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Repeating Jameson? Rereading Žižek Via Jameson, and Vice Versa - Introduction

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Fred Jameson is living proof that in theory...miracles DO happen, that what seems impossible CAN be done: to unite Marxism with the highest exploits of French structuralism and psychoanalysis. This achievement makes him one of the few thinkers who really matter today. – Slavoj Žižek¹

...the contemporary world has thrown up two of the most brilliant dialecticians in the history of philosophy [Adorno and Žižek]: and it seems only appropriate to scan each one for the dialectical effects with which their pages so often electrify us. – Fredric Jameson²

About every fifth issue in the ten-year history of the *International Journal of Žižek Studies* focuses on a special topic like Iran or the Left, but by my count only three take up Žižek's connection to another theorist, namely: Badiou, Heidegger, and Baudrillard.³ The present issue pairs the titular character of *IJŽS* with the American literary and cultural critic Fredric Jameson, both of whom, despite all of their writing dedicated to academic subjects, do not produce university discourse so much as that curious entanglement of discourses – at turns masterly, hysterical, bureaucratic, and analytical – that characterizes dialectical prose.⁴ Beyond being two of today's most famous dialecticians, where exactly does Žižek stand in relation to Jameson? How do their respective projects relate? Are Jameson and Žižek pretty much on the same page philosophically and politically – as I have long suspected (or rather desired) – or do their dissimilar writing styles and positions within academia and the world at large indicate or perhaps even precipitate significant divergences of thought? Put succinctly but with the drawback of jargon, is the Hegelian Marxist Jameson a foil for the Marxist Hegelian Žižek, or is this syntactical distinction between eponymous adjectival labels one without a difference?

¹ Jameson 2000: back cover.

² Jameson 2009: 51.

³ Notably, two issues have come out of the annual Žižek Studies Conference, which examine music and the relationship between art and philosophy, respectively.

⁴ For a discussion of Lacan's various categorizations of Hegelian discourse, see Žižek 2004: 56-57.

The various concepts that Žižek has employed over his career to describe the relationship between philosophers – *avec*, repetition, encounter, short-circuit, disparity – can help us better frame the question driving this special issue.⁵ Perhaps the intellectual relationship between Jameson and Žižek follows the *avec* logic employed by Lacan to discern the philosophical association of Kant with Sade, a logic that Žižek has sourced from at least his 1991 book *For They Know Not What They Do*. In what ways is Žižek the truth of Jameson or Jameson the truth of Žižek? Their fifteen-year age difference mirrors the sixteen that separated Sade from Kant, positioning Jameson as Kant⁶ to Žižek’s Sade, a connection made by Clint Burnham in this issue (Burnham 127). Burnham explores their relationship along these lines in detail by introducing a necessary step beyond reading them together: reading each *sans* the other in order to discover “what we think of their work, or read in their work *after* reading them together” (124). Our other three contributors – Matthew Flisfeder, Ed Graham, and Zahi Zalloua – do just that: Flisfeder by focusing on their theorizations of postmodernity, Graham their critiques of Adorno, and Zalloua their encounters with post- and decoloniality. While each observes striking similarities between how Jameson and Žižek theorize these objects, their analyses also uncover contrasts not inconsequential in nature that question whether Jameson and Žižek might be more “silent partners” than unequivocal comrades – to reference the title of Žižek’s collection, *Lacan: The Silent Partners*, in which Jameson is notably included.

All four contributors treat these differences differently, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, but each concludes, in their own way, that what separates Jameson and Žižek is so minimal as to be parallaxic, whether that parallax be

⁵ The current issue thus evokes the 2016 issue of *JŽS* on Baudrillard (Vol. 10, Issue 1), both in terms of subject matter – Jameson and Baudrillard being cultural critics of postmodernity – and also approach. See Mike Grimshaw and Cindy Zeihl’s introductory essay, “Baudrillard and Žižek: Short-circuiting the Parallax?,” for a model of comparative reading inspired by Žižek’s short-circuit book series that the contributors herein adopt in uncanny fashion.

⁶ In an interview with Jameson, Xudong Zhang asks a question inspired by a conference attendee who called Jameson a “Red Kant” (Jameson 2000: 161). See also, Robert Kaufman (2000) “Red Kant, or The Persistence of the Third ‘Critique’ in Adorno and Jameson.” *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 26, No. 4: 682-724; and Michael Wayne (2014) *Red Kant: Aesthetics, Marxism, and the Third Critique*. London: Bloomsbury.

located between historical and dialectical materialism for Flisfeder, narrative and non-narrative utopianism for Graham, decolonial nationalism and supranationalism for Zalloua, or Marxism and psychoanalysis for Burnham. Before I assume my editorial role to deliver proper summaries of their spirited arguments, I want to first develop the inherent tension between repetition and disparity with regard to Jameson's and Žižek's work. While Žižek can often be read as repeating Jameson, disparities between their two projects can be detected in what I am calling – inspired by our contributors – the “temporal parallax.” I will discuss three examples of mutually reinforcing repetitions between Žižek and Jameson that I will then, in dialectical fashion, reread as mutually exclusive disparities, before proposing to reconcile – in the sense of turning a problem into its own solution – their positions via the rubric of this temporal parallax.

Three Mutually Reinforcing Repetitions

In “Between the Two Revolutions,” the introduction to Žižek's collection of Lenin's 1917 writings, Žižek develops a theory of repeating a revolutionary intervention from one era in the present one. Instead of “nostalgically *re-enacting* the ‘good old revolutionary times’” or developing an “opportunistic-pragmatic *adjustment* of the old programme to ‘new conditions,’” Žižek understands repetition to mean retrieving “the same impulse in today's constellation” (Žižek 2002: 11). He develops this concept of repetition further in *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* with regard to the emergence of the New, especially in the context of the history of philosophy. Taking Kant as an example, he writes:

There are, accordingly, two modes of betraying the past. The true betrayal is an ethico-theoretical act of the highest fidelity: one has to betray the letter of Kant to remain faithful to (and repeat) the “spirit” of his thought. It is precisely when one remains faithful to the letter of Kant that one really betrays the core of his thought, the creative impulse underlying it. One should bring this paradox to its conclusion. It is not only that one can

remain really faithful to an author by way of betraying him (the actual letter of his thought); at a more radical level, the inverse statement holds even more, namely, one can only truly betray an author by way of repeating him, by way of remaining faithful to the core of his thought. If one does not repeat an author (in the authentic Kierkegaardian sense of the term), but merely “criticizes” him, moves elsewhere, turns him around, and so forth, this effectively means that one unknowingly remains within his horizon, his conceptual field. (Žižek 2004a: 13)

In other words, a successful repetition does not entail echoing the past verbatim as if it were sacred dogma, timeless wisdom, or university discourse. Because history exists, i.e., the present differs from the past, the current context requires one to repeat with a difference instead of restating the same. The idea is to bring out something within the original more than it was capable of doing so itself due to spatiotemporal and ideological circumscriptions and philosophical errors – a process reminiscent of the psychoanalytic definition of love and the etymology of “philosophy.” Žižek cites Deleuze’s notion of the “history of philosophy as a sort of buggery” to support this paradoxical notion of fidelity in betrayal (qtd. in Žižek 2004a: 46). Like Benjamin’s technique of reading against the grain, repeating involves discovering in philosophers’ “very theoretical practice procedures (of conceptual invention, of ‘staging’ concepts) that offer a way to undermine their ‘official’ position” (Žižek 2004a: 46).

Does Žižek repeat Jameson in this sense of betraying the letter of his texts and his “official” position to remain faithful to the innovative spirit of his theoretical procedures? That they both work within the same historical constellation poses an immediate challenge to considering their relationship one of repetition.

Jameson does not offer Žižek the historical distance afforded by Hegel, Lenin, or even Lacan, who write at different stages of capitalism’s development, but he is nevertheless Žižek’s predecessor, at least in the 1970s and ’80s. Furthermore, conceiving of Jameson as a theoretical event that Žižek repeats differs from considering him a theorist with his own conceptual field that one can betray for better or worse. In this more philosophical than historical context, Jameson

becomes very much Žižek's contemporary, so much so that we can invert the question: are there moments when Jameson repeats/betrays Žižek? Let's take up a few examples of their mutually reinforcing repetitions.

First and foremost, in many respects Žižek's career repeats Jameson's move in "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan" to reread Lacan dialectically and from a leftist perspective. In contrast to the Frankfurt School's use of psychoanalysis to supplement a proper Marxist analysis, Jameson turns to Lacan to unearth a series of homologies between these "unities-of-theory-and-practice" (Jameson 1977: 106). The famous opening chapter of Žižek's *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989), "How Did Marx Invent the Symptom?" develops another of these homologies in depth, that between dream logic and commodity form, and outlines its ramifications for ideology critique.⁷ In short, both seem committed to the possibilities of transcoding Lacanian psychoanalysis into Marxist terms, which of course Lacan himself began doing with his equating surplus-enjoyment with surplus-value. For example, while Jameson associates the Lacanian Real with "simply History itself" (Jameson 1977: 104), Žižek has consistently labelled the antagonism of class struggle as the Real – a notion that sounds more explicitly Marxist. In an exemplary case of repetition as a two-way street, Jameson returns to Lacan in his aforementioned contribution to Žižek's *Lacan: The Silent Partners*, and conducts a rhetorical analysis of Lacan's dialectical style that affirms Žižek's longstanding goal to rescue the French psychoanalyst from the clutches of poststructuralism.

Žižek has also repeated Jameson's longstanding critique of the "ideologies of theory" that accompanied the rise of postmodernity. His underrated book on Deleuze referenced above resonates with Jameson's essay "Marxism and Dualism in Deleuze," published in 1997 and republished as "Deleuze and Dualism" in 2009's *Valences of the Dialectic*. They agree that post-structuralism represents a regression from structuralism and its dialectical potential, and view Derrida with an ambivalence deriving from deconstruction's dialectical potentials

⁷ Samo Tomšič explores these homologies with remarkable depth in his 2015 book *The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan* (London: Verso). See, in particular, chapter 1, "The Unconscious Is Politics': From Saussure to Marx," pp. 13-78.

being thwarted by its ideological deployment in the American context, in particular.⁸ From their Hegelian perspective, we might say, poststructuralists underestimated the critical power of structuralism in critiquing structuralism's overestimation of its own critical powers.

Their understanding of theory as so many bourgeois philosophies dovetails with that of fellow leftist critic Terry Eagleton. The laudatory picture that Žižek paints of Lukács and his steadfast dedication to the notion of totality in his long-form postface to *A Defence of History and Class Consciousness: Tailism and the Dialectic* reiterates Jameson's resuscitation of the Hegelian Marxist for the English-speaking world in *Marxism and Form* and essays like "History and Class Consciousness as an Unfinished Project" and "Reflections on the Lukács-Brecht Debate." Indeed, one could argue that it was none other than Jameson who exemplified the practice of repeating, not only structuralist and poststructuralist thinkers by transcoding their theories through "the ultimate semantic precondition for the intelligibility of literary and cultural texts," i.e., Marxism, but also other figures of the Western Marxist tradition like Adorno, even at times employing a reading method similar to Lacan's *avec* technique to do so, e.g., his explication of Brecht through Barthes in *Brecht and Method* (1998) (Jameson 1981: 65). Žižek has consistently extended the purview of Jameson's criticism of leftist thinkers for not being left enough (e.g., Žižek's dialogue with Laclau and Butler, his charge that Badiou is a communist but not a Marxist, his analysis of French political philosophers in *The Ticklish Subject*, his quibbles with fellow Hegelians who liberalize instead of radicalize him, etc.), and his entries in Verso's *Revolutions* series, two books on Lenin, and engagement with Marx in *The Parallax View* and *Reading Marx* – a title that echoes Jameson's *Reading Capital* – make Žižek's humorous label of Jameson as a "Theorist of Revolutionary Philately" one that could easily be pinned on himself (Žižek 2004b: 112).

⁸ See, for example, Jameson (1972) *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*. Princeton: Princeton UP; and Žižek (2000) "History Against Historicism." *European Journal of English Studies*. Vol. 4, No. 2: 101-110.

The profound link between Jameson and Žižek exists not only in their methodological embrace of psychoanalysis for leftist critique and their common purpose to defend the Enlightenment tradition against the false radicalisms of postmodern philosophy,⁹ but also with regard to their similar style, broadly defined. By “style” I do not mean rhetorical choices per se; Jameson and Žižek write very different kinds of sentences, paragraphs, and chapters, formally speaking. Nevertheless, as I pointed out in an article I wrote for a regional academic journal on the development of Žižek’s theory of ideology, what Phillip Wegner has said about Jameson’s work can be applied to Žižek’s: “the entire expanded cultural and textual realm becomes grist for Jameson’s voracious analytical mill” (Wegner 2006: 264).¹⁰ Likewise, what Sean Homer calls Žižek’s “digressive, unsystematic and omnivorous style” aptly describes Jameson’s, with the caveat that Jameson’s books tend to be more systematically structured (Homer 2016: 67). This omnivorous style makes Jameson and Žižek more than culture vultures. Their ability to analyze literature, film, architecture, opera, painting, jokes, and a seemingly infinite array of aesthetic forms confirms their cultural studies bona fides. (Read enough Jameson and Žižek, and you will likely no longer be able to view the latest prestige television show from HBO or auteur production from Yorgos Lanthimos, genre cycles like the “dead girls show” (Alice Bolin) or the new wave in “woke” black media, or social media platforms such as Facebook or Snapchat, without thinking of how their symptomatic hermeneutics would turn these texts into so many allegories of Marxist and psychoanalytic principles.)¹¹ Following the linguistic turn’s expansive shift from work to text, the

⁹ “[I]t is crucial to insist to the end in the project of Enlightenment. Enlightenment remains an ‘unfinished project’ that has to be brought to its end, and this end is *not* the total scientific self-objectivization but – this wager has to be taken – a new figure of freedom that will emerge when we follow the logic of science to the end” (Žižek 2004: 133).

¹⁰ See Kirk Boyle (2011) “Ideology at the End of Times.” *Postscript*. Vol. 27, No. 1: 1-13. <http://pacpostscript.org/past-issues/postscript-21-30/postscript-27-1/ideology-at-the-end-of-time/>

¹¹ In a critique of both surface reading and symptomatic interpretation, Russell Sbriglia develops a theory of “fetishistic reading” that attempts to “shift our attention away from what texts (and their authors) unwittingly say and toward what, in the language of fetishistic disavowal, they know very well they’re saying but say all the same” (Sbriglia 2017: 108). Sbriglia pits Jameson as emblematic of symptomatic reading and its historicist assumptions against Žižek’s more psychoanalytically-informed ideology critique. The essay, which Burnham references, fits nicely with this issue’s focus, as does this issue with Sbriglia’s collection. See Russell Sbriglia (2017)

objects of Jameson's and Žižek's studies traverse disciplinary borders and epistemological categories as well: philosophical, scientific, political, and historical concerns accompany the cultural artifacts that litter their pages. As should be the case when confronting a genuine philosopher, one finds their ideas at work everywhere in the world.

What bears the semblance of postmodern style, however, does not imply allegiance to the ideologies of postmodern theory. Rather than embracing the cult of difference, a fidelity to the concept of truth occasions a certain homogeneity in their work. "The profound formal unity of his books" that Wegner observes of Jameson doubles as a description of Žižek's ever-expanding oeuvre, which Žižek has noted follows "a 'machinic' deployment of the line of thought" despite his books' "excessively and compulsively 'witty' texture" (Wegner 2006: 243; Žižek 1999: viii). It is their shared commitment to the dialectic that leads Jameson and Žižek to repeat the selfsame underlying premises and overarching assumptions throughout their respective decades-long corpora. They repeat Hegel in the sense that they apply his conceptual field to a whole host of contemporary phenomena that Hegel would have no possible way of knowing about. Although one could satirize them as wearing W.W.H.S. bracelets (What Would Hegel Say?),¹² they are careful not to betray Hegel by repeating his theoretical gestures within today's constellation. They not only frequently highlight Hegel's betrayals of his own thought, both in terms of logical inconsistencies and political missteps, but also they repeat Hegel by radicalizing him or, more accurately, by returning to the radical core that lies at the heart of his dialectical method (not unlike Marx before them, or what Lacan did with Freud). Theirs is a unique Hegel, one who would certainly be unrecognizable to the great German idealist if it were possible to resurrect him to query his thoughts on being turned into the logical foundation of the Left.

"The Symptoms of Ideology Critique." *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Literature but Were Afraid to Ask Žižek*. Ed Russell Sbriglia. Durham: Duke UP, 107-136.

¹² Much in the same way that readers of this special issue may be teased for wearing W.W.J.Ž.S. bracelets.

Three Mutually Exclusive Disparities

This introduction being an exercise in dialectical thinking, we can take these same three areas of overlap in Jameson and Žižek – Lacanian Marxism, postmodernity as late capitalism, and omnivorous dialectical style – to reveal potential disparities that complicate their correspondence. One way Žižek understands *disparity* in his recent book *Disparities* is as an “art of delimitation,” a “way of drawing a line that separates [dialectical materialism] from other deceptively similar forms of thought” (Žižek 2016: 5). Jameson and Žižek have drawn lines in the past that suggest they view each other’s thought as “deceptively similar.” For example, the question of whether Lacan or Marx takes precedence in their theoretical apparatus remains open. In an interview with Xudong Zhang from the late 1990s, Jameson remarks that “Žižek now wants to tell us that Lacanism...includes the dialectic and Marxism,” implying that for Žižek psychoanalysis usurps Marxism as a “privileged thought-mode” that can transcode between others (Jameson 2000: 158). In a 2000 interview in *Historical Materialism*, Žižek avers, “I don’t think that Lacanianism, even Lacanian psychoanalysis can directly substitute for a proper Marxist social analysis” (Žižek 2000: 183). Yet, in 2008, when asked whether he would call himself a Marxist by Ian Parker, Žižek wonders if anyone can be considered a Marxist today, including...Jameson!: “Is Fred Jameson a Marxist? I doubt it, even the latest Fred Jameson position is that the notion of ideology is totally useless and everything is just a narrative and so on. The last time I was shocked, he sounded practically like a kind of a vulgar version of Lyotard...” (Žižek 2008: 3). Žižek proceeds to distinguish his focus on Marx’s critique of the political economy from Jameson’s historical materialism. “Fred Jameson’s trick is to rely totally on Ernest Mandel I think,” Žižek remarks. “He knows nothing about the economy, Fred Jameson” (Žižek 2008: 4). Setting aside the fact that one could lob a similar criticism at Žižek’s economic literacy, Žižek seems to draw a line between “the one absolute and we may even say ‘transhistorical’ imperative of all dialectical thought...Always historicize!” and the concomitant task that Wegner frames,

when speaking of Jameson's work, as "Always totalize!" (Jameson 1981: 9; Wegner 2006: 241). Is the difference between Jameson and Žižek which dialectical commandment they tend to privilege, with Jameson preferring to historicize while Žižek totalizes? (See Flisfeder's essay for an elaboration on this divide between historical and dialectical materialism in their work.)

The role of historical analysis also demarcates Jameson's and Žižek's approaches to postmodernity. Each was ahead of the times three decades ago in reframing discussions of postmodernity away from facile aesthetic and theoretical celebrations of a liberation from metanarratives, subjectivity, and the like. Financial crises, information wars, and reality television stars with authoritarian inclinations signal the apotheosis of postmodernism as the cultural logic of neoliberal capitalism, and only confirm its political bankruptcy and essential conservatism. Nevertheless, periodizing has been more Jameson's bag than Žižek's. Despite Jameson's reservations about the practice, periodizing remains for him a method that we simply cannot do without.¹³ Absent the historical materialist procedure, it simply would not be possible to track the rise to dominance of any cultural production, to understand its emergence, to recognize the alterity of residual modes of existence, and to be attuned to those "seeds of time" that might sprout a post-capitalist future – the precise analytical moves that contour Jameson's *Poetics of Social Forms* project. Žižek, on the other hand, tends to reject analysis that smacks of genealogy for harboring an evolutionary determinism contrary to the retroactive effectivity of dialectical processes. This is not to imply that Jameson believes in a totalizing system in which history could not have played out differently in its more decisive moments (what Žižek, following Badiou, calls "events"). More to the point, Jameson's project seeks to understand the cultural and aesthetic forms that accompany the different stages of capitalism's history, while Žižek adopts a more polemical critique of our current ideological imbroglios: cynicism, the new super-egoic injunction to enjoy,

¹³ See Jameson (1988) "Periodizing the 60s." *The Ideologies of Theory Volume 2: Syntax of History*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 178-208; and also the opening chapter of Jameson (1991) *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke, 1-54.

multiculturalism and identity politics, Western Buddhism, fundamentalism, neo-fascism, etc. (That every other book Žižek produces could be considered a “political pamphlet” – Jameson’s own laudatory identification of their genre at a recent conference – is telling here.)

Even a cursory examination of their treatment of our postmodern era reveals different valences of the dialectic in their work. It’s rather banal to point out that an American literature professor will use the dialectical method differently than an Eastern European philosopher, especially when the latter has written brilliantly about Henry James and the former on Krzysztof Kieślowski. Yet, the centrality of narrative for Jameson nevertheless results in dialectical effects different from Žižek’s focus on the Real, the ontological gap in reality, or *disparity* in the strong sense where “A is not just not-B, it is also and primarily not fully A, and B emerges to fill in this gap” (Žižek 2016: 21). For Jameson, as he writes in his “apprehensive” review of what was once Žižek’s magnum opus, *The Parallax View*, Žižek’s theorization of the unnameable – even as he “rearticulate[s it] in the local terms of all the figurations into which it can be extrapolated” by renaming the Real *parallax* or *disparity*, or by qualifying it with an adjective: *scientific* Real, *Marxian* parallax, etc. – risks devolving into the reified jargon of a philosophical system in its own right (Jameson 2006).¹⁴ To be sure, Jameson recognizes this risk in Žižek’s work because his own flirts with the systematization peculiar to university discourse, the Marxist hermeneutic developed in *The Political Unconscious* being the most pronounced example. More and more, I get the impression that Žižek is fine with the charge of committing philosophy, of naming the unnameable and systematizing the unsystematizable, especially within the context of a world hellbent on capitulating to capitalist dictates regardless of the absolute chaos they unleash upon the Earth. Perhaps a “minimal anthropology,”

¹⁴ Contrary to popular opinion and Žižek’s own, I have come to prefer these political pamphlets to his philosophical tomes precisely because they rearticulate his insights in local terms. He also writes books like *Organs Without Bodies* and *The Incontinence of the Void* that fall somewhere in between, but interpreting his work via genre analysis – indeed a very Jamesonian thing to do! – is a line of thought to pursue at a future time.

albeit a dark one, is precisely what is needed at the present moment.¹⁵ It is not like Jameson is a stranger to dialectical practices encroaching upon the purview of social sciences, after all. Consider another claim from his take on *The Parallax View*:

Yet psychoanalysis always involves a tricky and unstable balance between the theorisation of an eternal human psyche and the historical singularity of culture and mores: the latter tilts you back into periodisation, while the “eternal” model is secured by the simple reminder that desire is never satisfied, whether you are a Victorian in thrall to duty or a postmodern intent on pleasure. (Jameson 2006)

Zeroing in on this “tricky and unstable balance” between the eternal and the historical returns us to the original question regarding the nature of Žižek’s relationship to Jameson’s project.

The first point to make is that this “tricky and unstable balance” between universality and particularity is immanent to the dialectical method. Consider that one could say much the same about Marxism as Jameson does psychoanalysis: a tension exists between Marxism’s premise that the history of all hitherto societies is the history of class struggle and Marxism’s almost exclusive practice of critiquing the manifestations of class struggle within the history of capitalism specifically. As noted above, psychoanalysis has a homologous relationship with Marxism, but the question of how one practices both simultaneously persists. Is one “contained” by the other? Is psychoanalysis a useful way to do *Ideologiekritik* within a more historical materialist framework, or is psychoanalysis more dialectically materialist than Marxism itself, offering a fuller picture of how society functions and changes?¹⁶

I am of the mind that it is paradoxically possible for psychoanalysis to be at once historicized within capitalist modernity while also remaining a relatively

¹⁵ I defend this exact thesis within the context of climate instability in Kirk Boyle (2018) “The Missing Element Is the Human Element’: Ontological Difference and the World-Ecological Crisis of the Capitalocene.” *Eco-Culture: Disaster, Narrative, Discourse*. Eds. Robert Bell and Robert Ficociello. Lanham: Lexington Books, 131-154.

¹⁶ Practically speaking, does one place psychoanalysis before or after Marxism on a Theory syllabus, Žižek before or after Jameson? (Perhaps before *and* after, or perhaps Jameson before and after Žižek?)

autonomous leftist praxis. The key is to distinguish different temporal registers of analysis or, to borrow from Bakhtin, *analytical* chronotopes (which are certainly not opposed to those of the narrative variety). When psychoanalysis and Marxism speak of the real of sexual antagonism and the real of class struggle, respectively, they operate within an “eternal” analytical chronotope. (The scare quotes indicate that what has been true for all human history need not be true for human futurity, thus “eternal” proves ultimately to be a historical category.) Marxism and psychoanalysis also share an epochal analytical chronotope. At this temporal register, the *longue durée* of capitalist modernity provides the historical horizon of analysis, but so do premodern epochs like the medieval and ancient. Žižek’s defense of Cartesian subjectivity, for example, applies to the five-hundred-year epoch of modernity. Analysis at this level is less abstract than that of the “eternal” mode, but it is more abstract than the periodization chronotope of analysis, to say nothing of the fine-tuned “positivistic” analytical chronotope of professional historians that obsesses over getting the particularities right but traditionally at the expense of seeing the forest for the trees.

Much confusion could be avoided if we acknowledge what I am calling the “temporal parallax” of historical materialist analysis. We would see that Žižek’s privileging of Hegel over Marx stems from his proclivity to ground his analysis within an epochal chronotope (e.g., “Hegelian dialectics is, at its most basic, a theory of modernity, a theory of the break between tradition and modernity...” (Žižek 2016: 3)), with his more speculative shifts to the “eternal” mode characteristic of his Lacanian-heavy work.¹⁷ Jameson tends to work within the periodization chronotope, but he makes frequent analytical shifts to the same epochal chronotope of Žižek, albeit with a stronger emphasis on capital instead of science demarcating modernity from prior history, hence his privileging of Marx over Hegel. Hence also the paradox, mentioned by Burnham in his book on Jameson and the film *The Wolf of Wall Street*, that “For some critics, Jameson’s turn to history is both too general and too specific at the same time” (Burnham

¹⁷ Again, Jameson’s review proves perspicacious: “Indeed, some of [Žižek’s] basic propositions are unthinkable except within the framework of the epochal, and of some new moment of capitalism itself.”

2016: 20). What critics seem to have a problem with when it comes to both Jameson and Žižek is their willingness to follow the dialectic as it makes allegorical leaps of interpretation between analytical chronotopes, breaching disciplinary borders in the process. Perhaps interdisciplinarity should be viewed as a method as much about switching between temporal registers as it is about transcoding epistemological approaches.¹⁸

The temporal parallax may also address objections to the vein of crude thinking that underpins their scholastic, wide-ranging treatment of topics communist, fascist, and everything bourgeois in between. As Jameson attributes to Brecht, “every hyperintellectual or philosophical Marxism ought to carry a vulgar one inside it” (Jameson 2009: 404). Does not vulgar class analysis assume an eternal chronotope, with sophisticated Marxist analyses being attuned to the stochastic causal webs of different space-times coming into conflict? In the contemporary U.S., for example, neoliberal hegemony has redistributed wealth upward to obscene levels of inequality, as capitalism in its financial stages is wont to do; at the same time, a plague of ideological fantasies of race, religion, rights – you name it – and their attendant histories intersect with class (and sexual) antagonism to complicate matters and necessitate refined analysis.

Yet, at the same time, I wonder if I may not have it backwards here, and that it is also true, paradoxically so, for the historical analysis of particularities to be on the side of vulgarity while hyperintellectual or philosophical analysis grapples with eternal universalities. What if, at the end of the day, Jameson and Žižek are good friends because they are both Marxist Hegelians? I have always been struck by their mutual acknowledgment of, even insistence on, subjectivity and an existential level of analysis that, true to the dialectic, must work in tandem with social analysis of the totality. (Zalloua addresses their shared connection to

¹⁸ My discussion of different modes of historical analysis owes a debt of gratitude to Sean Homer. First noticing a connection between Jameson and Žižek in 2001, Homer – who has since written a short book attacking Žižek’s politics – conducts a comparative reading of their conceptions of the Real and its implications for historical analysis in his 2006 “Narratives of History, Narratives of Time.” In this essay Homer writes, “it is not inconsistent to posit a differential notion of temporality, or what [Peter] Osborne [in *The Politics of Time* (Verso 1995)] calls alternative temporalizations of history, with an insistence on history as a collective singular. We are simply referring to different levels of experience and abstraction here” (Homer 2006: 86).

existentialism in his contribution.) Nevertheless, right at this point in which we stumble upon their profound intellectual affinity, a potential disparity lies waiting. While Žižek has drawn from Lacan to fruitfully theorize about ethical and even political acts (the analyses in *The Ticklish Subject* come to mind), Jameson has always adopted the Nietzschean critique of ethics as binary thinking. Jameson has consistently critiqued moralist Marxism as a political dead-end, and now with his *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*, asks us to consider the possibility that the political itself might be a fool's errand for socialist struggle: he writes, "We must cure ourselves of the habit of thinking politically, for politics is the art of power and of the state. If the latter is effectively to wither away, then we must confidently expect political theory to wither away along with it" (Jameson 2016: 22). While Žižek has responded positively to Jameson's provocative recuperation of the idea of "dual power," he believes politics and "how to rethink the state" to be ineliminable problems, echoing his claim from *The Parallax View* that "With regard to this split [between 'pure politicians' and 'the economists'], today, more than ever, we should return to Lenin: yes, the economy is the key domain, the battle will be decided there, one has to break the spell of global capitalism—but the intervention should be properly *political*, not economic," which none other than Jameson approvingly quotes in his review (Jameson 2016: 306; Žižek 2006: 320).

I find it fitting to end this initial foray into theorizing the intersections of Jameson's and Žižek's work with a series of questions that linger beyond their back-and-forth in *An American Utopia*: how do we configure the relationship between the moral, ethical, political, and economical, especially in an era of postmodern authoritarian capitalism? How might the temporal parallax apply to the delineation of these categories of intersubjectivity? Do economic acts, whether instigated by powerful individual actors or collectively by democratic coalitions, supersede or exemplify ethical acts? Must socialist/communist utopianism address moral, ethical, and political dimensions, or does it suffice to intervene only economically, acknowledging that alienation, envy, resentment,

and social antagonism will always be with us? Can modernity be defended not only against its detractors but also from itself?

To Conclude with a Proper Introduction

Our contributors touch on many of the issues I have raised and questions I have posed. The issue begins with Matthew Flisfeder's thorough examination of how Jameson and Žižek theorize the demise of symbolic efficiency in postmodernity. For Flisfeder, the "objective code" of Jameson's historical materialist approach to the historicity of the signifier in postmodernity "occup[ies] a parallax position of sorts" in relation to the "subjective code" of Žižek's dialectical materialist critique of the perverted subject that reigns dominant in late capitalism (24). Historical and dialectical materialism represent two sides of the same coin of what, borrowing from Bruno Bosteels, Flisfeder refers to as "structural causality" (34). This focus on causality as structural allows for a proper historical understanding of the critical limitations of post-Marxist celebrations of transgressive perversion, for what once proved subversive in an earlier modernist stage of capitalism now has become the ruling ideology of postmodernity. Flisfeder concludes by offering some further illuminating connections between Jameson and Žižek – on how cognitive mapping entails producing new Master signifiers (45-46), on how reified utopias should be replaced with realist ones (48-49) – that present possible avenues for escaping the deadlocks of capital's "evisceration of the signifier" (24) and its foreclosure of the New.

Ed Graham and Zahi Zalloua take up more specific connections between Jameson and Žižek within the context of postmodernity. For Graham, the same parallax Flisfeder finds between Jameson's historical and Žižek's dialectical materialism also rears its head when the two turn to Adorno to engage in utopian hermeneutics. Although Graham locates a similarity in their conception of utopia not as "a blueprint for a better world, but as a defamiliarizing strategy for thinking against the widespread conviction that there is no alternative," he nonetheless identifies how their approach to Adorno reveals "different starting points in each thinker's respective form of Marxism" (59-78). On one hand, Jameson's

sustained engagement with Adorno unearths utopian potentials in the conflicting narratives of the ruling and oppressed classes with regard to art and production that prove applicable to the historical conditions of our postmodern world. On the other hand, Žižek's occasional references to Adorno build a case for why utopianism cannot be based on eliminating the excessive, non-narrative, non-historical "kernel of *jouissance* that is the starting point for any politics" (77). Graham concludes, again not unlike Flisfeder, by arguing that both Jameson's and Žižek's approaches are necessary for thinking through the utopian potentials of the environmental crisis and Lenin's conception of "dual power."

Zalloua submits an extended case study of the Palestinian question to stage how Žižek's engagement with advocates of decoloniality repeats Jameson's troubles with postcolonial theorists after the publication of his infamous essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" in 1986. Zalloua's wide-ranging discussion begins by pointing out how Walter D. Mignolo's critique of Žižek mirrors R. Radhakrishnan's critique of Jameson, which itself was reminiscent of Fanon's attack on Sartre's view of the *négritude* movement. In essence, Žižek repeats Jameson who repeats Sartre, all of whom get denounced for a universalist Eurocentrism that erases the particular struggles of former colonial subjects. Against decolonial particularity *and* abstract universalism, Zalloua defends the dialectical "model of universality that confronts the exclusionary logic of Eurocentrism," a model which he finds at work not only in Žižek but also in postcolonial thinkers like Fanon and Said (92). An extended application of Žižek's theorizations of the Neighbor, the feminine non-all, the "part of no-part," anti-Semitism, love, and the Real of sexual antagonism as it applies to politics at large, follows as Zalloua lays out the theoretical soundness of binationalism compared with the "cruel optimism" and "pacifying pragmatism" of "the fantasy of the two-state solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (102, 103, 109). Though Žižek predominates in Zalloua's analysis, Jameson and Žižek's shared denouncement of the contemporary tendency to de-politicize and culturalize the political economic problems of neoliberal capitalism into so many ethical squabbles runs throughout his argument.

Finally, Clint Burnham assumes a meta-theoretical level of analysis that returns us to the topic at hand in this special issue: how do differences between Jameson and Žižek relate? I have already touched on his method above as a way to introduce the entire issue: the speculative move to read Jameson *avec* Žižek, and vice versa, and then each *sans* the other (124). This thought experiment opens up a space for employing each as an “instrument for performing certain critical tasks on” the other (127). Echoing Graham by positing Adorno as a source for both Jameson’s and Žižek’s dialectical writing, Burnham then reproduces, for all intents and purposes, the primary distinction Flisfeder lays out between the two: the historical materialism of Jameson’s Marxism versus the dialectical materialism of Žižek’s psychoanalysis. Burnham connects these dialectical approaches via their shared notion of contingency-cum-necessity, which he opposes to historicism’s groundless embrace of contingency (16). He then frames Jeff Wall’s lightbox photograph *Untangling* as a dialectical image of the intertwined work Jameson’s Marxism and Žižek’s psychoanalysis carries out (140-141). Burnham’s bravura performance concludes with a semiotic rectangle that once again maps out their relationship as a “difference that relates” (139), but this time by enlisting Lacan’s formulas of sexuation...and also us readers.

Our final two contributors need no introduction in this rhetorical context, especially considering the fact that this entire issue functions as an introduction of sorts to their work. So I will spare you, the reader, that redundancy and instead invite you to dive into these analyses to discern for yourself how Žižek repeats Jameson and Jameson encounters Žižek. Now, the editorial superego exclaims, Enjoy!

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