'inevitably [became] 'utopian' once again'.<sup>74</sup> The focus of Western Marxism, argues Anderson, has shifted towards philosophy from its earlier concerns with economics and politics<sup>75</sup> with an emphasis upon epistemology and method. That is to say it has become a discourse upon Marxism rather than within Marxism. The corollary of this has been that its language became increasingly 'specialized and inaccessible'.<sup>76</sup> Anderson writes:

The original relationship between Marxist theory and proletarian practice was subtly but steadily substituted by a new relationship between Marxist theory and bourgeois theory.<sup>77</sup>

Martin Jay has also emphasised this trait of Western Marxism, that is, its tendency to borrow from and engage with other philosophical traditions rather than mass political movements.<sup>78</sup> Jameson's work, I would contend, remains very much within this tradition. Indeed, the extent to which Jameson simply co-opts other ideas rather than providing a critique of them has been a recurrent theme of Jameson criticism from his early work on Formalism and Structuralism through to his endorsement of Baudrillard and postmodernism. There is always a sense in which Jameson's strategy of working through other philosophical traditions does not so much transform our perspective as, by some

dialectical sleight of hand, leave everything profoundly untouched. Ultimately, then, it may be time to conclude that the Marxism of the critical theorists, with their emphasis upon reification and commodification, is no longer the order of the day.

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#### Notes.

- 1 Fredric Jameson, 'Notes Towards a Marxist Cultural Politics', in *Minnesota Review*, no. 5 (1975), p. 37.
- 2 Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: Verso, 1979), p. 54.
- 3 Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept From Lukács to Habermas* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), p. 51, n. 4.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 513.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 514-5.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 520.
- 7 Michel Foucault quoted in Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, p. 521.
- 8 Linda Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 62.
- 9 This is exemplified in Hutcheon's own text wherein Jameson and Marxism are portrayed as examples of the very kind of totalizing thought postmodernism is contesting. See 'Total history de-totalized', in *The Politics of Postmodernism*, pp. 62-70.
- 10 Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, pp. 104-5. The quotation from Marx is from *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. N.I. Stone (London: 1904), p. 293.
- 11 See Chapter 2, section V
- 12 Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, p. 35.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 108.
- 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 108-9.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 251.
- 17 Terry Eagleton, 'The Idealism of American Criticism', in *Against the Grain: Essays 1975 -1985* (London: Verso, 1986), p. 62.
- 18 See *Late Marxism*, p. 46 and p. 91.
- 19 For a vehement critique of Jameson's reading of Adorno see R. Hullot-Kentor, 'Suggested Reading: Jameson on Adorno', in *Telos*, no. 69 (1991), pp. 167-77.
- 20 Jay writes of Adorno:  
The disdain for traditional logic manifested in the Hegelian tradition allowed Adorno to hold opposing, even incompatible positions simultaneously without worrying about their coherence. *Marxism and Totality*, p. 266.
- 21 Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, p. 259.



- 22 Ibid., p. 259.
- 23 Ibid., p. 259.
- 24 Ibid., p. 262.
- 25 Ibid., p. 265.
- 26 Ibid., p. 261.
- 27 Ibid., p. 274.
- 28 Eagleton, 'The Idealism of American Criticism', p. 58.
- 29 Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, p. 533.
- 30 Ibid., p. 267.
- 31 Eagleton, 'The Idealism of American Criticism', p. 63.
- 32 Andrew Arato, 'Lukács' Theory of Reification', in *Telos*, no. 11 (1972), p. 25.
- 33 See Chapter 2, pp. 34-5.
- 34 Tom Bottomore, Laurence Harris, Victor G. Kiernan & Ralph Miliband, eds. *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought*, Second Edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 465.
- 35 Eagleton, 'The Idealism of American Criticism', p. 63.
- 36 Phillip Wood, 'Sartre, Anglo-American Marxism, and the Place of the Subject in History', in *Yale French Studies*, no. 68 (1985), pp. 15-54.
- 37 Fredric Jameson, 'History and Class Consciousness as an "Unfinished Project"', in *Rethinking MARXISM*, vol.1, no.1 (1988), p. 52. This view is also expressed in a footnote in *The Political Unconscious*, p. 220..
- 38 Ibid., p. 52.
- 39 Arato, 'Lukács' Theory of Reification', p. 33.
- 40 Ibid., p. 25.
- 41 Ibid., p. 66.
- 42 Eagleton, 'The Idealism of American Criticism', p. 63.
- 43 Arato, 'Lukács' Theory of Reification', p. 52.
- 44 Ibid., p. 52.
- 45 Ibid., p. 52.
- 46 Ibid., p. 54-5.
- 47 Ibid., p. 54.
- 48 See Chapter 2, pp. 65-6.
- 49 Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, trans. J. De Bres (London: Verso, 1975), p. 46.
- 50 Ibid., p. 48-9.
- 51 Ibid., p. 65.
- 52 Ibid., p. 65.
- 53 Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, p. 265.
- 54 Fredric Jameson, 'Interview with Stuart Hall', in *Marxism Today* (1990), p. 30. I do not wish to imply that there are not good reasons for the Left being more pessimistic than they were ten or fifteen years ago but at the same time I do not think the possibilities for radical politics today are quite as bleak as Jameson appears to imply.
- 55 See Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, more specifically Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, the chapter on Adorno and Gregory Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (London: Verso, 1987), chapter 6.

- 56 Mike Featherstone, 'In Pursuit of the Postmodern: An Introduction', in *Theory, Cultural and Society*, vol. 5, nos. 2-3, ed. M. Featherstone (London: Sage, 1988) and 'Postmodernism, Cultural Change, and Social Practice', in *Postmodernism, Jameson, Critique*, ed. D. Kellner (Washington: Mouton de la Haye Press, 1989).
- 57 Fredric Jameson, 'Marxism and Postmodernism', in *Postmodernism, Jameson, Critique*, p. 381.
- 58 Dominick LaCapra, 'Review of *The Political Unconscious*', in *History and Theory*, vol. 21, no. 1 (1982), p. 103.
- 59 Ibid., p. 104.
- 60 Ibid., p. 104.
- 61 Ibid., p. 104.
- 62 Ibid., p. 104.
- 63 Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, p. 12.
- 64 Fredric Jameson, 'Marxism and Teaching', in *New Political Science*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1979), p. 31. Jameson gives a check list of issues to be taught: class struggle, the labour theory of value, the commodity form and four types of exchange value, alienation and reification, historical dynamics, ideology, mode of production and the nature of socialism.
- 65 As we saw in the opening chapter, for Jameson, there is also the problem of identifying where the "street" is in the modern superstate.
- 66 LaCapra, 'Review of *The Political Unconscious*', p. 97.
- 67 Robert Scholes, 'Interpretation and Narrative: Kermode and Jameson', in *Novel*, vol. 17, no. 3 (1984), pp. 271-2.
- 68 Robert Scholes, *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 84.
- 69 Ibid., p. 84.
- 70 Ibid., p. 84.
- 71 Terry Eagleton, 'Fredric Jameson: The Politics of Style' in *Against the Grain: Essays 1975 - 1985*, p. 66.
- 72 Ibid., p. 68.
- 73 Ibid., p. 69.
- 74 Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, p. 34.
- 75 In Anderson's subsequent assessment of the trajectory of Western Marxism through the 1970s and 80s - *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso, 1983) - he notes a marked shift back towards consideration of political and economic issues.
- 76 Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, p. 53.
- 77 Ibid., p. 55.
- 78 Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, see the Introduction.

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