

Cornel West, "Frederic Jameson's Marxist Hermeneutics,"
boundary 2 11 (1) (1982), 177-200.

Fredric Jameson is the most challenging American Marxist hermeneutical thinker on the present scene. His ingenious interpretations (prior to accessible translations) of major figures of the Frankfurt School, Russian formalism, French structuralism and poststructuralism as well as of Georg Lukàcs, Jean-Paul Sartre, Louis Althusser, Max Weber and Louis Marin are significant contributions to the intellectual history of twentieth century Marxist and European thought. Jameson's treatments of the development of the novel, the Surrealist movement, of Continental writers such as Honoré de Balzac, Marcel Proust, Alessandro Manzoni, and Robbe Grillet, and of American writers, including Ernest Hemingway, Kenneth Burke and Ursula LeGuin, constitute powerful political readings. Furthermore, his adamantly anti-philosophical form of Marxist hermeneutics puts forward an American *Aufhebung* of poststructuralism which merits close scrutiny.

In this essay I shall highlight Jameson's impressive intellectual achievements, specific theoretical flaws, and particular political shortcomings by focusing on the philosophical concerns and ideological aims in his trilogy.¹ Jameson is first and foremost a loyal, though critical, disciple of

* Note: I would like to extend my gratitude to Jonathan Arac, Stanley Aronowitz, Paul Bové, Fredric Jameson, David Langston, Michael Sprinker and Anders Stephanson for their incisive comments and criticisms of an earlier version of this essay.

¹ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) (further references to this work will be given parenthetically as *MF*); *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972) (further references to this text will be given parenthetically as *PHL*); *The Political Unconscious: Narrative As A Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) (further references to this book will be given parenthetically as *PU*). I shall include in this "trilogy" *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979) since it was originally conceived to be a part of *The Political Unconscious* but was separated, enlarged, and published as an independent work.

the Lukàcs of *History and Class Consciousness* in the sense that he nearly dogmatically believes that commodification—the selling of human labor power to profit-maximizing capitalists—is the primary source of domination in capitalist societies and that reification—the appearance of this relation between persons and classes as relations between things and prices—is the major historical process against which to understand norms, values, sensibilities, texts, and movements in the modern world.²

The central question that haunts Jameson is "How to be a Sophisticated Lukàcsean Marxist without Lukàcs's nostalgic historicism and highbrow humanism?" A more general formulation of this question is "How to take history, class struggle, and capitalist dehumanization seriously after the profound poststructuralist deconstructions of solipsistic Cartesianism, transcendental Kantianism, teleological Hegelianism, genetic Marxism, and recuperative humanism?" In Anglo-American common-sense lingo, this query becomes "How to live and act in the face of the impotence of irony and the paralysis of skepticism?" The pressing problem that plagues Jameson is whether the Marxist quest for totalization—with its concomitant notions of totality, mediation, narrative (or even universal) history, part/whole relations, essence/appearance distinctions, and subject/object oppositions—presupposes a form of philosophical idealism that inevitably results in a mystification which ignores difference, flux, dissemination, and heterogeneity. Jameson's work can be read as a gallant attempt at such a quest which hopes to avoid idealist presuppositions and preclude mystifying results.

² In the Preface to PU, Jameson refers to the "flawed yet monumental achievements ... of the greatest Marxist philosopher of modern times, Georg Lukàcs," (p. 13).

Jameson initiates this quest by examining the major European Marxist thinker for whom this problematic looms large: Jean-Paul Sartre.³ Yet Jameson's project takes shape in the encounter with the rich German tradition of Marxist dialectical thought best exemplified in the works of Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse, Bloch, and, of course, Lukàcs. His dialectical perspective first tries to reveal the philosophical and political bankruptcy of modern Anglo-American thought. In the preface to

Marxism and Form he writes:

Less obvious, perhaps, is the degree to which anyone presenting German and French dialectical literature is forced—either implicitly or explicitly—to take yet a third national tradition into account, I mean our own: that mixture of political liberalism, empiricism, and logical positivism which we know as Anglo- American philosophy and which is hostile at all points to the type of thinking outlined here. One cannot write for a reader formed in this tradition—one cannot even come to terms with one's own historical formation—without taking this influential conceptual opponent into account; and it is this, if you like, which makes up the tendentious part of my book, which gives it its political and philosophical cutting edge, so to speak. (*MF*, p. x)

Jameson's battle against modern Anglo-American thought is aided by poststructuralism in that deconstructions disclose the philosophical bankruptcy of this bourgeois humanist tradition. Yet, such deconstructions say little about the political bankruptcy of this tradition; further, and more seriously, deconstructions conceal the political impotency of their projects. In short, Jameson rightly considers poststructuralism an ally against bourgeois humanism yet ultimately an intellectual foe and political enemy. His tempered appreciation and subsequent rejection of structuralism and poststructuralism are enacted in his superb critical treatment of their roots and development in *The Prison-House of Language*. For example, he writes in the Preface of this text:

³ Fredric Jameson, *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961).

My own plan—to offer an introductory survey of these movements which might stand at the same time as a critique of their basic methodology—is no doubt open to attack from both partisans and adversaries alike ... The present critique does not, however, aim at judgments of detail, nor at the expression of some opinion, either positive or negative, on the works in question here. It proposes rather to lay bare what Collingwood would have called the "absolute presuppositions" of Formalism and Structuralism taken as intellectual totalities. These absolute presuppositions may then speak for themselves, and, like all such ultimate premises or models, are too fundamental to be either accepted or rejected. (*PHL*, p. x)

Jameson's first lengthy treatment of the Marxist dialectical tradition focuses on the most intelligent thinker and adroit stylist of that tradition: Theodor Adorno.⁴ Adorno presents Jameson with his most formidable challenge, for Adorno's delicate dialectical acrobatics embark on the quest for totalization while simultaneously calling such a quest into question; they reconstruct the part in light of the whole while deconstructing the notion of a whole; they devise a complex conception of mediation while disclosing the idea of totality as illusion; and they ultimately promote dialectical development while surrendering to bleak pessimism about ever attaining a desirable telos. In short, Adorno is a negative hermeneutical thinker, a dialectical deconstructionist *par excellence*: the skeleton which forever hangs in Jameson's closet.

In this way, Adorno is the most ingenious and dangerous figure for Jameson. Adorno ingeniously makes and maintains contact with the concrete in a dialectical demystifying movement that begins with the art-object and engages the psychological, that moves from the psychological and implicates the social, and then finds the economic in the social. Yet he refuses to ossify the object of inquiry or freeze the concepts he employs to interrogate the object. This intellectual energy and ability is characterized by Jameson in the following way:

⁴ Jameson's treatment of Adorno in Chapter One in *MF* is based on an earlier essay which appeared in *Salmagundi*, 5 (Spring 1967), 3-43.

It is to this ultimate squaring of the circle that Adorno came in his two last and most systematic, most technically philosophical works, *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*. Indeed, as the title of the former suggests, these works are designed to offer a theory of the untheorizable, to show why dialectical thinking is at one and the same time both indispensable and impossible, to keep the idea of system itself alive while intransigently dispelling the pretensions of any of the contingent and already realized systems to validity and even to existence Thus a negative dialectic has no choice but to affirm the notion and value of an ultimate synthesis, while negating its possibility and reality in every concrete case that comes before it . . . Negative dialectics does not result in an empty formalism, but rather in a thoroughgoing critique of forms, in a painstaking and well-nigh permanent destruction of every hypostasis of the various moments of thinking itself. (*MF*, pp. 54-55, 56)

Adorno is dangerous for Jameson because his deconstructionist strategies and political impotence resemble the very poststructuralists with whom Jameson wrestles. Jameson never adequately settles this deep tension with Adorno. In his later work, he circumvents this tension by reducing Adorno's negative dialectics to an aesthetic ideal, and this reduction minimizes Adorno's philosophical challenge to Jameson's own anti-philosophical hermeneutics. Jameson tries to disarm Adorno's position by construing it as a perspective which reconfirms the status of the concept of totality by reacting to and deconstructing "totality."⁵ In Jameson's view, the anti-totalizing deconstructionist strategies of Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man also "confirm" the status of the concept of totality since such strategies "must be accompanied by some initial appearance of continuity, some ideology of unification already in place, which it is their mission to rebuke and to shatter" (*PU*, p. 53). Jameson seems to be employing a rather slippery notion of how the idea of totality is confirmed, since powerful projects which "rebuke" and "shatter" this idea appear to "confirm" it. On this crucial point, Jameson presents neither a persuasive argument against deconstructionists nor a convincing case for his own position, but rather a defensive recuperative

⁵ For Jameson's view of Adorno's negative dialectics as an aesthetic ideal, see *PU*, p. 52, footnote 29.

strategy which co-opts the deconstructionists in a quest for totality unbeknownst and unrecognizable to them. This ad hoc strategy reflects Jameson's unsettled tension with Adorno and his reluctance to come to terms with Paul de Man's rigorous version of deconstruction.⁶

Yet what is missing in Adorno, Jameson finds in Benjamin, Marcuse, and Bloch: a theoretical mechanism which sustains hope and generates praxis in the present moment of the historical process. This hope and praxis is promoted by a *politicized notion of desire* which is sustained by a "nostalgia conscious of itself, a lucid and remorseless dissatisfaction with the present on the grounds of some remembered plenitude" (*MF*, p. 82). For example, Jameson is attracted to Benjamin primarily because Benjamin's conception of nostalgic utopianism as a revolutionary stimulus in the present delivers Jameson from the wretched pessimism of Adorno.

For Jameson, Benjamin's notion of nostalgic utopianism—best elucidated in his masterful essay on Nikolai Leskov, "The Storyteller"—unfolds as storytelling which does justice to our experience of the past, as nonnovelistic (hence, nonindividualistic) narrative which makes contact with the concrete, with an authentic form of social and historical existence quickly vanishing owing to the reification process in late monopoly capitalism. Following Benjamin, Jameson holds that reification destroys the conditions for storytelling, for meaningful destinies and common plots which encompass the past, present, and future of the human community. Therefore onedimensional societies do not simply domesticate their opposition; they also deprive such opposition of the very

⁶ The major difference between Adorno and Derrida (or de Man), between a dialectical deconstructionist and a poststructural deconstructionist, is that the theoretical impasse the dialectician reaches is not viewed as an ontological, metaphysical or epistemological aporia, but rather as a historical limitation owing to a determinate contradiction as yet unlodged due to an impotent social praxis or an absence of an effective historical revolutionary agent. For interesting comments on this matter, see Stanley Aronowitz, *The Crisis in Historical Materialism: Class, Politics and Culture in Marxist Theory* (New York: Praeger Press, 1981), pp. 24-34.

means to stay in touch with any revolutionary past or visionary future. Such societies present no stories but rather "only a series of experiences of equal weight whose order is indiscriminately reversible" (*MF*, p. 79).

Jameson conceives the politicized notion of desire—found first in Friedrich Schiller and then more fully in Herbert Marcuse—as the transformative élan repressed and submerged by the reification process in late monopoly capitalism. This conception of desire constitutes the central component of Jameson's notion of freedom, a notion which he argues can never be conceptually grasped but rather symptomatically displayed in the dissatisfaction of the present, in a Faustian Refusal of the Instant, or in a Blochian ontological astonishment which renders us aware of the "not-yet" latent in the present. To put it crudely, Jameson's politicized notion of desire promises access to a revolutionary energy lurking beneath the social veil of appearances, an energy capable of negating the reified present order.

This notion of freedom—or negational activity motivated by the desire for freedom—serves as the "center" which Jameson's Marxist hermeneutics dialectically discloses and decenters. This is what makes his viewpoint *political* and *hermeneutical* as opposed to *idealistic* and *philosophical*. For example, he states,

For hermeneutics, traditionally a technique whereby religions recuperated the texts and spiritual activities of cultures resistant to them, is also a political discipline, and provides the means for maintaining contact with the very sources of revolutionary energy during a stagnant time, or preserving the concept of freedom itself, underground, during geological ages of repression. Indeed, it is the concept of freedom which ... proves to be the privileged instrument of a political hermeneutic, and which, in turn, is perhaps itself best understood as an interpretive device rather than a philosophical essence or idea.⁷ (*MF*, p. 84)

⁷ See also *MF*, p. 373 where Jameson states. "we take a point of view not so much *philosophical* as *hermeneutic*."

Jameson's totalizing impulse is seen quite clearly in his claim that this political hermeneutic approach is the "absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation" (*PU*, p. 17). This approach preserves, negates, and transcends all prevailing modes of reading and interpreting texts, whether psychoanalytic, myth-critical, stylistic, ethical, structural, or poststructural. He unequivocally states,

One of the essential themes of this book will be the contention that Marxism subsumes other interpretive modes or systems; or, to put it in methodological terms, that the limits of the latter can always be overcome, and their more positive findings retained, by a radical historicizing of their mental operations, such that not only the content of the analysis, but the very method itself, along with the analyst, then comes to be reckoned into the "text" or phenomenon to be explained. (*PU*, p. 47)

This totalizing impulse can be best understood in the crucial links Jameson makes among the notions of desire, freedom, and narrative. In a fascinating and important discussion of André Breton's *Manifesto*, Jameson writes,

It is not too much to say that for Surrealism a genuine plot, a genuine narrative, is that which can stand as the very *figure* of Desire itself: and this not only because in the Freudian sense pure physiological desire is inaccessible as such to consciousness, but also because in the socioeconomic context, genuine desire risks being dissolved and lost in the vast network of pseudosatisfactions which makes up the market system. In that sense 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 stalling, but also of the awakening, of Desire in general. (*MF*, pp. 100-101)

In Jameson's sophisticated version of Lukàcsean Marxism, narrative is the means by which the totality is glimpsed, thereby preserving the possibility of dialectical thinking. This glimpse of totality-disclosed in a complex and coherent story about conflicting classes and clashing modes of production-constitutes the "very figure of Desire" in the present, a Desire which both enables and enacts the negation of the present. Unlike the function of the notion of desire in poststructuralism, Jameson understands this notion to result in a will to freedom, not in a will to presence. In fact,

Jameson's conception of the function of desire is much closer to the Christian view of a will to salvation than "the deconstructionist will to presence"; that is, Jameson's perspective more closely resembles a transcendental system which regulates human action than a rhetorical system which circumscribes epistemological moves.

Jameson's American Marxist *Aufhebung* of poststructuralism posits the major terrain—the Primal Scene—of contemporary criticism as not epistemology, but ethics. Instead of focusing on the numerous Sisyphean attempts to construct a metaphysics of presence, he highlights the various efforts to negate the present and shows how such negations point toward a society of freedom. For example, Jacques Derrida, the pre-eminent deconstructionist, brilliantly unmasks the binary oppositions in traditional and contemporary Western thought, such as speech and writing, presence and absence and so forth. Yet Derrida remains oblivious to similar binary oppositions in ethics such as good and evil.

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*, p. 114)

Jameson's attempt to shift the fierce epistemological and metaphysical battles in contemporary Continental philosophy and criticism to ethics is invigorating and impressive. This shift is prompted by his de-Platonizing of the poststructuralist notion of desire—which freely floats above History like a Platonic Form only to be embodied in various versions of metaphysics of presence—and his placing it in the underground of History which emerges in the form of a negation

of the present, as an "ontological patience in which the constraining situation itself is for the first time perceived in the very moment in which it is refused" (MF, pp. 84-85). Of course, Jameson recognizes that this shift replaces one metaphysical and mythical version of desire with his own. Yet, in his view, his politicized notion of desire has crucial historical consequences and therefore it is more acceptable than the poststructuralist conception of desire.

Yet, it will be observed, even if the theory of desire is a metaphysic and a myth, it is one whose great narrative events—repression and revolt—ought to be congenial to a Marxist perspective, one whose ultimate Utopian vision of the liberation of desire and of libidinal transfiguration was an essential feature of the great mass revolts of the 1960s in Eastern and Western Europe as well as in China and the United States. (*PU*, p. 67)

Jameson's project of politicizing the notion of desire is rooted in Schiller's Letters on the *Aesthetic Education of Mankind*, which sidesteps the Kantian epistemological question of the necessary conditions for the possibility of experience and instead raises the more political question of the speculative and hypothetical (or utopian) conditions for the possibility of a free and harmonious personality. In attempting to answer this question, Schiller presents analogies between the psyche and society, between the mental divisions of impulses (*Stofftrieb*, *Formtrieb*, and *Spieltrieb*) and the social divisions of labor (Work, Reason, and Art). In the same vein, Jameson's reading of Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* sees Marcuse as replacing Freud's inquiry into the structure of actual mental phenomena with an inquiry into the speculative and hypothetical conditions for the possibility of an aggression-free society in which work is libidinally satisfying. As in Benjamin's nostalgic utopianism, the primary function of memory is to serve the pleasure principle; the origin of utopian thought resides in the remembered plenitude of psychic gratification. Jameson quotes Marcuse's famous formulation of the origins of thought, "The memory of gratification is at the origin of all thinking,

and the impulse to recapture past gratification is the hidden driving power behind the process of thought."⁸ Jameson then adds,

The primary energy of revolutionary activity derives from this memory of a prehistoric happiness which the individual can regain only through its externalization, through its reestablishment for society as a whole. 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 the original clarity and force of our own most vital drives and wishes. (*MF*, pp. 113-114)

It should be apparent that Jameson is, in many ways, a traditional hermeneutical thinker; that is, his basic theoretical strategy is that of recuperation, restoration, and recovery.⁹ Furthermore, his fundamental aim is to preserve the old Christian notion—and Marxist affirmation—that History is meaningful.

Only Marxism can give us an adequate account of the essential mystery of the cultural past, which, like Tiresias drinking blood, is momentarily returned to life and warmth and allowed once more to speak, and to deliver its long-forgotten message in surroundings utterly alien to it. This mystery can be reenacted only if the human adventure is one ... These matters 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 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 vital episodes in a single vast unfinished plot.¹⁰ (*PU*, pp. 19-20)

⁸ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (New York: Random House, 1955), p. 29; quoted in *MF*, p. 113.

⁹ This traditional hermeneutical strategy is enunciated in the following passage in *MF*, p. 404: "Thus 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, beneath the distortions of the various kinds of censorship that have been at work upon it; and this revelation takes the form of an explanation of why the content was so distorted and is thus inseparable from a description of the mechanisms of this censorship itself."

¹⁰ Note also his remark in *PU*, p. 261, "that life is meaningless is not a proposition that need be inconsistent with Marxism, whose affirmation is the quite different one that History is meaningful, however absurd organic life may happen to be."

Jameson recognizes the deep affinity of his Marxist project with religious *Weltanschauungen*. And since he is not afflicted with the petty anti-religious phobia of scientific Marxists, Jameson develops this affinity by juxtaposing the medieval Christian allegorical method and Northrop Frye's interpretive system with his own project.¹¹ In fact, the system of four levels—the literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical levels—of medieval Christian allegorical interpretation constitutes a crucial component of his theoretical framework. This model provides him a means by which to come to terms with the persistent problem for Marxism: the problem of mediation, the task of specifying the relationship between various levels and of adapting analyses from one level to another in light of a meaningful story of the past, present and future of the human community.

The first (or literal) level permits Jameson to retain the historical referents of events and happenings (such as human suffering, domination, and struggle) and the textual referents of books and works—such as conflict-ridden historical situations, class-ridden social conditions, and antinomy-ridden ideological configurations. In this way, Jameson accepts the anti-realist arguments of poststructuralists, yet rejects their textual idealism.¹² He acknowledges that History is always already mediated by language, texts, and interpretations, yet insists that History is still, in some fundamental sense, "there." He conceives of History as an "absent cause" known by its "formal effects." In the crucial paragraph which directly replies to textual idealists and completes his theoretical chapter in *The Political Unconscious* he writes,

¹¹ For Jameson's interesting remarks on religion, see *MF*, pp. 116-118 and *PU*, pp. 70, 292.

¹² Jameson is one of the few Marxists who explicitly rejects a realist epistemological position. See *MF*, pp. 365-366. Note that he invokes the early work of the then American-style Marxist Sidney Hook at this point. For a persuasive treatment of the "textual idealism" of poststructuralists, see Richard Rorty, "Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism", *The Monist*, 64 (April 1981), 155-74.

History is therefore the experience of Necessity, and it is this alone which can forestall its thematization or reification as a mere object of representation or as one master code among many others. Necessity is not in that sense a type of content, but rather the inexorable *form* of events; it is therefore a narrative category in the enlarged sense of some properly narrative political unconscious which has been argued here, a retextualization of History which does not propose the latter as some new representation or "vision", some new content, but as the formal effects of what Althusser, following Spinoza, calls an "absent cause." 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*, p. 102)

The second (or allegorical) level sets forth the interpretive code, which is for Jameson the mediatory code of the reification process in capitalist societies.¹³ This mediatory code takes the form of a genealogical construction characterized by neither genetic continuity nor teleological linearity, but rather by what Bloch called *Ungleichzeitigkeit* or "nonsynchronous development." This conception of history and texts as a "synchronic unity of structurally contradictory or heterogeneous elements, genetic patterns, and discourses" allows Jameson to identify and isolate particular aspects of the past as preconditions for the elaboration of reifying elements in the present.¹⁴

The third (or moral) level constitutes an ethical or psychological reading in which, following Althusser's conception of ideology, representational structures permit individual subjects to conceive their lived relationships to transindividual realities such as the destiny of humankind or the social structure. The fourth (or anagogical) level-which is inseparable from the third level-provides a

¹³ *PU*, p. 139, 226.

¹⁴ *PU* pp. 97, 141. Bloch puts forward this complex notion in "Nonsynchronism and Dialectics," *New German Critique*, 11 (Spring, 1977), 22-38. For Jameson's powerful critique of teleological and genetic forms of Marxism, see "Marxism and Historicism," *New Literary History*, 11 (1979), 41-73

political reading for the collective meaning of History, a characterization of the transindividual realities which link the individual to a fate, plot, and story of a community, class, group, or society.

Jameson's appropriation of the medieval system leads him to redefine the activity of interpretation in allegorical terms; that is, his own political allegorical machinery, with its aims of ideological unmasking and utopian projection, dictates the way in which interpretation and criticism ought to proceed.

We will assume that a criticism which asks the question "What does it mean?" constitutes something like an allegorical operation in which a text is systematically *rewritten* in terms of some fundamental master code or "ultimately determining instance." On this view, then, all "interpretation" in the narrower sense demands the forcible or imperceptible transformation of a given text into an allegory of its particular master code or "transcendental signified": the discredit into which interpretation has fallen is thus at one with the disrepute visited on allegory itself. Yet to see interpretation this way is to acquire the instruments by which we can force a given interpretive practice to stand and yield up its name, to blurt out its master code and thereby reveal its metaphysical and ideological underpinnings. (*PU*, p. 58)

Jameson's redefinition of the allegorical model also draws him closer to Northrop Frye. In *Marxism and Form*, he invokes, in a respectful yet somewhat pejorative manner, Frye's interpretive system as "the only philosophically coherent alternative" to Marxist hermeneutics.¹⁵ In a later essay, "Criticism in History," Jameson harshly criticizes Frye's system as ahistorical and guilty of presupposing an unacceptable notion of unbroken continuity between the narrative forms of "primitive" societies and those of modern times.¹⁶ Yet in *The Political Unconscious*, there is some change of heart.

In the present context, however, Frye's work comes before us as a virtual contemporary reinvention of the four-fold hermeneutic associated with the theological tradition ...

¹⁵ *MF*, p. 402.

¹⁶ "Criticism in History," in Norman Rudich, ed., *The Weapons of Criticism* (Palo Alto: Ramparts Press, 1976), pp. 31-50.

The greatness of Frye, and the radical difference between his work and that of the great bulk of garden-variety myth criticism, lies in his willingness to raise the issue of community and to draw basic, essentially social, interpretive consequences from the nature of religion as collective representation. (*PU*, p. 69)

In fact, Jameson's central concept of the political unconscious—though often defined in Lévi-Straussian language as a historical *pensée sauvage* and influenced by the Feuerbachian and Durkheimian conceptions of religion—derives from Frye's notion of literature (be it a weaker form of myth or a later stage of ritual) as a "symbolic mediation on the destiny of community".¹⁷ What upsets Jameson about Frye is no longer simply Frye's ahistorical approach, but more importantly Frye's Blakean anagogy—the image of the cosmic body—which Jameson claims privatizes a political analogy and hence poses the destiny of the human community in an individualistic manner, in terms of the isolated body and personal gratification.¹⁸

Frye's conflation of ethics and politics gives Jameson the opportunity both to congratulate and to criticize him. Jameson congratulates Frye—the North American liberal version of structuralism—because Frye conceives the central problematic of criticism to be not epistemological but rather ethical, namely the relation of texts to the destiny of human communities. In this sense, Frye is preferable to the French structuralists and poststructuralists since he understands that there is a crucial relationship among desire, freedom, and narrative.

Jameson criticizes Frye because Frye understands this relationship too idealistically and individualistically. In this sense, Frye stands halfway between the Platonized notion of desire

¹⁷ For the Lévi-Straussian language, see *PU*, p. 167 and for Frye's notion of literature, see *PU*, p. 70.

¹⁸ Yet I remain unconvinced that the cosmic body in Blake's analogy is even roughly analogous to the individualistic bourgeois body. For discussion of this matter, see Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 119f.

employed by those who deconstruct the metaphysics of presence and the *politicized* notion of desire promoted by Jameson's Marxist hermeneutics. Frye's *moralized* notion of desire dictated by his "anatomy of romance" (to use Geoffrey Hartman's phrase) constitutes a halfway house.¹⁹ As Jameson notes, "Frye's entire discussion of romance turns on a presupposition—the ethical axis of good and evil—which needs to be historically problematized in its turn, and which will prove to be an ideologeme that articulates a social and historical contradiction" (*PU*, p. 110).

By contrast, the principal attraction of Jameson to the project of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guatarri in *Anti-Oedipus* is precisely their *politicized* notion of desire, which does not simply relegate it to the subjective and psychological spheres. He acknowledges that the "thrust of the argument of the *Anti-Oedipus* is, to be sure, very much in the spirit of the present work, for the concern of its authors is to reassert the specificity of the political content of everyday life and of individual fantasy-experience" (*PU*, p. 22). But Jameson objects to their Nietzschean perspectivist attack on hermeneutic or interpretive activity, and hence their anti-totalizing orientation and micropolitical conclusions.

The major problem with Jameson's innovative Marxist hermeneutics is that like Frye's monumental liberal reconstruction of criticism or M.H. Abrams' magisterial bourgeois reading of Romanticism, his viewpoint rests upon an unexamined metaphor of translation, an uncritical acceptance of transcoding. In this sense, Geoffrey Hartman's incisive criticisms of Frye and J. Hillis

¹⁹ Geoffrey H. Hartman, "Ghostlier Demarcations: The Sweet Science of Northrop Frye," in *Beyond Formalism: Literary Essays 1958-1970* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 40

Miller's notorious attack on Abrams render Jameson's project suspect.²⁰ In an interesting manner, the gallant attempts of Frye to resurrect the romance tradition and the Blakean sense of history, of Abrams to recuperate the humanist tradition and the bourgeois conception of history, and of Jameson to recover the Marxist tradition and the political-meaning of history all ultimately revert to and rely on problematic methodological uses of various notions of analogy and homology.²¹

For example, Jameson presupposes homologous relations between ethics and epistemology. This presupposition permits him to distinguish himself from Frye by articulating the differences between moralizing and politicizing the notion of desire. As I noted earlier, Jameson ingeniously shifts the Primal Scene of criticism from epistemology to ethics. Yet, his attempt to historicize the moralistic elements of Frye encourages him to follow the Nietzschean strategies of the poststructuralists in the realm of ethics. Therefore he arrives at the notion that he must go beyond the binary opposition of good and evil in order to overcome ethics and approach the sphere of politics. This notion leads him to the idea that such overcoming of ethics is requisite for a "positive" hermeneutics and a nonfunctional or anticipatory view of culture.

Three principal mistakes support Jameson's presupposition that analogous and homologous relations obtain between ethics and epistemology. First, he believes that the epistemological decentering of the bourgeois subject can be smoothly translated into the moral sphere as an attack on individualistic ethics of bourgeois subjects. This plausible case of analogy seems to warrant, in his

²⁰ Hartman, "Ghostlier Demarcations," pp. 24-41. J. Hillis Miller, "Tradition and Difference," *Diacritics*, 2 (Winter 1972), 6-13.

²¹ Note Jameson's remarks, "This formal character of the concept of freedom is precisely what lends itself to the work of political hermeneutics. It encourages analogy: assimilating the material prisons to the psychic ones, it serves as a means of unifying all these separate levels of existence, functioning, indeed, as a kind of transformational equation whereby the data characteristic of one may be converted into the terms of other" (*MF*, p. 85).

view, more general considerations about the homologous relation between ethics and epistemology. Second, he assumes that the poststructuralist attacks on epistemological and metaphysical binary oppositions can be simply transcoded *en bloc* to ethical binary oppositions. This assumption rests upon the notion that these attacks are merely "misplaced"²² rather than misguided. Third, Jameson misreads three important moments in modern philosophy, namely Nietzsche's ill-fated attempt to go beyond good and evil, Hegel's critique of Kantian morality, and Marx's rejection of bourgeois ethics.

There is a fundamental link between the epistemological decentering of the subject and an attack on the individualistic ethics of bourgeois subjects. For the arguments by Spinoza and Hegel against individualistic ethics were accompanied by epistemological hostility to the isolated subject. And as Jameson rightly argues, the distinctive Marxist contribution to the current discourse which takes "decentering" as its center is to show that both the subject decentered and the decentering itself are modes of ideological activity which are always already bound to particular groups, communities, and classes at specific stages of capitalist development.

In my view, Jameson goes wrong in trying to relate epistemological moves to ethical ones in ideological terms without giving an account of the collective dynamics which accompany these moves. From the Marxist perspective, all metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical discourses are complex ideological affairs of specific groups, communities, and classes in or across particular societies. These discourses must not be understood in their own terms (which Jameson rightly rejects) nor may one discourse become primary and consequently subordinate other discursive nets (which Jameson often insinuates). Rather the Marxist aim is to disclose the ideological function and

²² Jameson explicitly states, "I will argue that the critique [by poststructuralism] is misplaced" (*PU*, p. 21).

class interest of these evolving discourses in terms of the collective dynamics of the pertinent moment in the historical process. Jameson moves two steps forward by eschewing the metaphysical and epistemological terrains of the poststructuralists; his strategy discredits rather than defeats them, which is appropriate since poststructuralist defeatism is impossible to defeat on its own grounds. Yet, Jameson moves a step backward by shifting the battleground to ethics. This shift, as we shall see later, prevents him from employing the Marxist logic of collective dynamics and leads him to call for a "new logic of collective dynamics" (*PU*, p. 294).

Jameson's second mistake is to believe that the poststructuralist attacks on binary oppositions are enacted in the wrong terrains, rather than being wrong attacks. Instead of calling into question the very theoretical attitude or unmasking the ideological activity of "going beyond" binary oppositions, Jameson appropriates this same machinery and directs it to ethical binary oppositions. In this way, his project is akin to poststructuralist ones in the bad sense-or akin to idealist projects, in the Marxist sense. He mistakenly does not object to deconstructionist strategies but rather to where they have been applied. In short, his critique does not go deep enough; that is, he does not disclose *the very form of the strategies themselves as modes of ideological activity* that both conceal power relations and extend mechanisms of control by reproducing the ideological conditions for the reproduction of capitalist social arrangements.

Jameson's third mistake is a threefold misreading: of Nietzsche's attempt to go beyond good and evil, of Hegel's critique of Kantian morality, and of Marx's rejection of bourgeois ethics. For Jameson, Nietzsche's attempt to go beyond good and evil is the ethical analogue to the poststructuralist attempt to go beyond the binary oppositions in metaphysics and epistemology. But,

surely, this is not so. Nietzsche's attempt to go beyond good and evil is, as the subtitle of his text states, "Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft" (Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future). Nietzsche hardly rests with the aporias of deconstructionists, but rather aligns himself with the genealogical concerns of the "historically-minded" in order to get his own positive project off the ground. His profound transvaluation of values is not enacted in order to transcend the moral categories of good and evil, but rather to unmask them, disclose what they conceal, and build on that which underlies such categories. And for Nietzsche, the "reality" which lies beneath these categories is the will to power. *Ressentiment* is one particular expression of the will to power of the weak and oppressed toward the strong and oppressor within traditional Judeo-Christian culture and to a certain extent modern bourgeois European culture.²³ Unlike the deconstructionists, Nietzsche's aim is to debunk and demystify in order to build anew—and the springboard for his "countermovement," his "new gospel of the future," is the will to power.

Suppose, finally, we succeeded in explaining our entire instinctive life as the development and ramification of *one* basic form of the will—namely, of the will to power, as *my* proposition has it; suppose all organic functions could be traced back to this will to power and one could also find in it the solution of the problem of procreation and nourishment—it is one problem—then one would have gained the right to determine *all* efficient force univocally as—*will* to power. The world viewed from inside, the world defined and determined according to its "intelligible character"—it would be "will to power" and nothing else.²⁴

Jameson's emulation of poststructuralist strategies in the realm of ethics leads him to root Nietzsche's project in the isolated subject of bourgeois epistemology and offer the doctrine of Eternal Recurrence

²³ For the classic reply to Nietzsche on this matter, though not a thoroughly satisfactory one, see Max Scheler, *Ressentiment* (New York: The Free Press, 1961), trans. William Holdheim, ed. Lewis A. Coser, pp. 43-46, 79-97, 103-111, 114.

²⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), trans. Walter Kaufmann, p. 48.

as the Nietzschean solution to the problem of good and evil. He writes,

Briefly, we can suggest that, as Nietzsche taught us, the judgmental habit of ethical thinking, of ranging everything in the antagonistic categories of good and evil (or their binary equivalents), is not merely an error but is objectively rooted in the inevitable and inescapable centeredness of every individual consciousness or individual subject: what is good is what belongs to me, what is bad is what belongs to the Other ... The Nietzschean solution to this constitutional ethical habit of the individual subject—the Eternal Return—is for most of us both intolerable in its rigor and unconvincingly ingenious in the prestidigitation with which it desperately squares its circle. (*PU*, p. 234)

However, against Jameson, it is necessary to note four points. First, like Marx, Nietzsche realizes that all ethical discourse is a communal affair; ethics is a group response to particular historical circumstances. Therefore bourgeois ethics (tied to the individual subject) is but one communal response among others and certainly not identical or even similar to expressions of traditional Christian morality.²⁵ Second, Nietzsche's doctrine of Eternal Recurrence grounds his affirmative attitude toward life (an alternative to that of Christianity, in his view); it is itself an expression of his will to power, but not a "solution" to the binary opposition of good and evil. Third, Nietzsche acknowledges that his "going beyond" good and evil does not result in transcending morality, but rather in establishing a new morality which rests upon precisely that which former moralities concealed and precluded: a will to power that generates a creative, self-transforming, life-enhancing morality. Fourth, Nietzsche, again like Marx, holds that "going beyond" good and evil is not a philosophical or even hermeneutical issue, but rather a genealogical

²⁵ Nietzsche remarks repeatedly that modern bourgeois European culture is an amalgam of various traditions, only one of which is the Judeo-Christian tradition. Yet what Nietzsche stresses and Jameson ignores, is that Christian morality is a weapon of the oppressed against the oppressor, not simply a symptom of impotence. On this point, Jameson follows not Nietzsche but Sartre: "The moral attitude appears when technical and social conditions render positive forms of conduct impossible. Ethics is a collection of idealistic tricks intended to enable us to live the life imposed on us by the poverty of our resources and the insufficiency of our techniques." This passage is an unpublished note of Sartre's quoted by Simone de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance* (New York, G.P. Putnam, 1965), trans. Richard Howard, p. 199.

matter linked to a historical "countermovement" that contains a vision of the future. Going beyond good and evil will not result in finding new categories untainted by the double bind, but rather new distinctions of good and evil tied to building new communities or, for Nietzsche, building new "selves."

This building of new communities leads us directly to Jameson's misunderstanding of Hegel's critique of Kantian morality and Marx's rejection of bourgeois ethics. Jameson rightly notes that,

One of the great themes of dialectical philosophy, the Hegelian denunciation of the ethical imperative, is taken up again by Lukàcs in his *Theory of the Novel*. On this diagnosis, the *Sollen*, the mesmerization of duty and ethical obligation, necessarily perpetuates a cult of failure and a fetishization of pure, unrealized intention. For moral obligation presupposes a gap between being and duty, and cannot be satisfied with the accomplishment of a single duty and the latter's consequent transformation into being. In order to retain its own characteristic satisfactions, ethics must constantly propose the unrealizable and the unattainable to itself. (*PU*, p. 194)

But Jameson then problematically adds that dialectical philosophy addresses itself to the matter of "going beyond" good and evil and in contrast to Nietzsche, "proposes a rather different stance (this time, outside the subject in the transindividual, or in other words in History) from which to transcend the double bind of the merely ethical" (*PU*, p. 235).

The problem here is that Jameson reads Hegel through poststructuralist lenses in which "the double bind of the merely ethical" is a philosophical problem which demands categorical transcendence rather than through Marxist lenses in which "the double bind of the merely ethical" is an ideological activity to unmask and transform by collective praxis. This Marxist reading of Hegel is necessary in order to grasp the depths of Marx's rejection of bourgeois ethics. Hegel's disenchantment with Kant's morality was not simply because he believed that the categorical

imperative was empty or that the moral ought was unattainable. But rather, more importantly, because the way in which Kant separates the real from the ideal requires a philosophical projection of an impossible ideal which both presupposed and concealed a particular social basis, namely, Kant's own specific time and place.²⁶ In other words, Hegel saw Kant's morality as a *Moralität*—a first-personal matter—which was derivative from a *Sittlichkeit*—a communal matter.

The Hegelian critique of Kantian morality opens the door to a Marxist viewpoint on ethics in two respects. First, it rejects the Kantian conception of what a theory about the nature of ethics must be. Second, it imposes severe limits on the role and function of ethical discourse (which is not reducible to moral convictions) in social change. As David Hoy rightly points out "in giving up the Kantian metaphilosophical view about what theories of morality can and should do, Hegel is giving up the dream of ideal resolutions of moral conflicts. Conflicts are matters of weighing obligations, and moral obligations have no automatic priority."²⁷

On this view, Marx's rejection of bourgeois ethics bears little resemblance to poststructuralist attempts to go beyond good and evil. Rather Marx's rejection is based on giving up the Kantian

²⁶ This point is made most emphatically by Lucien Goldmann, *Immanuel Kant* (London: New Left Books, 1971), pp. 170-179. Hegel puts forward this critique in *Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), trans. T.M. Knox, pp. 89-103 and *Philosophy of Mind, Part Three of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 253-291. Jameson clearly grasps this point when he states, "as an ideological field, conceptions of ethics depend on a shared class or group homogeneity, and strike a suspicious compromise between the private experience of the individual and those values or functional needs of the collectivity which ethics rewrites or recodes in terms of interpersonal relationships." Yet, unlike Hegel and Marx, Jameson clings to the notion that the historicizing of ethics results in a "going beyond" good and evil. In the same paragraph quoted he continues, "In our time, ethics, wherever it makes its reappearance, may be taken as the sign of an intent to mystify, and in particular to replace the more complex and ambivalent judgements of a more properly political and dialectical perspective with the more comfortable simplifications of a binary myth." The basic point here is that Hegel, Marx, and Jameson agree that bourgeois ethics cannot do justice to the richness of moral experience without embarrassing equivocation. Yet Jameson believes that this has something to do with the binary oppositions of good and evil whereas Hegel and Marx rightly hold that such poststructuralist itching does not require scratching but rather getting rid of the source of the itch. The passage quoted above is from *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, p. 56.

²⁷ David Couzens Hoy, "Hegel's Morals," *Dialogue*, 20 (March, 1981), p. 99.

dream of ideal resolutions of moral conflicts, giving up the Hegelian dream of philosophical reconciliation of the real and the ideal, and surrendering the poststructuralist dream of philosophical transcendence of metaphysical, epistemological and ethical double binds.²⁸ The Marxist concern is with practically overcoming historical class conflicts. Therefore the Marxist rejection of bourgeois ethics has less to do with attacks on binary oppositions such as good and evil and more to do with the Hegelian subordination of *Moralität* to *Sittlichkeit*. The Marxist aim is to discern an evolving and developing *Sittlichkeit* in the womb of capitalist society, a *Sittlichkeit* whose negative ideal is to resist all forms of reification and exploitation and whose positive ideals are social freedom and class equality.

The Marxist lesson here is that only if one has taken metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics seriously will one be attracted by Heideggerian rhetoric about going beyond metaphysics or Nietzschean rhetoric about going beyond good and evil. If one instead takes History seriously—as does the post-1844 Marx, John Dewey at his best, and the neo-pragmatist Richard Rorty—then metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics are not formidable foes against which to fight nor are the Ali-like shuffles of the deconstructions which "destroy" them impressive performances. On this view, deconstructionists become critically ingenious yet politically deluded ideologues who rightly attack bourgeois humanism, yet who also become the ideological adornments of late monopoly capitalist academies.

Analogies and homologies, no matter how sophisticated and refined, between epistemology and ethics, metaphysics and morals, make sense as long as one clings to the notion that there are two

²⁸ For a detailed examination of Marx's critique of Kant and Hegel on ethical approaches, see Cornel West, "Ethics, Historicism and the Marxist Tradition," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, (Princeton University, 1980), pp. 28-74.

such interrelated yet distinct spheres, disciplines, or discourses. One rejects this notion neither by enabling interdisciplinary moves nor by quests "beyond" both spheres, but rather by viewing the historical process outside the lenses of traditional or contemporary metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical discourses. That is, our history has not posed metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical problems that need to be solved or "gone beyond"; rather, it has left us these problems as imaginative ideological responses to once pertinent but now defunct problematics.

To resurrect the dead, as bourgeois humanists try to do, is impossible. To attack the dead, as deconstructionist do, is redundant and, ironically, to valorize death. To "go beyond" the dead is either to surreptitiously recuperate previous "contents" of life in new forms (Nietzsche), or to deceptively shrug off the weight of the dead whether by promoting cults of passive, nostalgic "dwelling" (Heidegger) or by creative self-rebetting and self-redescribing (Emerson, Bloom, Rorty).

What is distinctive about the Marxist project is that it neither resurrects, attacks, nor attempts to "go beyond" metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical discourses. Rather it aims at transforming present practices—the remaining life—against the backdrop of previous discursive and political practices, against the "dead" past. Marxism admonishes us to "let the dead bury the dead"; acknowledges that this "dead" past weighs like an incubus upon prevailing practices; and accents our capacities to change these practices. Marx ignores, sidesteps, and avoids discussions of metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical issues not because he shuns his inescapable imprisonment in binary oppositions, remains insulated from metaphysical sedimentations, and not because he hesitates to make knowledge-claims and moral judgments, but rather because, for him, the bourgeois forms of

discourse on such issues are "dead," rendered defunct by his particular moment in the historical process. The capitalist mode of production—with its own particular mystifying forms of social relations, technologies, bureaucracies and its aim of world domination—requires forms of theoretical and practical activity, modes of writing, acting, and organizing heretofore unknown to the "dead" past.

From this Marxist view, the deconstructionist disclosing and debunking of the binary oppositions in the Western philosophical tradition is neither a threat to European civilization nor a misplaced critique better enacted against the binary oppositions in ethics. Rather deconstructions are, like the Left-Hegelian critiques of Marx's own day, interesting yet impotent bourgeois attacks on the forms of thought and categories of a "dead" tradition, a tradition which stipulates the lineage and sustains the very life of these deconstructions. My claim here is not simply that these attacks valorize textuality at the expense of power, but more importantly, that they are symbiotic with their very object of criticism: that is, they remain alive only as long as they give life to their enemy. In short, deconstructionist assaults must breathe life into metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical discourses if their critiques are to render these discourses lifeless.²⁹

The major ideological task of the Marxist intervention in present philosophical and critical discussions becomes that of exposing the reactionary and conservative consequences of bourgeois

²⁹ As Richard Rorty notes, "the non-Kantian is a parasite—flowers could not sprout from the dialectical vine unless there were an edifice into whose chinks it could insert its tendrils. No constructors, no deconstructors. No norms, no perversions. Derrida (like Heidegger) would have no writing to do unless there were a 'metaphysics of presence' to overcome. Without the fun of stamping out parasites, on the other hand, no Kantian would bother to continue building." "Philosophy as a Kind of Writing: An Essay on Derrida" *New Literary History*, 10 (1978), 158. This is precisely the philosophical "game" Marx ignores, sidesteps, and avoids. For Rorty's brilliant historical situating of this modern "game", see *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) and for a neo-Marxist critique of this text, see my review in *Union Seminary Quarterly Review*, 37 (1982), 179-85.

humanism, the critical yet barren posture of poststructuralist skepticism and deconstructionist ironic criticism, and the utopian and ultimately escapist character of the Emersonian gnosticism of Bloom and the Emersonian pragmatism of Rorty. The negative moment of Jameson's Marxist hermeneutics initiates this urgent task. The basic problem with the positive moment in his project is precisely its utopianism, especially in linking the Nietzschean quest beyond good and evil to Marxist theory and praxis. In a crucial—and soon to be celebrated—passage, Jameson writes,

It is clear, indeed, that not merely Durkheim's notion of collective "consciousness," but also the notion of "class consciousness," as it is central in a certain Marxist tradition, rests on an unrigorous and figurative assimilation of the consciousness of the individual subject to the dynamics of groups. The Althusserian and post-structuralist critique of these and other versions of the notion of a "subject of history" may readily be admitted. The alternatives presented by the Althusserians, however ... have a purely negative or second-degree critical function, and offer no new conceptual categories. What is wanted here—and it is one of the most urgent tasks for Marxist theory today—is a whole new logic of collective dynamics, with categories that escape the taint of some mere application of terms drawn from individual experience (in that sense, even the concept of praxis remains a suspect one). (*PU*, p. 294)

It comes as little surprise that Jameson's plea for a "new logic" resembles Jacques Derrida's call for a "new reason," since Jameson enacts the deconstructionist strategy of going beyond binary oppositions. At this level of comparison, the major difference is that Jameson banks his positive hermeneutics on this "new logic," whereas Derrida merely invokes "new reason" in his rhetoric before returning to his negative anti-hermeneutical activity. Yet, from a Marxist perspective, Jameson's basis for a positive hermeneutics is utopian in the bad sense; for it is a utopianism which either rests upon no specifiable historical forces potentially capable of actualizing it or upon the notion that every conceivable historical force embodies it. Jameson clearly favors the latter formulation.

The preceding analysis entitles us to conclude that all class consciousness of whatever type is Utopian insofar as it expresses the unity of a collectivity; yet it must be added that this proposition is an allegorical one. The achieved collectivity or organic group of whatever kind-oppressors fully as much as oppressed-is Utopian not in itself, but only insofar as all such collectivities are themselves figures for the ultimate concrete collective life of an achieved Utopian or classless society. 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*, pp. 290-91)

This exorbitant claim not only illustrates a utopianism gone mad, but also a Marxism in deep desperation, as if any display of class solidarity keeps alive a discredited class analysis. More importantly, this claim, similar to the thin historicism and glib optimism of Bloom's Emersonian gnosticism and Rorty's Emersonian pragmatism, reflects the extent to which Jameson remains within the clutches of American culture. Given the barbarous atrocities and large-scale horrors inflicted by hegemonic ruling classes in Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America, only a Marxist thinker entrenched in the North American experience could even posit the possibility of ruling class consciousness figuratively being "in its very nature Utopian" (*PU*, p. 289). Benjamin's tempered utopianism or Bloch's doctrine of hope certainly do not support such Marxist flights of optimism or lead to such an American faith in the future.

Jameson's bad utopianism is but a symptom of the major political shortcoming of his work: his texts have little or no political consequences. On the one hand, his works have little or no political praxis as texts; that is, they speak, refer, or allude to no political movement or formation in process with which his texts have some connection.³⁰ They thus remain academic Marxist texts

³⁰ For his brief characterization of the French and American left, see *PU*, p. 54, footnote 31.

which, for the most part, are confined to specialists and anti-specialists, Marxists and anti-Marxists, in the Academy. On the other hand, his works have little or no political praxis in yet another sense: they provide little or no space for either highlighting issues of political praxis within their theoretical framework or addressing modes of political praxis in their own academic setting.³¹

Jameson's works are therefore too theoretical; his welcome call for a political hermeneutics is too far removed from the heat of political battles, too little reflective on and about the prevailing political strife, and thus reenacts the very reification process his works pose as the culprit. Surely, the present fragmentation of the North American Left, the marginalization of progressive micropolitical formations, and the rampant mystification of North American life and culture impose severe constraints upon Jameson's textual practice; nonetheless, more substantive reflections on "practical" political strategies seem appropriate. My plea here is not anti-intellectual or anti-theoretical but rather a call for more sophisticated theory aware of and rooted in the present historical and political conjuncture in American capitalist civilization.

Of course, Jameson's own social positioning—Professor of French at Yale University, writing Marxist hermeneutical works and being an American Marxist—solicits expectations of self-obsession, political isolation, and naive optimism. Yet Jameson's texts are not self-obsessed, though his style of elusive, elliptical sentences (which appear more contrapuntal than dialectical) borders on a Frenchifying of English prose. Jameson's texts are not isolated, monadic works, despite the consistent absence of any acknowledgements to fellow critics or colleagues in his prefaces, yet they direct us to look at France rather than at ourselves. Hence his nearly hermetic critical treatments of

³¹ Jameson does address the role of the Marxist intellectual in the Academy in his essay "Marxism and Teaching", *New Political Science*, No. 2-3 (Fall/Winter 1979/1980), pp. 31-36.

Sartre, Lévi-Strauss, Althusser, Lacan, B6nichou, Deleuze, Guatarri and Lyotard and his relative silence on distinguished American critics such as his Yale colleague, Paul de Man, or noteworthy historically-minded critics like R.P. Blackmur, Philip Rahv or Irving Howe. Lastly, Jameson is not a naive optimist, but his sophisticated Utopianism seems to be part and parcel of the American penchant for unquenchable faith in History and irresistible hope for romantic triumph.

My main point here is not simply that Jameson write less Frenchified, expand his fascinating Marxist discourse to include talented American friends and foes, and situate himself more clearly within the American Marxist tradition. Rather Jameson's own historical predicament-his own conceptual tools, academic audience, Utopian proclivities, and political praxis-should become more an object of his dialectical deliberations. Nevertheless, Jameson has done more than any other American hermeneutical thinker in achieving intellectual breakthroughs and accenting theoretical challenges of the Marxist tradition in our postmodern times. The path he has helped blaze now awaits those, including himself, who will carry on with the urgent tasks of not simply taking seriously history and politics, but more specifically, of taking seriously our intellectual, American, and Marxist identities as writers of texts, shapers of attitudes, beneficiaries of imperialist fruits, inheritors of hegemonic sensibilities, and historical agents who envision a socialist future.