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The Figure of Adorno in the Utopian Politics of Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek¹

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Incorporating a diverse and eclectic range of theory and cultural forms, both Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek have persistently foregrounded Marxist questions of ideology, totality and utopia at points where they seem unfashionable and outmoded. As a phrase attributable to both thinkers, Jameson and Žižek share a commitment to writing in and against a time where it has become “easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.” Broadly speaking, in terms of a shared politics, both advocate seeing the system whole and keeping open the possibility of an “outside” to capitalism. As shown in his call for an aesthetic of cognitive mapping, the enabling of “a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society’s structures as a whole,” Jameson’s insistence on retaining the category of totality under a nominalist postmodern social order is related to keeping alive “the very idea of utopia” (Jameson 1991: 51; Jameson 1988: 6). Similarly, though not addressing utopia explicitly, for Žižek a return to Hegel today means deploying totality for critical, emancipatory ends: “The Hegelian totality is not the ideal of an organic Whole, but a critical notion” (Žižek 2012: 253). To differing degrees, as this article will show, there is a similar utopian undercurrent to Jameson’s and Žižek’s thought, that is, utopian not in the sense of committing to a blueprint for a better world, but as a defamiliarizing strategy for thinking against the widespread conviction that there is no alternative.

There are, however, some significant differences between Jameson and Žižek that should not be overlooked. While the shared interest in Hegel could certainly be a way of examining some of these divergences, this article will instead examine the figure of Theodor W. Adorno in the work of Jameson and Žižek. I will argue that, through attention to what both Jameson and Žižek view as lacking and in need of modification in Adorno, we can underscore a common, utopian ground to their respective politics, yet also recognize some underlying methodological differences.

Throughout his career, the study of utopia, the detective-work of uncovering traces of collective longing in even the most degraded cultural artefacts or areas of life, has been central to Jameson's work. As John Pizer (1993) argues, Adorno plays no small role in the aforementioned project. Despite Adorno's hostility to "the collective as a blind fury of activity" (Adorno 2005: 156), and his imageless materialism that bans the pre-determination of a future where all social antagonisms are reconciled (*Bilderverbot*), Jameson creatively rereads parts of Adorno to spark renewed interest in utopian thinking. The most sustained engagement of Jameson's utopian rereading can be found in *Late Marxism* (1990) [*LM*], his monograph that aimed to revitalize Marxist thought at a time of its waning, and a similar reading can be found in a section from *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005) [*AF*] which addresses utopia more explicitly. In the former, Jameson argues that Adorno's ideology critique has limited reach if taken on its own terms, and that closer attention to the latter's hidden libidinal investments is more useful for the postmodern age. I will focus on the "Parable of the Oarsmen" section of *LM*, where, despite acknowledging the historical limitations of his thinking, Jameson shows how Adorno's remarks on art, aesthetics and the culture industry "become characters and their abstract ballet turns out to be transferable to areas very different from art," revealing a number of utopian impulses (Jameson 1990: 134). In *AF*, Jameson's reading of the apparently "universally acknowledged zero degree of Utopian realization" embodied in Adorno's minimal utopian demand, turns out to be ideologically inseparable from multiple utopian narratives (Jameson 2005: 175). There is a line which follows from the framing of the Frankfurt School thinker in terms of narrative and utopia that feeds into Jameson's broader, more recent, critical utopian project. Like his readings of Adorno, for Jameson utopian speculation is allegorical rather than symbolic (Jameson 2010: 415), requiring the interpretation of multiple narratives, not for uncovering one formula to reconstruct society perfectly, but to instead keep alive and sharpen utopian thinking at a moment when it seems impossible. Therefore, rather than put Jameson in dialogue with Adorno, I am interested in how the latter appears in allegorical, figurative terms in the former's theory.

In his philosophical commitment to negativity and insistence on universal antagonism, Žižek seems far removed from this kind of utopian detective-work that is grounded in narrative and attentive to historical context. Insofar as there is a utopian undercurrent to Žižek's politics, it is distinct from Jameson in its privileging of

Lacanian psychoanalysis over Western Marxism. In particular, Žižek's psychoanalytic-Marxist articulation of the symptom underscores the uniqueness of his politics. For Todd McGowan the symptom is "perhaps the primary category in Žižek's conception of politics" (McGowan 2014: 242), arguing that, especially in his later works, Žižek constructs a form of utopianism out of his focus on the non-historical symptom:

a utopianism in which a community forms from the excluded rather than through a universal inclusion. All those who exist outside the system as its symptoms can come together in a universal solidarity. This solidarity would not involve any sense of belonging because what the subjects have in common is only their exclusion or symptomatic status. (McGowan 2014: 244)

Unlike Jameson, Žižek has not written any book-length study of Adorno, nor does he provide any particularly sustained engagement with him. Nonetheless, focusing on some key moments that address Adorno's shortcomings and limitations show not only the relevance of this critique for Žižek's utopianism of the excluded; they also highlight some crucial methodological differences between him and Jameson. This article will begin by foregrounding some of these differences. It will proceed, chronologically, by firstly exploring how Žižek views Adorno's ideology critique to be lacking because it does not account for a Lacanian theory of the subject's *jouissance* as ontologically irreducible, as non-historical, while Jameson, in *LM*, perceives Adorno's ideology critique to be lacking in a historical sense, not yet attuned to the demands of postmodern culture. If for Jameson the Adornian critique must be supplemented by attention to the historical, Žižek instead focuses on the non-historical and, in terms of utopia, on the moments in Adorno's writing which foreclose historicization. His remarks in both *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) [SO] and *The Parallax View* (2006) [PV] foreground this distinction with a theoretically distinct utopian emphasis. Whereas for Jameson utopian thinking requires attention to narrative, to the tensions within multiple representations of alternative life-worlds, Žižek's utopianism of the symptomatically excluded entails something which cannot be narrativized, which eludes historicization or context-situatedness. The second half of this paper will tease this difference out by comparing two passages, one from *AF*, the other from *PV*. I will show here that, for both Jameson and Žižek there is something missing from the Adornian critique that could revive utopian thought in line with today's global capitalism, turning Adorno's approach into what Jameson

calls a “late Marxism.” A close reading of these respective interpretations of Adorno therefore allows us to recognize some differences in Jameson’s and Žižek’s utopian politics. At the same time, within each there is a similar dialectic between narrative and non-narrative which may be helpful for stimulating utopian thought today. Rather than stress fundamental, irreconcilable differences, I suggest we read these different utopian emphases productively alongside one another. Doing so amounts to viewing Jameson’s and Žižek’s varying emphases on narrative and non-narrative as different perspectives on the same phenomena, as ways of tracing a “seed of imagination” within the objective structure of late capitalism.

Žižek and the Limits of Marxist Ideology Critique

In the wake of the collapse of actually-existing-socialism in 1989, both Jameson’s and Žižek’s work around this period grapples with the question of Marxism in an atmosphere of triumphant liberal capitalism. This was a problem not only for the ideological and political sphere. Academia, too, remained beholden to a wave of theory that, though by no means necessarily anti-Marxist, remained suspicious of certain Marxist categories like ideology, totality and utopia – from Jacques Derrida’s linguistic deconstruction to Gilles Deleuze’s valorization of flux and the aleatory, and even Ernst Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s post-Marxism. The coming-to-terms with the flaws of the Soviet Union meant that, even on the left, categories like totality and utopia were too frequently aligned with totalitarianism and the suppression of difference.

Of course, the above historical context by no means suggests that, in works like *SO* and *LM*, Žižek and Jameson merely orthodoxly reassert categories of totality and utopia. Whether explicitly or implicitly, both grapple with the legacy of the Western Marxist tradition and reassess some of its key touchstones in the context of late capitalism. Žižek’s reformulation of ideology critique in *SO*, for example, builds on and departs from that offered by Adorno. He endorses the insight offered by Adorno (and Horkheimer) in works like *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2002) [*DE*] and “The Schema of Mass Culture” (1991) that one’s relationship with their surroundings is inseparable from capitalism’s propagation of certain “false” needs. For Adorno, on an everyday level capitalism creates a set of false needs which the individual is nonetheless complicit in maintaining, a kind of “baby-food” of “permanent self-reflection based upon the infantile compulsion towards the repetition of needs which

it creates in the first place” (Adorno 1991: 67). Yet, Žižek argues that Adorno lacks a theory that sufficiently accounts for how ideology structures our practices and beliefs; Adorno’s theory merely remains at the level of consciousness.² For Žižek, our age is one of cynical reason, where people know what they are doing yet continue to do it anyway. In other words, the system’s functioning does not require that individuals actually believe what the powers that be proclaim; it has become possible to act according to the system’s logic whilst also being cynically detached from its actual content. On the surface, cynical reason would seemingly merit the conclusion that ideology critique is redundant. For what is the use of unmasking a real state of affairs when people already know that lies function as truth? For Žižek it is this premise – that ideology is not simply a lie but a lie experienced as truth, which only pretends to be taken seriously (Žižek 1989: 27) – that brings Adorno dangerously close to a post-ideological view. Given the apparent tendency toward total integration under modern society, Adorno speculates whether ideology will even be necessary in the future.

Žižek wants to rescue a form of ideology critique that accounts for the continuation of our fetishistic practices even while we supposedly do not believe in them. For example, no one would claim to believe that money really has a magical quality to it, yet people still act like it does – how do we account for this disjunction? Too much emphasis on cynical consciousness leaves untouched the fundamental level of ideological fantasy, the level on which ideology structures social reality itself. Adorno’s valuable insight that ideology is not merely illusion or false consciousness (requiring participation of the subject), nonetheless does not go far enough, as it lacks a conception of ideology as the unconscious structuring of our everyday practices.

In some sense, Adorno’s perceived shortcomings are historical because he is unable to foresee the spread of cynical reason so characteristic of Žižek’s time. Yet, they also reflect some deeper philosophical issues Žižek takes with Marxist ideology critique more broadly. An investigation into the fundamental level of ideology as unconscious fantasy demands attention to the subject’s *jouissance* – the traumatic Real of desire which resists full incorporation into the ideological apparatus yet is

² On the question of whether this is a misreading, which I will not go into here, see Bogdon, Ciprian (2016) “The Sublime Gesture of Ideology. An Adornian Response to Žižek.” *International Journal of Žizek Studies*. Volume 10, no. 3. Web. <http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/IJZS/article/view/979>

nevertheless a condition of ideology's functioning. For Žižek, Louis Althusser's theory of ideological interpellation fails to account for the ontologically irreducible *jouissance* that pre-figures any identification, recognition, subjectivation: "this leftover, far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command, is the very condition of it" (Žižek 1989: 43). What is important to notice here is Žižek's introduction of an account of the subject's *jouissance* which precludes easy incorporation into the symbolic universe of ideology. Our everyday, fetishistic practices depend not on smooth assimilation into a system, but instead on a traumatic residue stained with enjoyment, on *jouissance*. *Jouissance* also denotes lack at the same time it denotes excessive pleasure; the very bedrock of subjectivity is an extreme pleasure/pain which "the subject can never 'subjectivize', assume, integrate" (Žižek 1989: 61). It is an intrusion, an "ontological aberration" of the subject's symbolic universe which is nonetheless integral to that universe's functioning.

The Lacanian notion of *jouissance* explains how ideology depends on a kernel of enjoyment which remains the same in all possible (symbolic) universes (Žižek 1989: 62-3). For Žižek it is precisely this notion of *jouissance* as ontologically irreducible, as *not* historical, which the predominant Marxist view fatally overlooks. The uncovering of a positive network of historical, social relations must recognize its non-historical constituent:

If over-rapid universalization produces a quasi-universal Image whose function is to make us blind to its historical, socio-symbolic determination, over-rapid historicization makes us blind to the real kernel which returns as the same through diverse historicizations/symbolizations. (Žižek 1989: 51)

Žižek shows us that Adorno's critique lacks a non-historical positing of *jouissance*, and therefore addresses the inadequacy of Marxist "symptomatic" interpretation – the identifying of ideological blind-spots that betray hidden social relations – for overlooking its own preconditions. While both these propositions are important for comprehending Žižek's reformulation of ideology critique, they will also prove vital for understanding the utopian undercurrent in the latter part of this paper. For if utopianism amounts to the possibility of thinking an outside or alternative to capitalism, then ignoring this traumatic, excessive residue of *jouissance*, as in traditional Marxist analysis, overlooks not only the preconditions of ideology, but also potential points of rupture.

Jameson's Adorno in the Postmodern

Focusing on the infamous "Culture Industry," in *LM*, Jameson similarly addresses the shortcomings of Adorno and Horkheimer's ideology critique. Rather than a Lacanian theory of the subject, however, for Jameson what is missing is a conception of culture, one that would account for the condition of postmodernity. In his various analyses of postmodernism, Jameson argues that the period of late, finance-driven capitalism marks an expansion and saturation of commercialization into daily life, in which leisure-time and aesthetic experience are increasingly subordinate to the logic of exchange-value and available for consumption. As everyday life increasingly takes on an aesthetic dimension, paradoxically the old conception of the aesthetic as an enclave of negation, of resistance, no longer seems viable: "the real world has already been suffused with culture and colonized by it, so that it has no outside in terms of which it could be found lacking" (Jameson 1997: 262). While Adorno and Horkheimer presciently saw many of these postmodern aspects – for example, that "even during their leisure time, consumers must orient themselves according to the unity of production" (Adorno and Horkheimer 2002: 98) – their commitment to the determinate negation of aesthetic modernism nevertheless presupposed the "possibility of the positioning of the cultural act outside the massive Being of capital" (Jameson 1991: 48).

For Jameson, it is instead something like Raymond Williams' account of hegemony, whereby culture is conceived as a lived system of meanings and values that dominate and subordinate particular classes (Jameson 1990: 143), that would be appropriate for the postmodern period. Adorno and Horkheimer's analysis is restricted by certain historical factors that are no longer appropriate for postmodernism:

the "Culture Industry" is not a theory of culture but the theory of an industry, of a branch of the interlocking monopolies of late capitalism that makes money out of what used to be called culture. The topic here is the commercialization of life, and the co-authors are closer to having a theory of "daily life" than they are to having one of "culture" itself in any contemporary sense. For Williams' theory is, despite his seeming nostalgia, a very contemporary one indeed, which corresponds to an acculturation of social life far more thoroughgoing and "total" than could have been conceived in the 1930s (when, with industrial

mass production of cultural goods – so-called Fordism – the process was only beginning). Adorno and Horkheimer remain “modern” in this sense because although they presciently enumerated a whole range of tendencies in what was to become image-society, they could scarcely anticipate the dialectical transformation of quantity into quality that the intensification of the process would entail. (Jameson 1990: 144)

Jameson argues that much of the misunderstanding surrounding *DE*'s Culture Industry chapter stems from reading it as a theory of culture, when in fact it remains at the level of ideology critique: “‘ideology’ is still here the central concept and has not yet been modified by the demands of a postmodern social order (as, for example, in Althusser’s revision)” (Jameson 1990: 144). Like Žižek, he sees the analysis as beholden to certain limitations of Classical Marxism, yet for Jameson it is the historical condition of postmodernity, rather than the Real non-historical kernel of jouissance, that must be reckoned with. Furthermore, for Jameson Adorno and Horkheimer’s “more metaphysical propositions about the mimetic impulse” are a hindrance that explain an image or spectacle society “too easily and naturalistically” (Jameson 1990: 150). Jameson’s remarks here suggest that, unlike Žižek, ideology critique does not require a non-historical supplement.

If not the metaphysical dimension, nor the no longer historically apposite ideology critique, what, for Jameson, is it about Adorno that is so helpful in the postmodern moment? As outlined earlier, *LM* was written at a low-point of Marxist theory. Jameson argues that the cultural dominant of postmodernity poses a challenge for Marxist questions of totality. Existentially, postmodernism marks an increased inability to see the totality of capitalist social relations. The intensity of globalization and speed – of a consumer-driven and perpetually-present information society – effaces the possibility of seeing the system whole and therefore of replacing it with a different social order. In *LM* Jameson underscores the significance of Adorno’s deployment of totality as a critical category, not a celebration of the economic system as a whole, but rather a dialectical, critical engagement with the whole “to salvage or help to establish what does not obey totality, what opposes it or what first forms itself as the potential of a not yet existent individuation” (Jameson 1990: 232). For commentators like Robert Tally Jr., the way Adorno shows how even the minutest everyday forms of domination are inseparable from the totality of

capitalist social relations (Tally 2014: 82) becomes, for Jameson, a remedy against the era's reduction of everything to the particular.

But what about utopia, that other stigmatized category? Beyond totality, how might Adorno allow us to persist with the possibility of thinking the unthinkable, of thinking beyond capitalism? Throughout part II of *LM* Jameson pushes us to consider Adorno's views on art, the aesthetic and the culture industry as an unfolding narrative between different textual actants. By way of re-reading Adorno and Horkheimer's parable of the oarsmen (detailed below), Jameson extracts four oppositional terms or "characters" from Adorno's corpus that foreground the persistence of a utopian impulse "transferable to areas very different from art" (Jameson 1990: 134). In the following, I will show how Jameson arrives at this utopian reading and how, in focusing on narrative, it foreshadows the broader critical utopian project in *AF*, where, once again, Adorno figures.

Adorno, narrative and utopia

In part II of *LM*, Jameson inquires "into the way in which Adorno conceives of the negative or 'opposite' of art" (Jameson 1990: 151). Instead of reading *Aesthetic Theory* [*AT*] as a stand-alone text that offers an elitist view of art, Jameson is interested in how Adorno conceives "the new, the [great] works, the 'spirit'" of art in the negative terms of: Non-Art, Anti-Art and Philistinism (Jameson 1990: 151). Non-Art, the negation, denotes awareness but no conception of art; Anti-Art, the oppositional term, can be defined as the false aesthetic sublimation offered by mass commercial entertainment (or the Culture Industry); and finally, Philistinism constitutes "a generalized negation of the other three terms" marked by a hatred of art that understands it only too well (Jameson 1990: 151). Jameson outlines these terms in the two diagrams below, the second of which is transposed onto the broader social plane:

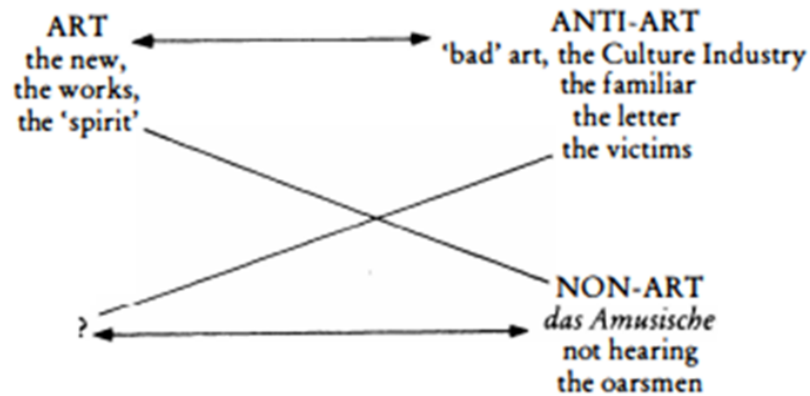


Fig. 1. Semiotic Square of Adorno and Art (Jameson 1990: 151)

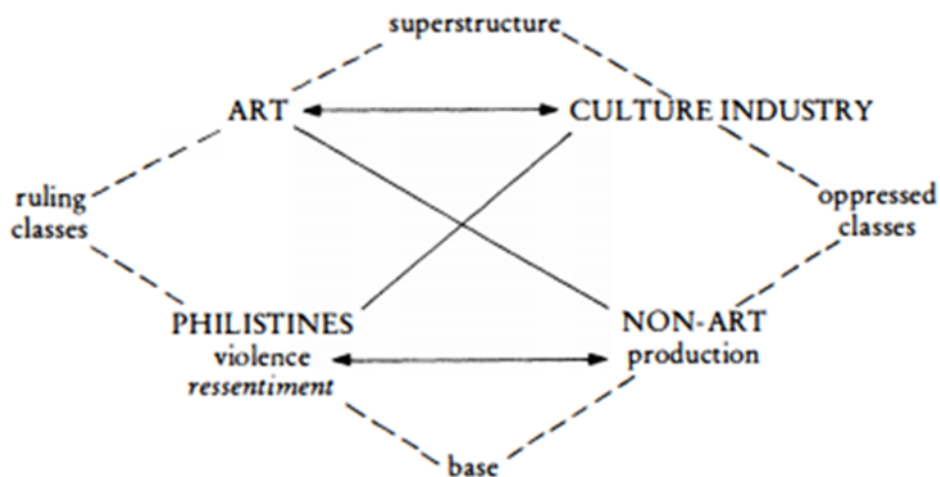


Fig. 2. Completed Semiotic Square of Adorno and Art (Jameson 1990: 154)

While it is difficult to give this remarkable reading justice, in the following I will elucidate some of the utopian elements Jameson identifies. In particular, I will focus on the characters of Non-Art and the Philistines, showing how, within each of these negations, Jameson draws out a utopian impulse that has application beyond the sphere of art. Thereafter, I argue that Jameson's identification of multiple utopian narratives, through the figure of Adorno, feeds into his broader critical project.

Jameson maps the above-mentioned oppositional terms by reading *AT* in dialogue with parts of *DE*, including, but not limited to, the retelling of Odysseus and the Sirens and the Culture Industry section. In doing so, he foregrounds the

inseparability of social class and history from art in Adorno's work, an inseparability that is strikingly apparent in the Sirens episode. For Jameson, this retelling is "the primal myth of Adorno's aesthetic theory," and it allows him to draw out the first oppositional term of Non-Art (Jameson 1990: 129). For Adorno and Horkheimer, beyond staging the foundations of bourgeois subjecthood and self-consciousness, the twofold solution devised to avoid the luring call of the Sirens' song reads as an allegory for the differing relationship to art embodied by the working class and the bourgeoisie. On the one hand, Odysseus' crew have their ears plugged and must focus on the labour of rowing past the sirens. They "must always face forward and ignore the incidental" and "thereby come to incarnate the practical realm" (Adorno and Horkheimer qtd. in Jameson 1990: 129). In the same way that the oarsmen "know only the danger of the song, but nothing of its beauty" (Adorno and Horkheimer qtd. in Jameson 1990: 129), the labouring masses are aware of but excluded from the powers of art. The privilege of art is reserved for the bourgeoisie, who are represented in the figure of Odysseus. His ears unblocked, yet shackled to the mast while his crew row, Odysseus represents the class that experiences the beauty of art yet, given their dependence on the toil of the working-class, can only fixate and therefore neutralize this beauty as an object of contemplation. Rather than genuine freedom, the motionless contemplation of the bourgeoisie at a concert reveals that art has become fixed as an object of consumption. In a dialectical twist that mirrors Hegel's master/slave dialectic, it is then the "unhearing laborers" that "learn something more profound about the 'individual work of art' to which they themselves are deaf" (Jameson 1990: 130).

Jameson then proposes that the unhearing laborers who occupy the negative narrative term of Non-Art betray a utopian impulse in the contemporary period. He argues that the figures of the oarsmen reappear in another passage of *DE*, where Adorno and Horkheimer identify a utopian enclave within the totalizing logic of the Culture Industry. In this passage, they suggest that for marginalized figures such as the housewife, the "darkness of the movie theater" provides:

a place of refuge where she can sit for a few hours with nobody watching, just as she once used to look out of the window, when there were still private homes and "free time" after work. The unemployed of the great cities find coolness in summer and warmth in winter in these temperature-controlled locations. (Adorno and Horkheimer qtd. in Jameson 1990: 136-7)

Thus, in Jameson's re-reading, the figure of the unhearing oarsmen is bound-up with the "‘marginals’ of contemporary radical rhetoric (...) in the persons of women and the unemployed" (Jameson 1990: 137). For those excluded individuals who cannot see the mesmerizing lure of art, whether the Siren's song or the movie screen, there is a "resting place," a kind of utopian enclave marked in its negation of not merely art but also the class-system out of which art emerges, "art as luxury and class privilege" and its attending guilt (Jameson 1990: 137, 130). In other works, for example in *AF*, Jameson defines utopia as an imaginary, spatially differentiating enclave. Against the apparently irreversible tide of progress and modernity, the utopian space forms an imaginary enclave within real social space, wherein the marginalized or excluded retains the possibility of an alternative (Jameson 2005: 15). In Jameson's creative reading of Adorno, we can see a narrative manifestation of where those excluded might take refuge. As alluded to at the beginning of this paper, Žižek has a similar interest in forging utopianism out of the marginalized or excluded, though, as we shall see, Žižek's account has different methodological underpinnings. To remain with Jameson, his detection of a utopian impulse arises out of the oppositional narrative of Non-Art. Furthermore, in moving from one "actantial manifestation" (the primary narrative of the unhearing oarsmen) to another (the marginalized figures that form an enclave in the face of total integration), Jameson's reading suggests how Adorno's "abstract ballet" is not restricted just to art but marks a more generalizable notion of utopianism (Jameson 1990: 136, 134).³

Jameson concludes part II of *LM* by identifying the fourth term in his square, the space of Philistinism. We already mentioned that this term is not "some new and positive 'negation of the negation'" but instead a generalized negation of all the terms associated with art (Jameson 1990: 152). In contrast to both the passive consumers of mass culture and the oarsmen who are "deprived of the very sense organs for any culture," Philistinism marks a negation of art through a hatred that understands it too well (Jameson 1990: 152). As the final allegorical character in "Adorno's deeper ideological and phantasmatic narrative," Philistinism is the negative term that, more than Non-Art, transcends the sphere of art to characterize a generalizable utopian impulse in the form of cultural envy because the philistines hate not merely art, but

³ Of course, the space or enclave of the cinema is still an area of art, even when abstracted from the screen. It may be helpful, therefore, to draw an analogy between the former enclave and the deck of Odysseus' ship. Both are narrative manifestations of enclave space within totalizing social space or spectacle, and thus mark a generic mode of the utopian enclave that is not limited to art.

also the promise of happiness embodied within art (Jameson 1990: 151-2). In their hatred, the philistines illuminate, through a negative foil, the utopian promise latent within all artworks:

For what the philistines “understand only too well” in the (modern) works they hate and characterize as incomprehensible is of course the deepest vocation of art itself – the “*promesse de bonheur*”, in the form of art’s “broken promise”, which keeps the idea of happiness alive at the moment of denying its present existence. It is, then, this ultimate relationship to “happiness” and to utopian fulfilment which is symbolically at play in the passion of the “*homme du ressentiment*”, and can thereby become manifest on a range of other social levels. (Jameson 1990: 152-3)

Like in Jameson’s realm of Non-Art, the negative utopian investigation of Adorno begins in the realm of art but ends up being applicable to “a range of other social levels.” These levels include the cultural envy associated with anti-Semitism, where the hatred of Jews is really an envy of their collective happiness, and thus a hatred of the happiness deprived to the anti-Semites. For Jameson, this staging of a negative relationship to happiness marks a repressed utopian impulse, and therefore aligns with his long-standing allegorical investigations of utopia, the detective-work of uncovering traces of collective longing in even the most degraded cultural artefacts or areas of life. While remarks on the philistine are mentioned by Adorno in *AT*, Jameson points out that the related figure of the anti-Semite can be found in the final chapter of *DE*. Again, we witness a narrative, oppositional staging of Adorno (and Horkheimer’s) philosophical corpus, spanning multiple works and contexts. Bringing these characters together through negation and intertextuality allows Jameson to tease out repressed utopian impulses.

Through his reckoning with the figure of Adorno, we can see that Jameson not only prompts us to consider the historical backdrop of postmodernity or (the cultural logic of) late capitalism, and which elements from Adorno are historically useful. He also stages a textual drama between these conflicting actants to tease out a thread of utopianism. Yet, what does the narrative interpretation of Adorno have to do with a broader project seeking to revive utopian thinking in the present, such as we find in *AF*?

Jameson’s engagement with Adorno in chapter 11 of *AF* presents another striking example of how the former frames the latter in terms of narrative and utopia.

In this and the preceding chapter, Jameson deals with opposing characterizations of utopia. For example: the city utopia versus the country utopia, Ursula LeGuin's idyllic countryside versus Samuel Delany's urban unlicensed zone. The point, Jameson will go on to argue, is not to claim one characterization as better than the other. Rather, one must, firstly, recognize that the "moment of truth" in each utopia can be found in its negation of the opposite representation. Such a negative utopian investigation reads similar to the utopianism of the negative and oppositional terms found in his above readings of Adorno, yet here Jameson also grapples with concrete representations of utopian narrative. Therefore, the critical value of LeGuin's pastoral vision lies in how it negates the postmodern utopia of urban sprawl, and vice versa (how the hi-tech, cosmopolitan city liberates one from the monotonous toil of the backward countryside). Secondly, tying to *AF*'s broader project, such oppositions need to be sharpened rather than resolved, to keep alive the "scandal" of their incompatibility and incommensurability (Jameson 2005: 180), precisely to foreground the freshness of utopian thinking, of alternative historical possibilities in an era of globalization where, as the late Mark Fisher put it, "(Francis) Fukuyama's thesis that history has climaxed with liberal capitalism [...] is accepted, even assumed, at the level of the cultural unconscious" (Fisher 2009: 6). Forcing consideration of utopian rupture takes the narrative form of conflicting actants, which Jameson ultimately outlines in the following diagram:

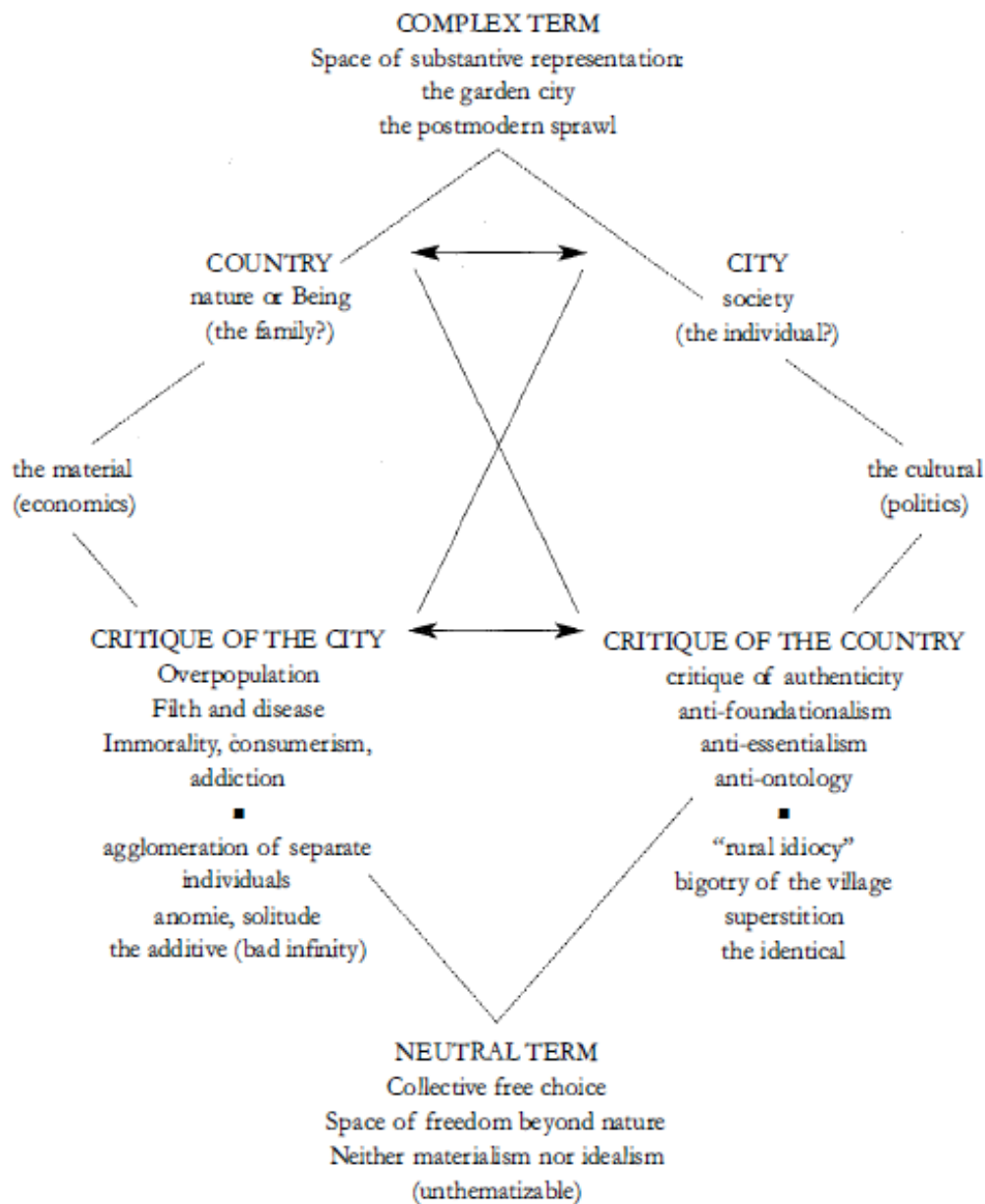


Fig. 3. Semiotic Square of Utopian Form (Jameson 2005: 181)

How does Adorno figure here? Jameson begins chapter 11 wondering whether any utopian representation can free itself from ideology or context-situatedness. On the surface, Adorno's "minimal Utopian demand" in *Minima Moralia*, the notion that utopia amounts simply to the formal principle that "no one should go hungry," seemingly transcends context-situatedness. Jameson goes on to demonstrate, however, that "far from being purely formal and without ideological content," Adorno's minimal demand "vehiculates the most complexly historical

themes and undertones” (Jameson 2005: 175). On the one hand, the refusal to give content to happiness must be read in the context of World War II and Auschwitz and is inseparable from an ideological aversion to hedonism. Underlying Adorno’s principle is his horror that anyone could valorize happiness and the good life in the present, when such a present is so capable of mass suffering. For Jameson, Adorno’s negative utopia is thus situated in an existential tradition, like the work of Dostoyevsky and Sartre, that mediates “the irredeemable guilt of the human condition” and foregrounds the “primacy of suffering” (Jameson 2005: 175). On the other hand, this commentary on the “nightmare of human history” (Jameson 2005: 174), is tied to speculations on negating the ultimate form of private property: the private property of the self, which Adorno (and Horkheimer) show in *DE* to be embodied in apparently “natural” self-preservation. Adorno’s minimalism thus soon conjures romantic visions of an unrecognizable human nature, “a life in the pure present (...) divested of all those fears of survival and anxieties about the future” (Jameson 2005: 174). Such an alien vision betrays an ideology of “an old longing for the serenity of animals or the simple-minded, from Wordsworth, Flaubert and Whitman” (Jameson 2005: 175). Even in an apparently “universally acknowledged zero degree of Utopian realization,” we can identify different ideological visions: a brooding commitment to the alleviation of suffering, yet also a joyful, nostalgic affirmation of the angelic and the posthuman (Jameson 2005: 175). Again, utopian impulses arise out of the conflicting, oppositional characters Jameson extracts from Adorno.

For Jameson it seems important to read Adorno, perhaps indeed all philosophy, not for extracting one utopian blueprint. Just like the opposing utopian representations in LeGuin and Delany, philosophical speculations on the good life must be situated within an array of opposing narratives and histories. Jameson argues that it is a mistake to identify each utopian moment of truth as a positive phenomenon; the function is instead “to discredit and demystify the claims to full representation of its opposite number” (Jameson 2005: 175). Holding together such opposing, conflicting representations between and within different thinkers is productive in the context of the “universal ideological conviction that no alternative is possible” (Jameson 2005: 232). Foregrounding utopian narratives forces us to speculate on alternative visions precisely when this was thought to be impossible – utopia as critical, defamiliarizing strategy rather than forwarding of specific agenda.

Critics like Peter Osborne (1992) have argued that, in rereading him in narrative terms, Jameson sheds Adorno of his philosophical import, wilfully misappropriating him for addressing the historical moment of postmodernity. This is a debate I will not go into here. I am not so much interested in whether Jameson has “understood” Adorno’s concepts in the correct way. Instead, I find it more useful to examine how Adorno figures in Jameson’s work. His reading, regardless of whether or not a misreading, illuminates Jameson’s broader interrogation of utopia as a series of conflicting narratives, where bringing such narratives together and in tension sharpens the urgency of utopian thinking.

Adorno, Non-Narrative and Symptomatic Utopia

After a long detour through Jameson, we can finally begin to pit his narrative framing of utopia against Žižek’s emphasis on non-narrativity. If, in Jameson’s reading in *AF*, Adorno’s positioning of something formalistic outside of narrative turns out to be inseparable from a range of ideological narratives, for Žižek Adorno’s narrative of the human fight against barbarism turns out to be inseparable from a non-narrative constituent. In *PV*, Žižek argues that while Adorno is certainly aware of the violence and inhuman exclusion that composes humanity and enlightenment, he nonetheless “basically conceives the ‘inhuman’ as the repository of ‘alienated’ humanity (...) the power of barbarism we have to fight” (Žižek 2006: 111). Adorno misses the paradox that normative determinations of humanity can only be conceived against an “impenetrable ground of ‘inhuman,’ (...) something which remains opaque and resists inclusion in any narrative reconstitution of what counts as ‘human’” (Žižek 2006: 111).

The project of overcoming the barbarism of Enlightenment through a more progressive, human Enlightenment arguably marks a kind of utopianism in Adorno. In *Negative Dialectics* (1981), for example, he proposes that, in the face of Enlightenment’s violent, exclusionary and catastrophic rationality, we push the critical project of rationality even further:

That is to say, one will survive not by preserving some so-called higher spheres (...) which reflection is not allowed to touch, but by pushing the process of demythologizing, or enlightenment, to the extreme. Only in this, if at all, is there any hope that the philosopher, through his self-reflection, will

not end by consummating triviality, the consummation of which is absolute horror. (Adorno 1981: 439)

For Žižek, however, what is missing here is recognizing and persisting with this very “absolute horror” or inhuman limit as something which cannot be narratively demythologized. In Adorno and Horkheimer we see an insistence “on fighting this excess consequence of Enlightenment by means of Enlightenment itself,” but for Žižek it is a mistake to try and overcome such excess (Žižek 2006: 111). I want to persist with this idea of something which cannot be narrativized in Adorno; through it, we can extract a Žižekian utopianism that is distinct from Jameson’s. In contrast to both Adorno’s more genuine enlightenment and Jameson’s focus on multiple narrative figurations, for Žižek a genuine utopian politics would be to instead persist with non-narrative excess. In order to elaborate this idea, it is first necessary to return to his account of *jouissance*, before exploring how it feeds into his politics of the symptom.

We will remember earlier that Žižek views ideology as inseparable from *jouissance*, arguing that “every ideology attaches itself to some kernel of *jouissance* which, however, retains the status of an ambiguous excess” (Žižek 1989: 63). What this means for the question of interpretation is the persistence of the kernel of *jouissance* when the critic confronts the symptom. Even after she/he has apparently decoded the symptom (showing, for example, that a line from a poem is a symptom standing-in for a range of historical factors), the symptom persists through the excess of *jouissance*: “even after the completed interpretation, the subject is not prepared to renounce his symptom; that is why he ‘loves his symptom more than himself’” (Žižek 1989: 80). In locating the dimension of enjoyment, Žižek identifies “the radical ontological status” of the symptom, conceived as *sinthome* by Lacan (81). Žižek and Lacan would go so far as to identify the symptom as the only substance that gives positive support to our being; one can only avoid descending into madness “through the binding of our enjoyment to a certain signifying, symbolic formation which assures a minimum of consistency to our being-in-the-world” (Žižek 1989: 81).

In broader political terms, we will remember also that the Marxist symptomatic or historical critique is marked by a “non-historical kernel of the process of historicization” – in other words, the symptom stained with *jouissance* (Žižek 1989: 62). If *jouissance* is the non-historical or non-narrative support for historicization or

narrative, we can recognize the symptom as a kind of non-narrative foundation for politics. As we have already suggested, Žižek's politics, his conception of radical alternatives, is inseparable from this understanding of the symptom. In his efforts to bring together Marxism and psychoanalysis, Žižek develops Marx's "invention" of this idea, where the proletariat is the symptom of capitalism, threatening to destroy the system even while it is its necessary product. But where the Marxist error lies in its "determination to escape the symptom" (McGowan 2014: 244), for Žižek it can never be resolved, even after social revolution. Just as the Marxist critique of ideology overlooks the fundamental, traumatic stain of *jouissance*, so too does a utopian perspective which strives for the eradication of all social contradictions.

How, then, can utopia be conceived differently? Returning to Adorno: why might an incorporation of, rather than attempt to overcome, the non-narrative inhuman excess be more utopian? As McGowan reminds us, the symptom cannot be overcome through interpretation but must instead be retained as the inevitable by-product of the system. Crucially, it is not only inherent to the system's functioning but also the site of potential transformation, as in Marx's identification of the proletariat. However, as McGowan notes, in Žižek's later work the symptom has more pronounced political importance as he becomes less and less sympathetic to democracy. He thus begins to locate resistance in what lies outside, what is negatively determined by, global capitalism – the slum dwellers, ecological threats – or that which is excluded by, yet is nonetheless integral to, the objective material determinations of the system:

the solution is a negative one: it is capitalism itself which offers a negative substantial determination, for the global capitalist system is the substantial "base" which mediates and generates the excesses (slums, ecological threats, and so on) that opens up sites of resistance. (Žižek 2008: 420-1)

As McGowan highlights, this identification of symptomatic exclusion marks a negative utopianism. He also notes that the symptom reorients political thought around enjoyment, given its inseparability from *jouissance* (McGowan 2014: 244). Žižek's utopianism is one where those disregarded by dominant regimes of representation can band together in their shared exclusion.

Like in Jameson, utopia functions here less as a blueprint and more as a defamiliarizing strategy for thinking against the system, focusing on what today's anti-utopian environment occludes. Carolyn Lesjak (2013) has forcefully argued that

in his book *Valences of the Dialectic* (2009), Jameson provides a similar utopian focus on the excluded, on those “fallen out of history,” through his proposing of a spatial dialectic. As we saw in his reading of the non-hearing oarsmen, Jameson also identifies a form of utopianism through the excluded; the philistines, too, are also marked by Adorno as those “excluded” from the social status afforded by artistic appreciation. Whether stressing narrative or non-narrative, what is important for both thinkers is arguably a way of seeing that pushes us to wonder whether things could be otherwise:

The Utopian form itself is the answer to the universal ideological conviction that no alternative is possible, that there is no alternative to the system. But it asserts this by forcing us to think the break itself, and not by offering a more traditional picture of what things would be like after the break. (Jameson 2005: 232)

We should not gloss over crucial differences between Jameson and Žižek. As shown in his readings of Adorno, Jameson’s interest in the productive tensions between different utopian narratives is inseparable from historical context: on the one hand the historical condition of postmodernity, and how changes in the relationship between culture and economy limit the applicability of certain parts of the Frankfurt School thinker; on the other hand, the situating of Adorno himself in a historical context, as inseparable from a range of ideologies unique to the post-WWII period. For Jameson, such historicization does not stop us from extracting utopian narratives from Adorno’s corpus. In contrast, for Žižek we must resist over-rapid historicization and focus on how historical narratives are sustained by *jouissance*, which forever escapes narrativization. It is telling that, at one moment of *The Plague of Fantasies* (1998), he demands we apply “Adorno’s dictum ‘In Freudian psychoanalysis, nothing is more true than its exaggerations’” to the historicist critic: in historicism, nothing is more true than its exaggerations (Žižek 1998: 65). Just like his focus on the inhuman in *PV*, Žižek raids Adorno to foreground the persistence of the symptom, the hidden, inescapable kernel of *jouissance* that is the starting point for any politics.

For both thinkers, reading Adorno in a more utopian way requires reading him more dialectically. For example, with Jameson, Adorno’s humanistic focus on the primacy of suffering turns out to be related to speculations on the post-human, on the ethical ideal “to live like good animals” (qtd. in Jameson 2005: 174). Meanwhile, in Žižek’s reading, Adorno’s humanistic desire to push Enlightenment further cannot

escape the irreducible *jouissance* associated with the overwhelming, “passive exposure” to the inhuman that constitutes humanity (Žižek 2006: 112). In both readings, the seemingly austere negativity of Adorno moves dialectically into a utopian politics that encourages different ways of seeing, and the remobilization of utopia in anti-utopian times, whether in the focus on utopian narrative itself or the non-narrative utopia of those excluded. Adorno is therefore a shared figure in Jameson and Žižek’s respective utopian politics, though a figure which allows us to pinpoint two different starting points in each thinker’s respective form of Marxism.

We should, however, also not overstate the differences between these two Marxist thinkers, and it might be better to read such differences – narrativity and the historical, on the one hand, non-narrativity and the ahistorical on the other – as instead indicators of a shift in political perspective. We might ultimately propose that there is pedagogical value in beginning from the identification of Jameson with narrative and Žižek with non-narrative: on the one hand, history and the diachronic (narrative); on the other, structure and the synchronic (non-narrative). Of course, this is not to simply align Jameson as diachronic and Žižek as synchronic. (Jameson’s use of semiotic squares, for example, underscores his own commitment to structure.) But taking narrative and non-narrative as starting points allows us to see how Jameson and Žižek are essentially writing about the same phenomena but from different parallaxic views,⁴ different views that have utopianism as their shared goal. In the two following closing examples, we can recognize such a Marxian parallaxic shift that ultimately amounts to the same political project of identifying a different way of seeing, a new form of subjectivity, within the objectivity of historical structure – a form, perhaps, of cognitive mapping.

Firstly, we could try thinking Jameson’s and Žižek’s utopianisms in the context of the environmental crisis. On the one hand, the discourse around global warming often reverts to, when not flat-out denial, so-called “catastrophism,” a fatalistic “revenge of nature” narrative, as identified by people like Jason W. Moore and Daniel Hartley (2015; 2015). While we should of course recognize the severity of the situation, the anti-Utopian inability to conceive anything beyond environmental devastation is hardly productive. In this sense, Jameson’s desire to place Utopian narratives, narratives that point at a world otherwise, back on the agenda is useful

⁴ I am grateful to Kirk Boyle for helping me formulate this insight.

for combatting this impasse. On the other hand, dominant discourses around climate change politics and the Anthropocene often fail to reckon with or downright exclude those most affected, those “so poor and peripheral to the central circuits of capitalism as to not even have a wage” (Malm 2018: 193) – for example, the peasant farmers killed in the Pakistan floods of 2010. Andreas Malm points to the theoretical need to foreground utopianism in the excluded:

Even if the theory is formulated from within the capitalist heartlands, it should, not the least importantly, take heed of the circumstances that global warming makes early landfall in places where the modernisation process has not been completed. People who lack the most basic amenities, who cannot afford to take up residence inside any house of mirrors (...) stand first in the firing line. Most of the bodies fished out from the rising seas belong to them. (Malm 2018: 17)

In a parallax view of ecological catastrophe, in which points of exclusion are particularly pronounced, utopia is not an evasion of real world problems but is grounded in the present, requiring attention to competing impulses and representations of what the good life might look like, and to the solidarity of those fallen out of history.

Finally, in their back-and-forth dialogue in the recent *An American Utopia* (2016), the move between narrative and non-narrative can be recognized in Jameson’s and Žižek’s perspectives on the problem of transition, on locating a form of “dual power” appropriate for taking us beyond capitalism’s perpetual present. In the main essay, Jameson identifies the universal army as vehicle for an alternate mode of power that, in its fulfilment and provision of basic needs ignored by the prevailing order (for example universal healthcare) will eventually lead to the withering away of the latter. In one sense, Žižek’s response addresses some of the practical shortfalls to Jameson’s speculations on the withering away of money and the political as such. As Žižek remarks on Jameson’s insistence in demarcating the realm of production and work (necessity) from that of pleasure and leisure-time (freedom):

The clear-cut division between production and pleasure is here to guarantee this disappearance of the political, and the price Jameson pays for this disappearance is that he ignores basic questions like who will command the army and how, who will allocate jobs and how, how the psychoanalytic

institutions regulating pleasures will be empowered, and so on. (Žižek 2016: 297)

Žižek expresses severe doubts about the notion that discipline and pleasure could be kept so separate: “Does obscene pleasure not always-already contaminate obligatory disciplined activity, so that we find pleasure in it?” (Žižek 2016: 298). Here, we can see the reappearance of the Žižekian non-narrative moment marked by obscene pleasure or enjoyment, a non-narrative or structural limit, perhaps, to Jameson’s narrative and historical utopian investigation.

Similarly, in the final pages of his essay, Žižek notes that Lenin’s idea of dual power, which Jameson rehabilitates, is ironically reminiscent of how in contemporary China power operates on dual-but-separate lines, whereby economic and policy decisions are enacted firstly by secret Party organs, and secondly by formal government bodies. Such a separation of powers also holds in the ultimate failure of Stalinist regimes, which Žižek pinpoints as the lack of a “depoliticized and competent administrative apparatus” (Žižek 2016: 308) that would properly unite party and state, rather than rely on “illegal” party power (Žižek 2016: 308). Thus, where Jameson stages a narrative drama of dual power, Žižek hones-in on the structural deadlock, the “missing piece,” for transitioning out of capitalism. It would be wrongheaded, however, to say that Žižek’s structural snapshot is a mere practical supplementation to Jameson’s utopian speculations. Both thinker’s view entails the need for new imaginaries and fresh perspectives on the problem of transition. As Kathi Weeks points out in her contribution, what seems like a more concrete proposal in Jameson’s essay retains “the critical function of utopian thinking and the efficacies of the form itself” (Weeks 2016: 246). The staging of the figures of dual power and the universal army are provocative challenges for the typically anti-institutional Left, and thus for taking seriously the transition out of capitalism. By proposing a narrative of dual power and its attending strategies, regardless of the model’s specifics, Jameson “obliges us to think on a larger social scale along a longer temporal trajectory than most seem willing to entertain these days” (Weeks 2016: 246). Rather than view Žižek’s commentary as highlighting the inadequacies of Jameson’s proposal, we could instead read his emphasis on structural deadlock as offering a different pedagogical valence on the Left’s need to address utopian transition. In utopian politics, the shift in the Marxian parallax amounts to a shift in how both the limits and seeds of our collective imaginations are framed.

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