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Rethinking "The Political Unconscious"

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Rice University, 1992

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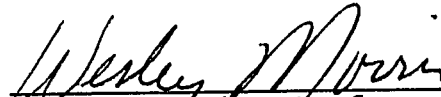
RETHINKING THE POLITICAL UNCONSCIOUS

by

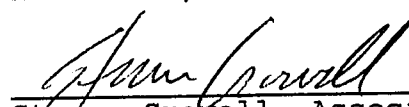
DANIEL KAY MUHLESTEIN

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
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ABSTRACT

Rethinking The Political Unconscious

by

Daniel Kay Muhlestein

Although The Political Unconscious is an effective advocate of "the perspectives of Marxism as necessary preconditions for adequate literary comprehension" (75), Fredric Jameson's method of interpretation suffers from a number of determinate insufficiencies: (1) its claim to a properly structural causality is ultimately unjustifiable; (2) its "horizon" of Cultural Revolution is grounded in mechanical and expressive causality; (3) its application to literary texts is an act of interpretive impoverishment; (4) its defense of a Marxian "master narrative" of history is a conflation of the Historical Real and its histories; and (5) its attempt at "articulating a properly Marxian version of meaning beyond the purely ideological" (285) is a kind of ideological conditioning in which an impulse common to all classes is harnessed to the ideological production of a single class. Nevertheless, The Political Unconscious is a critically important text in that it points toward--though it does not make clear--the means of production by which that physical necessity which is the material effect of the Historical Real is in the Symbolic Order (re)textualized into the various narrative forms of causality with which we attempt to understand and explain the determinate relations between the Real and its alienating necessities.

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I would like to thank my director, Dr. Wesley Morris; my wife, Shelley; and my two children, Paul and Nicholas. Without their help--and support--I would not have been able to complete this dissertation. Thanks!

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
I. Overview: A New Hermeneutic	1
II. Impoverishment and Expression	12
III. (Re)textualizing the Real	40
IV. A Question of Causality	87
V. The Ideology of Utopia	136
Sources Cited	181

I. Overview: A New Hermeneutic

Only Marxism can give us an adequate account of the essential mystery of the cultural past, which, like Tiresias drinking the 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.

--Fredric Jameson

"This book," declares Fredric Jameson in the first sentence of the first chapter of The Political Unconscious, "will argue the priority of the political interpretation of literary texts" (17). In doing so, "it projects a rival hermeneutic to those already enumerated" (21), one whose "master code" (10) of history claims for itself a place of preeminence in the intellectual marketplace

by arguing its ultimate philosophical and methodological priority over more specialized interpretive codes whose insights are strategically limited as much by their own situational origins as by the narrow or local ways in which they construe or construct their objects of study. (21)

Consequently, Jameson's "new hermeneutic" (21)--which argues "the priority of a Marxian interpretive framework in terms of semantic richness" (10)--does not actually "juxtapose a

Marxian method of literary and cultural interpretation" to other such methods in an attempt "to document its claims to greater adequacy and validity" (74); instead, it argues that the perspectives of Marxism are "necessary preconditions for adequate literary comprehension" and that Marxist critical insights are "something like an ultimate semantic precondition for the intelligibility of literary and cultural texts" (75):

In particular we will suggest that such semantic enrichment and enlargement of the inert givens and materials of a particular text must take place within three concentric frameworks, which mark the widening out of the sense of the social ground of a text through the notions, first, of political history, in the narrow sense of punctual event and chroniclelike sequence of happenings in time; then of society, in the now already less diachronic and time-bound sense of a constitutive tension and struggle between social classes; and, ultimately, of history now conceived in its vastest sense of the sequence of modes of production and the succession and destiny of the various human social formations, from prehistoric life to whatever far future history has in store for us. (75)

The first of Jameson's three "frameworks" or "horizons" of interpretation, then--each of which constructs its own

object of study and method of (critical) production--is the "narrowly political horizon" in which

history is reduced to a series of punctual events and crises in time, to the diachronic agitation of the year-to-year, the chroniclelike annals of the rise and fall of the political regimes and social fashions, and the passionate immediacy of struggles between historical individuals. (76-77)

Within this first horizon, the raw material upon which the critic works is the individual literary text or utterance. This "object of study" (76) is conceived of as a socially "symbolic act" (76) in which the literary text reconstructs its (prior) "ideological subtext" (81) in such a way as to produce a "system of antinomies as the symptomatic expression and conceptual reflex of something quite different, namely a social contradiction" (83), which "ultimate subtext" of social contradiction "must, however reconstructed, remain an absent cause, which cannot be directly or immediately conceptualized by the text" (82). At precisely the same time, the text generates a properly narrative structure with which to square the circles and to dispel the intolerable closure of the "logical scandal or double bind" (82) of such ideological antinomies, thereby "inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions" (79).

Just as the proper object of study of the first horizon

is a "determinate structure of . . . formal contradictions" (77) in which social contradictions find a purely symbolic resolution, so the method of (critical) production by which such raw material is to be "transformed"--to borrow Pierre Macherey's interesting phrase--"into a certain form of knowledge" (78-80) is a symptomatic "reconstruction" of the text's "ultimate subtext . . . of social contradiction" (82). This interpretive operation is grounded both in the theory of internally excluded external determinations advanced by Macherey in his A Theory of Literary Production and in "the readings of myth and aesthetic structure of Claude Levi-Strauss as they are codified in his fundamental essay 'The Structural Study of Myth'" (77). And in the process of interpretive production here proposed, the text's formal resolution of an ideological antinomy or logical bind is used as the semantic springboard from which to plunge into what Macherey has elsewhere called the "unconsciousness of the work" (91)--its necessary relation to its internally excluded external determinations--thereby "rewriting" the literary text "in such a way that the latter may itself be seen as the rewriting or restructuration of a prior historical . . . subtext" (81), which rewriting serves both to fulfill "the methodological requirement to articulate a text's fundamental contradiction" (80) and to prove--through specific analysis--the more general theoretical and methodological proposition to the effect that

the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal "solutions" to unresolvable social contradictions. (79)

Such a strategic rewriting of literary texts--grounded as it is in the assumption that "all cultural acts are to be read as symbolic resolutions of real political and social contradictions" (80)--ultimately leads to a second phase of interpretation complete with a second semantic horizon: "that of class struggle and its antagonistic discourses" (88). In this second horizon of interpretation--which Jameson calls the "social" (83)--political history "in the narrow sense of punctual event and chroniclelike sequence of happenings in time" gives way to the "now already less diachronic and time-bound sense of a constitutive tension and struggle between social classes" (75). Such class tension and struggle is here depicted as a dialogue between various class discourses, which discourses "fight it out within the general unity of a shared code" (84), it being understood that class discourse is "dialogical" in its structure (84); that the normal form of the dialogical is an "antagonistic one" (84); that "the constitutive form of class relationships is always that between a dominant and a laboring class" (83); that the term "discourse" includes--

but is by no means limited to--both Antonio Gramsci's notion of ideological hegemony and Louis Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses; and that by "shared code" is meant the common terms and definitions used by the contending class discourses.

But that being the semantic horizon within which the second phase of interpretation is carried out, the proper object of study can clearly no longer be "construed as coinciding with the individual literary work or utterance" (76); instead,

our object of study will prove to be the ideologeme, that is, the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes. . . . [The ideologeme can] manifest itself either as a pseudoidea--a conceptual or belief system, an abstract value, an opinion or prejudice--or as a protonarrative, a kind of ultimate class fantasy about the "collective characters" which are the classes in opposition. . . . (76, 87)

Further, as with the object of study, so with the method of (critical) production: what was in the first narrowly political horizon a strategic "rewriting" of the literary text "in such a way that the latter may itself be seen as the rewriting or restructuration of a prior historical . . . subtext" (81) must become, in the second

"social" horizon,

the restoration of an essentially dialogical or class horizon . . . [in which] the individual utterance or text is grasped as a symbolic move in an essentially polemic and strategic ideological confrontation between the classes. (87, 85)

This interpretive restoration occurs in four closely related steps. First, the text's dominate ideologeme is identified and its transformations traced (87). Second, the discrete literary text is refocused as "a parole, or individual utterance, of that vaster system, or langue, of class discourse" (85), which langue is "something like an ideal construct that is never wholly visible and never fully present in any one of its individual utterances" (87).

Third, the class discourse repressed or denied by parole and langue alike is artificially reconstructed as "the voice to which they were initially opposed, a voice for the most part stifled and reduced to silence, marginalized, its own utterances scattered to the wind or reappropriated in their turn by the hegemonic culture" (85). And fourth, the hegemonic forms of the dominant class discourse are themselves then "reread" or "rewritten" as

a process of the reappropriation and neutralization, the cooptation and class transformation, the cultural universalization, of forms which originally expressed the situation of

"popular," subordinate, or dominated groups. (86)

This reconstruction of "class struggle and its antagonistic discourses" (88) is not, however, the final phase in Jameson's hermeneutic. Instead, the concrete semantic differences produced by such a reconstruction must in time become the raw materials of yet a third phase of interpretation in which those differences are "[re]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" (88). This "code, sign system, or system of the production of signs and codes" (88-89) serves as the "index" of Jameson's third and final horizon of interpretation: that of "history now conceived in its vastest sense of the sequence of modes of production and the succession and destiny of the various human social formations, from prehistoric life to whatever far future history has in store for us" (75). "History" is thus for Jameson "the ultimate ground as well as the untranscendable limit of our understanding in general and our textual interpretations in particular" (100). And though such "history"--Louis Althusser's "absent cause," Jacques Lacan's "Real"--"is not a text, for it is fundamentally non-narrative and nonrepresentational" (83), it is nevertheless "inaccessible to us except in textual form" (82).

Interestingly, Jameson's "prior (re)textualization"

(82) of this "third horizon" of history is called "cultural revolution" (98). The "organizing unity" of Cultural Revolution is "what the Marxian tradition designates as a mode of production" (89). But though Cultural Revolution is often called the "horizon of modes of production" (90), such Modes are actually the smallest of three structural units which coexist within it. For on the one hand, "the overlay and structural coexistence of several modes of production" constitutes a larger structure called a "social formation" or "historically existing society" (95). And on the other hand, such synchronic social formations--which are usually (re)textualized as discrete historical "periods"--always

secretly imply or project narratives or "stories"--
-narrative representations--of the historical
sequence in which . . . [they] take their place
and from which they derive their significance.

(28)

Consequently, the Cultural Revolution of Jameson's final horizon of history is ultimately nothing less than "the unity of a single great collective story . . . [of] the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity" (19). And the most critical element of that narrative is "that moment in which the coexistence of various modes of production become visibly antagonistic, their contradictions moving to the very center of political, social, and historical life" (95), which moment is in fact a

"diachronic manifestation" of the permanent "structural antagonism" which exists between the various Modes of Production coexisting within Cultural Revolution itself (97).

Within this final horizon of history, then, the proper object of study can no longer be an individual text nor even a class ideologeme. Instead, both text and ideologeme must "know a final transformation" and must be read in terms of what Jameson calls the "ideology of form," that is, the "symbolic messages" transmitted by the "coexistence of various sign systems" (76):

Within this final horizon the individual text or cultural artifact . . . is here reconstructed as a field of force in which the dynamics of sign systems of several distinct modes of production can be registered and apprehended. These dynamics--the newly constituted "text" of our third horizon--make up what can be termed the ideology of form, that is, the determinate contradiction of the specific messages emitted by the varied sign systems which coexist in a given artistic process as well as in its general social formation.. (98-99)

Consequently, the method of (critical) production specific to Cultural Revolution must likewise be transformed: while in the "social" horizon the task of the

critic is "the restoration of an essentially dialogical or class horizon" (87), the "task of cultural and social analysis" within the final horizon of history must become "the analysis of the ideology of form" (100), which analysis is to be conducted in precisely such a way that Cultural Revolution itself "can be apprehended and read as the deeper and more permanent constitute subject in which the empirical textual objects know intelligibility" (97):

The concept of cultural revolution, then--or more precisely, the reconstruction of the materials of cultural and literary history in the form of this new "text" . . . which is cultural revolution--may be expected to project a whole new framework for the humanities, in which the study of culture in the widest sense can be placed on a materialist basis. (96)

This, then, is Jameson's "construction of a new hermeneutic" of cultural analysis (21). And in the Chapters that follow, we will both examine a number of the most significant charges that have--or can be--levelled against such a hermeneutic and evaluate the adequacy of Jameson's strategic moves to indemnify his master narrative of history against just such charges.

II. Impoverishment and Expression

History is a process without a
telos or a subject.

---Louis Althusser

I.

As we have seen in Chapter One, Jameson's intent in The Political Unconscious is to "project a rival hermeneutic to those already enumerated," one which claims for itself a place of preeminence in the intellectual marketplace "by arguing its ultimate philosophical and methodological priority over more specialized interpretive codes whose insights are strategically limited . . . by their own situational origins . . ." (21). But as Jameson himself is quick to admit, such an attempt must first "come to terms with a critical and theoretical climate which is variously hostile" to the notion of interpretation per se before it can begin the heavy lifting of proving the superiority of its master narrative to those of the practitioners of alternative or rival interpretive codes (21). One must first come to terms, in other words, with

the problem of representation, and most particularly of the representation of History; as has already been suggested, this is essentially a narrative problem, a question of the adequacy of any storytelling framework in which History might

be represented. (49)¹

Thus, before Jameson can make the case that "History is an interpretive code that includes and transcends all the others" (102), he must first make clear that such codes are themselves worthy of defense. This he does. And he does it by showing that the very rejection of interpretation--the very collapse of the question "What does it mean?"--is itself a type of hermeneutic, an interpretation (that is to say) of the production of meaning: "the repudiation of theory," as he observes elsewhere, "is itself a theory" ("Marxism and Historicism" 153). For even if such a repudiation should appear only in the form of technique or method (as, for example, in the schizo-analysis of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari), such modes of textual production always already signify the presence of an absent theoretical framework such that through the careful application of analytic pressure "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" (58). Hence, even those critics most hostile to interpretation are at length revealed as practitioners of that same black art, the

¹As S. P. Mohanty observes, the post-structural assault on interpretation "essentially takes the form of deconstructing the basic metaphors that have been traditionally used" to describe it (34). For a quick checklist of such assaults, see p. 148 of Jameson's "Marxism and Historicism."

denial of which practice is thus unmasked as ideological:

From the present perspective, in other words, Deleuze and Guattari's proposal for an antiinterpretive method . . . can equally well be grasped as a new hermeneutic in its own right. It is striking and noteworthy that most of the antiinterpretive positions enumerated . . . above have felt the need to project a new "method" of this kind: thus, . . . "political technology of the body" (Foucault), "grammatology" and deconstruction (Derrida), "symbolic exchange" (Baudrillard), libidinal economy (Lyotard) and "semanalyse" (Julia Kristeva). (23)²

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that what at first blush may appear to be an authentic critique of hermeneutics in general will usually eventually shrink itself into a much more manageable critique of the adequacy of this or that particular attempt at interpretation.³ And in most cases, Jameson's response to such critiques of his own interpretations is fully as sophisticated as is his response

²For a summary dismissal of Jameson's position, see pp. 28-29 of "Not Yet," in which Geoff Bennington argues that "to describe deconstruction . . . or Lyotard's 'libidinal economy' as hermeneutic methods is not to respect the strong sense of 'hermeneutics' that Jameson is concerned to defend in The Political Unconscious."

³See, for example, Jameson's critique of Susan Sontag's Against Interpretation on p. 5 of "Metacommentary."

to the critique of hermeneutics proper. When, for example, the initial injunction in The Anti-Oedipus against hermeneutics per se finally reduces itself to the more familiar assertion of the superiority of "immanent" criteria to that criteria which is called "transcendent" (22), Jameson is more than able to turn the critique to his own advantage by way of a three stage sequence of alternative pleadings.

First, Jameson temporarily collapses the distance between what is immanent and what is transcendent--and so renders moot Deleuze and Guattari's implicit charge that Marxism is, like psychoanalysis, a system of allegorical interpretation in which the "rich and random multiple realities of concrete everyday experience" are radically impoverished by being rewritten "according to the paradigm of another narrative, which is taken as the former's master code or Ur-narrative and proposed as [its] ultimate hidden or unconscious meaning" (22)--simply by seizing upon the older New Criticism as the raw material with which to fashion the reasonable conclusion that all analysis is ultimately transcendent and that "an immanent criticism is in this sense a mirage" (57).⁴

⁴A much more compelling production of this conclusion is found in "Modernism and its Repressed; or, Robbe-Grillet as Anti-Colonialist," in which Jameson argues that even the "extreme and rigorously absolute formalism" of Jean Ricardou's reading of Jealousy

Second, Jameson then cleverly reverses his ground and uses Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between inside and outside as evidence of the methodological superiority of his own approach by making the interesting case that although Marxism is in fact transcendent, unlike other methods of interpretation it is only "provisionally" transcendent such that in its most expansive form as a sequence of social formations it grows from interpretation as impoverishment into what--for lack of a better phrase--I will call interpretation as enrichment:

Rightly or wrongly, a totalizing criticism has been felt to be transcendent in the bad sense, or in other words to make appeal, for its interpretive content, to spheres and levels outside the text proper. We have seen that such apparently extrinsic operations are then drawn back into the dialectical framework as the latter expands and is systematically totalized. Thus, . . . this type of interpretation, while containing a transcendent moment, foresees that moment as merely provisionally extrinsic, and requires for its completion a movement to the point at which

⁴(...continued)

is not really as formalistic as it seems to be, and that in reality--far from constituting a repudiation of interpretation--is itself an allegorical interpretation whose "signified" or allegorical key is simply that of language or écriture or the text itself. (170)

apparently external content . . . is then at length drawn back within the process of reading.
(57)⁵

Finally--and most importantly--Jameson then nails down his case by adding a third alternative pleading to the others. For what starts out as a simple assertion that all interpretations are transcendent (which assertion is initially transformed into the view that although Marxism is transcendent, it is so only provisionally) actually ends up as the view that Jameson's method of Marxism, at least, is in fact "immanent or antitranscendent" (23), which conclusion is supported by Jameson's assertion that during

⁵The best example of a type of interpretation which arrives at the green pasture of enrichment only by walking through the valley of the shadow of impoverishment is the medieval system of the four levels of scripture, of which Jameson says (here speaking of how the Old Testament is read as prefiguring Christ),

[T]he movement is from a particular collective history . . . to the destiny of a particular individual: . . . and such a reduction is not without its analogies with that attributed by Deleuze and Guattari But the results are quite different: in the case of the four levels, it is precisely the reduction of the alien collective to the valorized individual which then permits the generation of two further interpretive levels, and it is precisely at these that the individual believer is able to "insert" himself or herself The collective dimension is thus attained once again, . . . but from the story of a particular earthly people it has been transformed into universal history and the destiny of humankind as a whole (30-31)

Indeed, the fact that medieval exegesis can so well serve as a model of interpretation as enrichment goes a long way towards explaining why Jameson uses it as his principle example of a master narrative.

the process of critical analysis here proposed, the literary text is not in any way inserted into some preexisting textualization of an external ground or context out of which it is presumed to have sprung; indeed, just the opposite: the ground or context of which the text is a product is reconstructed out of the materials of the text itself by means of an intense analysis of those determinate characteristics of the text--such as its content, its narrative paradigms, and its stylistic and linguistic practices--which serve as an index of the external conditions which must have been objectively present in order for the text to have been produced (57).⁶ Thus, through a sequence of alternative pleadings, universal transcendence becomes individual immanence. And thus Jameson turns the tables on Deleuze and Guattari.

But only for the moment. For what becomes clear, upon close analysis, is that Jameson's response is rather more sophisticated than it is compelling. For example, although his critique of the older New Critics is certainly persuasive enough, the fact that they and not Deleuze and Guattari are the objects of his analysis casts a pallor over his subsequent conclusions and suggests that what William C.

⁶For an extended discussion of the ways in which the internal characteristics of a text can be used as the raw materials with which to reconstruct the external conditions which must have been present in order for the text to have been produced, see Pierre Macherey's introduction to his A Theory of Literary Production.

Dowling charitably calls a "flanking maneuver" (103) executed "in the nature of a sidestep" (102) may in fact be nothing more than the strategic thrashing of a straw man.

Further, although Jameson's assertion that Marxism only reduces the complexity of lived experience in order then to expand that reduction into the whole of human history certainly sounds good, belief turns to skepticism as soon as we realize that Jameson's core justification for what I have just called interpretation as enrichment is at heart little more than an appeal to the pure bulk of his master narrative, which appeal fails simply because the mere fact that his Ur-narrative is (in its final state) a textualization of the whole of the Real of which all literary texts are necessarily a part does not make the application of that master narrative to any one text any less an act of impoverishment unless the individual text is precisely identical in its lived complexity to the lived complexity of the Real of which it is but a part--unless (that is to say) the former is an absolute expression of the latter. Otherwise, the application of the massive bulk of the Ur-narrative of history to the admittedly slender but still irreducible complexity of lived experience remains a clear act of interpretive impoverishment.

And finally, although Jameson's adoption of Macherey's approach to the internal reconstruction of an internally excluded external ground or context goes a long way towards

breaking down the distinction between a determinant which is immanent and one which is transcendent, it does not actually refute the charge against Marxism which is implicit in The Anti-Oedipus. For although Jameson is clearly able to expand the notion of the literary text to include both the text proper and the conditions of production which must have been objectively present in order for it to have been produced, he is not then able to explain why the application to that newly expanded "text" of an Ur-narrative by means of which (say) the determinate relations between context and text are explicated is any less an act of interpretive impoverishment. Put another way, as soon as we take the time to critique Jameson's argument from within the perspective of Althusser's description of Mode of Production as a process in which a certain method of production is applied to various raw materials in such a way as to produce a given product, which process can be diagramed as follows,

Raw Materials ---> Method of Production ---> Product,

we see at once that what Jameson has done is prove the immanence of his expanded object of knowledge without in any way proving that applying his method of production to that newly expanded object in order to produce the product of a properly Marxian explication of it is any less an act of interpretative impoverishment:

Raw Materials	---> Method of Production	---> Product
-----	-----	-----
Text as both product and conditions of production	---> Master Narrative of History by means of which the text is explicated	---> Analysis of the determinate relations between product and conditions

Thus, what at first blush appears to be a defense of the use of a properly Marxian master narrative of history is at length reduced to a mere defense of the immanence of the expanded "texts" to which such narratives are applied. And thus, the tables turn anew, and Jameson--who is to later call the "characterization of such enlargement as reductive . . . a never-ending source of hilarity" (Ideologies of Theory I.xxvii)--is once again brought face to face with the still unanswered charge of interpretive impoverishment.

II.

If, however, Jameson has a good deal of difficulty refuting the charge of interpretation as impoverishment, he has even more trouble refuting the closely related charge--one made by fellow Marxian theorist Louis Althusser--that any (re)textualization of history which characterizes the Real not as a synchronic structure of structures but as a diachronic sequence of modes of production has been seduced from the structural causality of Marxism proper into the expressive causality of what Althusser calls "historicism,"

which historicism--here defined as "a vast interpretive allegory in which a sequence of historical events or texts or artifacts is rewritten in terms of . . . a hidden master narrative which is the allegorical key or figural content of the first sequence of empirical materials (28)"--is very much at odds with the Althusserian dictum that "History is a process without a telos or a subject" (29), which dictum is (in Jameson's words) "a repudiation of such master narratives and their twin categories of narrative closure (telos) and character (subject of history)" (29). But if Jameson is unable to ultimately refute Althusser's critique of historicism, it is not for lack of trying. For on the one hand, he attempts (as we will see in Chapter Four) to mediate the distance between synchronic structure and diachronic narrative so as to produce a properly metasynchronic narrative of history grounded in Althusser's notion of structural causality, which history he calls "Cultural Revolution." And on the other hand (as we will explore here), he uses three closely related arguments to attempt to make the case that the application of Cultural Revolution to individual literary texts is both necessary and desirable.

To do so, he first makes clear that Althusser's assertion that History is a process without a telos or a subject is not in any way a denial of the reality of the Real, arguing that while the sweeping negativity of the

Althusserian formula may make it appear to be compatible with those post-structuralisms "for which History, in the bad sense--the reference to . . . an external real world of some kind . . .--is simply one more text among others" (35), such an appearance is necessarily misleading, for "what Althusser's own insistence on history as an absent cause makes clear . . . is that he does not at all draw the fashionable conclusion that because history is a text, the 'referent' does not exist" (35).

Having thus salvaged Althusser from what Jameson earlier calls "the ideology of structuralism" ("Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan" 98), Jameson then uses Althusser's own definition of history as that "absent cause" which "resists symbolization absolutely" (35) as an implicit justification for Jameson's own (re)textualization of it, arguing that since (on the one hand) history is not a text, and since (on the other hand) as an absent cause it is inaccessible except in textual form, it must necessarily be (re)textualized before it can be accessed:

We would therefore propose the following revised formulation: that 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. (35)

And finally, Jameson then makes a virtue of necessity by arguing that although such master narratives as (say) Cultural Revolution are necessarily (re)textualizations of the Real, such necessity is in fact the very thing that justifies applying them to literary texts. For texts, too, are (re)textualizations of the Real. And since both Cultural Revolution and literary texts are thus products of the same absent cause, although the application of the former to the latter may in fact be a "temptation" of expressive causality, what was before a vice is now become a virtue simply because Cultural Revolution and literary text have thus been revealed as two sides of the same interpretive coin:

The idea is, in other words, that 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 our thinking about them. (34)

Unfortunately, however, Jameson's attempt to "acknowledge . . . the powerful Althusserian objections to expressive causality and to interpretation generally, while making a local place for such operations" (35) is little more successful than is his attempt to indemnify Cultural Revolution against the charge of interpretive

impoverishment. Although his assertion that Althusser never denies the reality of the Real is certainly a handy rebuke to those post-structuralists who would incorporate Althusser's formula into their own theories of textuality, for example, it does nothing to answer Althusser's own critique of historicism, which critique is not--as Jameson himself makes clear--that the Real does not exist but rather that any narrative textualization of it is a *prima facie* case of expressive causality. Neither, for that matter, does Jameson's assertion that the Real can only be approached through our textualizations of it actually speak to Althusser's objection. For while it explains the existence of such narratives, it does nothing to defend their causality, addressing itself not to questions of effectivity but of necessity. Further, even when Jameson makes the case that texts as well as our theories about them are master narratives which seek--in one form of Necessity or another--to explain "why what happened . . . had to happen the way it did" (101), he does not then refute the charge that the application of the latter to the former is a case of expressive causality. Indeed, just the opposite: he concedes the point, acknowledging that "interpretation in terms of expressive causality or of allegorical master narratives remains a constant temptation . . ." (34). But more than that, he effectually doubles the point. For even though (as we will see in Chapter Three) his theory of the

political unconscious as the purely formal effects of an absent cause solves a number of thorny problems, it presents us with one as well: it piles one case of expressive causality upon another, leaving us not merely (as we were before) with the unanswered charge that the application of a master narrative to a literary text is the effectual expression of the former in the latter, but also with the new charge that both theory and text are--in Jameson's (re)textualization of the Real--effectually identical expressions of the same absent presence. Little wonder, then, that when Jameson explores Althusser's critique of periodization (which periodization Jameson calls the "synchronic version" of historicism) he at first blurts out in awe,

On its own terms, therefore, the Althusserian critique is quite unanswerable. . . ." (27)

III.

Having thus initially failed to defend his proposed master narrative of history from the twin charges of interpretive impoverishment and expressive causality, Jameson beats a temporary strategic retreat, shifting his focus--and so his defense--from authorizing theory to authorized technique. And in doing so, he completely indemnifies the important process of mediation--which Jameson correctly identifies as a "device of the analyst"

authorized by a preexisting master narrative rather than a master narrative in its own right (40)--against the persistent Althusserian charge of expressive causality. He does so simply by rewriting the definition of mediation itself. For although mediation--the classical dialectical term for the "establishment of relations between . . . the formal analysis of a work of art and its social ground" (39)--is defined by Althusser as "a process whereby each level [of the totality] is folded into the next, thereby losing its constitutive autonomy and functioning as an expression of its homologies" (39), Jameson asserts, to the contrary, that

if a more modern characterization of mediation is wanted, we will say that this operation is understood as a process of transcoding: as the invention of a set of terms, the strategic choice of a particular code or language, such that the same terminology can be used to analyze and articulate two quite distinct objects or "texts" or two very different structural levels of reality. (40)

Thus, Jameson continues, although mediation is a technique of analysis whereby the compartmentalization and specialization of the various regions of social life are "locally overcome, on the occasion of a particular analysis" (40), it is not--Althusser notwithstanding--necessarily thus an expression of intra-practice homology, and that simply

because "to describe mediation as the strategic and local invention of a code which can be used about two distinct phenomena does not imply any obligation for the same message to be transmitted in the two cases" (41). Indeed, mediation as transcoding can smelt contrast out of the ore of similarity quite as readily as it can hammer difference into identity, for "the distinguishing of two phenomena from each other, the affirmation that they are not the same, and that in quite specific and determinate ways, is also a form of mediation" (41). Hence, Jameson concludes, "Althusserian structural causality is therefore just as fundamentally a practice of mediation as is the 'expressive causality' to which it is opposed" (41). And hence, the "true target" of Althusser's critique is not the technique of mediation--a good of example of which is Lacan's transcoding of libidinal analysis and linguistic categories ("Imaginary and Symbolic In Lacan" (88ff)--but rather "the structural notion of homology," representative practitioners of which are evidently Lucien Goldmann (who in Sociology of the Novel discovers a rigorous homology between the novel as a form and the daily life of individuals in a market economy) and Rosalind Coward and John Ellis (who in Language and Materialism establish a tacit homology between economic production and the production of language in speech and

writing).⁷

Unfortunately, however, the very skill with which Jameson here defends the technique of mediation from the Althusserian critique of expressive causality rather highlights than solves his previous inability to so defend a properly Marxian master narrative of history by means of which such a "device of the analyst" is authorized (40). Indeed, Jameson inadvertently juxtaposes technique to master narrative in just such a way as to indite--at least by ready implication--the latter with the very charge of expressive

⁷The vigor with which Jameson here attacks Coward and Ellis is nothing short of spectacular, as is perhaps best evidenced by his assertion that

One cannot without intellectual dishonesty assimilate the "production" of texts . . . to the production of goods by factory workers; writing and thinking are not alienated labor in that sense, and it surely fatuous for intellectuals to seek to glamorize their tasks . . . by assimilating them to real work on the assembly line and to the experience of the resistance of matter in genuine manual labor. (45)

More importantly, the extent of Jameson's anger implies that more is at stake here than a feeble attempt by a pair of intellectuals to claim for themselves the suffering of the proletariat, that what is in fact at stake is the adequacy of Jameson's reading of Althusser. For as we will see in depth in Chapter Four, Jameson characterizes Althusser's totality as a single Mode of Production whose structure is "nowhere empirically present as an element . . . of the whole" (36). But this reading is in direct conflict with those of Coward and Ellis, who imply that Althusser's totality is not a single structure but a structure of structures, a structure in dominance (that is to say) in which each level is itself a structure, is itself a Mode of Production. Hence, when we reinsert Jameson's discussion of mediation into the broader context of his rewriting of Althusser, we begin to suspect that the problem for Jameson of The Material Word is less that Coward and Ellis claim the alienation of factory workers than that their readings of Althusser are an implicit challenge to his own.

causality against which he is indemnifying the former. For even as he makes clear the benefits of the application of a single code to multiple levels within the social totality, Jameson argues that to use transcoding as a way of reunifying the heretofore fragmented disciplines is of value only to the precise extent to which the levels behind such disciplines are themselves already unified, already "one and indivisible" in that they constitute a "seamless web" of social life:

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 The realm of separation, of fragmentation, of the explosion of codes and the multiplicity of disciplines is merely the reality of the appearance (40)

Thus, even as he frees mediation from the charge of expressive causality, he reminds us that the "rational and philosophical justification" for its use is a theory of the "underlying unity of the various levels" which has all the trappings of expressive causality (40).

Of course it would seem possible to deflect this charge by asserting a determinate difference between (say) "unity" and "identity"--by asserting, in other words, that

Althusser's theory of semi-autonomous levels authorizes the view of a unified and indivisible seamless web which is nevertheless non-expressive precisely because unity is then defined not as being "the same as" but merely as being always "in relation to"--in short, as simply being part of a structure. Unfortunately, however, to make such an obvious defense, to assert a determinate difference between "unity" and "identity," is to run directly counter to Jameson's own position. For on the one hand, his appropriation of Althusser's notion of semi-autonomy effectively robs that imperative of any such function by reducing it from a critique of notions of determination per se to a simple assertion of structural distance, which reduction both cuts against the definition of unity just proposed and makes the imperative itself unapplicable to questions of determination--and so of expressive causality--per se. And on the other hand, Jameson himself seems to conflate unity and identity when he concludes that his notion of mediation is--in spite of its obvious ability to detail difference as well as similarity--nevertheless quite compatible with and, indeed, ultimately authorized by, the view that "at some level" it is "certainly true" that the superstructures are "mere reflexes, epiphenomenal projections of infrastructural realities" (42).

IV.

If, however, Jameson's defense of mediation as a non-expressive technique of analysis inadvertently calls into question the causality of the very master narrative by which it is authorized and so "seeks"--to borrow Jameson's interesting description of Adorno's negative dialectics--"by biting its own tail, to deconstruct itself" (54), it is nevertheless still a more persuasive argument than is his next attempt to defend an authorizing theory by defending its authorized techniques.

I refer, of course, to Jameson's underwhelming response to the nouveaux philosophes. Like Althusser, that ragged band of critics and philosophers are extremely critical of what Perry Anderson has aptly named the Stalinization of Marxism as a theory and communism as a movement. But while Althusser argues that such Stalinization is caused (at least in good measure) by the misapplication of expressive causality to political theory such that the elimination of the former will engender the eventual de-Stalinization of the latter, the nouveaux philosophes assert (to the contrary) that the political Stalinization of the theory of Marxism was inevitable and is irreversible simply because it was a product of Marx's own materialization of Hegel's Absolute Spirit, simply--that is to say--because when Marx appropriated Hegel's idealism to his own brand of

materialism, he made Hegel's theoretical resolution of contradiction a matter of brute material force such that "a direct line runs from Hegel's Absolute Spirit to Stalin's Gulag" (51).

This critique of Marxism by the nouveaux philosophes is thus vastly greater than is Althusser's, both in scope and severity. And so answer it Jameson must, at his peril. And so answer it he does. But not directly. For rather than asserting that (say) the critique itself is a *prima facie* case of expressive causality in that it posits a political position as the wholly unmediated (and, indeed, entirely uncomplicated) expression of an absent theoretical process, Jameson chooses to stage another of what Dowling earlier called a flanking maneuver executed in the nature of a sidestep. He does so by responding to the charges of the nouveaux philosophes precisely--and only--by way of a defense of Georg Lukacs' Hegelian notion of totality, which notion is a target of the nouveaux philosophes only indirectly, only (that is to say) insofar as the theory of Marxism which it presupposes is itself a target.

This defense of Lukacs' totality Jameson stages in three related phases. In the first, he disputes the view that Hegel was an idealist, arguing that "Hegel's 'conception' of Absolute Spirit is little more than a symptom of a historical situation . . .; less an idea in its own right than an attempt to resolve an impossible

historical contradiction" (51). In the second, he adds that just as Hegel was no idealist, so was he no producer of identity theory either, and so left no identity theory behind to be materialized by such as Marx and Lukacs, which conclusion--i.e. that "it is thus inaccurate or dishonest to associate Hegel with what is attacked under the term 'identity theory'" (51-2)--Jameson justifies by noting that "the Hegelian dialectic emerges precisely from his own assault on 'identity theory' in the form of Schelling's system" (51). And in the third and final phase, Jameson concludes (as much by implication as by assertion) that Lukacs is thus no more a necessary advocate of the forceful overthrow of contradiction than was Hegel a proponent of identity theory, and that simply because Lukacs's theory of totality is (when understood properly) "an essentially critical and negative, demystifying operation" (52), one which projects no positive vision of the end of history from which such a necessity would emerge, but one which instead produces the methodological standard of "an imperative to totalize," one which instead produces--that is to say--a "method of ideological critique" by which "the 'false' and the ideological can be unmasked and made visible" (53).

This, then, is Jameson's entire response to the nouveaux philosophes. It has at least three determinate insufficiencies, the first two of which I mention for their own sake, the third of which is more directly relevant to

our broader discussion of the extent to which Jameson defends a method or technique without then defending the master narrative by which such a method or technique is authorized.

First, the internal logic of Jameson's position is sometimes unpersuasive. It is clear, for example, that the argument that Hegel is not really an idealist since his notion of the Absolute Spirit was not an idea in its own right because it was thrust upon him by history can hold no currency within any problematic of history in which all ideas (including of course even Marx's epistemological break, against which Jameson here juxtaposes Hegel's theory as a way of highlighting the authenticity of the former against the unauthenticity of the latter) are thrust upon them. And it is also clear that the assertion that since Hegel's system was developed as a critique of an identity theory, his own theory cannot therefore be one, is true only to the precise extent to which we accept the surely unacceptable premise that one identity theory cannot--by definition--critique another.

Second, Jameson's defense of Lukacs is, within the broader context of the thrust of the nouveaux philosophes, arguably less a defense per se that it is a diversion, less a rescue of Lukacs than a repression of the critique of Marx. For though Lukacs is an incidental target of the nouveaux philosophes, the real object of their wrath--the

essential link in the chain, in other words, that begins with Absolute Spirit and ends with the Gulag--is Marx's materialization of the resolution of contradiction, which materialization must, in the view of the nouveaux philosophes, necessarily manifest itself as Stalinism. From this perspective, then, Jameson's discussion of totality and identity theory can be seen as a strategic move designed to blunt the critique of the nouveaux philosophes, not--as we might have expected--by confronting it head on, but rather by a process in which Jameson first represses the essential object of the critique (represses the question, that is to say, of the political consequences of Marx's materialization of Hegel); then presents in place of that object issues which were heretofore only preparatory to it, such as issues of idealism and identity theory; and then refutes--but with only partial success--the critique of those issues as though to do so were to refute the whole of the nouveaux philosophes. In short, then, when Jameson is faced with the essential chain of logic of the nouveaux philosophes, which is that a line runs

From Hegel ---> to Marx ---> to Stalin ---> (to Lukacs),
he simply valorized the ends of line and represses the
middle

From Hegel -----> to Lukacs

in such a way that the essential critique of Marx drops out altogether, and the subsequent solution to the part functions as the solution to the whole. But of course the problem with this solution is that it is effective only as long as the mechanics of its production remain hidden. Once they come to light, once the repression of the critique of Marx is revealed as such, then neither Marx nor Lukacs--nor even Jameson--is any longer free from the plague of the nouveaux philosophes. For the defense of Lukacs only works in the absence of Marx. And with the return of the link comes the stigmatization of the whole.

Third (and perhaps more to the point), here too, as in the earlier case of the contradiction between the defended technique of "mediation as transcoding" and the undefended master narrative of history by which such mediation is authorized, although Jameson's defense of the "imperative to totalize" as a "method of ideological critique" is somewhat persuasive (53), he is still unable to then answer the next logical problem to come into view, which is (as Jameson himself makes clear) that any technique of analysis always implies an ideological imperative which itself implies a theory which itself implies a master narrative (in this case, at least, a master narrative of history in the form of a positive notion of totality): "even the plainest unreflexive history," Jameson writes elsewhere, "implies a whole metaphysics and constitutes through its mere

enunciation a whole philosophy of history in its own right" ("Figural Relativism" 154).⁸ Thus, although Jameson's observation that

Marxism is no doubt implied as that thinking which knows no boundaries of this kind, and which is infinitely totalizable, but the ideological critique does not depend on some dogmatic or "positive" conception as a system (53)

is true in a very limited sense and for a fairly brief period,⁹ it is only true to the precise extent to which the critique is held in isolation from both its theoretical authorization and its ideological imperative. Thus, Jameson's rejoinder, though locally true, rather highlights than answers the more fundamental relational and functional objection to the effect that the theory by which such an

⁸See also p. 169 of "Modernism and Its Repressed; or Robbe-Grillet as Anti-Colonialist" (in which Jameson critiques the post-structuralist "attempt to continue to talk of a given phenomenon without interpretation") and p. 58 of The Political Unconscious, in which he observes that It should not . . . be necessary laboriously to argue the position that every form of practice . . . implies and presupposes a form of theory; . . . that even the most formalizing kinds of literary or textual analysis carry a theoretical charge whose denial unmasks it as ideological. . . . [And] that the working theoretical framework or presuppositions of a given method are in general the ideology which that method seeks to perpetrate. (58)

⁹As Jameson himself later observes, over time even "the most negative critical stance loses its therapeutic and destructive shock value and slowly turns back into yet another critical ideology in its own right" ("Architecture and the Critique of Ideology" 36).

imperative is authorized and--indeed--the very decision to use such a technique are both ground in a Marxian master narrative of history which must as yet suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune more commonly known as the still unanswered charges of expressive causality and interpretive impoverishment.

III. (Re)textualizing the Real

All that is past does not exist. . . . Far from working on the past, the ostensible object of history, historical knowledge works on a body of texts. These texts are a product of historical knowledge. The writing of history is the production of texts which interpret these texts.

--Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst

I.

The twin plagues of expressive causality and interpretive impoverishment that we have just examined in Chapter Two are not, however, the only--or even the most common--forms a specific critique of a particular hermeneutic can take. Indeed, the more usual complaint has less to do with a given master narrative's relation to the texts it interprets than with its relation to other such interpretive codes. And so it is with the clear majority of the specific critiques of Jameson's proposed method of interpretation. For as Jameson himself is quick to acknowledge, nor sooner does he conclude that history is the "ultimate ground as well as the untranscendable limit of our understanding in general and our textual interpretations in particular" than does the "whole problem of interpretive priorities" return "with a vengeance" (100). For at that self same moment,

practitioners of alternative or rival interpretive codes--far from having been persuaded that History is an interpretive code that includes and transcends all the others--will again assert "History" as simply one more code among others, with no particularly privileged status. (100)

Thus, at the very apex of his method of interpretation, Jameson is faced with the challenge of defending his theory against the charge that it, too--like every other master narrative he discusses and then subsumes within his various Horizons of Interpretation--is simply another form of ideology, one which reifies "History" in order to produce thematic closure and so offer itself as an absolute method.

But this time, rather than (say) simply defending authorized techniques at the expense of their authorizing theory, Jameson takes the bull firmly by the horns. He asserts that "nothing is to be gained by opposing one reified theme--History--by another--Language--in a polemic debate as to ultimate priority of one over the other" (100). He argues that "it would seem . . . more useful to ask ourselves . . . how History as a ground and as an absent cause can be conceived in such a way as to resist such thematization or reification, such transformation back into one optional code among other" (101). And he provides at least four possible approaches to such a conceptualization.

The first approach, and the one which Jameson discusses

only "obliquely," is to suggest that what Aristotle calls the "generic satisfaction" of the great monuments of historiography is not--as we might have expected--a function of the narrative's content, not a function of "the sheer chronology of fact as it is produced by the rote-drill of the history manual" (101); it is, rather, a function of a "formal restructuration" by which the "otherwise inert chronological and 'linear' data" is radically restructured "in the form of Necessity: why what happened . . . had to happen the way it did" (101). Thus, Jameson seems to imply, the resulting vision of historical necessity may well be indemnified from the charge of reification if for no other reason than that its "emotion" or "history-effect" (depending upon whether you favor the Aristotelians or the semioticians) is a product not of its content--which may, we assume, be changed without substantive injury to form of the narrative--but of the form into which such content has been molded: "the form--[in the case of Marxism, at least]--of the inexorable logic involved in the determinate failure of all the revolutions that have taken place in human history" (102).

The second approach that Jameson advocates is both much more direct than the first and--in some respects, at least--much more troubling. This approach is simply to assert that the nature of history is such that the reality of its absent presence will impose itself upon all scoffers and

disbelievers in such a way and to such an extent as to eliminate the need for any particular theoretical defense of the fact of its existence. For history, Jameson argues, is nothing more nor less than "the experience of Necessity" (102). As such, it "is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis" (102). 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" (102). In short, Jameson concludes, although history can be apprehended only through its effects, those effects are such that you will damn well acknowledge the existence of history whether you want to or not:

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. (102)

There are, however, a trio of problems with Jameson's first two attempts to conceptualize history in such a way as to keep it from being transformed back "into one optional code among others" (101). First, the easy distinction that Jameson draws between a narrative's form and its content is an obvious appeal to a set of categories which are today very much in dispute. And even if we are willing to grant

the line thus drawn between form and content, it is hard to see how such a distinction can, of itself, rescue the (re)textualization of history from the jeers of the practitioners of alternative or rival interpretive codes. For what is at stake here is evidently not the functional relation between a form and its content but rather the struggle for dominance between a multitude of conflicting Ur-narratives. Thus, Jameson's oblique reference to the "emotion" of great historiography is perhaps better understood less as a defense of history per se than as a simple preamble to his subsequent attempt to mediate the gap between the Real and its histories.

Second, the assertion that history as a ground and an absent cause "needs no particular theoretical justification" simply because "its alienating necessities will not forget us, however much we might prefer to ignore them" seems rather to beg the question of the relations of dominance between one master code and others than to answer it (102); for as Jameson himself has made clear, virtually all such master narratives make just such a claim, though of course the specific forms such claims take will necessarily vary from code to code. Further, Jameson's abrupt descent from the realm of theory and the application of logic to the sphere of subjectivity and an implicit appeal to the endlessly seductive siren song of the apparent infallibility of what are, upon reflection, necessarily culturally defined

personal experiences has the appearance, at least, of the kind of intellectual desperation that comes from having come face to face with an unsolvable logical bind or ideological antinomy.

And third (and most importantly), even if we should be persuaded that Jameson's first two attempts to conceptualize history in such a way as to rescue it from the clutches of those who would deny it a place of preeminence among the host of the codes, we must nevertheless insist that the history thus indemnified is not actually the history that is in dispute. Put another way, there are at least two histories under discussion here. One is not a narrative, not a text, and not subject to representation per se; indeed, it is precisely that which, in Lacan's memorable phrase, "resists symbolization absolutely."¹ This history (which is usually called the Real, the Historical Real, the Absent Cause, or the Non-Text) is situated roughly at the ground level--or perhaps even in the basement--of what Antonio Gramsci calls the social relations of forces. As an absent cause, it can be apprehended only through its

¹"We must not," writes Jameson in "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan," expect much help from Lacan himself in giving an account of a realm of which he in one place observes that it--"the Real, or what is perceived as such--is what resists symbolization absolutely." Nevertheless, it is not terribly difficult to say what is meant by the Real in Lacan. It is simply History itself. (104)

effects, which are pain, the denial of desire, the limitation of praxis, and (at least in Jameson's problematic) various formal properties. It both requires and makes possible what Jameson earlier calls--echoing Marx--"the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity" (19). And its existence is defended by Jameson magnificently. But it is not the history that is in dispute.

What is in dispute is the ability of any individual or group to conceptualize and textualize that Historical Real in such a way that the resulting narrative is not ultimately ideological, in such a way--that is to say--that the resulting text does not necessarily present the part as the whole. What is in dispute, in other words, is not the existence of the Historical Real but rather the adequacy of any given history of that Real, including--and this is obviously my key point--any Marxian interpretive code which, as does Jameson's, claims to include and transcend all other such codes. But this history is precisely the one that Jameson chooses not to defend on its merits. Instead, he neatly sidesteps the issue, using a three step shuffle. As his first step, he argues quite persuasively (as I have noted above) that "nothing is to be gained by opposing one reified theme . . . by another . . . in a polemic debate as to ultimate priority of one over the other" (100). As his second step, he raises the fundamental issue at hand by

asking how "History as a ground and as an absent cause [which history, is--by definition--the Historical Real] can be conceived [which is to say, can be textualized in the form of a properly Marxian master narrative] in such a way as to resist such thematization or reification, such transformation back into one optional code among others" (101). And as his third and determinate step, he effectually papers over the critical issue he has just raised by presenting a superior defense of the materiality of the Historical Real as though to do so were a defense of the adequacy of any given Marxian textualization of that Real ('History will not forget us, however much we might prefer to ignore it,' etc.), thereby brushing aside his own earlier insistence in "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan" that "we must distinguish between our own narrative of history . . . and the Real itself, which our narratives can only approximate in asymptomatic fashion" (107). Thus, Jameson's defense is at heart as much conflation as it is analysis such that it is often difficult to tell whether his references to history are references to the Historical Real, to a Marxian (re)textualization of that Real, or to some unspecified combination of the two: while (for example) the declaration that "History is an interpretive code which includes and transcends all the others" obviously refers to history as text (100), and while the view that "History is what hurts" clearly has in mind the workings of the

Historical Real (102), when Jameson remarks that "History" is neither "a mere object of representation [n]or . . . one master code among many others," his comment implies that history is here used as a sign of both the Historical Real and of a textualization of that Real, for (on the one hand) the charge that history is a "mere object of representation" can only be leveled against the Historical Real, and (on the other hand) the assertion that history is but "one master code among many others" can only be made against a textualization of that Real (102).

II.

There is, however, a very important passage in The Political Unconscious in which Jameson attempts to work out the relation between the Historical Real and a Marxian history of that Real not through conflation but through mediation (and this I take to be his third attempt to conceptualize history in such a way as to forestall its transformation back into one optional code among others). "History," he begins, is "the experience of Necessity" (102). And though Jameson's use of "History" here encompasses both the Real and its histories, the context in which the statement occurs--Jameson's discussion of various of Marx's visions of "historical necessity"--implies that the predominant meaning of history is here initially that of the Historical Real, and that by "experience of Necessity"

Jameson has in mind the kind of physical necessity of which Marx--earlier quoted by Jameson in his own discussion of necessity--said

Just as the savage must wrestle with Nature to satisfy his wants, to maintain and reproduce life, so must civilized man, and he must do so in all social forms and under all possible modes of production. With his development this realm of physical necessity expands as a result of his wants. . . . But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end of itself, the true realm of freedom, which however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. (19)

Thus, Jameson begins his analysis by establishing--as much by implication and position as by definition--a quite conventional correlation between the Historical Real and physical necessity, both of which are familiar (if somewhat weatherworn) tenants in Gramsci's ground floor of social relations of forces, and both of which dovetail nicely into Jameson's subsequent discussion of history as what hurts, what denies desire, what limits praxis, and so forth. His first equation, then, is as follows:

Historical Real = Experience of Physical Necessity

This initial equation is, however, no sooner established that it is modified. For although Jameson's earlier reference to Marx and his present use of "experience" both function to imply the definitions of history and necessity noted above--physical necessity can be "experienced"; necessity in (say) "the form of inexorable logic" must be produced (102)--Jameson soon makes clear that such an implication is, if not wrong, at least ripe for the rewriting. For "Necessity," he says, drawing upon his earlier reference to the history-effect of great historiography, "is not in that sense a type of content, but rather the inexorable form of events" (102). By this he evidently means that just as "history" is both the signifier of a given signified at one level of the social formation and the signifier of quite another signified at another level of the formation; just (that is to say) as it is both the Historical Real at the level of material production and the (re)textualization of that Real at the level of the Symbolic Order; so, too, "necessity" performs a dual role and signs a dual signification such that while at the level of material production the signified to which it points is what Marx calls physical necessity, at the level of the Symbolic Order it becomes--at least for Jameson--the sign of a formal structure or paradigm by which causality is expressed: it becomes (in other words) what Jameson calls the "form of Necessity," by which he means a particular type

of narrative category, one which--through the radical restructuration of inert material--serves to explain "why what happened (at first received as 'empirical' fact) had to happen the way it did" (101).² Jameson's assertion thus clearly implies the existence of two complementary pairs of terms, one used to describe a set of relations existing within the practice of material production, the other, a set of relations within the Symbolic order itself:

History of the Real = A Restructuring of Inert Material
into Formal Necessity

Historical Real = Experience of Physical Necessity

But of course Jameson goes much farther than this. For when he brings history--at this point clearly defined as the Historical Real--into a determinate relation with that necessity which "is not in that sense a type of content, but rather the inexorable form of events" (102), what he is in fact doing--though he is remarkably subtle about it--is nothing less than asserting that a determinate relation exists between the material and symbolic practices such that one can with propriety say not merely that the Historical Real has a certain relation to physical necessity (which

²For an brief elaboration of Jameson's notion of the forms of Necessity, see his assertion in "Architecture and the Critique of Ideology" that "the dialectic, or powerful dialectical history, must somehow always involve a vision of Necessity . . . , always tell the necessity of an event, why it had to happen the way it did" (41).

relation is, after all, something of a given) but also that it has a certain relation to the process of restructuration by which inert chronological facts are (within the confines of the level of the production of sign systems) transformed into purely narrative expressions of textual causality.

Of course such relation--which Jean-Francois Lyotard will later rewrite in terms of "il faut enchaîner" and "the politics of linkages" and the necessity of occurrence (73-77)--can only be justified upon the absolute precondition that although each level or practice within the totality may be relatively autonomous, "social life is in its fundamental reality one and indivisible, a seamless web, a single inconceivable and transindividual process" (40). And such relation can only be expressed through the creation of a concept or term by means of which the relation thus asserted can be identified. Otherwise, what is in concept an act of transcoding becomes in expression an act of simple conflation. Of course for Jameson that concept--that privileged term--is the political unconscious, which (as we might expect) now makes its appearance, thus providing the purely formal textual linkage between two sets of terms the referents of which are always already so thoroughly interwoven that there is "no need to invent ways of linking language events and social upheavals or economic contradictions because on that level they were never separate from one another" (40):

History is therefore the experience of Necessity.

. . . Necessity is . . . a narrative category in the enlarged sense of some properly narrative political unconscious which has been argued here. (102).

This, then, is mediation as transcoding in its finest hour; it is a superior example of how the apparently uncrossable gulf between two discrete social practices or levels--in this case the gulf between the material and the symbolic--can be bridged through the instrumentality of a term common to both, which bridge can be diagramed as follows:

History of the Real = A Restructuring of Inert Material into Formal Necessity	
	<div style="border-left: 1px solid black; padding-left: 10px; margin-left: 10px;"> Infra-practice gap bridged by the notion of the Political Unconscious, which is produced at the material Level, but which is manifest at the level of the symbolic </div>
Historical Real	= Experience of Physical Necessity

Trouble, however, follows hard upon the heels of triumph. For no sooner is the Historical Real linked to formal necessity through the instrumentality of the political unconscious--which link is of special interest to us here because it can perhaps be made to function as the center of a chain of relations by means of which the Historical Real can be brought into determinate relation to

the history of the Real--than does the term by which such transcoding is accomplished become not merely the privileged "mediating category" (44)--to borrow S. P. Mohanty's phrase--by which such transcoding is produced³, not merely the "articulated critical apparatus" (James 64) or formal link between two extra-practice signifieds, but also the product of just such mediation:

History is therefore the experience of Necessity.
 . . . Necessity is . . . 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." (102)

And so while the antecedent of the appositive phrase beginning "a retextualization of History . . ." is functionally ambiguous and can be either necessity or the

³As Mohanty observes, the notion of the political unconscious has "considerable potential" as a "mediating category for any cultural Marxism" in that the "idea" of a political unconscious provides us with a mediation that has the advantage of shifting back and forth between levels, suspending preconceived notions of the Subject, of desire, and textual form. . . . The advantage, in a word, consists of the articulation of desire on the social, of the political in the aesthetic, an articulation now possible on one and the same plane of analysis. (44)

political unconscious, the result is the same in either case. For as soon as we look closely at this last chain of relations, we see that Jameson's process of mediation ends up engenders a quite bizarre and reductive rewriting of the Historical Real as the experience of its own formal effects: "History is therefore the experience of the formal effects of what Althusser, following Spinoza, calls an "absent cause" (102). And although we can certainly forestall such an unfortunate conclusion by asserting that the "History" with which Jameson begins his mediation is not the Historical Real after all, but is instead the history of that Real--which assertion is clearly authorized by Jameson's observation that the type of history here invoked is not only not "a mere object of representation" but is also not merely "one master code among many others" (102)--we can do so only at the expense of most of what we were trying to accomplish when we began the process of mediation itself. For what we are then left with is a very conventional definition of the history of the Real as the experience of the formal effects of the Historical Real, which definition--while certainly true enough--is of no particular value to us simply because we already have it and in fact could not have begun the process of transcoding by which we engendered such a restatement of it without it.

III.

There, is, however, perhaps a better way to come to grips with this extraordinary attempt at mediation, and that is from within the perspective of Althusser's important concept of Mode of Production. As I noted in Chapter Two, Althusser defines Mode of Production as a process in which a certain method of production is applied to various raw materials in such a way as to produce a given product, which Mode of Production can be diagramed as follows:

Raw Materials ---> Method of Production ---> Product.

And from this perspective, we begin to see that the political unconscious can perhaps be understood not as a product but as a process. For from this perspective, the political unconscious is no longer merely what John Behar calls "the Freudian unconscious appropriated in Marx's name and transformed into metaphor" (132): it is no longer a purely formal link (that is to say) between the trans-practice signifieds of the Historical Real and various histories of that Real. Neither is it any longer just another name for the formal effects of an absent cause. It is, instead, a specific method of production by means of which the raw materials of the Historical Real are transformed--or, to borrow Jameson's own term, "retextualized"--into that narrative "form of Necessity"

with which we are here concerned:

Raw Materials	--->	Method of Production	--->	Product
-----		-----		-----
Historical Real	-->	Political Unconscious	--->	Form of Necessity

Put another way, from this perspective the political unconscious can be understood as the mechanism by which that physical necessity which is the material effect of the Historical Real is in the Symbolic Order retextualized into the various narrative forms of causality with which we attempt to understand and explain the determinate relations between the Real and its alienating necessities.

Unfortunately, however, this potentially compelling view of the political unconscious as a process by which the material effects of the Real are imposed upon our ways of thinking that Real is not actually the one advocated by Jameson. For in his haste to mediate the distance between the Real and its histories, Jameson identifies the political unconscious not as a process by which the narrative categories of causality (which he calls the forms of Necessity) are produced but rather as the forms themselves; for him, in other words, the forms of causality with which we explain the Real are not produced by the political unconscious; rather, they are the political unconscious:

Necessity is . . . a narrative category in the enlarged sense of some properly narrative

political unconscious which has been argued here,
 a retextualization of History . . . as the formal
 effects of what Althusser, following Spinoza,
 calls an "absent cause." (102)

Thus, for Jameson the political unconscious is not a method
 of production by which a textualization of the Real is
 produced; it is rather the product--in the form of a
 textualization--of just such a method. And so an accurate
 diagram of Jameson's attempt at mediation is not

Raw Materials	---->	Method of Production	---->	Product
-----		-----		-----
Historical Real	->	Political Unconscious	-->	Form of Necessity

but rather

Raw Materials	---->	Method of Production	---->	Product
-----		-----		-----
Historical Real	->		---->	Forms of Necessity called the Political Unconscious

Of course the most obvious problem with Jameson's view
 that the political unconscious is not the means by which the
 Real is retextualized so much as it is the
 (re)textualization of that Real is that such a view
 immediately engenders--or at least brings to the surface--a
 gaping conceptual and logical tear or rift between the

categories of raw material and finished product and so puts at risk the very mediational link between the Historical Real and a properly Marxian history of that Real that Jameson is here attempting to produce. And although he is quick to recognize the danger of such a break, he is hard pressed to suture it. For on the one hand, when he attempts to bridge the gap between the Real and the political unconscious--and to bridge it, as it were, from the raw material side of the gulf--by defining the Historical Real itself as the "absent cause" of formal necessity (102), he is at first brought up short simply because he appears to have no conceptual materials left with which to construct such a causal connection, having already transferred the notion of the political unconscious over onto the product side of the rift (I will have much more to say about Jameson's move to bridge the gap from the material side of the gulf in a moment). And on the other hand, when he attempts to bridge the gap by building backward, as it were, from the product side of the gulf to the raw material side, although he certainly has the conceptual lumber of the political unconscious with which to construct the necessary bridge of a method of production, the fact that such lumber has already been designated as the product of the very method of production that he is here attempting to construct presents him with a bit of a problem: it implies, among other things, that such conceptual lumber can be both a

method of production and the product of that same method only upon the absolute preconditions that Althusser's distinction between method of production and product is false and presumably ideological; that to assert that production and product are identical is not--notwithstanding certain appearances to the contrary--any type of conflation; and that the product in question is in fact capable of a kind of spontaneous generation and so can literally inscribe itself into existence, can somehow think itself into being:

The conception of the political unconscious outlined in this book is an attempt to cut through this particular dilemma by relocating it within the object. . . . The idea is, in other words, that 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 our thinking about them. (34)

But even if all three preconditions are met, we are still left with an unbridged conceptual gap between materials and product, between the Real and its textualization. For even as Jameson asserts with some persuasiveness the ability of the political unconscious to think itself into existence and so inscribe itself into both subject and text, he remains unwilling--or perhaps even unable--to then make clear the

process by which such a Godlike act of self creation is carried out. Instead, he carries out a tactical retreat in the form of what James H. Kavanagh calls "the circularity" of an argument that "pivots around the semi-colon" ("The Jameson-effect" 24): Jameson simply restates (that is to say) the definition of the political unconscious as though such a restatement were somehow an adequate explanation of the process by which it is engendered, thus concluding that the Ur-narratives of the political unconscious "reflect a fundamental dimension of our collective thinking and our collective fantasies about history and reality" without ever actually specifying the method of production by which such a "reflection"--which, incidently, sounds awfully like expressive causality--is engendered (34).

IV.

As I suggested above, however, there is clearly another way of thinking Jameson's attempt to mediate the distance between the Historical Real and his (re)textualization of that Real, one which bridges the gap between material and product from (as it were) the material side of the divide. And that way is to assert that the Historical Real is itself a method of production--"The machinery" of which, as Hayden White has observed, "is comprised of . . . Desire in conflict with Necessity" (4)--and that the determinate relations of production of that historical machinery is

precisely that which engenders the forms of necessity which Jameson calls the political unconscious. From this perspective, then, what was before

Raw Materials	---	Method of Production	---	Product
-----		-----		-----
Historical Real	---		---	Forms of Necessity called the Political Unconscious

becomes

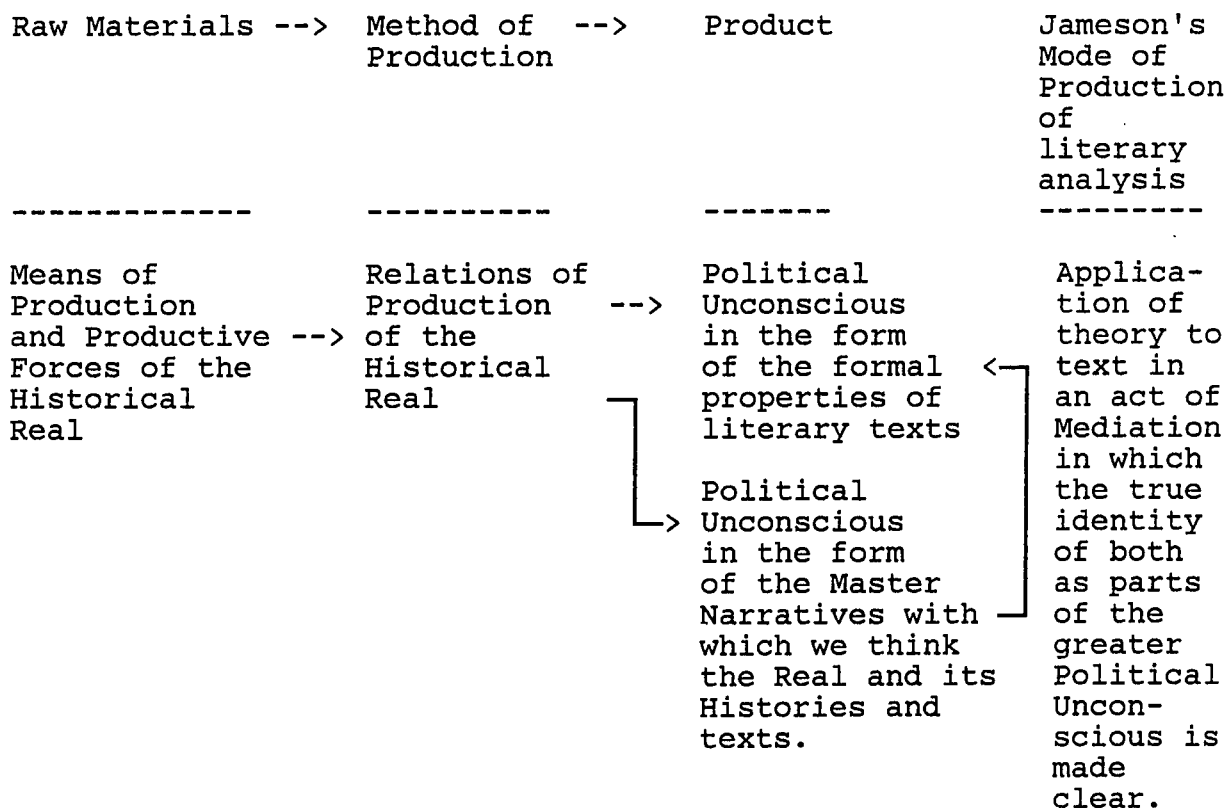
Raw Materials	---	Method of Production	--	Product
-----		-----		-----
Means of Production and Productive Forces of the Historical Real	---	Relations of Production of the Historical Real	---	Forms of Necessity called the Political Unconscious,

with the relations of production of the Historical Real functioning as the method of production of that "absent cause" which produces the "formal effects" called the political unconscious (102). From this perspective, in other words, while the Mode of Production of the Historical Real can be (re)textualized as the "collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity" (19), the relations of production within that Mode are of such a magnitude of exploitation that the resulting gap between exploiters and exploited--which gap is the precise measure

of the extent to which the freedom of the former is purchased at the cost of the slavery of the latter--produces an almost overpowering need to understand why such a gap should exist, which need then engenders a multitude of forms of necessity which explain "why what happened (first received as 'empirical' fact) had to happen the way it did" (101).

Indeed, this view of the relation between the Historical Real and the political unconscious is precisely, it seems to me, what Jameson has in mind when he asserts that he will "cut through" the "particular dilemma" of Althusser's discreditation of "the Marxian versions of a properly teleological history" by "relocating it within the object" (34). For it is surely true that if the relations of production of the Historical Real are capable of producing the forms of necessity at the level of (say) literary and philosophical theory, such relations of production are equally capable of producing those same forms at the level of literary texts themselves, thus inscribing "master narratives . . . in the texts as well as in our thinking about them" (34). And if that is in fact the case, if--as Jameson here asserts--"such allegorical narrative signifieds . . . reflect a fundamental dimension of our collective thinking and our collective fantasies about history and reality" (34), then both theory and texts are part of the same greater whole--part, that is to say, of the

same political unconscious of the formal effects of the Historical Real--such that the application of the former to the latter is perhaps less an example of interpretive impoverishment than it is a case of establishing the authentic identity which exists between apparently disparate phenomena, which process of transcoding can be diagrammed as follows:



Thus, in one sweeping move Jameson appears to both mediate the distance between the Historical Real and his Marxian version of a properly teleological history of that Real and refute the charge of the Anti-Oedipus crowd that the

application of any such master narrative to an individual text necessarily constitutes a case of interpretive impoverishment.

V.

Unfortunately, however, Jameson's move (which I take to be his fourth attempt to mediate the distance between the Real and its histories) simply does not hold up under close analysis, for at least two reasons.

First, what has become evident, by now, is that there are in fact not merely two different kinds of history under discussion here, but three, which plentitude of signifieds causes White to conclude that "the confusion to the reader that is likely to result from the effort to follow Jameson in his many uses of the term 'history' will be more than justified" (4). Thus, we have

(1) History as the Historical Real, as the "ground and absent cause" of the political unconscious, as that which hurts, which refuses desire, and which sets inexorable limits on individual and collective praxis (102).

(2) History as the formal effects of the Historical Real, as the various literary forms which--"carrying ideological messages of their own, distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the works" (99)--constitute the proper object of knowledge of Jameson's third and final Horizon of Interpretation, constitute (that is to say) "that . . . 'text' of our third horizon, [which] can be termed the ideology of form, that is, the determinate contradictions of the specific messages emitted by the varied sign systems which coexist within a given artistic process . . ." (98-99); history, in other words, as a super-set of Macherey's

notion of the formal effects of an internally excluded external determination, which super-set is evidently Jameson's expansion of Macherey's formal contradiction into a whole host of disparate formal properties, the expansion evidently being a prudent response to Terry Eagleton's telling observation that texts are not always--Macherey notwithstanding--forced into grievous disorder by the production of the ideologies of the Real (see especially Eagleton, Criticism and Ideology, 92-95).

(3) History as an "interpretive code that includes and transcends all others" (100), as a properly Marxian master narrative of the Historical Real which--in Jameson's final Horizon of Interpretation--assumes the "unity of a single great collective story" (19) in the form of a linked series of metasynchronic Modes of Production, which series--under the provocative sign of "Cultural Revolution"--provide both the problematic within which the Ideology of Form is situated and the method of production by which that textual object of knowledge is transformed into the product of such literary exegesis as Chapter Five of Jameson's The Political Unconscious.

And though the latter two types of history are clearly products of the relations of production of the former, they are not the same products; they are not the same causality; they are not the same "form of Necessity" (101). For while the Ideology of Form is a purely formal product, one whose "ideological messages" are entirely "distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the works" (99), Cultural Revolution is both a form of causality and the specific content of that form such that while the Ideology of Form can be present in literally any content, any change of content in Cultural Revolution would necessarily transform it into another master narrative altogether, one which would

be--by very definition--no longer Cultural Revolution. And though the fact that the formal properties of Ideology of Form and Cultural Revolution are both products of the same relations of production may cause some initial conflation of the two types of history, the determinate difference between them becomes clear as soon as we recall that in Jameson's ultimate Horizon of Interpretation, while the Ideology of Form is the proper object of knowledge of the Horizon, Cultural Revolution is the precise method of production--which method Jameson elsewhere calls "a kind of ninety-degree rotation" ("Ideology of the Text" 24)--by which that very object is made to yield up its "ideological messages" which are "distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the works" (99):

Raw Materials	->	Method of Production	-->	Product
-----		-----		-----
Ideology of Form	---	Cultural Revolution	-->	Literary Analysis of the Ideological Messages of the Ideology of Form

Thus, Jameson's implicit assertion that the application of such master narratives as Cultural Revolution to such "texts" (99) as the Ideology of Form is not--appearances notwithstanding--a case of interpretive impoverishment simply because both types of history are part of the same greater whole of the political unconscious must ultimately fail, collapsing into either homology or expressive

causality. For on the one hand, since even though Ideology of Form and Cultural Revolution are both products of the same method of production, they are not the same product and so are not the same form of necessity, it follows that to apply the latter to the former so as to produce what Jameson earlier calls the "study of the ideology of form" ("Symbolic Inference" 139)

is necessarily to impoverish it through an interesting example of interpretation as extra-practice homology, one which establishes an ultimate identity between the two types of history by effacing the difference between form and content, between material and method, between philosophy and literature; hence, the justice of Michael Sprinker's assertion that

it is difficult to see how Jameson's rewriting of literary history does not fall into the same kind of homologies between the mode of production as a whole and the instance of culture which has plagued Marxist literary criticism from Lukacs to Goldmann (69)

And on the other hand, even if master narrative and literary form were in fact the same, they would be so only upon the absolute precondition that both were--underneath the false illusion of the determinate difference between (on the one hand) a multitude of forms the contents of which can vary from moment to moment and (on the other hand) the permanent

fusion of a particular type of causality to the particular content of a linked series of metasynchronic Modes of Production--identical expressions of an absent cause: hence, expressive causality.

And second, even if we should conclude that Jameson's weaving of the Ideology of Form and Cultural Revolution into the seamless web of the political unconscious is neither an example of expressive causality nor a case of extra-practice homology but is instead an authentic act of mediation as transcoding, one which identifies the essential unity of the two signifieds only against a background of the obvious differences between them, we have still not actually provided any kind of substantive theoretical defense for the contents of Jameson's Ur-narrative, have still not refuted the charge that "'History' is simply one more code among others, with no particularly privileged status" (100). For although we have shown that the narrative forms with which we attempt to explain the Real and so come to grips with the gap between the laboring and the exploiting classes are a product of the Real itself, having been engendered by the relations of production of that ultimate Mode of Production, we have also shown--at least by ready implication--that every other master narrative is also a product of precisely that same method of production, that they are all threads in the same seamless web of the political unconscious, are all forms of necessity which attempt to explain "why what

happened . . . had to happen the way it did" (101). Indeed, far from privileging our master narrative above others, far from proving that "History is an interpretive code that includes and transcends all the others" (100), we have done just the opposite; we have proven that insofar as we have examined the issue, insofar--that is to say--as the forms of the various master narratives are concerned, they are all equal precisely because they are all forms of necessity, are all explanations of causality, are all products of the relations of production of the Historical Real. Put another way, although we have certainly explained why causality is such a privileged form in both texts and our ways of thinking about texts, we have not then provided any theoretical basis for determining which of the whole host of master narratives is the most accurate (re)textualization of the Historical Real; we have not then shown, in other words, why our particular form of necessity is superior to any other such form. In short, we have defended the form of our properly Marxian master narrative of history magnificently without thereby defending its content a whit, without in any way demonstrating that our history of the Real is a real history.

VI.

Thus, regardless of from which side of the rift in his theory Jameson attempts to span the gap between the raw

materials of the Historical Real and the finished product of "the inexorable form of events" of the political unconscious, the gap remains. Thus, Jameson's most ambitious attempt at mediation to date suffers an untimely collapse, retreating first into reductivism, then into repetition, and then into silence. And we are at length left with an oddly fractured text, one which seems to fit together much more smoothly when the abortive attempt at mediate between the Historical Real and histories of the Real is removed:

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. . . . Conceived in this sense, History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits on individual as well as collective praxis, which its "ruses" turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention. (102)

More importantly, we are also left with a growing awareness that in spite of his best efforts, Jameson has been unable to provide a substantive theoretical defense to the assertion that his own textualization of the Historical Real is "simply one more code among others, with no particularly privileged status" (100). Indeed, at one point

he comes very close to admitting as much himself and opting for White's view that "the critical problem . . . is not whose story is the best or truest, but who has the power to make his story stick . . ." (12-13). For in his final chapter (which we will explore in some depth in Chapter Five), although Jameson returns once again to the question of the superiority of one problematic or field of consciousness to another, instead of attempting to produce an adequate defense of a properly Marxian interpretation of the Real, he asserts that such an attempt is at best unnecessary and at worst the mark of a fool or--gasp!--an ethicist:

Only an ethical politics, linked to those ethical categories we have often had occasion to criticize and to deconstruct in the preceding pages, will feel the need to "prove" that one of these forms of class consciousness is good or positive and the other reprehensible or wicked. (290)

And although Jameson's conclusion is clearly more a function of his attempt to raise an impulse towards Utopia, Phoenix-like, out of the ashes of cultural demystification than it is an authentic expression of theoretical capitulation, the necessary consequence of such a move is an effectual if only temporary abandonment of the difficult defense of Marxism's claim to objective truth for the easy out of an assertion of willful subjectivity, perhaps the best indication of which

abandonment is Jameson's surprisingly casual adoption of the term "ideological":

It is unnecessary to argue these quite correct propositions; ideological commitment is not first and foremost a matter of moral [or even, one would assume from the context of Jameson's remarks, philosophical] choice but of the taking of sides in a struggle between embattled groups. (290)

Thus, Jameson's "Conclusion" in The Political Unconscious is an implicit repudiation of his earlier assertion in "The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodern Debate" that "the dialectic is 'beyond good and evil' in the sense of some easy taking of sides, whence the glacial and inhuman spirit of its historical vision" (111). As such, his "Conclusion" begins to drift uncomfortably close to Terry Eagleton's "Conclusion" in Literary Theory: An Introduction. For although Jameson's book is as deep and expansive as Eagleton's is shallow and reductive, Jameson's temporary abandonment of theory in favor of a simple "taking of sides" bears an unfortunate resemblance to Eagleton's own abandonment of theory and method, both of which tactical moves necessarily beg the strategic question of the adequacy of the basis upon which a side is chosen or an objective--"what we want to do"--justified:

Indeed, "ideology" can be taken to indicate no more than this connection--the link or nexus

between discourses and power. Once we have seen this, then the questions of theory and method may be allowed to appear in a new light. It is not a matter of starting from certain theoretical or methodological problems: it is a matter of starting from what we want to do, and then seeing what methods and theories will best help us to achieve these ends. (Eagleton 210)

I do not, however, want to make too much of this parallel. For while Eagleton's assertion is the culmination of a sustained attack upon the role and significance of theory and methodology per se (including, of necessity, an implicit denouncement of the quite impressive method of interpretation earlier articulated in his own Criticism and Ideology), Jameson's comment is essentially little more than an aside engendered during his intensive search for a positive hermeneutic of Utopia with which to supplement the more traditional Marxian negative hermeneutic of cultural demystification. And in fact, in the very passage in which Jameson renounces the need to "prove" the adequacy of this or that Ur-narrative of class consciousness, he implies that at some (prior) level, analysis must indeed be conducted, and proof offered. For on the one hand, even though he juxtaposes "moral choice" to "the taking of sides" as though the latter is carried out in place of the former, his distinction collapses almost immediately simply because to

take a side is necessarily to make a choice, and to choose the side of (say) the proletariat in the struggle between embattled groups is--at least for anyone who is not a member of that class and who rejects Marx's salvational view of history and so feels little compelling material justification for so siding with the working class--of necessity to make a quintessentially moral and ethical choice, at least in the broadly philosophical sense in which Jameson here uses those words. And on the other hand, Jameson makes clear that regardless of what he has just said about the lack of a need for proof, analysis has in fact already been done, proof offered, and conclusions reached. For even as he declares that it is not necessary to proof that (say) "working-class consciousness is potentially more universal than ruling-class conscious, or that the latter is essentially linked to violence and repression" (290), he implies that these arguments have already been proven: they are, after all, not merely propositions but "quite correct propositions" (290), which is to say that they have already been defended on the basis of the adequacy of some specifically Marxian narrative of history.

Thus, it becomes increasingly clear that each time Jameson attempts to indemnify his final Horizon of Interpretation against the charge that history, far from being "an interpretive code that includes and transcends all the others," is "simply one more code among others" (100),

he fails not because he would not succeed but because he evidently could not. And so "in the end" (as White observes) "he must leave it to individual judgment to decide whether the Marxist 'master-narrative' of world history is the best story that can be told about it" (12).

VII.

But even if Jameson had been successful, even if he had been able to brandish his theory of the political unconscious in such a way as to keep at bay the snarling pack of rival codes, he would have done so in vain: he would have solved the first of the two riddles of representation by which his hermeneutic is bedeviled in just such a way as to make made unsolvable the second. For since the political unconscious is said to inscribe itself into cultural artifacts quite as fully as into our ways of thinking about such artifacts, any defense of that theory worthy of the name must therefore make clear the determinate relations not merely between the Real and its master narratives but also between the Real and its literary texts, must therefore "give a sense"--to quote Jameson's earlier comment in "Criticism in History"--"of this momentary contact with the real . . . insofar as it takes place in the realm of literary studies" (120). But this Jameson is finally unable to do. This is not to say, of course, that he does not make the attempt. Indeed, he makes two closely

related pronouncements on the subject. The first--which we have heard before in more general terms--is that the Real always informs literary texts. The second is that just as the Real informs texts, so texts "always entertain some active relationship with the Real" (81), with each cultural act or artifact drawing the Real "into its own texture" in order that it might "submit it to the transformations of form" (81). Unfortunately, however, in neither case does Jameson then delineate the precise Mode of Production by means of which such information and transformation are produced.

In the first case, for example, although Jameson makes the claim that the Real contradictions of the "ultimate subtext which is the place of social relations" (82) within (say) capitalism produce a multitude of corresponding "secondary" contradictions "which take . . . the form of the aporia or the antinomy" within the ideology of the Symbolic Order (82), he gives us no real indication as to how this occurs: he never specifies the method of production by which the former produces the latter. Indeed, the closest he ever comes is an adverbial phrase chock full of expressive causality:

Such a distinction, positing a system of antinomies as the symptomatic expression and conceptual reflex of something quite different, namely a social contradiction, will now allow us

to reformulate the coordination between a semiotic and a dialectical method, which was invoked in a preceding section. (83; my emphasis)

And that is truly unfortunate, since it is through this precise method of production (which method is here only implied) that the determinate relations between the Real and its literary texts are evidently established. But although Jameson is here effectually silent--or, worse, explicitly "expressive"--with regard to such a method, one thing, at least, should by now be abundantly clear: the political unconscious is not the answer. For on the one hand, in Jameson's problematic, at least, it is not a method of production at all, and so cannot be the means by which a Real contradiction is (re)textualized into an ideological antinomy or a logical bind; instead, it is (as I have indicated above) precisely the product--in the form of a textualization--of just such a method. And on the other hand, although the political unconscious is a product which itself produces texts, the raw materials out of which it fashions those texts are neither the Real nor any of its discrete relations of production. Indeed, to assume that they are would be--as Althusser rightly points out in his discussion of Generalities I, II, and III--to fall into what Macherey calls the "empirical fallacy," to mistake a mental construct of the Real for the Real itself (For Marx 187-90;

Macherey 12-15).⁴ Instead, the raw materials upon which the political unconscious works are nothing more nor less than the very ideological antinomies and logical binds under discussion here; such formal contradictions are thus not the products of the political unconscious but rather the precise problems which its forms of Necessity must "explain," its narrative paradigms, "resolve" (82). Hence, the political unconscious cannot properly be said to function as the method of production by which the "ultimate subtext" of Real contradictions is (re)textualized as a "secondary" subtext which "takes the form of the aporia or the antinomy" (82). It is, rather, the formal structures by which such prior (re)textualizations are explained and resolved. It is the forms of necessity and narrative paradigms, that is to say, with which we attempt to "square" the "circles" and "dispel" the "intolerable closure" of just those determinate contradictions which are our prior (re)textualizations of the Real (83). In short, the political unconscious does not produce what Jameson elsewhere calls the "facts" of history (101): it produces the precise forms by which such facts are "resolved" (82). Hence, it is not available as a substitute method of production with which to bridge the gap between the Real and

⁴For a provocative discussion of the extent to which Jameson himself "characteristically conflates the real object with the object of knowledge," see p. 40 of John Frow's "Marxism after Structuralism."

its "facts."⁵ And hence, Jameson's attempt to produce a trans-practice mediation between the "ultimate subtext of social contradiction" and the "secondary one . . . of the aporia or the antinomy" of the Symbolic Order (82) necessarily fails for simple lack of a theory of the method of production by which the former produces latter.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that when Jameson attempts to defend his related pronouncement to the effect that as "socially symbolic acts" texts are necessarily "resolutions of determinate contradictions" (80), his assertion that "the literary or aesthetic act . . . always entertains some active relationship with the Real" (81) quickly flounders upon the rocks of this same implacable gap between Real and text. For although in this case Jameson is able to designate the precise method of production by which such a relationship is entertained--which method is a text's

⁵As Steve Giles observes in "Against Interpretation? Recent Trends in Marxist Criticism,"

By defining necessity as the inexorable form of events, Jameson implies that necessity is an epistemological rather than an ontological category. But this means that in Jameson's terms it must be an irreducibly textual phenomenon, and therefore intrinsically incapable of grounding the reality of history. Jameson is caught in this epistemological dilemma because of the way in which, under the influence of Sarte and Lacan, he sets up an unbridgeable gap between Knowing and Being, arguing on the one hand that all knowledge of reality is categorially determinate, but on the other hand that reality as such is an ontological realm beyond the category and therefore inaccessible to it. (75)

"rewriting or restructuration of a prior historical or ideological subtext" (81)--he is unable to then provide the raw materials upon which such method can work, those "prior historical or ideological subtext[s]" being precisely the product of the very method of production he was as yet been unable to produce (81). Or, to be more exact, although Jameson is in fact able to provide the raw materials, the raw materials that he provides are precisely the wrong ones. That they should in fact be the Real is made clear enough by Jameson himself:

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. It must rather draw the Real into its own texture, and the ultimate paradoxes and false problems of linguistics, and most notably of semantics, are to be traced back to this process, whereby language manages to carry the Real within itself as its own intrinsic or immanent subtext. Insofar, in other words, as a symbolic action . . . is a way of doing something to the world, to that degree what we are calling "world" must inhere within it, as the content it has to take up into itself in order to submit it to the transformations of form.

(81)⁶

But of course such raw materials cannot in fact be the Real, for the Real is precisely that which "is not a text, for it is fundamentally non-narrative and nonrepresentational"

(82). The text can, however, (re)construct the determinate characteristic of the Real: its structural contradiction. And so it would be possible to argue that the text draws the Real into itself in the sense that it (re)constructs within its form the very structural contradiction which is the determinate characteristic of the Real. The problem, of course, is that to do so is to conflate two fundamentally different types of contradiction, thereby collapsing the very distinction between material contradiction and textual difference so central to Jameson's own problematic:

"Contradiction . . . [is] a category about which we must insist that it be radically distinguished from the semeiotic categories of opposition, antinomy, or aporia" (50).

Further, just as the text cannot actually "draw the Real into its own texture" (81), neither can it draw in the political unconscious per se. For the political unconscious is--as we have had occasion to observe--the "formal effects of what Althusser, following Spinoza, calls an 'absent

⁶For somewhat more detailed discussions of the need for the text to draw the Real into itself, see pp. 140-42 of Jameson's "Symbolic Inference; or Kenneth Burke and Ideological Analysis" and pp. 80-81 of his "Of Islands and Trenches: Neutralization and the Production of Utopian Discourse."

cause' (102): it is thus precisely and wholly a "form of necessity," whether expressed as the causality of Cultural Revolution or the narrative paradigms of (say) the novels of George Gissing (101; my emphasis). Like the Freudian unconscious upon which it is modeled, then, the only textual presence of the political unconscious is its determinate absence, is the extent (that is to say) to which it shapes--or misshapes--what is present as content. In this respect, it is rather like a bullet which has always already passed through the text; all that remains is not the bullet but precisely the bullet hole.⁷ Unfortunately, however--and this is obviously my key point--in Jameson's formulation of the process by which the text envelopes the Real, what is drawn into the text is evidently not bullet hole but bullet: what is drawn in is not form at all, but "content," which content is precisely that which is "submitt[ed] to the transformations of form" (81). And though we can perhaps sidestep Jameson's use of "content" and so re-certify the

⁷Although in my view the most adequate definition of the political unconscious is those "forms of necessity" produced by an absent Real, other definitions may also be authorized by the text. For as Jerry Flieger observes, "Jameson fails to provide a clear-cut working definition of his key concept. . . . [He] seems to hesitate between a theory of the political unconscious as a textual agency . . . and a theory of the political unconscious as a property of the literary text" (50-51). Hence, the political unconscious has been called--to list but a few examples--a metaphor (Behar 132), a mediating category (Mohanty 44), a symbolic mediation (West 187), a language situation (Lyotard 75), a critical apparatus (James 64), a pensee sauvage, and so forth.

political unconscious as a candidate for the office of raw materials by conflating the two categories with the observation that any form under analysis is content, we have not really solved the problem, and that simply because the notion that what is to be drawn into the text is not form but content is suggested as much by the way in which Jameson frames the relation between the Real and that which interrogates it as it is by his use of the word "content"; it is suggested by his juxtaposition (that is to say) between the object of transformation and the formal properties which transform it (81-83). (In this respect, Jameson's view of the way in which form operates upon content is almost identical to Althusser's notion of the function of "internal distance".)⁸ Further, even if we should somehow overcome the semantic difficulty here encountered, we still have not yet solved the problem. For as long as we are left with the notion of a form which precedes the one to be drawn into the text--as long, in other words, as we are left with a preexisting form to whose transformational power the "formal effects of . . . an 'absent cause' must somehow submit (102)--we are still left with no ability to textualize the political unconscious per se. For any such process of "vehiculation" (to borrow a

⁸For more on Althusser's notion of the transformative distancing effects of aesthetic practice, see "A Letter on Art to Andre Daspre" and "Cremonini, Painter of the Abstract."

provocative term from Jameson's earlier discussion of "the process whereby something is done to the Real" ["Of Islands and Trenches" 81]), any such infusion of form into form, would necessarily produce only the kind of hybrid which would be the equivalent of neither of its constituent parts. Consequently, even the slightest residual notion of a formal property which precedes the textualization of the political unconscious guarantees that the very process of textualization will necessarily transform the "formal effects of . . . an 'absent cause'" (102) into something other than what they were. Or, to look at the problem from a somewhat different prospective, what we are left with is not the political unconscious, not the formal effects of an absent Real, but rather the second degree effects of the formal effects of the Real upon our own pre-existing form--not the thing itself, but rather its twice removed absence.

We are left, then, with the conclusion that the only subtext which can actually be drawn into the text is neither the Real nor even its formal effects; instead, what is drawn in is precisely and wholly what Jameson--in a somewhat different context--calls "the hypothetical textualization of ideology" ("Of Islands and Trenches" 88), is precisely and wholly a false and contradictory representation of the Real whose "logical scandal or double bind, the unthinkable and paradoxical, that which cannot be unknotted by the operation of pure thought" (82-3) must thus be "resolved" by (say) the

creation of formal contradiction, which symbolic act will somehow "square its circles and dispel, through narrative movement, its intolerable closure" (83). And in fact, this same conclusion is evidently reached by Jameson himself, for it appears to form the theoretical basis for his selection of Levi-Strauss's method of symptomatic reading as the Mode of (Textual) Production of choice in his first Horizon of Interpretation (77-80). But that being the case, we are then left with the sobering realization that although Jameson details the precise method of production by which an aesthetic act transforms the Real, the raw materials upon which that method works are anything but the Real; that under the terms of Jameson's theory, what the text is in fact able to "take up into itself in order to submit it to the transformations of form" (81) is not the Real at all but the determinate absence of reality. What we realize, in short, is that Jameson's assertion that "the literary or aesthetic act therefore always entertains some active relationship with the Real" (81) is absolutely and exactly false: the relationship thus entertained is not with the Real but with the precisely unreal. Consequently, it becomes clear that the relationships themselves--as Jameson acknowledges of the "resolutions" such relations produce--must necessarily "leave the Real untouched" (81). Indeed, to conclude otherwise "is surely" (to borrow a phrase from Jameson) "to produce sheer ideology" (82).

IV. A Question of Causality

What we have not yet considered is whether Althusser's . . . concept of a properly "structural causality" has content in its own right and implies specific interpretive possibilities distinct from those already outlined.

---Fredric Jameson

I.

Although Althusser's structural Marxism has acquired a good deal of prestige, and although it has (as Jameson rightly points out) "produced powerful and challenging oppositional currents in a host of disciplines, from philosophy proper to political science, anthropology, legal studies, economics, and cultural studies" (37), it has also been the subject of a good deal of criticism. Indeed, Althusser's conception of social structure has been critiqued as everything from an essentially apolitical alibi to a surreptitious defense of Stalinism.¹ And since Jameson's master narrative of history is grounded in Althusser's assertion of the "problematic of the mode of production as the central organizing category of Marxism" (33), Jameson is thus faced with the difficult task of

¹See, for example, chapter two of Jacques Ranciere's La Leçon d'Althusser and pp. 374-79 of E. P. Thompson's The Poverty of Theory.

defending the Althusserian revolution from its critics at precisely the same time as he is attempting to indemnify his own theory of Cultural Revolution against Althusser's quite withering critique of the expressive "historicism" of just such Ur-narratives.

In general, Jameson's defense of Althusser is stellar. At times, though, it is barely adequate, as when Jameson concludes that it would be "frivolous" to attempt to discriminate between Stalinist and anti-Stalinist interpretations of the Althusserian operation because "they mark out a space in which that operation is objectively and functionally ambiguous" (39). And in one seminal instance, although Jameson's defense of Althusser is in fact a defense, it is not in fact a defense of Althusser. In this instance, the charge at hand is--interestingly enough--that Althusser's synchronic system of social relations is itself guilty of the very expressive causality against which Althusser so rages, which charge has both a diachronic and a synchronic version. In the diachronic version, Althusser's theory of Mode of Production is critiqued on much the same grounds as is his notion of ideology. For just as ideology in general "has"--to invoke Althusser's famous dictum--"no history . . . in the sense in which that structure and functioning are immutable, present in the same form throughout what we call history" ("Ideology and the State" 161) and so can be said to express itself throughout

history, so Mode of Production is critiqued as "something like Spinoza's 'eternity,' a timeless structure which must apparently effortlessly reproduce itself without change across the empirical vicissitudes of human history" (Jameson, "Marxism and Historicism" 173).² And in the synchronic version (which version is acknowledged by Jameson principally through his attempts to repress and forestall it), each of the individual levels or practices within Althusser's system of social relations is critiqued as an effectual expression of the same structure of Mode of Production such that the totality itself is seen as the sum total of an infinity of identical structures, which charge cannot be entirely refuted by the counter-slogan of "structural causality" simply--as we will see in a moment--because while structural causality defines both the relations between the various practices and their relations to the whole, it does not define the (prior) structuring of the practices themselves; it does not define (that is to say) the structuring of their structures. Thus, structural causality is no defence against the charge that the structuring of the various levels is a result of expressive causality on the level of structure itself. Indeed, that

²For more on this critique of Althusser's--and Etienne Balibar's--formulation of the concept of Mode of Production, see pp. 64-66 of Perry Anderson's Considerations on Western Marxism and pp. 313-20 of Hindess and Hirst's Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production.

the charge as such is credible is implied by Jameson himself, for it is precisely the one he lays at the feet of Lucien Goldmann when he argues that the notion of homology--the notion, that is to say, that at some level of generality the structures of various practices are "the same"--is expressive causality per se (43-44). And though it can be argued (and Jameson himself seems to imply as much) that Althusser's insistence on the semi-autonomy of the various levels is a guarantee against the charge of expressive causality, the concept of semi-autonomy does not actually speak to the issue at hand. For while semi-autonomy is an adequate response to the charge of expressive causality at the level of content and at the level of inter-practice relations in that the notion of overdetermination limits the ability of the content of any one practice to express itself in any other practice, it is also an adequate response at the level of structure only on the absolute precondition that the practices have no identical structures. For it is certainly true that as long as even semi-autonomous practices have identical structures they are liable to the charge that they are expressions not--to be sure--of one another but rather of the master structure of Mode of Production itself, which (from this perspective) both determines the structure as a whole through structural causality and determines the structures of the individual levels through expressive causality, through--that is to

say--it expression in them.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Jameson chooses not to rebuke the charge of expressive causality with the counter-slogan of structural causality. Instead, when he is confronted with the implication that Althusser's synchronic system of social relations may itself be guilty of expressive causality, although Jameson's explicit response is the traditional one to the effect that the Althusserian insistence on the semi-autonomy of the various levels within the social whole not only circumvents any such charge but even acts as the very "correlative of the attack on Hegelian expressive causality in which all these levels are somehow 'the same' and so many expressions and modulations of one another" (37), his implicit--and much more fundamental--response is to forestall the critique altogether by first asserting that Althusser defines his important concept of Mode of Production not--as it has been defined by traditional Marxism--as simply "one level within the social system" but rather as "the structure as a whole" (36) and then concluding--on the basis of his initial assertion--that Althusser's model of the totality thus has only one structure, which Mode of Production is never objectively present within any given level precisely because it is entirely and only the system of relationships existing among or between just such levels:

If therefore one wishes to characterize

Althusser's Marxism as a structuralism, one must complete the characterization with the essential proviso that it is a structuralism for which only one structure exists; namely the mode of production itself, or the synchronic system of social relations as a whole. This is the sense in which this "structure" is an absent cause, since it is nowhere empirically present as an element, it is not a part of the whole or one of the levels, but rather the entire system of relationships among those levels. (36)

II.

Unfortunately, however, although Jameson's reading of Althusser's Mode of Production as the "synchronic system of social relations as a whole" (36) would certainly appear--at least at first blush--to indemnify Althusser's model against the synchronic version of the charge of expressive causality, there is something of a problem with that indemnification. And that is simply that Jameson's reading is not a reading at all: instead, it is perhaps better characterized as a strong misreading of--or a willful rewriting of--the whole Althusserian problematic, one which is evidently a response not merely to the potential charge of expressive causality but also to what Jameson later calls the "ultimate 'meltdown' of the Althusserian apparatus"

which occurs when Althusser "attempt[s] to open up a semi-autonomy of the levels" ("Periodizing the 60s" 192). For as soon as we turn from what James H. Kavanagh calls Jameson's "straw-man construction" of a "weak Althusserianism"³ to Althusser's texts themselves, we see at once that although Althusser's problematic is in fact grounded in only one structure, that structure is not (properly speaking) Mode of Production at all but rather the more general one of Practice of Production, which structure expresses itself in any number of different Modes, each of which is thus a distinct structure complete with its own raw materials, methods of production, and products:

We can assert the primacy of practice theoretically by showing that all the levels of social existence are the sites of distinct practices: economic practice, political practice, ideological practice, technical practice, and scientific (or theoretical) practice. We think the content of these different practices by

³"I am not particularly interested," writes Kavanagh, "in identifying how Jameson 'distorts' Althusserian concepts":

But Jameson does, I think, construct a weak Althusserianism appropriate for his purposes, especially in the way he represents the Althusserian critique of "historicism" and "expressive causality," and this straw-man construction does relate to the "unconscious" political point that Jameson identifies in Althusser and then avoids in himself. ("The Jameson-effect" 23; see also p. 54 of Jerry Flieger's "The Prison-House of Ideology: Critic as Inmate")

thinking their particular structure, which, in all these cases, is the structure of a production; by thinking what distinguishes between these different structures, i.e. the different natures of the objects to which they apply, of their means of production, and of the relations within which they produce. (Reading Capital 58)

Consequently, although Althusser's totality is in fact a structure, it is not actually a Mode of Production at all but rather the sum of all such Modes of Production, each of which has both relative autonomy and specific effectivity, and all of which are determined--"in the last instance"--by the "Mode of Material Production" of the economic practice (Reading Capital 317):

We think the relations establishing and articulating these different practices one with another by thinking their degree of independence and their type of "relative" autonomy, which are themselves fixed by their types of dependence with respect to the practice which is "determinant in the last instance": economic practice. (Reading Capital 58)

Thus, although it is accurate to say that Althusser's Marxism "is a structuralism for which only one structure exists" (36), it is not quite accurate to say that that one structure is "mode of production itself" (36), since to do

so is to rewrite the particular Modes in which the Practice of Production is expressed as that more general structure itself. Neither is it accurate to define Mode of Production as "the synchronic system of social relations as a whole" (36), that being the precise definition of the totality of all such Modes, which social whole Althusser calls either "social formation" or "social totality" (108). Neither is it accurate to say that Mode of Production is "the entire system of relationships among those levels" within the social formation (36), that system of relations being--as we will explore further in a moment--the exact definition of Althusser's concept of structural causality, of which he said,

What is thus grasped as absences in a localized practice is precisely the non-localization of the structure of the whole, or, more accurately, the type of effectivity peculiar to the structure of the whole on its "levels" (which are themselves structured) and on the "elements" of those levels.

(Reading Capital 104)

Neither (and this is obviously my key point) is it accurate to say that Mode of Production is "nowhere empirically present as an element . . . of the whole or one of [its] levels" (36): indeed, that is precisely and entirely what each Mode of Production is. For as Althusser himself makes clear (to refer to but the most famous of his examples of

the various Modes of Production existing within the social totality), the practice of--say--philosophy is

a determinate mode of production of knowledges. As such it is constituted by a structure which combines ("Verbindung") the type of object (raw materials) on which it labours, the theoretical means of production available (its theory, its method and its technique, experimental or otherwise) and the historical relations (both theoretical, ideological and social) in which it produces. (Reading Capital 41)

Thus, it is clear that Jameson's assertion that Althusser's totality has only one structure and that that one structure of Mode of Production "is nowhere empirically present as a element" of the totality and so is "not a part of the whole or one of [its] levels" (36) is a strong misreading--or perhaps a willful rewriting--of what Kavanagh calls "a diluted Althusserian theory" ("The Jameson-effect" 26), one which produces its mono-structure denial of expressive causality precisely by repressing the Althusserian insistence that his social formation is a complex cluster of overdetermined structures a dominante, is an authentic structure of structures, one in which not merely practice but also sub- and sub-sub-practice are discrete Modes of Production, with the total structure of social formation thus being built upon regional structures

upon local structures upon individual structures, Mode upon Mode upon Mode ad infinitum:

If the relations of production now appear to us as a regional structure, itself inscribed in the structure of the social totality, we are interested in it because of its structural nature. . . . Not only is the economic a structural region occupying its particular place in the global structure of the social whole, but even in its own site, in its (relative) regional autonomy, it functions as a regional structure and as such determines its elements. (Reading Capital 179-80)

It is clear, too, that Jameson's rewriting is very much at odds with the bulk of the readings of Reading Capital produced by other Althusserians, most of whom are in agreement with Kavanagh's view that

the Althusserian problematic identifies each of the major social practices as, strictly speaking, a practice of production, with its own specific "mode of production"--a constantly developing assembly of raw materials, instruments of labor, labor processes, and products / Like social formations themselves, such practices can be understood as complex, overdetermined "structures in dominance" (structures a dominante)--conflicted, asymmetrical structures,

"skewed" or "keyed" in a specific, dominant direction. ("Marxism's Althusser" 32-33, 28)

But more importantly, it is also clear that although Jameson's rewriting of Althusser's structures a dominante as a "structuralism for which only one structure exists," which structure is "nowhere empirically present as an element . . . of the whole or one of the levels" (36), is an effective defense to the charge that each of the practices within the totality is an expression of an absent structure, it is not actually a defense of Althusser's problematic if for no other reason than that--as Terry Eagleton observes in a quite different context--"there is little evidence that Jameson has ever really thought Marxism through again within such an Althusserian problematic" ⁴ It is clear, in short, that although Jameson's response to the synchronic version of the charge of expressive causality--which charge typically begins with the assertion that since the "different structures" of the various practices are all the

⁴"Jameson," writes Eagleton in "Fredric Jameson: the Politics of Style," never appears to have taken the full pressure of the Althusserian critique of Marxist historicism. Althusser . . . has no particularly prominent place on the shelves of The Prison-House; and the way is then open for the resolute historicism of Marxism and Form to resurface almost unmodified in The Political Unconscious. . . . The passage through and beyond Althusser is never really effected Because there is little evidence that Jameson has ever really thought Marxism through again within such an Althusserian problematic, . . . his work occasionally evinces a rather too homogeneous linear flow. (19)

same "structure of a production," they all express the same "particular structure" (Reading Capital 58), and then defends that assertion by referring to (say) Ben Bruster's view that while Mode of Production is properly taken to mean "mode of material production, . . . the term can also be applied by analogy to any other practice or level" (Reading Capital 317) or to Althusser's view (to take but one among many) that the "identity of essential structures" between the material and theoretical practices "makes it possible to assimilate theoretical practice directly, immediately and adequately to historical practice," which "reduction of these practices to a single structure" is read (by Althusser's critics) as expressive causality per se (Reading Capital 135)--is certainly a defense, it is not a defense of Althusser, his problematic having been effectually over-written by it.

And though we can blunt the force of this realization by arguing that in Jameson's problematic--and, indeed, even in Althusser's--the words "Mode of Production" perform a dual role and sign a dual signification such that while at one level of abstraction they signify the structure of each of the practices within the social whole, at a much greater level of abstraction they signify the totality of just such practices, we can do so only at the absolute cost of Jameson's defense itself. For as soon as we make clear the difference between these two Modes of Production (the former

of which we can designate a "micro" Mode, the latter, a "macro"), we see at once that what was before an adequate defense in the form of a willful rewriting is now revealed as a simple evasion in the form of a repression. We see at once, in other words, that although Jameson's assertion that Althusser's Marxism is a "structuralism for which only one structure exists; namely the mode of production itself, or the synchronic system of social relations as a whole" (36) is precisely true of a "macro" Mode of Production (indeed--is an effectual definition of just such a Mode), it is precisely false with respect to all "micro" Modes of Production, the particular examples of which are in fact not nowhere but everywhere "empirically present as an element, . . . a part of the whole or one of its levels" (36). And since the synchronic version of the charge of expressive causality is leveled not--as is implied by Jameson's defense--against the "macro" Mode of Production of the totality as a whole but rather against the multitude of "micro" Modes within it, we see at once that Jameson's defense does not actually speak to the charge, but rather defends the "macro" Mode of Production as though to do so were somehow an adequate defense of the "micro" Modes against which the charge is actually levelled. We see at once, in short, that Jameson defends the latter precisely and entirely by obliterating it and burying its bones deep beneath the glossy text of his defense of the former.

III.

This is not to imply, however, that when Jameson rewrites Althusser's social totality from structures a dominante to a "structuralism for which only one structure exists" (36), he in any way erases or over-writes Althusser's notion of structural causality. Indeed, just the opposite. For although Jameson argues that "mechanical effectivity retains a purely local validity in cultural analysis" (25), and although he provides a "minimal defense of the procedures of expressive causality" (34), his causality of choice--the one upon which his problematic of Cultural Revolution is based and so the one by which it is ultimately justified or discredited--is clearly Althusser's important concept of a properly structural causality.

Unfortunately, however, Althusser is rather better at showing the determinate insufficiencies of linear and expressive causality than he is at defining the functional mode of his proposed replacement. To be sure, he poses the question clearly enough, asking

by means of what concept or what set of concepts is it possible to think the determination of a subordinate structure by a dominant structure; In other words, how is it possible to define the concept of structural causality? (Reading Capital

186)⁵

Althusser also makes quite clear what structure is, noting that

structure is . . . a cause immanent in its effects in . . . 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. (Reading Capital 189)

And he even goes so far as to detail precisely what structure is not, thus making explicit what is unquestionably implied above:

The structure is not an essence outside the . . . phenomena which comes in and alters their aspect, forms and relations and which is effective on them as an absent cause, absent because it is outside them. The absence of the cause . . . is not the fault of the exteriority of the structure with respect to the . . . phenomena; on the contrary, it is the very form of the interiority of the structure, as a structure, in its effects. (Reading Capital 188)

⁵The majority of the quotations from Althusser which follow are (at least in my edition of Reading Capital) entirely in italics, including this one.

Indeed, all in all Althusser tells us a great deal about what structure is. But what he does not then tell us is how it works. What he does not then perform, in other words, is the essential theoretical task of explicating the exact "mode of presence of the structure in its effects" in such a way as to "designate structural causality itself" (Reading Capital 188; my emphasis). For rather than making clear the precise "mode" of structural causality (which mode is, strictly speaking, Althusser's stated object of knowledge in that it is the functional aspect of the effectivity of structural causality), he first presents us with the name of the precise effects of that mode--which effects he calls "overdetermination" (Reading Capital 188)⁶--and then leaves us with a mere metaphor of the as yet unrevealed "machinery" by means of which such overdetermination is produced (which metaphor he borrows from Marx whole cloth):

Now we can recall that highly symptomatic term "Darstellung," compare it with the "machinery," and take it literally, as the very existence of this machinery in its effects: the mode of existence of the stage direction (mise en scene) of the theatre which is simultaneously its own

⁶For a more extensive discussion of structural causality generally and overdetermination in specific, which discussion makes clear how narrowly I have here construed the definition of overdetermination, see Althusser's important "Contradiction and Overdetermination."

stage, its own script, its own actors, the theatre whose spectators can, on occasion, be spectators only because they are first of all forced to be its actors, caught by the constraints of a script and parts whose authors they cannot be, since it is in essence an authorless theatre. (Reading Capital 193)

Little wonder, then, that when the theory of structural causality is used as a tool in the explication of this or that local phenomena, it is applied rather more metaphorically than analytically, with the success of the endeavor being contingent upon the simultaneous projection of at least one other causality by means of which the effectivity of the structural causality is itself guaranteed. Thus, when William C. Dowling demonstrates the theory of structural causality by reference to the spatial relations between various of the dots in a drawing, the success of his endeavor depends less upon the internal relations between the dots per se than upon the simultaneous projection into the analysis of an extra-structural observer whose precise function it is to determine the nature and significance of the visual structure by applying to it--in a manifestly expressive way--a preexisting mental concept of

visual relations (65-67).⁷ And thus, too, when Jameson claims for his own model of Cultural Revolution the authority and prestige of Althusser's notion of structural causality, he does so against the necessary backdrop of his own simultaneous defense of the very kinds of causality that structural causality was itself created to exorcise, which defense (quoted at length below) is necessary within Jameson's text precisely because the types of causality thus defended are themselves necessitated by structural causality itself, precisely (that is to say) because the very structural causality that makes mechanical and expressive causality wholly "unsatisfactory" also makes them wholly "indispensable" as the functional guarantors of the effectivity of just that causality:

I would want to argue that the category of mechanical effectivity retains a purely local validity in cultural analysis

[P]eriodization and its categories . . . would

⁷This necessary intervention of an extra-structural observer is perhaps best described by Jameson himself when, in a somewhat different context, he observes that the existence of phenomena like caricature--a few bare lines that cannot be read in any other way than as some well-known face--suggests what will be Gombrich's basic hypothesis in this area, namely that the visual raw materials are reordered into a meaningful "parole" or artistic representation by means of the intervening agency of what he calls "schemata"--a storehouse of ideas of things [which] trigger our recognition of them in the language of art--in other words, precisely what Barthes means by . . . the "Code of Empirical Realities." ("Ideology of the Text" 32-33)

seem to be as indispensable as they are unsatisfactory for any kind of work in cultural study A minimal defense of the procedures of expressive causality will then take much the same form as did our previous discussion of mechanical causality: we can view both as local laws within our historical reality. . . . [I]f this is where the study of "expressive causality" leads, then to switch it off at the source entails the virtual repression of the text of history and the political unconscious in our own cultural and practical experience, just at the moment when increasing privatization has made that dimension so faint as to be virtually inaudible. (25, 28, 34)

IV.

The evident need to use linear and expressive causality to guarantee the effectivity of a properly structural causality is not, however, the only--or even the worst--problem to adhere to Althusser's theory of effectivity. As even Jameson seems willing to acknowledge, structural causality is different from linear and expressive causality in that the former is expressly atemporal (46, 96-97). But that being the case, what necessarily follows is that the application of structural causality to any given system

effectually guarantees the immediate calcification of that same system: to the exact extent (that is to say) that a structure's causality is only and precisely the synchronic relations between its effects, to that same extent the structure is itself necessarily static. For on the one hand, the effects of the structure's causality cannot--by definition--change their cause. And on the other hand, once that cause has initially determined those effects, it cannot change the effects of that determination until it has itself been changed. But that change is a logical and definitional impossibility. For the causality in question is defined precisely and entirely as the relations between its own effects, which relations it--as their properly synchronic structural causality--has always already determined. In short, a painting (to return for a moment to Dowling's example) can never change the relations between its various infrastructural elements or effects; for that you need a painter, or at least a different observer.

Little wonder, then, that as the determinant of only atemporal, static systems, structural causality seems actively in opposition to--or at least particularly inappropriate for--any Marxist theory of history which includes as an important component of its master narrative notions of transitions from one structure to another (96-97). Indeed, the whole Althusserian approach to causality and structure can be critiqued on just such grounds. As

Sarte observes, expressing--it seems to me--what Jameson in "Marxism and Historicism" calls "structuralism's inaugural perception of the incommensurability between synchrony and diachrony" (170):

Althusser . . . limits himself to the analysis of structure. From the epistemological point of view, that amounts to privileging the concept over against the notion. The concept is atemporal. One can study how concepts are engendered one after the other within determined categories. But neither time itself nor, consequently, history, can be made the object of a concept. There is a contradiction in terms. When you introduce temporality, you come to see that within a temporal development the concept modifies itself. Notion, on the contrary, can be defined as the synthetic effort to produce an idea which develops itself by contradiction and its successive overcoming, and therefore, is homogenous to the development of things. ("Replies to Structuralism" 114)

Structural causality, then, is possible only within the confines of a properly synchronic structure. And in fact, such is Althusser's model of social totality, it being--as Jameson rightly observes of this most expansive of all forms of Mode of Production--"the synchronic system of social

relations as a whole" (36). This necessary fusion of synchronic structure and atemporal causality can, however, be quite as conservative as it is effective. For example, such a fusion immediately puts at risk such traditional Marxist views as (say) the transitional "phase" between feudalism and capitalism. For from within the problematic thus engendered,

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. (91)

Unfortunately, this conservative reductivism of class struggle is but one of many examples of a more general trend. For when synchronic structure is wedded to structural causality, their firstborn is virtually always an intensely conservative theory of structural determination, one in which the determination of the structure's individual elements by the structure as a whole comes to be seen as being so powerful and so inclusive as to effectually eliminate the possibility that an individual element may exist which has not itself always already been determined by--and, indeed, even expressly "authorized" by--the system as a whole. Of course the most obvious consequence for

critical methodology of such a theory is the implicit demand for a type of analysis which systematically marginalizes whatever heterogeneous or oppositional groups, movements, or forms may exist within the system itself. Such marginalization tends--in the analysis of (say) politics--to "eliminate any possibility of the negative as such, and to reintegrate the place of an oppositional or even merely 'critical' practice and resistance back into the system as the latter's mere inversion" (91). In the analysis of art, too, it tends to "empty cultural production of all its antisystemic capacities, and to 'unmask' even the works of an overtly oppositional or political stance as instruments ultimately programmed by the system itself" (91). And since the production of this theory of determination in which "change and development are relegated to the marginalized category of the merely 'diachronic,' the contingent or the rigorously nonmeaningful" (91) is a function less of authorial whim or caprice than of the untimely fusion of synchronic structure and structural causality, its results are manifest quite as fully in the works of Marxist as of non-Marxist critics, quite as fully (that is to say) in the societe de consommation of Jean Baudrillard as in the theories of subversion and containment of Stephen Greenblatt or the political technology of the body of Michael Foucault.

Of course Jameson is very much aware that this disturbing trend towards marginalization has produced a good

deal of "theoretical foreboding about the limits of synchronic thought" (91). Consequently, he takes pains to make clear two fundamental differences between his own theory of Cultural Revolution and various of the synchronic--or "total system"--models of the Real produced by critics ranging from Weber to Foucault, which differences he deems sufficient to indemnify his three Horizons of Interpretation against the charges of conservatism and marginalization leveled against other such models. The first difference, Jameson, observes, is that their systems are determined by a different dominant or historical actant than is his. For while his notion of Cultural Revolution is grounded in economics in the stricter sense of relations of production, most other total systems--whether their dominants happen to be the Symbolic Order of Lacan, the language of Derrida, the political power of Weber or Foucault, or even the cultural production of Baudrillard and the American theorists of a "post-industrial society"--do not respect the Marxian injunction of the "ultimately determining instance" of economic organization and tendencies. Consequently,

the theoretical problem with the synchronic systems enumerated above lies elsewhere, and less in their analytical framework than in what in a Marxist perspective might be called their infrastructural regrounding. (91-92)

The second difference, though (Jameson continues), is

much more fundamental in that it is a difference not merely of emphasis or actant but of structure itself. For unlike (say) the iron cage of Weber or the gridwork of Foucault, Cultural Revolution is not merely synchronic but properly metasynchronic. For although Jameson clearly grounds his final Horizon of Interpretation in Althusser's theory of Mode of Production, he also clearly recognizes--following Nicholas Poulantzas--that "no historical society has ever 'embodied' a mode of production in any pure state" (94) and that "every social formation or historically existing structure has in fact consisted in the overlay and structural coexistence of several modes of production all at once" (95). Consequently, Jameson's model of Cultural Revolution is not actually a Mode of Production at all, but rather "the coexistence of various synchronic systems or modes of production, each with its own dynamic or time scheme--a kind of metasynchronicity, if one likes" (97)⁸, at least one happy consequence of which metasynchronicity is that

the problems of the "synchronic" system and of the topological temptation are both solved at one stroke. What is synchronic is the "concept" of the mode of production; the moment of the

⁸For a more extended discussion of the metasynchronicity (or, as Jameson calls it elsewhere, the "nonsynchronicity") of Cultural Revolution, see pp. 173-74 of "Marxism and Historicism."

historical coexistence of several modes of production is not synchronic in this sense, but open to history in a dialectical way. (95)

Further, Jameson continues, building upon the implications of what he has just said, Cultural Revolution is not merely metasynchronic; it is diachronic as well, with the "two apparently inconsistent accounts" actually functioning in concert as "the twin perspectives which our thinking can take on this same vast historical object" (97). Indeed, each perspective has always already engendered the other. For on the one hand, as soon as we examine such synchronic representations of history as (say) periodization, we see at once 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" (28). Consequently, as Jameson observes in "Marxism and Historicism,"

Such synchronic models do not discredit History in any absolute sense as an object of study and representation but rather determine a new and original form of historiography, a structural permutation in the latter's narrative form or trope . . . , namely the narrative reconstruction of the conditions of possibility of any full

synchronic form. (155)⁹

And on the other hand, as soon as we scrutinize such diachronic representations of history as (say) the transition from one Mode of Production to another, we see immediately that the "triumphant moment in which a new systemic dominant gains ascendancy" is in fact nothing more nor less than a "diachronic manifestation" of the permanent "structural antagonism" which exists between the various Modes of Production coexisting within Cultural Revolution itself (97).

Consequently, Jameson concludes, although any number of purely synchronic "total systems" may in fact be guilty of both conservatism and marginalization, Cultural Revolution is not. Indeed, even though the very Althusseian problematic in which Cultural Revolution is grounded may be guilty of the charge that it is the "construction of a static and classificatory concept of 'modes of production'" (98), Cultural Revolution itself is not. For as a unique and powerful fusion of temporal narrative and atemporal structure, the

Cultural Revolution thus conceived may be said to

⁹For a brief elaboration of the extent to which not merely historical periodization but also all apparently synchronic or ahistorical analysis depends on and presupposes (for the most part covertly) a diachronic scheme, a vision or "philosophy" of history, a historical "master-narrative," in terms of which its evaluations are processed, see pp. 54-55 of Jameson's "The Ideology of the Text."

be beyond the opposition between synchrony and diachrony, and correspond roughly to what Ernst Bloch has called the Ungleichzeitigkeit (or 'nonsynchronous development') of cultural and social life (97),

which nonsynchronous development is able--on the one hand--to both "preserve" and "cancel" the "older schema of the 'linear' stages" of Modes of Production (98) and--on the other hand--to set in motion hitherto static and typologizing categories by "moving from a classificatory use of the categories of modes of production to a perception of their dynamic and contradictory coexistence in a given historical moment" (98).

V.

Unfortunately, however, the evident power of Jameson's rejoinder ultimately depends less upon the strength of its logic than upon the undeniable appeal of its rhetoric. For example, although the distinction that Jameson here draws between the "structural historicism" ("Marxism and Historicism" 172) of his Cultural Revolution and (say) Foucault's political technology of the body--the distinction, in other words, between economics and politics as the determinant actants of history--is certainly an important distinction, it is nevertheless not a determinate one, and that simply because the difference thus defined is

not sufficient, of itself, to indemnify Jameson's model against the charges alleged. For the kind of methodological reductivism here under discussion is not actually a consequence of the introduction into structure of this or that particular historical determinant. Instead, it is precisely and wholly a product of the mode of determination of structural causality itself. It is a consequence, that is to say, not of the particular characteristics or place of prominence assigned to any given element within structure, but rather of the way in which structure itself necessarily always already determines all such elements. Jameson's first distinction, then, does not actually speak to the issue of the methodological consequences of fusing an atemporal causality to a synchronic structure, the obviousness of which becomes clear as soon as we ask ourselves in what ways and to what extent a properly structural causality grounded in economic relations of production is any less likely to marginalize infrastructural oppositions and contradictions than is one grounded in (say) cultural or political relations. If anything, the distinction would seem rather to cut the other way.

But even if we should somehow be persuaded that the initial distinction thus drawn between Jameson's "ultimately determining instance" and the determinants of other total systems is a wholly adequate defense to the charge that as a synchronic--or even a properly metasynchronic--structure,

Cultural Revolution necessarily marginalizes infrastructural oppositions and contradictions, we have still yet to solve the temporal and so trans-structural aspect of the same charge. We have still yet to solve the problem, in other words, of the radical marginalization of temporal change and development which occurs as a necessary consequence of the determinate inability of an atemporal structure grounded in a synchronic causality to explain a diachronic process. For the solution to this diachronic version of the charges of marginalization and reductivism, we must thus appeal to Jameson's observation that Cultural Revolution differs from other total systems in structure as well as content. And yet here, too, as soon as we look closely at what Jameson has said, we discover that although he does in fact mark out two very important differences between the structure of his totality and those of other total systems, the distinctions thus produced are not actually an adequate response to the charges alleged.

What becomes clear, for example, is that although Jameson's view that each synchronic Mode of Production always implies a broader diachronic process of which it is a part and from which it draws its significance is--at least for me--a quite compelling one, it rather highlights than solves the determinate contradiction between a synchronic structural causality whose effectivity is a function of a given set of static relations and a diachronic object of

knowledge whose effectivity is evidently that of temporal displacement; it rather highlights than solves (that is to say) what Jameson calls the "traditional crux" of the Marxian problematic of Modes of Production:

The problem of such "transitions" is the traditional crux of the Marxian problematic of modes of production, nor can it be said that any of the solutions proposed . . . are altogether satisfactory, since in all of them the inconsistency between a "synchronic" description of a given system and a "diachronic" account of the passage from one system to another seems to return with undiminished intensity. (96-97)

That Jameson's view--of which Eagleton once observed, "Who but Jameson . . . would grandly remark that he feels no great inconsistency between the concept of totality and a 'symptomal' attention to structural discontinuities?" ("Ideology of American Criticism" 63)--does not in any way solve this "crux" becomes evident as soon as we recall that the diachronic narrative of history thus produced is precisely and completely a potentially infinite sequence of discrete social formations. For what--from an epistemological point of view, at least--is most immediately striking about this endless chain of metasynchronic structures is that although the synchronic Modes of Production within it are perfectly able to explain the way

in which they produce their own structural effects, they are also perfectly unable--by virtue of the synchronic nature of the structural causality by which they are informed--to in any way explain the determinate relations between themselves and the Modes which proceed and follow them. Because of the kind of causality by which they are determined, in other words, they are--by very definition--wholly unable to explain the essential process of history itself, the process by which one structure is first determined by the structures which proceed it and then determines those that follow. And so although the Horizon of History thus produced does in fact bring to light a series of theoretical links between historically discrete social formations and so postulates the form (one might say, echoing Marx) of the appearance of a diachronic model, what it does not then do is produce a corresponding form of causality by means of which the newly engendered diachronic relations between the synchronic--and ultimately metasynchronic--structures can thus be explicated. What it does not then do, in other words, is produce a form of causality by means of which the determinate relations between the synchronic structures which "always secretly imply" a larger diachronic process and the diachronic process thus implied can be explicated (28). Instead, it evidently simply represses the problem itself by positing linear causality as the unacknowledged mode of determination of all such temporal relations, the

hidden but determinate presence of which thus serves as the guarantor of the effectivity of the very structural causality in whose name and by whose authority the model of Cultural Revolution is itself established.

This first problem with Jameson's Cultural Revolution, then, is more one of the inadequacy of the type of causality chosen for his master narrative of history than it is of the composition of the narrative itself. And in fact, the very presence of the problem (to say nothing of its magnitude) tends to argue for the elimination of--or at least the substantial modification of--the concept of structural causality itself. For what the as yet unresolved contradiction between an atemporal causality and a temporal phenomena makes clear is that structural causality has precisely the same determinate insufficiency as does expressive causality: in both cases, the one thing that the causality in question cannot explain is its own determinate characteristic. Expressive causality can never explain the mechanism by which its essence is expressed and so must go outside itself to explain itself, must sell itself into bondage to its brethren. And structural causality can never decipher the essential mystery of its own existence, can never explain--that is to say--the fact of the structuring of its own structure, and so must beg for scraps at the table of its rivals, which need to beg is thus revealed as the precise reason why such structurally determined

constructs as (say) historical periods must always--to return for a moment to Jameson's highly symptomatic phrase--"derive their significance" from the diachronic historical sequence of which they are part (28). Indeed, one could easily make the case--though I do not choose to go so far myself--that structural causality does not exist as a material force in history. For as Sarte makes clear in the passage from "Replies to Structuralism" quoted above, structural causality is always only applicable to purely synchronic structures. And as Jameson asserts, "the moment of the historical coexistence of several modes of production is not synchronic in this sense"; instead, "what is synchronic is the 'concept' of the mode of production" (95). It follows, then, that structural causality cannot--by very definition--be the determinant of anything more material than the mere "concept" of Mode of Production. Farther into the Real it cannot go.

VI.

If the initial problem with Cultural Revolution is one of causality, however, the two subsequent problems then engendered are those of structure or (to be more precise) an evident lack of structure. It is clear, for example, that although an implicit appeal to linear causality may successfully function as the glue by which successive Modes of Production are bonded together, the very fact that it is

able to do so is itself prima facie evidence that Cultural Revolution, in its diachronic configuration as a series of historically discrete social formations, is not a structure at all--at least not in Althusser's sense of the word. For as Althusser himself is quick to point out, the fundamental insufficiency of linear causality is precisely its inability to determinate the relations between a structure's parts and its whole: "The mechanistic system . . . could not be made to think the effectivity of a whole on its elements, except at the cost of extra-ordinary distortions" (Reading Capital 186). But that being the case, the very necessity of its (repressed) presence within Cultural Revolution is sufficient to disqualify Jameson's final Horizon of Interpretation from any claim to the kind of structurality common to Althusser's problematic. Neither, in fact, does Jameson make quite that claim for his third Horizon of Interpretation. For though he certainly characterizes Cultural Revolution as a whole as a structure, it is important to bear in mind that the kind of structure to which he alludes is no longer the synchronic structure of Althusser's social totality (no longer the structure, that is to say, upon which Jameson's individual Modes of Production are modeled) but rather the very different structure of a diachronic narrative:

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 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 vital episodes in a single vast unfinished plot. (19-20)

Jameson here makes the switch, in short, from the kind of structure properly attributed to Concept to that associated with Notion. Insofar, then, as we are comfortable with the idea that Notion, too, has structure--insofar, in other words, as we are willing to defer the important question of whether what we call the structure of narrative is not rather the structure of our own reductive synchronization of an irreducibly diachronic process and so table the analysis of the implications of what Jameson elsewhere calls the "problem" which arises "from the apparent necessity of the mind to grasp diachrony in what is essentially 'synchronic,' or static and systemic, terms" ("Vanishing Mediator" 17)--what I earlier called the "problem" with the structure of Cultural Revolution has in fact less to do with the presence or absence of structure as such than it has to do with Jameson's apparent willingness to blend into one two very different kinds of structures (Conceptual and Notational), the strategic conflation of which makes possible a complementary conflation of causalities such that the

scandal of the presence of linear causality within Cultural Revolution is comfortably repressed beneath the application to a diachronic narrative of the very type of synchronic structural causality by which such narratives are themselves brought into question.

If, however, Jameson makes no real claim for the Concept-ual structurality of Cultural Revolution as a whole, he certainly does for each of its constituent parts. And yet here, too, we run into difficulty. For as I indicated above, Jameson's notion of social formation is less a replication of Althusser's theory of social totality than it is a multiplication of it such as to produce a properly metasynchronic structure of social relations: "a given social formation consists in the coexistence of various synchronic systems of modes of production, each with its own dynamic or time scheme--a kind of metasynchronicity, if one likes" (97). Consequently, as soon as we ask "By means of what causality are we to think the determinate relations existing not within but between the 'various synchronic systems or modes of production' (97) coexisting within the social formation?", we see at once that just as Cultural Revolution as a whole suffers from a determinate lack of causality, so each of the discrete social formations within it suffers from precisely the same lack, the latter's metasynchronic absence being the evident equivalent of the former's diachronic lack in that in both cases, what first

manifests itself as an absence of causality ends up either as an absence of structure or as the repressed presences of linear and expressive causality functioning as the guarantors of structural causality. For what is perhaps most interesting about Jameson's description of his social formations is that although he is quite careful to emphasize that each Mode of Production within them is determined by structural causality (which causality determines the Mode's "own dynamic or time scheme" (97), he never specifies the exact causality by means of which the relations between the individual Modes of Production within the metasynchronic social formations are determined. Of course the most obvious candidate for the job would appear be to Althusser's intriguing concept of overdetermination. It, however, may not qualify. For though it certainly speaks to the question of the determination of one Mode of Production by another, it is not (as I mentioned above) the sign of a causality at all, but is rather a sign of the effects of such a cause; it does not sign a force, that is to say, but rather the imprint of other such forces. Further--and this is obviously my key point--even if overdetermination does qualify to do the heavy lifting of trans-Mode determination, Jameson never hires it. Indeed, rather than invoke than term and make that claim, he instead represses it beneath the glossy ellipses within his citation of Althusser:

Jameson

In other words, Leibniz and Hegel did have a category for the effectivity of the whole on its elements or parts, but on the absolute condition that the whole was not a structure. . . .

[The third concept of effectivity, that of structural causality,] can be entirely summed up in the concept of "Darstellung", the key epistemological concept of the whole Marxist theory of value (24)

Althusser

In other words, Leibniz and Hegel did have a category for the effectivity of the whole on its elements or parts, but on the absolute condition that the whole was not a structure. . . . This text [Marx's] is discussing the determination of certain structures of production which are subordinate to a dominate structure of production, i.e., the determination of one structure by another and of the elements of a subordinate structure by the dominant, and therefore determinant structure. I have previously attempted to account for this phenomena with the concept of overdetermination, which I borrowed from psychoanalysis. . . . It can be entirely summed up in the concept of 'Darstellung,' the key epistemological concept of the whole Marxist theory of value (Reading Capital 187-88)

Of course exactly why Althusser's interesting notion of overdetermination is repressed both here and elsewhere in The Political Unconscious¹⁰ is something of a mystery. Jameson is, as we might expect, entirely silent on that count. I suspect, though, that he does not invoke the term

¹⁰As Kavanagh observes in his discussion of "the omission of important concepts in Jameson's account of [Althusser's] theory at the very moments when they seem most relevant,"

Jameson's five pages (pp. 39-44) "correcting" with the concept of mediation the Althusserian critique of "expressive causality" never address the concept of over-determination that surely should be posed as the Althusserian theoretical analogue of "mediation." ("The Jameson-effect" 25; see also p. 26ff)

precisely because he cannot. For on the one hand, when Althusser develops the concept of overdetermination, he applies it not to metasynchronic but only to synchronic relations. Indeed, in his problematic of social totality, there are no metasynchronic relations. And on the other hand, even when the notion of overdetermination is detached from the circumstances of its origin and so freed from the need to fulfill a particular Althusserian function, it is not an easy target for theoretical expansion and appropriation simply because it is the designation not of some new and improved type of causality but merely of the effects of an old one, the effects--that is to say--of structural causality itself. As such, the notion of overdetermination is limited by the limits of structural causality itself and so cannot without violence (or at least a good deal of modification) be expanded into a theory of a properly metasynchronic causality with which to explicate the determinate relations between discrete synchronic structures. Thus, we are left--as before--with a fairly dismal choice. On the one hand, we can opt for a structure (in this case a properly metasynchronic one) which upon close analysis ceases to be a structure at all simply because the assertion that a determinate set of relations exists between its constituent synchronic structures is not accompanied by the simultaneous production of a type of causality by means of which such relations can be theorized.

Or on the other hand, we can opt for a structure which is in fact a structure, but one whose claim both to that name and to the effectivity of structural causality must once again be guaranteed by the surreptitious insertion into the model of the repressed but indispensable glue of linear causality, the precise function of which is to bond together the individual Modes of Production within the metasynchronic whole; or we can opt, in other words, for a metasynchronic structure whose claim to the power and authority of structural causality is guaranteed by Jameson's apparent willingness to blend into one two very different kinds of structures (in this case, metasynchronic and synchronic), the strategic conflation of which makes possible a complementary conflation of causalities such that the scandal of the presence of linear causality within Jameson's rewriting of Althusser's theory of Mode of Production is comfortably repressed beneath the application to a metasynchronic structure of a purely synchronic form of structural causality.

VII.

Of course there is a certain ironic justice in the disorder into which Cultural Revolution is thus pressed. For if Jameson had not rewritten Althusser's structures a dominante as a "structuralism for which only one structure exists," which single Mode of Production is "nowhere

empirically present as an element" of the totality and so is "not a part of the whole or one of the levels" within it (36), he would have not then been compelled to produce a properly metasynchronic alternative for which structural causality is no longer a sufficient determinant. Such justice is, however, purchased at a dear price indeed: the causality of Jameson's preferred method of textual analysis. For when Jameson attempts to link the essential aesthetics of his Cultural Revolution to Althusser's notion of structural causality, the attempt necessarily turns against itself, thus revealing expressive and linear causality as the functional guarantors of what Jameson (following Macherey) calls the "hypothetical reconstruction of the materials . . . which had to have been given in advance in order for [a] . . . text to be produced in its unique historical specificity" (57-8). Interestingly, Jameson's attempt to identify the analysis of a text's "semantic conditions of possibility" as the "mode of interpretation . . . which is specific to Althusser's third or structural form of causality" (58) is very nearly the antithesis of traditional dialectical analysis, and that simply because the success of his endeavour depends not--as does traditional dialectical thought--upon an ultimate resolution of contradictory terms or positions but rather upon the successful maintenance of just such contradictions. For when Jameson attempts to produce a determinate link between

Macherey's--and his--symptomatic reading of cultural texts and Althusser's theory of structural causality, he does so by first producing a number of pairs of opposing terms or positions and then linking those binary oppositions together in such a way that the determinate distance between the two terms of any given pair is effectually guaranteed by the like distance existing between the terms of each of the other pairs. As the first step in this process, Jameson brings Georg Lukacs into active opposition to Louis Althusser, reviving--as he does--"what may be called the Althusser-Lukacs debate" (49). After establishing this initial pair of opposed positions, Jameson then identifies Lukacs with "the expressive totality associated . . . with Hegel" (56) and links Althusser to the notion of "a properly structural causality" (56) in such a way as to both strengthen the initial opposition between Lukacs and Althusser and provide an additional structural justification for the epistemological distinction between expressive and structural causality. In like manner and for like reasons, Jameson then links expressive causality to "organic form" (56) and structural causality to "rifts and discontinuities within the work" (56), thus creating a third set of opposing positions, this binary opposition being made up of two very different conception of a work of art, the former viewing it as "an ordered whole" (56), the latter, as "a heterogeneous and . . . schizophrenic text" (56). Jameson then concludes

his attempt to link his reconstruction of a text's conditions of possibility to Althusser's structural causality by asserting--on the basis of the binary oppositions thus shown and the sequential links thus formed--that although the "task of interpretation viewed from the standpoint of expressive causality . . . is accordingly to seek a unified meaning" in the text (56), the "aim of a properly structural interpretation or exegesis thus becomes the explosion of the seemingly unified text into a host of conflicting and contradictory elements" (56)--which explosion is (as we might expect) the "initial moment" (56) in precisely the kind of symptomatic reading proposed by Jameson himself:

[T]he expressive totality associated here with Hegel and Lukacs implies the value of what is sometimes called organic form and projects the notion of a work of art as an ordered whole: the critic's business--the task of interpretation viewed from the standpoint of expressive causality--is accordingly to seek a unified meaning . . . [in] the work. . . . It follows, then, that the interpretive mission of a properly structural causality will on the contrary find its privileged content in rifts and discontinuities within the work. . . . In the case of Althusserian literary criticism proper, then, the

appropriate object of study emerges only when the appearance of formal unification is unmasked as a failure or an ideological mirage. (56)

This sequence of linked binary oppositions, then, can be diagrammed as follows:

Lukacs	--	Expressive Causality	--	Organic Unity of the Text	--	Discovering the Unified Meaning of the Text
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Althusser	--	Structural Causality	--	Rifts and Discontinuities in the Text	--	Unmasking the Ideological Mirage of Formal Unity

And as a rhetorical device, it is quite as economical as it is effective. For within the space of a single page, Jameson's essential aesthetic is both authorized by structural causality and brought into favorable relation to the very method of analysis that Jameson most clearly wants to subsume within his own approach: deconstruction.

There are, however, two fatal flaws with this sequence of linked oppositions. First, as Jameson himself makes clear when he observes that "Althusser's program for a structural Marxism must be understood as a modification within the dialectical tradition, rather than a complete break with it" (49), the opposition between the initial pair of terms is misleading insofar as it implies a clear demarcation of and a clean break between the theories of the two Marxists when their problematics are in fact quite as

interrelated as they are separate. Thus, the structural gap opened up between the two terms is as much a result of Jameson's strategic privileging of one of the two functions of mediation--that of showing difference against an implicit background of sameness--as it is of the nature of the problematics themselves. And since the duality of functions implicit in the notion of mediation always already necessarily implies the possibility of the reversal of the application of any one of its functions by the simultaneous application of its other function, the mere presence of mediation within the sequence of binary oppositions--the mere presence, to be more exact, of mediation as the producer of such oppositions--is of itself sufficient to bring the oppositions thus produced into question. In short, to use mediation as the tool with which to put the terms into opposition is already to guarantee the relative dissolution--in potential if not in fact--of just such oppositions, which dissolution must necessarily sound the death knoll of any project the success of which depends upon the maintenance of a determinate distance between the terms within the binary oppositions.

And second, the linkage between various of the terms in the sequence does not hold up well upon close analysis. The linkage, especially, between expressive causality and organic unity is suspect. For while expressive causality clearly implies a certain identity with and so unity between

a given determinate base and its various determined superstructural expressions, such a theory does not necessarily also imply that the structures of the resulting expressions should themselves be models of organic unity. Indeed, quite the contrary. As soon as we take seriously the view that such superstructural expressions as literary texts express neither themselves nor a single idea or concept nor even a single structure but precisely the economic base whose epiphenomena they are, we see at once that expressive causality can engender an aesthetic of textual organic unity only upon the absolute precondition that the determinate base in question is itself an organic unity free of contradiction and dissonance. Otherwise, expressive causality implies rather an aesthetic of disunity than of unity--which aesthetic of formal rupture would, in fact, be virtually identical to the one advocated by Macherey himself when he asserts that a text's internally excluded external determinations necessarily press its formal properties into disorder. In short, then, we can link the aesthetic of organic unity to the notion of expressive causality only to the precise extent to which our conception of the determinate base is expressly non-Marxist. And so we are left either with a mid-sequence sundering of the linkage between causality and aesthetics or--as seems more likely, given the symptomatic presence within The Political Unconscious of Jameson's own quite peculiar

"minimal defense" of expressive causality--with a reversal of the terms of the third binary opposition such that expressive causality becomes linked not to organic unity but to textual disorder and dissonance. But being the case, the sequence of binary oppositions so carefully produced by Jameson begins to reveal precisely what it was instigated to conceal; it begins to expose expressive and linear causality as the functional guarantors of the essential aesthetic of Jameson's master narrative of Cultural Revolution.¹¹

¹¹Because I am here chiefly concerned with arguing the theoretical necessity of what Jameson is pleased to call his "minimal defense of the procedures of expressive causality" (34), I have not attempted to demonstrate that what he is driven to defend in theory he is also content to use in practice. Evidence that such is the case, however, abounds. Indeed (and I present this not as a critique proper but simply as an index of various issues which, while falling outside of the scope of my present enterprise, are clear candidates for further analysis), at least three of Jameson's most important interpretive techniques--(1) his analysis of the ways in which individual texts embody the ideologemes of a class discourse; (2) his mediation of a whole host of oppositional voices into a single class discourse; and (3) his assertion that other critical approaches share the same ideological limitations as do the texts they critique--are all variations on the single theme of expressive causality: texts express ideologemes, oppositional voices express a common class discourse, and texts and their non-Marxist critiques express identical ideological limitations (see, for example, 46-49, 62-68, 84-87, and 87-88). Consequently, each of these interpretive techniques--which are the applicatory equivalent of Jameson's theoretical defense of expressive causality--ultimately functions not only as the kind of interpretive impoverishment critiqued by Deleuze and Guattari but also as the very mediation as homology denounced by Jameson.

V. The Ideology of Utopia

Only the Utopian
future is a place of
truth.

--Fredric Jameson

I.

As we have seen in the preceding chapters, Jameson--like any theorist projecting "a rival hermeneutic to those already enumerated" (21)--has been forced to defend his master narrative of history against a number of related charges: that its claim to structural causality is insupportable; that it is grounded in linear and expressive causality; that its application to specific texts is necessarily interpretive impoverishment; and that it is simply one code among others, with no particularly privileged status. And this is not all. For the most persistent criticism of Marxist literary and cultural analysis has actually been none of the above. Instead, it has been the old charge of economism, which charge--in its most sophisticated form--is that Marxism is necessarily always locked into a "functional" or "instrumental" approach to culture:

In a splendidly argued confrontation with Marxism, the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins has attempted to demonstrate that it is by its very philosophical structure locked into an approach to

culture which must thus remain functional or instrumental in the broadest sense. Given the Marxian orientation toward the reading or demystification of superstructures in terms of their base, or relations of production, even the most sophisticated Marxian analysis of cultural texts must, according to Sahlins, necessarily always presuppose a certain structural functionality about culture: the later will always "ultimately" (if not far more immediately) be grasped as the instrument, witting or unwitting, of class domination, legitimation, and social mystification. (282)

But here, too, Jameson has an answer. For although he admits that what Sahlins calls the "instrumentalization of culture" is a "temptation or tendency within all Marxisms," he asserts that such a temptation need not be succumbed to, that it need not be "a necessary and fatal consequence" of Marxism's philosophical structure (282). More importantly, Jameson also produces what he calls "a perspective in which this particular problem becomes a false one" (282). This perspective is evidently that of dual vision: it is the view that Marxist cultural analysis need not--and indeed must not--remain only a form of negative dialectic, one which is content to spell out "the lesson of false consciousness, of class bias and ideological programming,

the lesson of the structural limits of the values and attitudes of particular social classes" (281); instead, this traditional "negative hermeneutic" of ideological analysis must be exercised in conjunction with a "positive hermeneutic" which articulates "a properly Marxian version of meaning beyond the purely ideological" (285):

Such a distinction [between individual and collective knowledge] allows us to spell out the priority, within the Marxist tradition, of a "positive hermeneutic" based on social class
 . The concept of class is thus the space in which, if anywhere, a Marxian version of the hermeneutics of meaning, of some noninstrumental conception of culture, may be tested
 (286)

Jameson then proposes two related explanations of how "a properly Marxian version of meaning beyond the purely ideological" can be produced (285). The first--which he uses primarily as a preamble to the second--is the traditional Marxist view that although an individual subject is always "positioned within the social totality" in such a way that he or she can never be fully conscious of his or her determination by class and so can never fully "square the circle of ideological conditioning by sheer lucidity and the taking of thought" (283), a unified class of just such determined subjects can:

Only a collective unity--whether that of a particular class, the proletariat, or of its 'organ of consciousness,' the revolutionary party--can achieve this transparency. (283)

Consequently, a meaning beyond ideology can be achieved only by achieving just such a collective unity, which unity can perhaps best be produced through a "dialectical reversal" in which the "consciousness of the individual subject" is confronted with an external determination--such as the political unconscious--in such a way as to produce a "painful 'decentering'" from individual experience to collective unity:

What this impossibility of immanence means in practice is that the dialectical reversal must always involve a painful 'decentering' of the consciousness of the individual subject, whom it confronts with a determination (whether of the Freudian or the political unconscious) that must necessarily be felt as extrinsic or external to conscious experience. (284-85)

In short, the collective unity that produces the "transparency" of meaning beyond the purely ideological can itself be produced by--as we might have expected--either the political unconscious itself or (depending upon how we choose to read the passage) the judicious application of that very Cultural Revolution which is, at least for

Jameson, the privileged form of the form of Necessity (283).

II.

There are, however, a trio of related problems with this first hurried explanation of how a collective unity of class or party can produce a "meaning beyond the purely ideological" (285). First, the notion of a collective unity of class subjects has itself become problematic, in good measure--at least--because the various models of the social formation produced by structural and post-structural western Marxism all insert individual subjects into more than one class. Regardless, in other words, of whether we are working within the problematics of Althusser, Macherey, Eagleton, or even Jameson, we see at once that any one subject is inserted into more than one Mode of Production and that--perhaps more importantly--his or her function within the individual Modes of Production may vary from Mode to Mode such that while in one Mode (say that of economic production) a given subject may appear as a member of the petty bourgeoisie, in another Mode (say that of artistic production) that same subject may simultaneously appear as a member of the proletariat. And although we may be willing to risk the twin charges of economism and reductivism by invoking Althusser's notion of "last instance determination" as a way of solving the riddle of the multi-class subject (in which case class membership would become "dominant"

class membership in that it would be the identification of a subject with the class of which it is a part within the finally dominate Mode of Economic Production), we can do so only at the cost of both marginilizing the extent to which superstructural Modes of Production produce consciousness and repressing the extent to which all Modes of Production--including, of course, the production of cultural artifacts--are at heart economic Modes of Production.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Jameson himself is torn between his loyalty to the traditional Marxist notion of the determinate collectivity of an economic class "whose structural unity--whether a peasantry, slaves, serfs, or a genuine proletariat--evidently derives from the mode of production" (289) and the allure of more contemporary theories of a trans-economic "cultural unity" grounded not in Mode of Production but in race, gender, or sexual orientation. But although Jameson attempts to mediate the distance between the two by a reflexive play across the categories of class and culture, such mediation is often only minimally (or ever effectually counter-) productive, perhaps the best example of which is found in Jameson's discussion of the Mode of (Critical) Production specific to his second Horizon of Interpretation. There, Jameson calls for the reconstruction of the heterogeneous cultures which have been marginilized by the dominant class. While doing so, he frequently interchanges the terms "class"

and "culture" as though the two concepts were synonymous (see especially the last full paragraph on page 85). At the same time, he calls for the insertion of the strategies of subversion employed by the various marginalized cultures into their respective class discourses. And since the cultures Jameson here proposes to reconstruct (the cultures, that is to say, of ethnic groups, blacks, women, gays, and so forth) tend as often as not to cut across purely economic lines, both logic and Jameson's own willingness to flip-flop the two key terms would appear to dictate that the determinate basis of classification for the various class discourses would thus be grounded not in some narrowly defined notion of economic relations of production but in such trans-economic notions as ethnicity, gender, race, sexual preference, and so forth. Unfortunately, however, they are not. Indeed, it is in this very Horizon that Jameson most dogmatically defines the category of class membership in terms of purely economic relations of production:

The constitutive form of class relationships is always that between a dominant and a laboring class: and it is only in terms of this axis that class fractions (for example, the petty bourgeoisie) or ex-centric or dependent classes (such as the peasantry) are positioned. (83-84)

Jameson is thus faced with the practical difficulty of

inserting the rhetorical strategies of various multi-class cultures into a framework of narrowly defined economic class discourses. Perhaps more importantly, he is also faced with a quite perplexing logical double bind: on the one hand, if he chooses to maintain the integrity of his basis of classification by inserting a given strategy of subversion into a given class discourse on the basis of the economic relations of production of the subject by which that strategy is produced, he can do so only at the cost of dissipating the very cultures that he is simultaneously seeking to reconstruct; and on the other hand, if he chooses instead to reconstruct these same marginilized cultures, he can do so only at the cost of inserting their strategies of subversion into class discourses which are no longer defined in terms of economic means of production. In short, he can reconstruct marginilized trans-class cultures. And he can insert strategies of subversion into class discourses. But he can do one only at the cost of dissipating the other.¹

¹For a much more provocative attempt to mediate the distance between class and culture, which attempt is evidently grounded in something like Gramsci's notion of the gap between the social and the political relations of forces, see Jameson's later assertion that although in the 60s the "transition from one infrastructural or systemic stage of capitalism to another" produced a "sense of freedom and possibility" which for a time seemed "not to compute in the dichotomous class model of traditional Marxism," with the 80s came the end of the infrastructural transition and with it a corresponding end to the "superstructural movement and play" and a corresponding reemergence of "traditional" class struggle:

Second, just as the notion of a "collective unity" of class subjects has become problematic, so Jameson's brief allusions to the various methods of production by which such unity can be achieved are less than satisfactory. Traces of three such methods of "renewing"--to borrow a phrase from "The Ideology of the Text"--"the primacy of the group and of the collective life . . . and returning to a view of the individual subject as a function of the collective structure" (62) are evident in The Political Unconscious. The first is clearly signified by Jameson's reference to the "revolutionary party," which--as the official "organ of consciousness" of the proletariat--first achieves a collective unity of its own and then helps engender (through persuasion, force, or a combination of the two) a like unity within the economic class whose organ of consciousness it is (283):

But in the Marxian system, only a collective unity--whether that of a particular class, the proletariat, or of its "organ of consciousness,"

¹(...continued)

And this is finally also the solution to the so-called crisis of Marxism and to the widely noted inapplicability of its form of class analysis: "traditional" Marxism, if "untrue" during this period of a proliferation of new subjects of history, must necessarily become true again when the dreary realities of exploitation, extraction of surplus value, proletarianization, and resistance to it in the form of class struggle, all slowly reassert themselves on a new and expanded world scale, as they seem currently in the process of doing. ("Periodizing the 60s" 208)

the revolutionary party--can achieve this
transparency. (283)

This first implicit answer to the question of how a "collective unity" of determined subjects can be achieved is not, however, equal to the task at hand, for at least three reasons. First, the revolutionary party is not so much a method of production as it is the productive forces by which such a method is employed; consequently, to invoke it as the "organ of consciousness" of the working class without then defining the method by which such an "organ" first produces and then articulates such "consciousness" is as much a repression of the extent to which such a method is grounded in violence as it is an explanation of how such unity is produced. Second, even if we agree that Jameson's description of the revolutionary party as an organ of consciousness is sufficient to imply the method by which it articulates the unification of the workers, we have not answered the question so much as displaced it. For although we have thus established at least one method by which the collective unity of the proletariat is produced, we are then faced with the still unfinished task of explaining the precise method by which the prior unity of the revolutionary party is produced, which displacement of the task at hand is rather like the displacement implicit in Jameson's later assertion that working-class consciousness is "the truth" of ruling-class consciousness because the "solidarity" of the

former "generates the mirror image of class solidarity" in the latter (290): in both cases, the question of the method by which such unity is produced is never adequately addressed; instead the site at which the question is to be raised is simply shifted from one group to another, the latter being posited as the producer of the former, with the solidarity of the bourgeoisie thus becoming a product of that of the proletariat becoming a product of that of the revolutionary party ad infinitum, until we arrive at last at the productive omnipotence of that primordial antagonistic solidarity of the "nonhuman" conceived of--at least by the pygmy society--as "the over-arching spirit of the world" (290). And third, even if we should then discover the method by which such as the revolutionary party is first unified and then unifies the proletariat, such a discovery can be made only at the cost of the very purpose for which Jameson develops his theory of the consequences of class unity. For on the one hand, if we accept the view that the ideological limitations imposed upon subjects by their prior insertion into the social structure can be made transparent only through the instrumentality of a truly collective class unity, then we must conclude that the revolutionary party cannot have access to the "transparency" of the whole class precisely because it is not the whole but only a fragment of it, which fragment is in fact always necessarily alienated from the rest of the class simply because its function--as

Gramsci himself makes clear--is different from theirs (301-321ff); thus, the revolutionary party can serve as the "organ of consciousness" not of the proletariat but only of itself, only--that is to say--of the revolutionary party as a class. And on the other hand, if we choose instead to accept the notion that the revolutionary party is--or can be--the authentic "organ of consciousness" of the proletariat, we must then conclude that Jameson's claim that a truly collective class unity is needed to burst the bands of ideology is necessarily false.

III.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that even though Jameson--who elsewhere speaks frankly of the "risks of the concept of a 'midwife' of truth, either analyst or vanguard party" ("Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan" 106)--here makes the obligatory reference to the revolutionary party as the "organ of consciousness" of the proletariat, he then immediately implies two other methods by means of which the collective unity of such classes can be achieved--which methods can obviously be used to produce the prior unity of the revolutionary party as well. Interestingly, traces of both methods can be found in the same passage. Or, to be more precise, the passage in question is sufficiently ambiguous to authorize two distinct readings, each of which articulates a different method by which collective unity is

produced. This passage is of course the one quoted in part above:

What this impossibility of immanence means in practice is that the dialectical reversal must always involve a painful 'decentering' of the consciousness of the individual subject, whom it confronts with a determination (whether the Freudian or the political unconscious) that must necessarily be felt as extrinsic or external to conscious experience. (283-84)

Here, although the precise method of production by which the consciousness of the individual subject is painfully decentered from the comfortable illusion of the individuality of conscious experience to the deeper Reality of class relations and collective determination is given both a name and a blessing (it is the privileged "dialectical reversal" that Jameson elsewhere defines as the "paradoxical turning around of a phenomenon into its opposite" [Marxism and Form 309]), the determinant agent or actant by which such a reversal is produced is functionally ambiguous. Indeed, the sentence is framed in just such a way as to forestall the need to identify it, a strict reading of which is that the "dialectical reversal" is--like God Himself--capable of vacuum genesis: it thinks itself into existence precisely by confronting the individual subject with a determination "that must necessarily be felt

as extrinsic or external to conscious experience" (283-84). Thus, both the agent or actant by which such a confrontation is produced and the specifics of the method by which it is produced are repressed beneath an easy appeal to spontaneous generation.

There are, however, two obvious candidates for the job. The first--which is suggested by Jameson's discussion of the various types of determinations confronting the individual subject--is the political unconscious itself, which (with a minimum of fuss) can be posited as both the productive force which stages such a confrontation and the method of production employed by such force, the result being that the political unconscious is seen to produce the dialectical reversal in question simply by revealing itself to the individual subject. As should be quite evident by now, however, there are number of problems with such a view, the most obvious of which is that although the political unconscious is the product of an external determination (in my view, of the relations of production of the capitalist Mode of Production) it is not itself a determining agent of the kind under discussion here. Instead, it is--as I have indicated more than once--the precise "form of Necessity" (101) by which the effects of just such determinants are explained or "resolved" (82). And though the forms of Necessity may, on occasion, be the formal structures through which such theories of external determination as (say)

Jameson's Cultural Revolution are expressed, more often than not the contents of such forms are the very antithesis of that view. For as Jameson himself is quick to emphasize, almost all master narratives but his own, far from proving the "impossibility of immanence" (283), are in fact virtual "model[s] of immanence" (282):

We suggested in our opening chapter that most forms of contemporary criticism tend, as toward their ideal, towards a model of immanence. . . . [T]his is to say that the phenomenological ideal--that of some ideal unity of consciousness or thinking and experience or the "objective" fact--continues to dominate modern thought, even where phenomenology as such is explicitly repudiated. (282)

Consequently, this initial reading in which the political unconscious is identified as the force or actant by which the dialectical reversal is produced must give way to a second. In it, the unnamed agent which produces the dialectical reversal by confronting individual subjects with a determination which must seem external to conscious experience is not the political unconscious at all. Instead, it is Jameson himself, who--as a member of the revolutionary party whose exact function it is to promote and articulate the consciousness of the proletariat--is thus revealed as the very embodiment of the revolutionary hero:

it is precisely he (we see at last) who "decenters" individual subjects by confronting them with the contents of his own form of Necessity, the cornerstone of which Cultural Revolution is what he elsewhere calls "the rebuke and therapeutic humiliation of consciousness forced to reground itself in a painful awareness of what Marx calls its 'social determination'" ("Architecture and the Critique of Ideology" 40), which determination--expressed as it is in terms of a political unconscious which is itself based on "the Freudian model of the unconscious" (282)--must thus "be felt as extrinsic or external to conscious experience" (283).² But that being the case, although we have had the good fortune to discover that

the theory as well as the experience of the decentering of consciousness may serve "to liquidate the last vestiges of bourgeois individualism itself and to prepare the basis for some new postindividualistic thought mode to come" ("Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan" 103),

we have also discovered that rather than providing a new and more adequate explanation of the method by which class unity is produced, the readings authorized by the functional ambiguity of the passage in question produce nothing more

²For Jameson's interesting account of how "the subject is therapeutically 'decentered' by other people," see p. 82 of his interview in diacritics.

than the same old theory of the revolutionary party as the "organ of consciousness" of the working class, the determinate insufficiencies of which it was our express intent to escape. We have also discovered, in short, that Jameson's first hurried explanation of how a "collective unity" of class or party (283) can produce "a meaning beyond the purely ideological" (285) must necessarily falter for lack of an adequate explanation of how such unity is itself produced.³ For absent such an explanation, Jameson's assertion that the members of the working class will share a certain unity of thought and perception--the form of Necessity of which is the political unconscious, the physical embodiment of which is evidently the revolutionary party--looks a good deal like just another example of expressive causality, one in which a given superstructural problematic expresses a specific set of infrastructural relations of production. Indeed, in the absence of such an explanation, the identification of the superstructural problematic itself looks very like a case of interpretive impoverishment, one in which the strategic centralization of the ways of thinking held in common by the individual members of the class is accomplished through the concurrent marginilization of their quite dissimilar perceptions--is

³For an indication of the possible trajectory of such an explanation, see Jameson's intriguing discussion of ontology in his interview in diacritics.

accomplished (that is to say) by simultaneously privileging mediation's function as a discoverer of identity and repressing its function as an identifier of difference. Little wonder, then, that Jameson--who acknowledges that "the approach to the Real is at best fitful, the retreat from it into this or that form of intellectual comfort perpetual" (284)--moves almost at once to "bracket that whole dimension of the critique of the Marxist doctrine of determination by social being which springs from exasperation with this unpleasant reflexivity" (284). For by thus framing the issue, by thus flooding the stage with a host of critiques of the Marxist theory of social determination, all of which are said to spring from exasperation with how difficult it can be to approach the Real, Jameson is able to bracket not merely those critiques engendered by the pain of "decentering" and the temptation to re-center but also those critiques of the adequacy of his explanation of the determinate method by which the collective unity which necessitates just such decentering is itself produced.

Still, if these were the only problems by which Jameson's clarification of the "troubled position of the individual subject" (282) is beset, his argument could well stand, if for no other reason that his first explanation of the way in which the collectivization of the production of meaning can produce a "meaning beyond the purely

ideological" (285) is essentially a preamble to his second. There is, however, yet another problem. And that is that just as Jameson is evidently unable to produce an adequate explanation of the means of production by which class unity is achieved, so he is unable--or at least unwilling--to explain the determinate process by which such collective unity (once it is in fact achieved) is able to transform the raw materials of a multitude of structurally determined ideologies into the "transparency" (283) of a "meaning beyond the purely ideological" (285). Indeed, his definition of the criteria by which class membership is determined mitigates against just such a process. For in this regard, his position is evidently the traditional Marxian one to the effect that class membership is a function of the structural position the subject occupies within the Mode of (Material) Production:

The prior moment of class consciousness is that of the oppressed classes (whose structural identity--whether a peasantry, slaves, serfs, or a genuine proletariat--evidently derives from the mode of production.) (289)

But that being the case, it is hard to see how class unity--which is thus defined as the unity of all the subjects occupying the same structural position within the Mode of Production--can make transparent the very "ideological conditioning" (283) which is a necessary product of the

occupation of just such a position. If anything, such a view would seem rather to cut the other way. It would seem, in other words, that insofar as the ideology imposed upon subjects is a function of the structural position they occupy within the determinate Mode of Production, the collective unity with the best chance of making transparent the limitations of such ideology would be the unity of those subjects occupying the most radically opposed structural positions within the Mode of Production. And by the same token, it would seem that the collective unity with the least chance--indeed, with precisely no chance--of making transparent the limitations of such ideology would be the unity of all those class subjects who occupy the same structural position and so who are interpellated via the same ideological conditioning. Indeed, such a unity of identically determined subjects would appear rather to reinforce than to threaten such interpellation, rather to make opaque than to render transparent the ideology by which such hailing is given voice. In short, given Jameson's definition of what constitutes class membership, it would appear that nothing could strengthen the ideology by which a subject is bound quite so much as a jumbo sized helping of good old-fashioned class consciousness.

IV.

It is important to remember, however, that Jameson's

first hurried explanation of how a collectivity of class or party can produce a "meaning beyond the purely ideological" (285) is at heart little more than a preamble to his second. As such, it is perhaps unfair to expect his brief clarification of the "troubled position of the individual subject" (282) to contain as much theoretical substance as we have demanded of it. For that, we must evidently turn to his second response to Sahlins' critique of the Marxist "instrumentalization of culture" (282). This response, too, is developed in terms of the production of a positive hermeneutic, the articulation of a "properly Marxian version of meaning beyond the purely ideological" (285) which is Marxist precisely because it--like Jameson's first response--is "based on social class" (286), but which is beyond ideology precisely because its "noninstrumental conception of culture" (286) does not project the "value or desire" (282) of any one class as the culture of the whole but rather discovers a "universal value" (288) of collective unity--what Jameson calls "a properly Utopian impulse" (288)--within that very "class solidarity" (290) which is "the index of all class consciousness" (290).

This properly "Marxian version of the hermeneutics of meaning" (286), then, is grounded in a pair of related propositions: the first is that the "index of all class consciousness" is to be found not in the content of the ideology produced by such consciousness but rather in fact

of "class solidarity" itself, in the "sense of solidarity" a determined subject feels "with other members of a particular group or class" (290); and the second is that such solidarity--which is the effectual index of "all class consciousness of whatever type" (291)--"is Utopian insofar as it expresses the unity of a collectivity" (291), the happy result of which is that "the effectively ideological is also, at the same time, necessarily Utopian" (286):

How is it possible for a cultural text which fulfills a demonstrably ideological function . . . to embody a properly Utopian impulse, or to resonate a universal value inconsistent with the narrower limits of class privilege which inform its more immediate ideological vocation? There can, I think, be only one consequential "solution" to the problem thus posed: 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. (288, 289)

Of course Jameson's conclusion here, that even hegemonic or ruling-class culture and ideology are Utopian, not in spite of their instrumental function to secure and perpetrate

class privilege and power, but precisely because that function is also in and of itself the affirmation of collective solidarity (291), requires a good deal of proof. And proof Jameson provides. For though he initially justifies the absence of proof on the grounds that his "dialectical thought" is--like the doctrine of hope and ontological anticipation of Ernst Bloch--but "the anticipation of the logic of a collectivity which has not yet come into being" (286) and that consequently "to project an imperative to thought in which the ideological would be grasped as somehow at one with the Utopian . . . is to formulate a question to which a collective dialectic is the only conceivable answer" (286-87), he then skillfully reverses his ground and provides two of the very proofs he has just declared unavailable.

The first proof that "the effectively ideological is also . . . necessarily Utopian" (286), Jameson declares, "may initially be argued in terms of a manipulatory theory of culture" (287). Such theories typically take either of two related forms. In the first, the ideological function of mass culture can perhaps best be understood as a process in which the text first "awakens" and then "manages" or "defuses" various "otherwise dangerous and protopolitical impulses" (287). And in the second, the mass cultural text is seen as producing "false consciousness" though "a complex strategy of rhetorical persuasion in which substantial

incentives are offered for ideological adherence" (287). In both cases, however, the manipulation in question is either--as in the first case--the manipulation of or--as in the second case--the manipulation by means of various properly Utopian impulses:

We will say that such incentives as well as the impulses to be managed by the mass cultural text, are necessarily Utopian in nature. Ernst Bloch's luminous recovery of the Utopian impulses at work in . . . advertising slogans . . . may serve as a model for an analysis of the dependence of [even] the crudest forms of manipulation on the oldest Utopian longings of mankind. . . . [In like manner, Adorno and Horkheimer have produced an analysis in which] one of the ugliest of all human passions, antisemitism, is shown to be profoundly Utopian in character, as a form of cultural envy which is at the same time a repressed recognition of the Utopian impulse. (287-88)

Such analyses as these, however, are ultimately flawed in that they depend on a separation between means and ends--between "Utopian gratification" and "ideological manipulation"--which "might be invoked to deny the profound identity between these two dimensions of the cultural text" (288). Consequently, Jameson, who denies himself the easy "solution of a coexistence of different functions" (289),

buttresses this initial evidence that "the effectually ideological is also . . . necessarily Utopian" (286) with a brief but persuasive analysis of the determinate relations between working- and ruling- class consciousness. While doing so, he argues that "the prior moment of class consciousness" is that of "the oppressed classes," who necessarily grasp their own solidarity "before the dominant or ruling class has any particular incentive for doing so" (289); that the threat of this emerging solidarity "generates the mirror image of class solidarity among the ruling groups" (290); and that--as I noted above--"the index of all class consciousness is [thus] to be found not in the latter's 'contents' or ideological motifs but first and foremost in the dawning sense of solidarity with other members of a particular group or class" (290).

Consequently, Jameson concludes (on the basis of the evidence thus presented and the proofs thus offered), "All class consciousness of whatever type is Utopian insofar as it expresses the unity of a collectivity" (290-91). And consequently, the application to discrete cultural texts of the twin propositions thus proven constitutes a whole new "Marxian positive hermeneutic," a strategic "decipherment of the Utopian impulses of those same still ideological cultural texts" (296) which must be exercised simultaneously with the more traditional Marxian negative hermeneutic of class demystification:

Marxist analysis of culture . . . can no longer be content with its demystifying vocation. . . . It must not cease to practice this essentially negative hermeneutic function . . . but must also seek, through and beyond this demonstration, . . . to project its simultaneous Utopian power as the symbolic affirmation of a specific historical and class form of collective unity. (291)

This, then is Jameson's "strong" answer to Sahlins' charge of functionality: a positive hermeneutic of Utopia grounded in a "noninstrumental conception of culture" (286), one capable of producing--to return once again to Jameson's words--"a properly Marxian version of meaning beyond the purely ideological " (283), and one in which (as Jameson once said of Bloch's hermeneutic)

little by little wherever we look everything in the world becomes . . . a manifestation of that primordial movement towards the future, and toward ultimate identity with a transfigured world which is Utopia, and whose vital presence, behind whatever distortions, beneath whatever layers of repression, may always be detected, no matter how faintly, by the instruments and apparatus of hope

itself. (Marxism and Form 120)⁴

V.

As Jameson himself is quick to admit, however, "A number of significant objections can be made to this proposal" (292). And though he first raises and then disposes of several such objections--i.e. that the Durkheimian problematic upon which his hermeneutic is based "seeks to project a functional defense of the bourgeois parliamentary state" (292); that its formulations are grounded in "categories of the individual subject" (294); and that it is "alien to Marxism" (294)--at least three determinate problems with Jameson's hermeneutic of Utopia remain unresolved, one of which Jameson raises but does not satisfactorily solve, two of which are effectually obscured by his discussion of other such problems.

The first problem, which is buried deep within the clutter of Jameson's discussion of various other problems,

⁴The affinity between Jameson's hermeneutic of Utopia and Bloch's doctrine of hope and ontological anticipation is perhaps best indicated by Jameson himself when he writes in Marxism and Form that Bloch's work

may serve as an object lesson in some of the ways available to a Marxist hermeneutic to restore a genuine political dimension to the disparate texts preserved in the book of our culture: not by some facile symbolic or allegorical interpretation, but by reading the very content and the formal impulses of the texts themselves as figures--whether of psychic wholeness, of freedom, or of the drive toward Utopian transfiguration--of the irrepressible revolutionary wish. (159)

is that the product of his positive hermēneutic of Utopia is not actually a "meaning beyond the purely ideological" at all (283), but rather is precisely ideology in its strongest sense: it is precisely a value or desire of a particular class which has been projected--through a process of class mystification Jameson elsewhere calls the "tendency . . . to transform culture into nature" ("Ideology and the Text" 59)--as a "universal value" (288) of all humanity. That such is the case, that Jameson's proposed hermeneutic is in fact less a "mode of production of knowledge" than it is a "mode of production of ideology (which is utterly different from the . . . mode of production of science)" (Reading Capital 41, 52), becomes evident as soon as we evaluate Jameson's hermeneutic from within the perspective of Althusser's problematic. For as soon as we call to mind Althusser's identification of the determinate difference between the method of production of knowledge and the method of production of ideology--while the former is primarily an ideological practice determined by interests exterior to the "need for knowledge," the latter constructs a "knowledge-effect" through a system of protocols which (motivated principally by the "need for knowledge") serve to guarantee the validity of its products--we see at once that a positive hermeneutic (which is, of course, a Mode of Critical Production) can produce a product which is a "meaning beyond the purely ideological" (285) only to the precise extent to

which the method of production by which such meaning is produced is itself beyond ideology, is itself driven not by class interest, not by the "will to power," but by what Althusser--drawing a clear distinction which Foucault will latter attempt to collapse--calls the "will to knowledge"⁵:

Raw Materials	---	Method of Production	---	Product
-----		-----		-----
Such Cultural		Method of Analysis that		A meaning
Artifacts as	---	is not an expression of	---	beyond the
Texts		class ideology		ideological

But while Althusser makes just such a claim for his much maligned theory of a method of (scientific) production, Jameson--who has observed first hand how hard it can be to defend such a position, and who later writes that he finds "the whole Althusserian epistemology . . . problematical and unsatisfactory" ("Interview" 79)--does not. Instead, he employs a two-part approach in which he first makes a persuasive case that the raw materials of class consciousness upon which his method of critical production works all express the same "unity of a collectivity" (291) and then concludes--mostly by inference--that the presence of such a "universal value" (288) within the raw materials to which he applies his method of production serves to

⁵For an overview of Althusser's provocative and problematic distinction between Mode of (Scientific) Production and Mode of (Ideological) Production, see James H. Kavanagh's "Marxism's Althusser: Toward a Politics of Literary Theory."

guarantee that the product of the analysis of that value is similarly universal, is similarly trans-class and trans-ideological, is--in a phrase--a "meaning beyond the purely ideological" (285):

Raw Materials	---	Method of Production	---	Product
-----		-----		-----
Texts which express a trans-class desire for collectivity	---	Method of Analysis	---	A meaning beyond the ideological
<div style="border-left: 1px solid black; border-right: 1px solid black; padding: 0 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> (The trans-class nature of the desire found within the Raw Materials functions to guarantee the trans-ideological nature of its analysis) </div>				

Thus, rather than actually refuting any impending charge of class mystification by demonstrating the trans-ideological nature of the Ur-narrative employed by his positive hermeneutic in its production of interpretive meaning, Jameson creates the mere appearance of such a refutation by conflating raw materials and finished products such that (on the one hand) a description of the former becomes a defense of the latter and (on the other hand) the conflation of the two becomes a functional defense of the method of critical production itself. And though we may perhaps rescue this approach from the charge of sleight of hand by arguing that such a conflation is justified by the method of critical production employed, we can do so only at the loss of the functionality of the method itself. For

although such a conflation of materials and products can in fact be justified, it can be so justified only upon the absolute precondition that no critical production ever occurs within the Mode of Production, that what at first blush presents itself as a method of critical "decipherment" (296) is in fact nothing more than an example of what Macherey elsewhere calls the "interpretive fallacy" (75-77); it is nothing more--that is to say--than a mere act of transfer in which the critic plunges a hand into the ore of the text, pulls out the golden nugget of "class solidarity" (290), and holds it aloft.

Of course a more reasoned response may well be simply to assert that what appears at first blush to be a conflation of materials and products is in fact merely the identification of a characteristic common to both, which characteristic "class solidarity" (290) is first discovered in and then extracted from the raw materials of cultural artifacts for the sole purpose that it might then be "deciphered"--through the instrumentality of a properly Marxian master narrative of history--as an imperative to establish "the ultimate concrete collective life of an achieved Utopian or classless society" (291). And in fact, this active process of production is clearly the one authorized by Jameson himself when he notes that the affirmation of class solidarity implicit in the ideology of all social classes is "not in itself" Utopian in any Marxist

sense of the word but only becomes so when it is read allegorically as a figure of the future collective life of an achieved classless society (291):

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 collectives are themselves figures for the ultimate concrete collective life of an achieved Utopian or classless society. (291)

As soon as we reach this conclusion, however, we see that we have come full circle and that by banishing the charges of sleight of hand and unseemly conflation, we had cleared the way for the triumphant return of the rather more serious charges of class mystification and ideological production, of what Cornel West has gone so far as to call "a utopianism gone mad" (195). We see, in other words, that if what Jameson has said is true--if the desire for class solidarity inscribed in cultural texts is in fact not intrinsically Utopian and only becomes so when it is rewritten as an allegory of an essentially proletarian

master narrative of history⁶--then the product of such a rewriting can no longer be conceived of as a "meaning beyond the purely ideological" (285). Instead, it stands revealed as an ideology which is ideological precisely because it has been produced by the master narrative of a single class. It stands revealed (that is to say) as a type of ideological conditioning, one whose meaning is produced precisely and wholly by reading trans-class expressions of class solidarity allegorically, as "figures" of the proletariat's imperative to free itself from one such solidarity: that of the bourgeoisie (291). As such, it is not trans-class and so trans-ideological at all; indeed, it is precisely the opposite: it is precisely and wholly--as Jameson himself so much as admits--the ideological projection of a "specific historical and class form of collective unity" (291), the effectual "prisoner"--one might even say, echoing Jameson's description of the myth critic--"of a Utopian vision of [its] own devising" ("Criticism in History" 126).

But that being the case, we see what we saw before. We see that although Jameson can in fact have a meaning beyond ideology, and although he can in fact have a positive hermeneutic in which a multi-class expression of class solidarity is rewritten as a figure of working class desire

⁶For an excellent discussion of the method of production of Utopian thought posited by The Political Unconscious, see p. 71 of Michael Clark's "Imagining the Real: Jameson's Use of Lacan."

for a classless Utopia, the latter is the precise process by which the former is (re)inserted into the ideology of the proletariat: it is the precise process, that is to say, by which an impulse common to all classes is harnessed to the ideological production of a single class. We see, in short, that the provocative and symptomatic phrase "a properly Marxian version of meaning beyond the purely ideological" (285) is always already a determinate contradiction in terms.

VI.

This first problem with Jameson's hermeneutic of Utopia, then, is that the meaning it produces is not a "meaning beyond the purely ideological" precisely because it is a "properly Marxian version" of such meaning (285; my emphasis). The second problem is closely related to the first: it is the problem of the functional conception of culture imbedded in that meaning. In this case, however, the problem in question need not be extracted from the clutter of Jameson's discussion of various other objections to his proposal: it is clearly identified by Jameson himself. For on the one hand (Jameson observes) Durkheim's view that religious and ritual practices are a symbolic way of affirming social unity is clearly grounded in an instrumental conception of culture:

There would, in other words, seem to persist an

instrumental or functional view of culture and religion even here, since the symbolic affirmation of the unity of society is understood as playing a vital role in the health, survival and reproduction of the social formation in question.

(293)

And on the other hand, Jameson continues, his own theory of the Utopian impulses embedded in texts "amounts to a generalization of Durkheim's theory of religion to cultural production as a whole" (292). Consequently, his own hermeneutic of Utopia would appear--at least at first blush--rather to confirm than to repudiate Sahlins' charge that "even the most sophisticated Marxian analysis of cultural texts must . . . necessarily always presuppose a certain structural functionality about culture" (282).

This, then, is Jameson's frank admission of the second of the three problems with his positive hermeneutic of Utopia under discussion here. Unfortunately, however, his identification of the problem is more persuasive than are either of the reasons he then advances for dismissing it. The first (which is mostly implied) is that though Jameson's theory of the Utopian impulses in texts is in fact a generalization of Durkheim's view of the function of religion, his positive hermeneutic is not at present grounded in an instrumental view of culture simply because it does not assert that such impulses serve to maintain the

various classes of which the producers of those impulses are a part; indeed, in this respect his theory can be said to be expressly non- or anti- functional in that the consequence, over time, of such impulses is precisely the destruction of the very classes in whose name they presently speak. And the second (which Jameson argues in detail) is that just as his positive hermeneutic is not presently grounded in an instrumental view of culture, neither--strictly speaking--will it be so grounded when that future Utopia of which it is at present merely a "symbolic affirmation" comes into being (291). For when that happy day finally arrives, when the properly Marxian Utopia of a classless society is at last realized, then

the problem of a functional or instrumental conception of culture is basically transcended and annulled In a classless society, . . . our own view of culture as the expression of a properly Utopian or collective impulse [is] no longer basely functional or instrumental in Sahlins' sense. That is to say, if one likes, that [the Marxian "decipherments" of such impulses] are in this society false and ideological; but they will know their truth and come into their own at the end of what Marx calls prehistory. At that moment, then, the problem of the opposition of the ideological to the Utopian,

or the functional-instrumental to the collective, will have become a false one. (293)

Thus, Jameson uses both space and time to indemnify his positive hermeneutic of Utopia against the charge of functionality. On the one hand, he opens up a rift between functionality and Utopia and then inserts into the conceptual gap a third category, which, although unnamed, is evidently that of a non-functional or non-"basely functional" function. And on the other hand, he uses the impulse towards Utopia as the mechanism with which to project his theory into Utopia itself, thus guaranteeing that when what was before non-functional begins to function, it does not function "basely" (293) simply because its function is no longer a process of mystification by which a divided and oppressive social structure is preserved. Rather, it is a revelation of truth and an establishment of authentic identity.

There are, however, two signal problems with this process of indemnification. First, the move to use the characteristics of a Utopia which has yet to be achieved as *prima facie* evidence in a debate about functionality would appear to be justifiable only insofar as such a move is grounded in Marx's salvational view of history. But of course Jameson has rejected that view of history as a form

of ideology (see, for example, "Interview" 80).⁷

And second, the indemnification thus produced is valid only to the precise extent to which we are persuaded that Jameson's distinction between a "basely functional" type of instrumentality (293) and one whose operation is evidently much more delicate is sufficient to "annul"--or at least to "transcend"--the problem of a functional or instrumental conception of culture (293). But such a distinction rather more poses a problem than it proposes a solution, for it is not (properly speaking) a distinction between two kinds of functionality at all; it is, instead, a distinction between two of the kinds of masters which an undifferentiated functionality can evidently serve: the former, ideology;

⁷Perhaps the most perceptive critic of Jameson's attempt to displace the issue of functionality "to a space in time where the problem would no longer be operative" is Larysa Mykyta, who argues that by playing on the ambiguity of the phrase, "in the Utopian perspective that is ours here" (which in reference to what preceded it has to refer to his "positive hermeneutic," and in reference to what follows implies that his perspective is from within the future), [Jameson] substitutes description for demonstration. He thereby suggests that the methodology that describes Utopian impulses in texts already somehow stands in the space of a realized Utopia and achieves what it was to reveal a desire for through the revelation of this desire. In short, the decoding of the presence of a Utopian desire for classless society is translated into or confused with the gratification of this desire, and this conflation is presented in place of proof for the effectiveness and validity of the critical method as one which transcends the problem of instrumentality. The argument is circular but with a twist that disturbs the place and the function of Utopia in Jameson's work. (48-9)

the latter, a "meaning beyond the purely ideological" (285). Thus, Sahlins' charge of functionality is itself effectually shunted aside through a fairly slick conflation of messenger and message, of instrumentality and ideology, such that (on the one hand) the acid test of the functionality of a given cultural activity becomes the quality of the perception it will engender, and (on the other hand) the notion of functionality itself becomes restricted to that of the mere production of false consciousness. And though we may well be inclined to take the bait and to agree with Jameson that a cultural activity is not "basely" functional (293) as long as the problematic it engenders--the creation of which serves as the mechanism by which the health, survival, and reproduction of the social formation is guaranteed--is "beyond the purely ideological" (285) in the sense that it is the instrument of (and so functions on the behalf of) the whole of the social formation, we can do so only by rejecting both Jameson's description of the functionality of Durkheim (293) and his explanation of the collective consciousness of prepolitical culture (290). We can do so only, that is to say, by redefining the concepts of instrumentality and functionality themselves, which process of redefinition will thus signify that our attempt at indemnification is less a determined defense than an effectual retreat, which retreat is--I take it----the real gist of Larysa Mykyta's complaint to the effect that

What Jameson never makes explicit is that in the process of the discussion, the terms "instrumental" [and] "functional" . . . have slipped into a different register, something has been added to and something subtracted from their sphere of reference. (48)

Of course the reason that Jameson is initially so eager to indemnify his positive hermeneutic against Sahlins' charge of functionality is that to the extent to which such instrumentality is linked to ideology (to the extent, in other words, to which its function is evidently that of mystification), its presence within his system would pose a very real threat to his theory of Utopia. As soon, however, as he is able to project into Utopia a kind of instrumentality which is free from any taint of ideology, one whose function is not that of mystification but of revelation, his initial somewhat embarrassing insistence that such functionality is in fact nonfunctional (or at least not functional in any "base" way) begins to slip away (293). And as it does so, Jameson slowly begins to reabsorb the category of instrumentality into that of Utopia by asserting that the present opposition between a functional view of art and a view of art as an expression of Utopian impulses will be swept aside when the latter's presently nonfunctional impulse towards Utopia becomes functional. For at that very instant, what was until then the

instrumentality by which Utopia was beaten down and held at bay becomes the precise method by which it is preserved; thus, what was earlier a curse and a scourge has become, with the dawning of a new age called Utopia, a balm, a succor, a support:

At that moment, then, the problem of the opposition of the ideological to the Utopian, or the functional-instrumental to the collective, will have become a false one. (293)

Thus, while Jameson's innovative solution to Sahlins' charge of functionality is clearly open to challenge, the conclusion he reaches when all the dust has settled is fairly reasonable. And so what is perhaps more interesting than the particulars of his analysis is their apparent relation to his earlier discussion of ideology. For when we draw back a step and ask what relation the former bears to the latter, we see at once that what Jameson has done in these pages (285-93) is construct an essentially circular argument in which he suggests--as much through the structuring of his text and the sequencing of his various points as through any particular declaration--that since (on the one hand) his theory of positive hermeneutic is beyond ideology, it must thus also be beyond instrumentality, given that the function of such is class mystification; and since (on the other hand) his theory of positive hermeneutic is beyond base functionality, his original claim to a meaning

beyond the purely ideological is guaranteed. And round and round we go. But of course the danger with such an argument is that while it is pleasingly effective as long as the integrity of each of the halves of the circle is maintained, and while such integrity is--though not actually guaranteed by--at least amply buttressed by each turn of the wheel, if one should ever be breached, the argument begins to turn violently against itself. And that is precisely what happens here. For as soon as Jameson's claim to a "meaning beyond the purely ideological" (285) begins to crumble (the specifics of which we have explored above), that collapse calls into question his subsequent claim to a functionality beyond the "basely functional" (293). And as soon as that occurs, round and round we go, spinning down into the pit.

VII.

It is clear, then, that Jameson's production of a "Marxist positive hermeneutic, or a decipherment of the Utopian impulses of . . . ideological cultural texts" (296), is not sufficiently grounded in a "noninstrumental conception of culture" (286) to be fully indemnified against Sahlins' charges of functionality and instrumentality. Neither is such a hermeneutic finally able to produce a "meaning beyond the purely ideological" (285), its only product being--as we have seen--a "properly Marxian version of meaning" produced by an Ur-narrative of history grounded

in the ideology of a single class (285; my emphasis). These are not, however, the only charges than can be levelled against Jameson's theory of "a 'positive hermeneutic' based on social class" (286). For yet a third, we must return for a moment to Jameson's earlier assertion that his proposal that "the effectively ideological is also . . . necessarily Utopian . . . may initially be argued in terms of a manipulatory theory of culture" (286-87). There, as you recall, Jameson argues that both the "incentives" used to induce passivity and ideological adherence and the "impulses" such incentives must "manage" are ultimately all one in the sense that they are all "necessarily Utopian in nature" (287). Hence,

Ernst Bloch's luminous recovery of the Utopian impulses at work in . . . advertising slogans . . . may serve as the model for an analysis of the dependence of [even] the crudest forms of manipulation on the oldest Utopian longings in humankind. (287)

But while such an assertion certainly does yeomen's work in paving the way for Jameson's subsequent development of a positive hermeneutic of Utopia, it must do so either by reductivism or by a manifest appeal to expressive causality. For on the one hand, given the extraordinary range of desires to which cultural artifacts appeal (a range as infinite, one might say, as absence itself), the conflation

of that range into a single longing for the Utopia of human collectivity seems *prima facie* evidence of interpretive impoverishment. And on the other hand, although the charge of reductivism engendered by such evidence can certainly be refuted by the assertion that the vast range of desires to which (say) advertising appeals is only an apparent range in that its seeming diversity is merely so many variations on a single theme, such a refutation makes uncomfortably clear the precise kind of causality necessarily employed by any theory of culture in which a single desire is seen as expressing itself in an infinity of collapsible forms.

Further--and this is obviously my key point--although the fact that Jameson's discussion of the Utopian nature of cultural incentives can be defended against the charge of interpretive impoverishment only by pleading guilty to the related charge of expressive causality is certainly interesting in its own right, its deeper significance lies less in what it tells us about the adequacy of Jameson's elaboration of various proto-Marxian theories of culture than in what it implies about his subsequent development of a positive hermeneutic grounded in the notion of a trans-class desire for human collectivity. For although Jameson's assertion that his positive hermeneutic is beyond both ideology and functionality is (as we have seen above) very much open to debate, what we have here learned suggests that his hermeneutic of Utopia can also be brought to task upon

the much more vital charge that its very functionality--like that of the negative hermeneutic of his three Horizons of Interpretation--is ultimately both guaranteed by reductivism and an easy appeal to expressive causality and grounded in what Jerry Flieger has shown is a surprisingly "uncritical analysis of the aesthetic process which is finally idealistic in nature" (54).. What we have here learned suggests, in other words, that if Jameson is in fact able to discover an impulse towards Utopia in literally all cultural artifacts, he is able to do so principally because he has always already reduced the definition of desire to precisely that of the desire for Utopia, which "impoverished conception of the relation between desire and history" (Seaton 133) must thus necessarily express itself (in this or that local form) whenever desire is made flesh in the form of a cultural artifact, whenever--that is to say--a text is produced. For as soon as we assert (to the contrary) that not all desire is reducible to the simple hunger for class solidarity, and as soon as we assert (to the contrary) that all desire is not always--Jameson's later claim for a genuinely political pleasure notwithstanding--"able to stand as a figure for the transformation of social relations as a whole" ("Pleasure: A Political Issue" 74), we see at once that a great many cultural artifacts have been produced which, when squeezed, do not blurt out the sacred name of Utopia.

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