

Special Issue:
Repeating Jameson?



Guest Editor: **Kirk Boyle**
IJŽS Vol 13 n. 1 (March, 2019)

ISSN 1751-8229

Volume Thirteen, Number One

Monograph: Repeating Jameson?

Guest Editor: **Kirk Boyle** - March, 2019

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|------------|
| Kirk Boyle: Repeating Jameson? Rereading Žižek Via Jameson, and Vice Versa. Introduction | pp. 2-21 |
| Matthew Flisfeder: Postmodern Marxism Today: Jameson, Žižek, and the Demise of Symbolic Efficiency | pp. 22-56 |
| Ed Graham: The Figure of Adorno in the Utopian Politics of Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek | pp. 57-82 |
| Zahi Zalloua: Decolonial Particularity or Abstract Universalism?: No, Thanks!: The Case of the Palestinian Question | pp. 83-120 |
| Clint Burnham: Jameson <i>avec</i> or <i>sans</i> Žižek: Psychoanalysis, Marxism, and the Impossible Social Bond | pp.121-145 |
| Slavoj Žižek: Hegel with Beckett: The Persistence of Abstraction | pp.146-160 |
| Fredric Jameson: Afterword:)n Eurocentric Lacanians | pp.161-168 |

ISSN 1751-8229

Volume Thirteen, Number One

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

Kirk Boyle, University of North Carolina Asheville

Kirk Boyle is an Associate Professor of English at the University of North Carolina Asheville. He is the author of *The Rhetoric of Humor* (Bedford St. Martin's, 2017) and, with Daniel Mrozowski, co-editor of *The Great Recession in Fiction, Film, and Television* (Lexington Books, 2013). His scholarly work appears in the books *Eco Culture: Disaster, Narrative, Discourse* (2017) and *The Žižek Dictionary* (2013), and the journals *Film-Philosophy*, *Jump Cut*, and *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, among others. His long-form review of introductory books on Fredric Jameson, "Rereading Jameson: On Doing Versus Introducing Dialectical Criticism," will appear in *Science & Society* in July.

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 located between historical and dialectical materialism for Flisfeder, narrative and non-narrative utopianism for Graham, decolonial

⁵ The current issue thus evokes the 2016 issue of *IJŽS* 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 Zeihr’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.

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 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

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.

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.

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).

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;

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).

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 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

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) "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.

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.

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

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

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 transcend 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, 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

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.

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,” 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.

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.

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.

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 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.

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?)

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 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

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.”

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] Osbourne [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).

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 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!

References

- Burnham, Clint (2016) *Fredric Jameson and The Wolf of Wall Street*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Homer, Sean (2006) "Narratives of History, Narratives of Time." *On Jameson: From Postmodernism to Globalism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 71-91.
- Homer, Sean (2016) *Slavoj Žižek and Radical Politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Jameson, Frederic (1981) *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Jameson, Frederic (1988) "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan." *The Ideologies of Theory: Volume I*. Minneapolis: Minnesota.
- Jameson, Frederic (2000) *The Jameson Reader*. Eds. Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Jameson, Fredric (2006) "First Impressions." *London Review of Books*. Vol. 28, No. 17
<https://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n17/fredric-jameson/first-impressions>
- Jameson, Frederic (2009) *Valences of the Dialectic*. New York: Verso.
- Jameson, Fredric (2016) *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*. Ed. Slavoj Žižek. New York: Verso.
- Wegner, Philip E (2006) "Periodizing Jameson, or, Notes toward a Cultural Logic of Globalization." *On Jameson: From Postmodernism to Globalism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 241-279.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2000) "An Interview with Slavoj Žižek." Interview by Matthew Beaumont and Martin Jenkins. *Historical Materialism*. 7, 181-97.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2004) *Revolution at the Gates*. New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2004a) *Organs Without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences*. New York: Routledge.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2004b) "Theorist of Revolutionary Philately." *Fredric Jameson: A Critical Reader*. Eds. Sean Homer and Douglas Kellner. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 112-124.

- Žižek, Slavoj (2006) *The Parallax View*. Cambridge: MIT.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2008) "Conversation with Slavoj Žižek about *Slavoj Žižek: A Critical Introduction*." Interview by Ian Parker. *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, Vol. 2: No. 3.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2009) *The Žižek Reader*. Eds. Elizabeth Wright and Edmond Wright. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2016) *Disparities*. London: Bloomsbury.

ISSN 1751-8229

Volume Thirteen, Number One

Postmodern Marxism Today: Jameson, Žižek, and the Demise of Symbolic Efficiency

Matthew Flisfeder, University of Winnipeg

Matthew Flisfeder is an Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Communications at the University of Winnipeg. He is the author of *Postmodern Theory and Blade Runner* (Bloomsbury 2017), *The Symbolic, The Sublime, and Slavoj Žižek's Theory of Film* (2012), and co-editor with Louis-Paul Willis of *Žižek and Media Studies: A Reader* (2014). He is currently completing a book manuscript called *Algorithmic Desire: Towards a New Structuralist Theory of Social Media*.

A Bit of Periodization

I will begin by being reductive and for the purposes of contextualization attempt a brief definition of “postmodernity,” the period that is not only most illuminated by the writings of Jameson and Žižek, but also that in which their work ultimately *makes* sense. With hindsight, we might say that the *arrival of postmodernism* is the product of the sublation of the various subversive tendencies found within modernism, buckling under the mighty weight of capital. “Modernism,” to put matters simply, describes the various art movements within the cultural moment of advancing or developing capitalism, the technological advancement of industrial modernity, as well as the rising hegemony of the market and the bourgeoisie as its political and cultural authority. Although it might be fair still to separate the field of cultural production out from the market for various other goods, the market still bears upon the qualitative dimensions of art because it debases it in its diminishment towards commodification. The art of modernity is therefore constantly under threat of commodification, which as we know from critics such as Adorno and Horkheimer, reduces the work of art to its mere exchange value. This is, after all, the purpose of mass culture, according to them, serving the ideological interests of capital. Modern art therefore exists in a dialectical tension with mass culture – in fact, it is easy enough now, with hindsight, to claim that modern art comes into existence as that form which endeavours to chide commodification, thus evoking its ethic: “Make it new!”

But modernism is also instigated by the technological development of industrial verisimilitude, where the work of art, as Benjamin tells us, can be mechanically reproduced and copied. We might say that modernism emerges, for instance, with the rise of Impressionism in the visual arts, which, in seeking to reinvent the authority and authenticity of its medium – painting – against the new onslaught of the photographic image and its mimetic powers – makes the *subversion* of the real its very own form of self-authorization. Culturally and politically, too, as modern art sought to *subvert* commodification, as it sought to subvert realism, it made of the bourgeoisie its public enemy *numéro uno*. My objective in raising this brief exploration of the cultural history of modernism is to make the following point, which bears upon the relevance of Jameson and Žižek

within the postmodern: whereas modernism, as Perry Anderson (1998) has described, defined itself as anti-bourgeois, *postmodernism* occurs when, without any (apparent) victory, that adversary is gone.

The virtual disappearance of the adversarial relationship of modernism provides just one way that I want to express a critical overlap in the approaches of Jameson and Žižek; and, I would say that we can simplify their overlap by looking towards the problem of the *signifier* in the culture and politics of postmodern capitalism. For it is exactly around the politics of the signifier that I locate a shared sense of the historical, the subject, and the ideological in their work. Each, I should point out, has developed his own understanding of the relationship between the postmodern and the logic of the signifier, and each has done so according to a Lacanian “aesthetic.” Jameson has, on the one hand, likened postmodernism to the aesthetic picture drawn by the Lacanian schema of the psychotic – read by Deleuze and Guattari (1983) through the character of the schizophrenic – as a “breakdown of the signifying chain” (Jameson 1984). Žižek, on the other hand, has in various ways referred to a post-ideological era, but has summarized this perspective with the notion of the “demise of symbolic efficiency” (Žižek 1999). Both highlight the loss or the foreclosure of the master-signifier as central to postmodernity. My proposal, in looking at the two as occupying a parallax relationship of sorts, is to position Jameson – in the Marxist jargon – on the side of the *historical* materialist logic, and to view Žižek, conversely, through the side of *dialectical* materialism. But this distinction shouldn’t confuse us since Jameson is likewise very much dialectical in his approach, just as Žižek, too, with his own periodizing schema, is very much historical. Regardless, the historical emergence of the postmodern positions the historicity of the signifier in each of their respective trajectories.

The Evisceration of the Signifier

If modernism may be understood as a code that subverts commodification, new media and realism, and the bourgeoisie, postmodernism can best be grasped, not as the point at which subversion disappears, but as the point at which it becomes hyperextended – when it becomes *everything* (see Jameson 1998). Let’s consider this point in the following manner: first at the level of commodification. We need to understand the dialectical tension between the

commodification of art and its subversion, and the pace at which this dynamic is increasingly dissolved. If the ethic of modern art was to “Make it new!,” where newness had been defined against the old that had been diffused into the market logic of commodification – having become mere *kitsch*, mere repetition of the once novel – then commodification can be seen very much so as the *driving force* of modern art. We shouldn’t mistake this brand of subversion as anomalous to the capitalist logic of deterritorialization, flight, re-territorialization, and accumulation, since capital itself is constantly seeking to subvert its own practices, not unlike the visual media which similarly have to continuously re-invent themselves in order to maintain their relevance. This being the case, if modernism sought continuously to *escape* commodification – that is, to escape its own essence – postmodernism is what happens when modern art reaches its Notion, not of escaping commodification, but of leaving no possibility of escape.

Postmodernism arrives on the scene when art and commodity converge: when art can no longer escape commodity and where mere commodities and the culture of the everyday, of the popular classes, *become* art – hence the worn out example of Andy Warhol’s Campbell’s Soup Cans. Similarly, postmodern criticism emerges as the lines between subversion and the canon begin to blur. Whereas modernism sought to subvert the official art of the canon (or of the market), postmodernism is what happens when modern art, the art of subversion, *becomes* the official art of the canon, the museum, the gallery, and the university. Postmodern art and culture then becomes a practice of *subverting subversion* itself. If modernism was defined by the subject seeking to subvert the phallic signifier – the paternal metaphor – then postmodernism is what occurs when the phallic signifier is foreclosed. In the general conditions of modern culture, perversion *is* subversion. This, however, is no longer the case under postmodernity when generalized perversion becomes typical of the reigning ideology. This is a theme that I intend to unpack and historicize/hystericize in what follows. But before doing so, I would like to provide a brief comment on the relationship between the cultural and the political in postmodernity.

With regards to the emergence of the *political* postmodern we need to question what happens to the radical subject when the adversarial relationship between bourgeois and proletariat begins to evaporate under the conditions of the postwar social welfare state, where in the aftermath of the depression, the

second World War, and in the face of the “Red Threat” of the Cold War years, capital and labour come to a compromise formation, where capital agrees to sacrifice short-term immediate profits in order to ensure the longevity of the system; meanwhile, growing investment in social and public programs and services, the redistribution (or what I’d like to think of more appropriately as a more *equitable* distribution) of wealth made the class struggle appear to have withered away. However, the repressed conflict of the class struggle, under the conditions of the postwar class compromise, only ended up returning in the guise of the so-called New Social Movements of the 1960s, from the Civil Rights Movement and Second Wave Feminism to the Student Movement, the Antiwar Movement, and the Gay Liberation Movement, culminating (as legend has it) in the generation of the *soixante-huitards*. It’s the experience of the 60s and the rise of the new subjects of History that allowed the new postmodern theory to claim the disappearance of the Marxist historical subject and declare a new “incredulity towards metanarratives,” as Jean-François Lyotard (1984) famously put it. But if there have been, in the last several decades, two prominent voices that have declared the continued relevance, not only of the Marxist narrative, but also of the Marxist interpretation of the postmodern and the Marxist subject of History, it has of course been Jameson and Žižek. If the historical picture I have just painted of postmodernism is at all familiar to readers of Jameson and Žižek, then it is surely because I’ve drawn upon them to produce my own claims.

Object of History/Subject of History

As I’ve already stated above, I think we can graph the relationship between Jameson and Žižek according to the conceptual distinction between historical and dialectical materialism – “conceptual” because I want to avoid the suggestion that these are two *different* forms of critical engagement. Every Marxist position is *both* historical *and* dialectical. But it is worth separating the two lines of inquiry to assess their respective objects. I wish also to stress this separation as only conceptual to avoid the elevation of the materialist dialectic into a dogma. Yet, I provide the distinction between historical and dialectical materialism to show what is different and identical in the way that Jameson and Žižek approach the logic of the signifier and its apparent evisceration in the context of postmodern capitalism.

Jameson himself provides us with a useful framework for conceiving these two different, however identical, logics. First, in *Marxism and Form* (1971), Jameson writes that:

Marxism, owing to the peculiar reality of its object of study, has at its disposal two alternate languages (or codes, to use the structuralist term) in which any given phenomenon can be described. Thus history can be written either subjectively, as the history of class struggle, or objectively, as the development of the economic modes of production and their evolution from their own internal contradictions: these two formulae are the same, and any statement in one can without loss of meaning be translated into the other. (297)

Speaking of the differences between the two codes, he adds that it is:

...easier to write a history of matter than of consciousness, and the changes of the type of commodities produced and in the systems that produce them has somehow a tangible linear content that is lacking in the story of the productive power of labor and the ferocity of human antagonisms at every moment of the way. (297-298)

Later, in *The Political Unconscious* (1981), following his infamous proclamation – “Always historicize!” – Jameson adds that:

... the historicizing operation can follow two distinct paths, which ultimately meet in the same place: the path of the object and the path of the subject, the historical origins of the things themselves and the more intangible historicity of the concepts and categories by which we attempt to understand those things. (8)

We can see from the outset the way that Jameson conceives the parallel, yet identical logics of historical and dialectical materialism. Although he does not name them as such, we can see clearly the way in which *historical* materialism refers to the *objective* code – as the historical development of the various modes of production, themselves transforming, rising, and then falling according to the various internal contradictions that they produce. *Dialectical* materialism, then, refers to the subjective code – of the class struggle, the (class) consciousness of the subject, but also – and this remains important for the way that we can think the relationship between Jameson and Žižek – the concepts and categories of

interpretation. It is the latter that complicates what might otherwise be the smooth distinction between the operations of the two.

Historical materialism, as a description of the historical progression or succession of the different categories and concepts used to think and interpret the capitalist relations of production, its culture and its ideology, is a project that we can see developed in Jameson's inspiring body of work, from his earliest studies of Western Marxism in *Marxism and Form*, to his examinations of Russian Formalism and French Structuralism in *The Prison-House of Language*, his challenges against the anti-humanism and the anti-interpretivism of structural Marxism and post-structuralism in *The Political Unconscious*, and also his readings of realism, romanticism, postmodernism, and utopia in theory and culture. Jameson, we might say, is an historical materialist "tracker" of the signifier (to borrow a phrase from Colin MacCabe) as it moves through various historical practices of critical theory and interpretation, across the changing lifespan and conditions of the capitalist mode of production. For, in his eyes, in his writing, we see the various transformations of the "ideology of Theory" – the changing and retroactive determination of the different practices of critical interpretation that move along a trajectory defined by the evolving conditions of the capitalist relations of production; and, with the postmodern anti-interpretivist criticism, it would seem from his perspective that the suturing operation of the signifier arrives at a dialectical standstill, leaving open a cleavage of "reflexive impotence," as Mark Fisher (2009) calls it, that, as Terry Eagleton (1996) has described, resulted less from the Left's rising-up-only-to-be-beaten-down than from an imaginary defeat marked by the cynicism of the present that has become decidedly anti-revolutionary. It's *within* this problematic that Žižek's brand of ideology criticism enters the scene.

End of Ideology/End of History

Žižek's earliest contributions to Marxist critical theory are particularly innovative in the way that he responds to the apparent deadlock of the postmodern critique of ideology. He begins in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) by describing the problem of the arrival of a supposedly "post-ideological" era. The criticism of the inadequacy of the "post-ideological" condition applies, in my view, equally to both the Left and the Right. On the Right, from Daniel Bell

(1960) to Francis Fukuyama (1992), we have heard since the 1960s about the “end of ideology.” For Bell, this is so on account of two overlapping historical and political phenomena: one the one hand, the publication of Khrushchev’s “secret speech,” in which he publicly denounced Stalin, acknowledging failures of the Soviet Union; on the other hand, noting the coming post-industrial society that – as Lyotard (1984) would later agree – changed the technological basis of capitalism, resulting in a cultural transformation that would eschew hegemonic struggle in favor of pragmatic consensus about global operations. Then, of course, in 1989, Fukuyama declared the “end of history,” a claim he reiterates in his book, *The End of History and the Last Man* in 1992. For him, drawing intriguingly on a Kojévian inspired reading of Hegel’s dialectics of history – the very same interpretation that caused much of the French Left to reject the Hegelian model – the demise of the Soviet Union marked the culmination of (capital ‘H’) History: no longer the ideological battle between which is the better system – Socialism or Liberal Democracy; for Fukuyama, the end of the Cold War and the triumph of Liberal Democracy in politics, and the capitalist (“market”) economy, demonstrated that the world had finally settled on *the* model.

End of History and end of ideology are not without their mirror reflections on the Left. It is precisely the postmodern critiques of Marxism (and psychoanalysis) that place Jameson and Žižek in critical positions. The post-structuralist and postmodern Left, responding to some of the same phenomena as Bell and Fukuyama, have sought to displace the centrality of the Marxist theories of History, ideology, and subjectivity. Michel Foucault, for instance, in a particularly telling passage discusses what are, for him, some of the deficiencies of the concepts of “ideology” and “repression” – two terms that arise in the Althusserian theory of ideology and subjectivity, particularly in his essay on the Ideological State Apparatuses.

Foucault asserts some difficulty with the concept of ideology for three reasons: first, that ideology “always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth;” second, that the concept of ideology refers to “something of the order of the subject;” and, third, that ideology “stands in a secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure” (Foucault 1984: 60). Regarding the concept of “repression,” Foucault finds it dismissive of the productive aspects of power. Identifying power as repression,

with the power to say “No!” – as a force of prohibition – ignores, according to Foucault, the way that power induces to varying degrees, forms of pleasure, the regulation of which is one of power’s primary functions (Foucault 1984: 61).

Foucault, as it is well known, replaces the concept of ideology with his concept of discourse, which is neither true nor false but instead produces “truth effects.” By identifying ideology with the false – i.e., “false consciousness” – Marxism, he claims, either ignores or dismisses its own particular subjective position within the relations of power, interpretation, and the production of knowledge. Discourse produces knowledge of an object; it is not simply true or false. The category of the subject therefore exists only in and by discourse. There is, in other words, no single “Subject of History” – a claim that both reflects and distances Foucault from Althusser. For Althusser, “ideology interpellates individuals as subjects.” However, as he famously claims, “History is a process without subject or goal.” Thus, ideology is on the one hand responsible for activating the subject; however, the subject for Althusser is a particularly fallacious, bourgeois conception of the individual, which I would oppose to the Marxist subject(s) of History: the proletariat (plural). Denying the (singular) existence of the subject, Foucault is then able to claim similarly the mere contingency rather than the necessity of the proletarian revolution. With his criticism of the Marxist (or more specifically Althusserian) rendering of the base/superstructure distinction, Foucault also asserts his disdain for the historical materialist analysis of social, cultural, and political change and transformation, preferring as he does the Nietzschean genealogical approach that he uses to rebuke an apparent search for historical origins or essences, which in Marxism he sees as the priority placed upon the material relations of production in the material basis of society, or the mode of production. With this, Foucault develops a theory of history that departs from the historical materialist approach. We can see then in Foucault, for instance, a Left variation on the theme: end of ideology/end of History.

The Left challenge to History (read “historical materialism”) also comes across, of course, in Lyotard’s description of postmodernism – the end of “Grand Narrative” let’s call it – as does the Derridean practice of deconstruction reject (or at least destabilize) the theory of ideology; and, of course, so too does the Deleuzo-Guattarian conception of the subject displace practices of interpretation

of the ideological. In all of these cases, there comes about a certain postmodern “breakdown of the signifying chain,” whether it is positioned towards History, ideology, or subjectivity. We can discern the impact of this line of inquiry further, and the impact it has had on Žižek in particular, by exploring the early post-Marxism of Ernesto Laclau. It is Laclau’s earlier writings on the logic of the signifier and the Real that bear upon Žižek’s Marxist theories of ideology and subjectivity.

A Foray into Post-Marxism

Apart from his well-known book, co-authored with Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (1985), Laclau’s position is best articulated in two short pieces: “The Impossibility of Society” (1983) and “Psychoanalysis and Marxism” (1986). In both pieces, Laclau tries to challenge what he sees as the essentialist and positivist tendencies in Marxism. Laclau identifies two overlapping problems with the Marxist concept of “ideology.” Not unlike Foucault, the two problems that he identifies are the notions of the social “totality” and the conception of ideology as a kind of “false consciousness.” Like Foucault, Laclau’s criticism here appears to be grounded more so in a critique of the Althusserian reading of both the Marxist topography of the base/superstructure and the ideological category of the subject. With regards to the concept of the social totality, Laclau takes up the Foucauldian conception of discourse to assert the ultimately antagonistic character of the social. The social, he writes, “must be identified with the infinite play of differences” – that is, he asserts the ultimately impossible closure of the social totality as the product of antagonism. The social whole always remains incomplete precisely because it is impossible to totalize meaning. With this, Laclau – like Jameson – turns to the Lacanian discourse of the psychotic to assert that “meaning cannot possibly be fixed,” without the operation or mechanism of fixation, of “domestication” – without a “nodal point” or, more specifically, what Lacan later termed the “master signifier” (Laclau 1990: 90-91; Cf. Lacan 2007). It’s not insignificant, then, that what Laclau accomplishes here is a translation of the Foucauldian critique of the Marxist topography into the Lacanian logic of the signifier, which equally demonstrates why Deleuze and

Guattari, for instance, rail against the ideological “tyranny of the signifier,” a point to which I will return.

For Laclau, the logic of the signifier is also where Marxism and psychoanalysis overlap. Unlike Foucault, however, Laclau credits psychoanalysis for bringing “a theory of subjectivity to the field of historical materialism” (Laclau 1990: 93). As well, against what he sees as the affirmative or positive characterization of historical materialism – mainly as it had been produced as the dogmatic reading of *dialectical* materialism under Stalin, and the affirmation of the Historical “mission” of the proletariat – Laclau draws upon Lacan to identify lack in the form of the political antagonism as the very reason why society “is not a valid object of discourse” (Laclau and Mouffe 2000: 111). As he and Mouffe describe, the “impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations – otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible.” The social, they claim, “only exists, however, as an effort to construct that impossible object [“society”]” (Ibid: 112). The hegemonic relationship, Laclau then claims, “can be thought only by assuming the category of *lack* as a point of departure;” and furthermore, that the “hegemonic subject is the subject of the signifier, which is in this sense, a subject without a signified [i.e., without positive content – as *lacking*]” (Laclau 1990: 96). For Laclau, the confluence of Marxism and psychoanalysis is made possible, not by adding the two or supplementing one with the other, but by reflecting upon their coincidence – as fixing or “suturing” the social totality, as *the* point of interpellation of the subject – around the logic of the signifier. Despite agreeing with the latter, I would be remiss not to point out that, although Laclau makes a convincing case about the overlap between Marxism and psychoanalysis around the logic of the signifier, and despite the fact that Althusser’s topographical (base/superstructure) and ideological model is a point of contention for the Foucault-inspired critique proposed by Laclau, it is in fact Althusser who first demonstrated another significant overlap between Marx and Freud.

Both Marx and Freud, according to Althusser (1996), exemplify materialist and dialectical thought. And both, he claims, have troubled significantly the bourgeois consciousness. Marx, on the one hand, through his critique of political economy, identified the class struggle, rather than the individual, as the motor of history. Class struggle, for Marx, shows that there is nowhere in existence this

thing we call “political economy” or market; and, therefore, despite the way that Laclau admonishes the apparent affirmative character of the Marxist conception of the social, bourgeois society for Marx is plagued by a gap or a lack in the form of the class struggle. Freud similarly troubled the bourgeois consciousness by dis-unifying (unfixing) the individual through his discovery of the unconscious – that is, he originally de-centred the subject. Thus, as Althusser already pointed out, both Marx and Freud show that neither society nor the individual exist as a unified *thing* – conflict, in fact, prevents such a unity. Historical materialism and psychoanalysis, both as practices of dialectical materialism, do in fact identify lack or gap, or the negative rather than the affirmative, as the very point of departure for existing conflicts, both socially and subjectively, implying that each has already troubled the signifier. Bearing this in mind, there is an important line here that runs from Laclau and Mouffe to Žižek that I explore in the following section.

The “New Doctrine of Structural Causality”

Whereas the post-Structuralist (Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari, in particular) approach is one that rails against the “tyranny of the signifier,” and the post-Marxist one (Laclau and Mouffe) sees in the signifier a point of convergence for the Marxist and psychoanalytic “projects,” we can best understand the play of the signifier in Žižek and Jameson by way of what Bruno Bosteels has referred to as the “new doctrine of structural causality.” Just as Jameson had done so previously, Bosteels identifies the differences between historical and dialectical materialism. “The object of historical materialism,” he writes, “as theory of history, includes the various modes of production, their structure and development, and the forms of transition from one mode to another” (Bosteels 2005: 117). But he is somewhat more precise in addressing the relationship between historical materialism as a “science” (in Althusser’s terms) and dialectical materialism as a philosophy: “In principle, the scientific nature of [historical materialism] cannot be established by historical materialism itself but only by a philosophical theory designed for the express purpose of defining the scientificity of science and other theoretical practices. This general epistemological theory of the history of the theoretical offers a first definition of dialectical materialism” (Ibid). Bosteels then

uses this distinction as a springboard for addressing the Althusserian model of “structural causality.”

Dialectical materialism, according to Bosteels, can be understood as a theory of “contradictory breaks.” Applied, then, to historical phenomena, such as the material transition from one mode of production to the next arising out of contradictions in each previous one, historical materialism helps to define the *object* of dialectical materialist investigation, that is, through the production and deployment of a series of analytical concepts. Two of the concepts central to the Althusserian project are “structural causality” and its “absent cause.” Structural causality, as Bosteels explains, rests on the fact that “a society always possesses the complex unity of a structure dominated by one of its instances, or articulated practices. Depending on the conjuncture at a given moment in the history of society, the dominant can be economical, political, scientific, religious, and so on” (Bosteels 2005: 119). Depending, then, upon the historical conjuncture, a certain tendency will have *dominance* upon the characterization of the social totality.

Tangentially, we can perhaps come to understand this through the prism of Raymond Williams’ (1977) distinctions between dominant, emergent, and residual elements of a culture. Whereas it is difficult to claim that any one particular cultural formation totalizes the entire field, it is more so the case that the *dominant* tendency sutures – as Laclau might say – the entire field of the social, while still running in parallel with new *emergent* cultural elements, as well as *residual* elements from older or more traditional culture. Similarly, although we might talk about the dominance, today, of finance capital, it is not as though we have witnessed the disappearance of agrarian capital, or industrial capital, or merchant capital. The dominance of finance capital speaks merely to its historically contingent position in organizing the entirety of the system within this particular stage or moment of the class struggle. Likewise, as Jameson (1984) argues, postmodernism is *not* the only cultural force – it is merely the “cultural logic of late capitalism,” which is to say that it is the culture that *dominates* alongside residual elements of traditional, national or ethnic culture, modern culture, as well as likely emergent elements of a wholly new and not yet fully formed culture, perhaps reflective of the ideological tendency that Mark Fisher (2009) has called “capitalist realism.” This way of reading the relationship

between the dominant, residual, and emergent is what makes the logic of the signifier, as a point of meaningful fixation, culturally and ideologically significant. It does not totalize in the way that Foucault, or Deleuze, or even Laclau and Mouffe describe; but it does articulate a point of closure that is not disconnected from the historical state of power and the class struggle. But I digress...

What then gives cause to the structural emplacement of this or that dominant and overdetermining force is what Althusser, drawing on Spinoza, calls the “absent cause,” or the ultimately determining instance of the mode of production. As Jameson explains in *The Political Unconscious*, Althusser identifies the entirety of the structure itself with the mode of production (36). Therefore, he writes, if we wish to characterize Althusser’s as a *structural* Marxism, “one must complete the characterization with the essential proviso that it is a structuralism for which only *one* structure exists: namely the mode of production itself, or the synchronic system of social relations as a whole” (Ibid). For Jameson, this is the sense “in which this ‘structure’ is an absent cause, since it is nowhere empirically present as an element, it is not part of the whole or one of the [topographical] levels, but rather the entire system of *relationships* among those levels” (Ibid). This means, then, according to Jameson, that *history* figures as the very absent cause of the entire structure – history, that is, if we take it in the way we have seen already defined above as that intersection of the historical movement from one mode of production to the next and the class struggle as the antagonistic relationship that colours the dominant cultural and social character of the historical conjuncture; but also, as the sets of relationships between subject positions differently articulated according to the topography: base/superstructure. For what is the base if not the expression of a particular social relationship between agents, i.e., the relations of production, which in the case of the capitalist mode of production is a relationship of exploitation? The superstructure similarly articulates the social relationship between agents, but it does so according to a different set of practices that are not unrelated to those of production. Marx (1993), in fact, notes in the introduction the *Grundrisse* that every mode of production must also at the same time bear upon the legal and political formation of every society to sustain and legitimize existing relations of exploitation.

Jameson writes, “history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the [Lacanian] Real itself [as that which resists symbolization] necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious” (Jameson 1981: 35). Jameson’s claim provides an important rejoinder to the Foucauldian critique of the apparent search for historical origins in Marxism since historical materialism shows, according to Jameson’s reading of structural causality and its absent cause, that each new expression of the class struggle in the present – each new historical conjuncture, marked by the ever changing conditions of the class struggle – *retroactively* determines the subjective reading of the historical. Marxism and historical materialism, upon this reading, are truly a “history of the present” – it’s the signifier that gives history its dominant retroactive figurability. We can then read the development of what Bosteels calls the “new doctrine of structural causality,” and Žižek’s place within this approach, in the following manner.

Beginning with Laclau and Mouffe, Bosteels identifies three points that can be made regarding the relationship between the Lacanian Real, the subject, and ideology. First, as Laclau and Mouffe point out in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, the social field, just like the Lacanian Symbolic order (the field of the big Other) is “structured around the traumatic kernel of the real” (Bosteels 2005: 128). The traumatic kernel of the social field is identified by Laclau and Mouffe as (political) antagonism (Cf. Laclau and Mouffe 2000: 122). In Lacanian terms, we could say that the social field is *not-all*, and in order for it to have some ultimate fixity, it requires the addition of the master-signifier. For Laclau and Mouffe, as Bosteels explains, politics only emerges because society is lacking – it does not exist as a unified whole. There is, in other words, a *gap* or *void* in the structure that they identify with the Lacanian Real and which Jameson identifies with the absent cause of *history*.

But in a second move that veers towards Žižek and other so-called *neo-Lacnians*, such as Mladen Dolar, Bosteels notes that for them the *subject*, in fact, *is* this gap in the structure. If the Real is signalled by the very limits of the Symbolic, if antagonism posits the impossibility of society, then the subject is what overlaps with this very position; or, as Žižek puts it, just as the Real emerges as the limit of society, “the subject is strictly correlative to its own

impossibility; its limit is its positive position” (Žižek 1989: 209). The subject, in other words, “is *nothing but* the impossibility of its own signifying representation – the empty place opened up in the big Other by the failure of this representation” (Ibid: 208). Better still, as Dolar explains the difference between the truly Lacanian category of the subject and the Althusserian one, is that for Althusser “the subject is what makes ideology work; for [Lacanian] psychoanalysis, the subject emerges where ideology fails” (Dolar 1993: 78). Subject, here – the political or revolutionary subject, the “proletariat” – is *correlative with the impossibility of society*. Not some positive or affirmative character – not yet, anyway – but the symptomal point at which the deadlocks of the social emerge. This is one reason why, for Žižek, the antagonism identified by Laclau and Mouffe that forever prevents the full closure of the social has a precise name: class struggle (Žižek 1989: 164; Cf. Žižek 1994: 22).

Class struggle, for Žižek, names the social Real – the antagonism at the heart of the social, its limit point – at the same time that it posits the emergence of the subject of psychoanalysis: the hysteric. The hysteric comes to figure and overlap with History as an absent cause in the way that Jameson describes history as the absent cause of the structure. History, according to Žižek, is “nothing but a succession of failed attempts to grasp, conceive, specify this strange kernel [of the Real]” (Žižek 2002: 101). It’s this point that allows us, he writes, to reject the common reproach that psychoanalysis is non-historical and transform it from a critique into a positive identification of the historical. Put differently, in his own defense of the Hegelian dialectic (and this is a point that asserts his own commitment to dialectical *materialism*), Žižek argues that dialectics offers the most cogent articulation of what Laclau and Mouffe conceive as antagonism: “far from being a story of progressive overcoming, dialectics is for Hegel a systemic notation of the failure of all such attempts – ‘absolute knowledge’ denotes a subjective position which finally accepts ‘contradiction’ as an internal condition of every identity” (Žižek 1989: 6). The Lacanian subject therefore exists according to him on two levels: both as the neurotic/hysterical subject and as the subject who emerges at the ends of analysis, when the subject has traversed the fantasy and has gone beyond the deadlock of subjective destitution – that is, when the subject herself occupies the position of the analyst – *this* subject is for him *the* subject of history: “hysteria is the subject’s

way of resisting the prevailing, historically specified form of interpellation or symbolic identification.... Hysteria means failed interpellation” (Žižek 2002: 101).

But, now, there is a third movement in Bosteels’ description of the new doctrine that moves us back from the revolutionary character of the subject and into the subject caught in ideology; and, this movement is where finally we can claim the originality of Žižek’s theory of ideology, which departs from the Althusserian one, but also which allows us to understand more fully what remains ideological – from a Marxist standpoint – under the conditions of a post-ideological era (in both the Right and Left versions) at the “end of History,” or more specifically, within the historical context of the postmodern culture and society. That is to say that, when we have reached the limits of the social, when we have reached the limits of the Symbolic – or, when we have begun to acknowledge first-hand the nonexistence of the big Other – what is there left to keep us within the terrain of the ideological? Žižek’s response, of course, is *jouissance*: enjoyment!

Enjoyment as a Political Factor

Žižek, at the beginning of *For They Know Not What They Do*, posits the problem in the following terms – and, here, we should note the specific historicization/periodization of his writing, which took place precisely at the moment of the Fukuyamaist pronouncement of the “end of History,” at the moment of the apparent triumph of liberal democracy, and of course what it truly stands for within the co-ordinates of capitalism: the equation of consumerism with freedom. He poses the question: “How do we account for this paradox that the absence of Law universalizes Prohibition?” The answer, he says, is that “*enjoyment itself, which we experience as ‘transgression’, is in its innermost status something imposed, ordered* – when we enjoy, we never do it ‘spontaneously’ we always follow a certain injunction. The psychoanalytic name for this obscene injunction, for this obscene call, ‘Enjoy!’, is superego” (Žižek 2002: 9-10). To understand this claim we need to return to the problem of the signifier and what it stands for, both as a marker of the postmodern, but also as a marker of prohibiting agency or authority.

What makes Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983) reading of capitalism so intriguing is that they figure the relationship between capitalism, the structure of

the modern family, and the impact upon each as they are reflected in the formation of the subject. As Marx states in volume three of *Capital*: “Capitalist production constantly strives to overcome [its own] immanent barriers, but it overcomes them only by means that set up the barriers afresh and on a more powerful scale” (Marx 1991: 358). In other words, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, capitalism constantly enforces processes of “deterritorialization,” which implies that to overcome its own self-imposed barriers to accumulation capital must become unhinged from its own processes and seek new ones as a means of survival. Such a practice implies, for them, the waning of the signifier that assigns meaning to the subjective dimensions of experience. The neurotic subject, for them, appears in the form of the bourgeois subject who is troubled by the changing conditions enforced by capital flight. However, rather than applying – as they see it – the re-Oedipalization of the subject (back into the mommy-daddy-me triad), they prefer an anti-interpretivist practice that seeks to maintain the barring of the signifier, restricting its (re-)territorialization, keeping open the range of freedom for the subject to accelerate the decline of the capitalist mode of production. This is why the schizo figures as their ideal hero: he is the one who forecloses the (tyranny of) the signifier. But there is a problem here that Žižek rightly identifies, and it addresses precisely what is problematic about both the Deleuzian and Foucauldian approaches.

On the one hand, the Deleuzo-Guattarian approach seems correct in demonstrating that internal revolutions to the capitalist mode of production end up producing new forms of subjectivity. But it is by positing desire as a positive, rather than a negative force – i.e., lack – that they miss the ideological dimensions of postmodern (consumer) capitalism. The dilemma, in other words, is not one with neurosis or Oedipalization, but with generalized *perversion* in the strictest Lacanian sense. Žižek points out at the end of *The Ticklish Subject* the historical waning of the Oedipus complex, which he says is somewhat tied to the postmodern fading of authority – more precisely for my purposes, the waning of the signifier. But if the modern authority is on the wane this creates a strange scenario for the subject. If, as Bruce Fink puts it, “neurosis can be understood as a set of strategies by which people protest against a ‘definitive’ sacrifice of jouissance – castration – imposed upon them by their parents... and come to desire in relation to the law, *perversion involves the attempt to prop up the law so*

that limits can be set to jouissance" (2003: 38). In perversion, the subject wishes to bring the law into existence – to make the Other exist – since it is the very existence of the Other that provides a space for transgression as a means of obtaining "obscene enjoyment," as Žižek calls it. This is the sense in which Žižek identifies the form of postmodern ideology as *cynical*. Drawing upon the Lacanian description of the perverse mechanism – of disavowal – and relying on the phrase used by Octave Mannoni, Žižek describes the cynical attitude as one of "*Je sais bien, mais quand même...*" – "I know very well, but nevertheless..." (Žižek 1989: 28-30). It is even, in this way, that Žižek amends the Marxist logic of commodity fetishism with the Lacanian theory of the fetish.

The predominant Marxist approach to commodity fetishism is one in which the commodity masks or hides or conceals the *positive* – i.e., existing – social relationship between people or, more specifically, the social relations of production and exploitation. But the psychoanalytic conception of the fetish, instead, refers to it as that which "conceals the lack ('castration') around which the symbolic network is articulated" (Žižek 1989: 49). Fetish, in other words, mirrors the operation of the signifier. It is that which allows the subject to disavow the lack or gap which it *is* within the Symbolic order; however, what fills the lack that *is* the subject in the field of the Symbolic is the fantasy structure that allows her to relate to her enjoyment – fantasy, not as some dream of successfully obtaining the lost object of desire (the *object a*), but that which regulates for the subject, teaches her, about what she desires. Fantasy, in this way, becomes a support of ideology, especially when we appear to inhabit a post-ideological era. But that is not all.

As Lacan had claimed, desire is the desire of the big Other – of the Symbolic order. The Symbolic order, in other words, comes to figure for the subject her relationship to her desire and to her enjoyment. As the gap within the Symbolic order, fantasy supports the subject's approach to this position, filling in for her what is lacking; but she simultaneously attributes this position to the signifier that defines her. Žižek therefore describes how "a signifier (S_1) represents for another signifier (S_2) its absence, its lack \$, which is the subject" (2002: 22); "the Master-Signifier, the One, is the signifier *for which* all the others represent the subject" (Ibid: 21). Simply marking the signifier as that which represents the subject, would however also miss the relationship between the

subject and the ideological implication of propping up a power, that makes it ideological.

In contrast to the Althusserian claim that ideology interpellates individuals as subjects – which seems to imply that ideology is somehow *zapped* into the mind – Žižek adds that “ideology is the exact opposite of internalization of the external contingency: it resides in externalization of the result of an inner necessity, and the task of the critique of ideology here is precisely to discern the hidden necessity in what appears as a mere contingency” (1994: 4). This implies that, at the same time that the subject assumes a defining signifier giving her substance within the spaces of the Symbolic, the task for the subject is to have recognized by the authority of the big Other the signifier that she confers upon herself, and which has been conferred *upon her* by the big Other. Or, to be more precise, “it is never the individual which is interpellated as subject, *into* subject; it is on the contrary the subject itself who is interpellated as x (some specific subject-position, symbolic identity or mandate), thereby eluding the abyss of \$” (Žižek 1993: 73-74). The ambiguity as to the desire of the Other – *Che vuoi?* – “What do you want from me?” “What am I to you?” – forces the subject into a precipitous identification, anticipating what the Other demands. But with the apparent loss of the Other in the postmodern, post-ideological condition of the *loss* of the signifier, it appears as though the Other is nowhere – nowhere, that is, *to confer* meaning.

It appears in postmodern times that we enjoy so much freedom. There is a loss of authority (in the form of the big Other, in the form of political oppression, etc.). But what if what appears as a prohibition of enjoyment is in fact its very condition of possibility? This is the trick of the postmodern superego injunction: “Enjoy!” It becomes all the more difficult to enjoy the more we are increasingly and directly *enjoined* to do so. There is, as Žižek describes, a transgressive dimension to enjoyment where it is the transgression, itself – breaking the rules – that garners for us our enjoyment. This concerns the dialectical tension between desire and drive. If I can again be somewhat reductive for the sake of brevity, we might see desire as “enjoying what we don’t have” (to cite the title of a book by Todd McGowan). We desire insofar as we are lacking. But if that’s the case, then drive has to do, in a way, with hating what we enjoy – that is, the pain involved in *not* obtaining the apparent lost object of desire (which only exists insofar as it

remains lost), which actually procures enjoyment. *Jouissance*, enjoyment, is thus caught up in an odd mixture of pleasure and pain – we both enjoy what we *don't* have but we still hate (it is experienced as painful) what we enjoy. What separates the two, on the one hand, is the fantasy that screens the experience of the drive – and this is why in working towards the analytical cure, the subject must “traverse” the fantasy to arrive at the recognition that *jouissance* is firstly a treatment of the relationship between desire and drive, and secondly that what we desire is the obstacle (Cf. McGowan 2016). The latter is the position arrived at, at the ends of analysis. But in ideology, which also knows that the obstacle is a condition of enjoyment – the obstacle which we seek to transgress as the source of our enjoyment – the subjective position becomes one of perversion.

If we go back and recall that, at the beginning, I pointed out that modernism was a culture of subversion and that postmodernism is what occurs when subversion *becomes* the dominant ideology, then we can similarly propose that while perversion may have been subversive in modern times, in the conditions of postmodern culture, “perversion is not subversion” (Žižek 1999: 247). This is Žižek’s reproach to Judith Butler (and to Foucault), who provides perhaps what is the most cogent explanation of this relationship between ideology and enjoyment. Referring to what she calls “passionate attachment,” Butler proposes (like Foucault) that power *constitutes* the subject. Power, she says, “is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbor and preserve in the beings that we are” (Butler 1997: 2). How does it do so? Butler, on the one hand, notes that this has to do with the discursive terms set out by power and that we depend upon for our existence. But if we read Foucault in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, we also see that we come to depend upon power for our existence because it is only by *resisting* power that we become subjects. This is Foucault’s critique of the “repressive hypothesis,” where amongst other things, he claims that (and this is returning to another line of criticism addressed above) desire is not something that is repressed – through a power that says “No!” – power, in fact, becomes the very *raison d’être* of desire in the sense that: “where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault 1990: 95). Where there is power, there is, in other (Žižek’s) words, an inherent transgression. What the pervert knows, then, is that without the obstacle, without power, there is no transgression – there is no *jouissance*. It

is the perverse subject, then, whose goal it is to prop up power, to impose an authority that says “No!” so as to be able to transgress. This is why, I claim, that *the pervert, and not the schizo, is the typical subject of postmodern capitalism – the subject whose arrival is marked by the generalized acceptance of subversion, when subversion becomes the dominant ideology.* But let’s put another spin on this because the pervert relates to the analyst as two sides of the same coin, as Žižek might put it.

Both relate to enjoyment in a similar fashion, but are distinguished by their relationship to the *objet a*. The pervert, we might say, remains caught in the logic of desire, needing then the imposition of the Master(-Signifier) as an obstacle to transgress. The analyst, however, is oriented towards drive, having traversed the fantasy. She accepts the non-existence of the big Other, and therefore comes to accept the possibility of her own non-existence.

I would argue that the analytical practice does, in this way, relate to the ethics of dialectical materialism. And we can find in this ethics, very closely to the way that Georg Lukács describes the movement from Kant to Hegel to Marx, the core of Žižek’s dialectical materialism. If, with Kant (and here I am relying on descriptions produced by all three: Lukács, Jameson, and Žižek), we can know only our knowledge of things, but we cannot know things-in-themselves, when we move to Hegel, we find that the gap in knowledge – the gap between phenomenal and noumenal – bears upon the subject herself – the subject just *is* the very gap in our knowledge. The shift from Hegel to Marx, then, is tied to what the Lacanian discourse calls the “act” (Lukács 1971; Jameson 1971; Žižek 1993). When we act, we perform a radical material transformation that likewise results in a radical transformation of the self. As Žižek describes (and I apologize for quoting at length):

the proletariat becomes an *actual* revolutionary subject by way of integrating the *knowledge* of its historical role: historical materialism is not a neutral “objective knowledge” of historical development, since it is an act of self-knowledge of a historical subject; as such it implies the proletarian subjective position. In other words, the “knowledge” proper to historical materialism is self-referential, it changes its “object”. It is only via the act of knowledge that the object becomes what it truly “is”. So the rise of “class consciousness” produces the effect in the existence of its “object”

(proletariat) by way of changing into an actual revolutionary subject. And is it not the same with psychoanalysis? Does the interpretation of the symptom not constitute a direct intervention of the Symbolic in the Real, does it not offer an example of how the word can affect the Real of the symptom? And, on the other hand, does not such an efficacy of the Symbolic presuppose entities whose existence literally hinges on certain non-knowledge: the moment knowledge is assumed (through interpretation), existence disintegrates? Existence is here not one of the predicates of the Thing, but designates the way the Thing relates to its predicates, more precisely: the way the Thing *is related to itself* by means of (through the detour of) its predicates-properties. When a proletarian becomes aware of his “historical role”, *none of his actual predicates changes*; what changes is just the way he relates to them, and this change in the relationship to predicates radically affects his existence. (Žižek 1993: 144-145)

Whereas the pervert seeks to impose a Master-Signifier as the sign of the obstacle that regulates his enjoyment, the analyst retroactively creates a new one in the process of the act, which *only* retroactively *authorizes itself*, or, in other words, historical inevitability is only knowable *after the fact*. Although, we could say, the subject caught in ideology is a product of “positing the presuppositions” of her own existence, the knowledge that comes to the ethical position of the analyst and the proletariat is one of “presupposing the positing.” But in order to do so, as Žižek acknowledges, one must have access to the analytical *discourse*, to its interpretive prowess. This, too, is where Marx and Freud overlap, and is where we can shift gears to consider what Jameson has called “cognitive mapping” – what I consider to be a foundational element of his own practice of *historical* materialist interpretation.

Cognitive Mapping, or Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act

Even in Žižek’s work we can often locate the significance of the category of cognitive mapping. In *In Defense of Lost Causes*, he describes an ironic coincidence between the rise of postmodernism and developments in the biological sciences. As he puts it, the “predominance of scientific discourse thus entails the retreat, the potential suspension, of the very symbolic function as the

metaphor constitutive of human subjectivity” (Žižek 2008: 32). Paternal authority, for instance, he suggests is based upon faith or trust in the identity of the father. The symbolic function of the father (the Name-of-the-Father) operates only to the extent that we do not know directly who our father is – we must accept his word. But, “the moment I know with scientific certainty who my father is, fatherhood ceases to be the function which grounds social-symbolic Trust.... The hegemony of the scientific discourse thus potentially suspends the entire network of symbolic tradition that sustains the subject’s identifications” (Ibid: 33). What Žižek describes here is close to his earlier claim in *The Ticklish Subject* regarding the “demise of symbolic efficiency” (Žižek 1999: 322). What he describes is the postmodern dispensation with the Master-Signifier, which as we have seen is rendered still quite well by Deleuze and Guattari in their connection between capitalism and deterritorialization. Again, it would appear that the dispensation with the Master-Signifier – the apparent recognition of the non-existence of the big Other, the end of History, the end of ideology, and so on and so forth – would, on the one hand, leave open the potential for mass freedom. But on the other hand, as we have seen, it instead brings forth new ideological conditions. This, I would argue, is partly to do with the fact that the postmodern “incredulity towards metanarratives” leaves open a gap in the subject’s ability to positively reflect upon and recognize her position in the world and to herself – it creates a deadlock, an inability to act; or, what Mark Fisher calls “reflexive impotence.”

As Žižek again puts it, the postmodern end of grand narratives, or big explanations (like Marxism and psychoanalysis) “is one of the names for this predicament in which the multitude of local fictions thrives against the background of scientific discourses as the only remaining universality deprived of sense” (2008: 33). The problem as he sees it is the existence of various parallel discourses, caught in a chain of equivalences, none of which has been able to radically intervene in the capitalist relations of production. All they do, he claims, is supplement the dominant narrative with other local narratives that do not effectively disturb the existing system. Instead, he says, “the task is to produce a *symbolic fiction (a truth) that intervenes into the Real*, that causes a change within it” (Ibid) – and isn’t this exactly what Jameson has in mind with his notion of “cognitive mapping”?

We have to recall that when Jameson first introduces the concept in his essay on Postmodernism, he does so by pointing out the Althusserian relationship between the Imaginary and the Real, noting that the Lacanian matrix is in fact a tripartite system that includes the Symbolic. He then says that an aesthetics of cognitive mapping will require the dimension of the Symbolic to provide the social co-ordinates necessary for the subject to arrive at her ethical position. And, if I can go further along in this thread, we might even begin to understand Jameson's application of the Lacanian Symbolic, as the intervention of the Symbolic in the Real, very much in the way that Žižek describes it as a condition of the analyst's discourse, as a return to grand narrative – the specificity of the historical materialist one. In fact, this is how we should also understand Jameson's approach to allegorical interpretation, beginning with his essay on "Metacommentary" and *The Political Unconscious*, and all of his work that has since followed.

One of Jameson's chief insights relating to the concept of the political unconscious is the fact that *all* interpretation *is* allegorical interpretation. He identifies this, initially, by noting some of the ways that post-structural criticism has gone after the Marxist hermeneutic, which he defines according to its own historicism and application of historical materialism as a "master code," as well as its practices of ideological criticism or the theme of representation (as it has been defined by Althusser – ideology *represents* an imaginary relationship of the subject to her real conditions of existence). With his focus on practices of interpretation, Jameson points out that every hermeneutic, whether consciously or unconsciously, is an allegorical process, meaning that it acts as a process of *rewriting*. Every interpretive operation, therefore, operates according to "some ultimate privileged interpretive *code* in terms of which the cultural object is allegorically rewritten" (Jameson 2008: 451-452). Examples of this in critical discourse include: forms of language or communication in structuralist criticism; desire and *jouissance* in psychoanalysis; anxiety and freedom in existentialism; temporality in phenomenology; collective archetypes in myth criticism; or, even some forms of liberal humanism as in the reigning ideological framework (Ibid: 452). The point of the political unconscious, as a concept, is that even statements that appear as mere fact or "common sense" (more on this below) are always already operating according to a particular interpretive framework, which we

might even say is preceded by the subject-position which gives it its particular political shading. Or, to put this differently: there is no interpretation that is not already determined (in the last instance) by the class struggle.

Like these other examples, Marxism, according to Jameson, proposes its own “master code,” which he says is neither the “economy” (as in much of the reductive criticism of Marxism which sees it as a practice of “economic determinism”), nor is it even the class struggle. Instead, it is, according to him, that absent cause of the system, itself: the mode of production. How might the mode of production be conceived as an interpretive master code? History, as we have already seen from Jameson, “is not in any sense itself a text or master text or master narrative.” It remains, according to him, “inaccessible to us except in textual or narrative form” (Jameson 2008: 452). Historical materialism provides in narrative form an interpretation of the historical and material transition from one *mode of production* to the next. It provides an explanation, from the perspective of a dialectical materialist understanding – that is, from the subjective position of the proletariat – of the historical transformation from one mode of production to each successive mode of production, and the internal forces of each, its contradictions, which are sublated in the shift from the one to the next.

We can also read this practice against the Lacanian approach that Žižek describes, of the overlap between the ethics of psychoanalysis and the radical ethics of the proletariat, if – that is – we begin from the position of subjective destitution, verging *towards* the ends of analysis. This is a crucial moment, we might say, when the subject is left destitute *without* any reason. Here, we need to indeed locate the master code or master text, or an interpretive framework, that retroactively authorizes the ethics of the subject. What is needed, in other words, is a practice of cognitive mapping. At the moment of destitution, the subject is trapped by the weight of the act, and the gravity of the decision to do so. Deciding, therefore, in some ways requires the imposition of a teleology – that is, of asking implicitly what kind of goal do we seek out? From the psychoanalytic perspective, the ethical imperative is one of not giving way to one’s desire. This may create the appearance of a non-goal-oriented approach, but if we understand anything about the drive – that which desire becomes once it has traversed the fantasy – we know that it still maintains a goal, despite re-orienting itself with regard to its aim. By going after its aim, the drive achieves satisfaction

by never reaching its goal – it merely circulates around the objectified lack that it *is*. So if we can now return to the historical materialist interpretation, we must add, I think, another important dimension central to cognitive mapping, which Jameson correctly identifies as Utopia.

The Dialectic of Ideology and Utopia: Reification or Realism

All class consciousness – all ideology – is ultimately utopian. Jameson (1981) has proposed this thesis in different ways, but along the lines of two contradictory formulations – contradictory, that is, from the perspective of the class struggle – that I think are pertinent to the *context* of the class struggle. He has, on the one hand, looked at the relationship between *reification* and utopia, as well as, on the other hand, that between *realism* and utopia. Jameson explains that every class consciousness is utopian insofar as “it expresses the unity of a collectivity.” Such a unity is an allegorical one in the sense that the achieved collectivity is utopian “not in itself, but only insofar as all such collectivities are themselves *figures* for the ultimate concrete collective life of an achieved Utopian or classless society.” Because of this, “even hegemonic or ruling-class culture and ideology are Utopian, not in spite of their instrumental function to secure and perpetuate class privilege and power, but rather precisely because that function is also in and of itself the affirmation of collective solidarity” (Jameson 1981: 291).

Consider, for instance, the way that Žižek describes the utopian vision of the so-called middle class: “the ‘middle class’ is in its very ‘real’ existence, the *embodied lie*, the denial of antagonism – in psychoanalytic terms, the ‘middle class’ is a *fetish*, the impossible intersection of Left and Right which, by expelling both poles of the antagonism into the position of antisocial ‘extremes’ which corrode the healthy social body... presents itself as the neutral common ground of Society. In other words, the ‘middle class’ is the very form of the disavowal of the fact that ‘Society does not exist’ (Laclau) – in it, Society *does* exist” (Žižek 1999: 187). “Middle class,” we might say, is therefore the utopian fetish of the ruling order – the utopian hegemonic vision of a “classless” society, in which the organic whole of the collectivity is secured by the disavowal of the class antagonism. This, I believe, is what we might refer to as a *reified* utopia. It is one in which the social body is articulated – is “sutured” – by the fetish object that

ultimately dispels and disavows an existing antagonism. The flip side to the corporatist imaginary of the “middle class” utopia could also take the form of the fetish of the “intruder” tied to the fascist-populist imaginary.

Both Jameson and Žižek have used the example of Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws* (1975) to make this case. The shark in the film operates as a kind of fetish object – an enemy or intruder – that galvanizes the collective efforts of the community, bringing them together to formulate the unified whole. It is not unlike the way that the Nazi anti-Semitic representation of the “Jew,” or even today the racist-populist image of the Islamic fundamentalist, the refugee, or even those who identify as transgender – it is not unlike how the images of these figures are deployed to disavow and displace the centrality of the class antagonism. These are images of figures who operate as fetish objects used to constitute the implied unity in the utopian vision of the organic body through exclusion. Utopia is here *reified* through the fixation on the fetish object and is similar to the logic of the commodity fetish, which is the very objectively regulated appearance that stands as the linchpin of the entire capitalist system. The fetish objectifies and then displaces the Real social antagonism, i.e., the class struggle, which is the true indication of the fact that “Society does not exist.”

A *realist* utopia is one, conversely, that does not make any claim to the organic composition of the collective unity of the community. In fact, its operation is to pronounce fully the presence of the antagonism that *prevents* the collective unity of the society, while simultaneously offering a glimpse of an emancipatory resolution to the problem. It accomplishes, in other words, a mediation of the antagonism that leaves it intact while simultaneously elucidating that which remains true on both sides of the contradiction. The latter is also how I understand the category of the *totality*. A cultural example that both Jameson and Žižek cite is the David Simon television series, *The Wire* (2002-2008) (Jameson 2010; Žižek 2012). What they both show is that each season of the series portrays a genuine social problem – the conflict between drug dealers/organized crime and the police, which is ultimately also a racialized conflict; the struggles of labour unions and the disintegration of organized labour; problems in public education; and the problems with what is now commonly referred to as the “fake news” – but each season also proposes some ultimately utopian scenario in which the problem is ideally resolved; the solutions, however, are only ultimately

defeated due to ill political will, and the context of power within the existing class struggle. To cite Žižek, who refers to Jameson's piece on the series, "*The Wire* is a whodunit in which the culprit is the social totality, the whole system, not an individual criminal (or group of criminals)" (Žižek 2012: 101). He goes on to ask, "how are we to represent (or, rather, render) in art the totality of contemporary capitalism?... The point is that the Real of the capitalist system is abstract, the abstract-virtual movement of Capital" (Ibid). And isn't this in fact what Jameson means when he refers to the mode of production as the absent cause, of History as being only available to us in textual form? Nevertheless, the aesthetic rendering, and particularly the utopian realist one, provides access to and represents the unrepresentable absent cause: the Real of the class struggle.

Dystopia is a relevant postmodern genre. Unlike the kinds of utopian envisioning that was typical of modernism, dystopia is postmodern in the way that it relates to History at the end of History, quite so in the sense of Jameson's own hyper-quoted statement (often, wrongly attributed to Žižek), that "it seems easier for us today to imagine the thoroughgoing deterioration of the earth and of nature than the breakdown of late capitalism" (Jameson 1994: xii). As I have argued in other places (Flisfeder 2013; Flisfeder 2017), Jameson's statement models the postmodern disposition against big utopian projects. Jameson's thesis and picture of capitalist cynical reason ("it's easier to imagine the end, than...") amounts to a kind of retroactive utopia in which the present situation (despite existing flaws) is imagined as the best of all possible worlds – all that's left is the end of the world. But this, I would argue is a kind of *uncritical* dystopia; dystopia also has the potential for bringing to consciousness a truly utopian ideal, what we might call *critical* dystopias (see Mirrlees 2015). An *uncritical* dystopia would be of the kind that Jameson links to reification, whereas a *critical* dystopia is of the realist variety. An uncritical dystopia depicts a future gone bad *because* we strayed too far from the present conditions – for example, the film adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2009); a critical dystopia, instead, shows us just where we are headed if we *do not change* the present course of things historically, such as Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006) – it stands as a realist warning of the potential to come should we continue down our path of existing capitalism. Critical dystopia provides in textual form what is truly at stake in the category of the *totality*, or maybe even a metaphoric negative image of it –

it is a concept not unlike that of cognitive mapping, which Jameson (1998: 49) has also proclaimed to be merely another way to express what is at stake in class consciousness.

Totality as the Form of Historical and Dialectical Thought, or, How to Arrive at the New

Far from the caricature depicted by Laclau, the concept of totality goes beyond the modeling of the society according to the base/superstructure topography. Lukács provides for Jameson the most adequate model of totality, which he says expresses the *limits* to bourgeois consciousness: not to its content, but to its *form*. For Lukács, totality shows us what is false, not so much at the level of the *content* of any given ideology, but what is false at the level of its *form*. Applying totality to his predecessors, Marx, for instance, showed us, not what was wrong in the *details* of Ricardo and Smith, but how their models failed to identify the larger totality of perspective (Jameson 1971: 183). This is where we can return to what is dialectical within the field of the historical, for as Jameson also points out with regard to the shift from Hegel to Marx:

dialectical thought is in its very structure self-consciousness... The difference between the Hegelian and the Marxist dialectics can be defined in terms of the type of self-consciousness involved. For Hegel this is a relatively logical one... here the thinker comes to understand the way in which his own determinate thought processes... limit the results of his thinking. For the Marxist dialectic, on the other hand, the self-consciousness aimed at is the awareness of the thinker's position in society and history itself, and of the limits imposed on this awareness by his class position. (Jameson 1971: 340)

Form, of course, matters for Žižek as well, as he is very keen to point out some of the methodological overlaps between Marx and Freud when it comes to the analyses of commodities and of dreams (Žižek 1989). What is historical about Žižek's thought is shown in the way that he describes the significance of the *formal* transitions in the consciousness of the subject, from feudalism to capitalism, from modernity to postmodernity, from the predominance of the Master's Discourse to that of the University Discourse (see Žižek 2006: 298-308). It involves the formal shift in the position and the role of the Master-Signifier,

whereas in the Master's Discourse it is in the position of agency, and in the University Discourse it is in the position of truth – the truth that the university administrator is really just the repressed Master. But it is in the Hysteric's discourse that the Master is troubled, bombarded with the question: "what do you want?" "What am I for you?" It is the Hysteric who is the true agent of the production of new historical *knowledge*, the hysteric who does for psychoanalysis what the proletariat does for historical materialism; they are the assumed subject positions of those who produce real new knowledge, who push forward the hermeneutic practice in the face of the dialectical motion at a standstill.

Change, as Jameson describes, "is essentially a function of content seeking its adequate expression in form" (Jameson 1971: 328); and "form is but the working out of content in the realm of the superstructure" (Ibid: 329). At this intersection, we might be able to see in what sense the signifier is the cipher of both the historical and the dialectical relative to Marxist and Freudian hermeneutics, of which Jameson and Žižek now name the co-ordinates for the continuation of these analytical and political projects under conditions of contemporary postmodern capitalism. So how might we now imagine change and the new? How might we understand subversion at a moment when the subversion of the signifier is the dominant ideology?

Communist Epilogue; or, An American Utopia

What is ultimately paralyzing about the end of history and the end of ideology, about the postmodern incredulity towards metanarratives, about the breakdown of the signifying chain or the demise of symbolic efficiency – what is ultimately paralyzing about all of these things is the loss of the utopian imaginary that drives historical progress. Therefore, those who have proclaimed the end of history, as well as those who have chided the tyranny of the signifier, regardless of what they may attest to with regard to their criticisms of the present system, are today the true utopians of the present. They are those who miss the retroactive determination of the imaginary required for emancipatory cognitive mapping, which in the same gesture that it deconstructs the hegemonic signifier of the present, brings – through its radical act – a wholly new one. The *Communist* imaginary is not one that premises a necessarily inevitable, absolute teleology; it does not conceive a predestined historical outcome. Rather it

provides for us the co-ordinates for regulating the movement away from the *dystopian* trajectory of the present that is maintained by the cynical resignation of the dominant postmodern consciousness. Communism is a signifier of *retroactive speculation* – or of *retroactive signification*. And, if postmodernism means in some ways the elevation of subversion into the reigning ideology, then perhaps the signifier of contemporary radical politics needs to be Communism, not as subversion, but as our new *common sense* political unconscious.

Communism as our new common sense master code arises in Jameson and Žižek's recent projects, from Žižek's volumes on *The Idea of Communism*, to Jameson's essay "An American Utopia" (contained in the book of the same name, edited by Žižek, which we might also count as another volume in *The Idea of Communism* series). What they both continue to demonstrate is that in the face of the absolute foreclosure of the signifier, the deadlocks of capitalist exploitation, as well as its own inherent internal contradictions, can only go on and transform into absolute excess. As Žižek has put it, "when people tell me that nothing can be changed [my response is] – no it can, because things are already changing like crazy. And what we should say is just this: if we let things change the way they *are* changing automatically we are approaching a kind of new perverse, permissively authoritarian society, which will be authoritarian but in a new way" (Žižek 2013: 50). Against the Deleuzo-Guattarian-inspired #accelerationist view (see, for instance, Shaviro 2015; and, Srnicek and Williams 2015) that seeks only to exacerbate and heighten existing contradictions, or at the very least continue to maintain the deterritorialized flows of capital, without – that is – imposing a new signifier, we might take the advice of both Jameson and Žižek that it is today increasingly necessary to re-invent utopia!

References

- Althusser, Louis (1996) "Marx and Freud." In *Writings on Psychoanalysis: Freud and Lacan*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Althusser, Louis (2008) *On Ideology*. New York: Verso.
- Anderson, Perry (1998) *The Origins of Postmodernity*. New York: Verso.
- Bell, Daniel (1960) *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties*. New York: The Free Press.

- Berman, Marshall (1982) *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Bosteels, Bruno (2005) "Alain Badiou's Theory of the Subject: The Recommencement of Dialectical Materialism." In Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Lacan: The Silent Partners*. New York: Verso.
- Butler, Judith (1997) *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari (1983) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane, trans. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dolar, Mladen (1993) "Beyond Interpellation." *Qui parle* 6.2: 75-96.
- Eagleton, Terry (1996) *The Illusions of Postmodernism*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Fink, Bruce (2003) "Perversion." *Perversion and the Social Relation*, Molly Anne Rothenberg, Dennis A. Foster, and Slavoj Žižek, eds. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Fisher, Mark (2009) *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Winchester, UK: Zero Books.
- Flisfeder, Matthew (2013) "Communism and the End of the World." *PUBLIC: Art, Culture, Ideas* 48: 105-115.
- Flisfeder, Matthew (2017) *Postmodernism and Blade Runner*. New York: Bloomsbury should be Flisfeder, Matthew (2017) *Postmodern Theory and Blade Runner*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Foucault, Michel (1984) "Truth and Power." In *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow ed. New York: Pantheon.
- Foucault, Michel (1990) *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, Robert Hurley, tans. New York: Vintage Books.
- Fukuyama, Francis (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: The Free Press.
- Jameson, Fredric (1971) *Marxism and Form: 20th Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Jameson, Fredric (1981) *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Jameson, Fredric (1984) "Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review* I 146: 53-92.

- Jameson, Fredric (1992) "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture." In *Signatures of the Visible*. New York: Routledge.
- Jameson, Fredric (1994) *The Seeds of Time*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Jameson, Fredric (1998) "End of Art/End of History." In *The Cultural Turn: Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998*. New York: Verso.
- Jameson, Fredric (2008) *The Ideologies of Theory*. New York: Verso.
- Jameson, Fredric (2010) "Realism and Utopia in *The Wire*." *Criticism* 52.3/4: 359-372.
- Lacan, Jacques (1981) *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Alan Sherridan, trans. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Lacan, Jacques (1997) *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, Russell Grigg, trans. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Lukács, Georg (1971) *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, Rodney Livingstone, trans. Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press.
- Lyotard, Jean-François (1984) *The Postmodern Condition*, Brian Massumi, trans. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Marx, Karl (1990) *Capital, Volume 3*, David Fernbach, trans. New York: Penguin.
- McGowan, Todd (2016) *Capitalism and Desire: The Psychic Cost of Free Markets*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Mirrlees, Tanner (2015) "Hollywood's Uncritical Dystopias." *CineACTION* 95: 4-15.
- Laclau, Ernesto (1990) *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. New York: Verso.
- Laclau, Ernesto and Chantal Mouffe (2000) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, 2nd Ed. New York: Verso.
- Shaviri, Steven (2015) *No Speed Limit: Three Essays on Accelerationism*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Srnicek, Nick and Alex Williams (2015) *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*. New York: Verso.
- Williams, Raymond (1977) *Marxism and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Žižek, Slavoj (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1993) *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1994) "The Spectre of Ideology." In Slavoj Žižek, ed., *Mapping Ideology*. New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1999) *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2002) *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, 2nd Ed. New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2008) *In Defense of Lost Causes*. New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2012) *The Year of Dreaming Dangerously*. New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2013) "The End of the World (As We Know It)," transcribed by Matthew Flisfeder. *PUBLIC* 48: 41-50.

ISSN 1751-8229

Volume Thirteen, Number One

The Figure of Adorno in the Utopian Politics of Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek¹⁹

Ed Graham, Simon Fraser University

Ed Graham is a PhD candidate at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver. He holds an MA in Philosophy from the University of Amsterdam and a BA in English Literature from the University of Warwick. His research interests include Marxism and critical theory, contemporary literature and culture, and utopian studies.

¹⁹ A version of this paper was presented for a panel on “Remobilizing Utopia” (Seattle, 20 May 2018), part of the annual Red May Seattle series. Many thanks to Morgan Young and Philip Wohlstetter for the invitation to speak. Special thanks also to Clint Burnham and Carolyn Lesjak for the advice and encouragement, and to Burnham for allowing me to write this paper as part of a directed study.

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.²⁰ 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

²⁰ 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 Žižek Studies*. Volume 10, no. 3. Web. <http://zizekstudies.org/index.php/IJZS/article/view/979>

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 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 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:

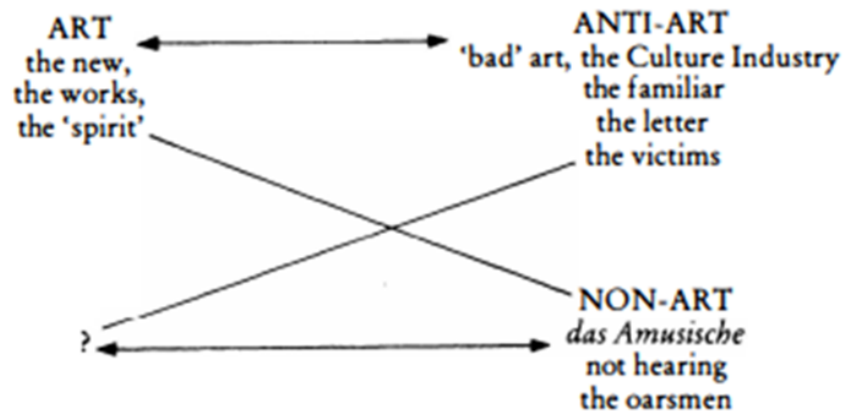


Fig. 1. Semiotic Square of Adorno and Art (Jameson 1990: 151)

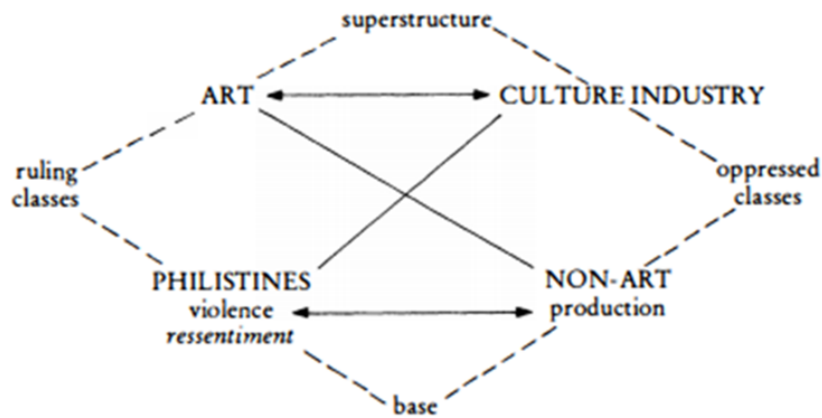


Fig. 2. Completed Semiotic Square of Adorno and Art (Jameson 1990: 154)

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).²¹

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

²¹ 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.

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 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:

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 parallax views,²² different views that have utopianism as their shared goal. In the two following closing examples, we can recognize such a Marxian parallax 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

²² I am grateful to Kirk Boyle for helping me formulate this insight.

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 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.

References

- Adorno, Theodor W. (1981 (1966)) *Negative Dialectics*. Trans. E.B. Ashton. New York: Continuum.
- Adorno, Theodor W. (1991) *The Culture Industry: Selected essays on mass culture*. Ed. Jay Bernstein. London: Routledge.
- Adorno, Theodor W. (2005 (1951)) *Minima Moralia*. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. London: Verso.
- Adorno, Theodor W., Horkheimer, Max (2002 (1947)) *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Trans Edmund Jephcott. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Fisher, Mark (2009) *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Ropley: Zero Books.
- Jameson, Fredric (1988) "Cognitive Mapping." *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Jameson, Fredric. (1990) *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic*. London: Verso.
- Jameson, Fredric (1991) *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Jameson, Fredric (1997) "Culture and Finance Capital" *Critical Inquiry* 24 (1): 246-65.
- Jameson, Fredric (2005) *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. London: Verso.
- Jameson, Fredric (2010) *Valences of the Dialectic*. London: Verso.
- Jameson, Fredric (2016). "An American Utopia." *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*. Ed. Slavoj Žižek. London: Verso.

- Lesjak, Carolyn (2013) "Reading Dialectically." *Criticism* 55 (2): 233–77.
- Malm, Andreas (2018) *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World*. London: Verso.
- McGowan, Todd (2014) "Symptom." *The Žižek Dictionary*. Ed. Rex Butler. Durham: Acumen.
- Osborne, Peter (1992) "A Marxism for the Postmodern? Jameson's Adorno." *New German Critique* 56: 171-92.
- Pizer, John (1993) "Jameson's Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Utopian." *New German Critique* 58: 127–51.
- Tally, Jr., Robert T. (2014) *Fredric Jameson: The Project of Dialectical Criticism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Weeks, Kathi (2016) "Utopian Therapy: Work, Nonwork, and the Political Imagination." *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*. Ed. Slavoj Žižek. London: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1989) *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1997) *The Plague of Fantasies*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2006) *The Parallax View*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2008) *In Defence of Lost Causes*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2012) *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2016) "The Seeds of Imagination." *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army*. Ed. Slavoj Žižek. London: Verso.

ISSN 1751-8229

Volume Thirteen, Number One

Decolonial Particularity or Abstract Universalism? No, Thanks! The Case of the Palestinian Question

Zahi Zalloua, Whitman College

Zahi Zalloua is the Cushing Eells Professor of Philosophy and Literature and a professor of French and Interdisciplinary Studies at Whitman College. He is the author of *Žižek on Race: Toward an Anti-Racist Future* (forthcoming); *Theory's Autoimmunity: Skepticism, Literature, and Philosophy*; *Continental Philosophy and the Palestinian Question*; *Reading Unruly: Interpretation and its Ethical Demands*; and *Montaigne and the Ethics of Skepticism*.

In the neoliberal imaginary of Western nations, democracy and the free market are symbiotically interwoven; the latter could not exist without the full *presence* of the former in the realm of public discourse. In addition to guaranteeing a way of life at home, neoliberalism serves in this imaginary as a global antidote to the most corrupt and tyrannical governments in the world. The neoliberal ethos, however, does not merely dominate or colonize the public or political sphere; it also structures our very mode of being. As David Harvey puts it, “[Neoliberalism] has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world” (Harvey 2007: 3). Nearly three decades ago, Fredric Jameson alerted us to the dangerous and alarming ways neoliberal rhetoric infiltrates not only how we conceptualize the economic field but also how we understand our place within that field: “‘The market is in human nature’ is the proposition that cannot be allowed to stand unchallenged; in my opinion, it is the most crucial terrain of ideological struggle in our time” (Jameson 1991: 263). Neoliberal ideology has thoroughly naturalized itself – appearing to its defenders and dissenters alike as the only game in town. As the argument goes, global capitalism may not be perfect – but what else is really out there as an alternative?

More recently, echoing Jameson, Slavoj Žižek has expressed a sense of urgency mixed with utter dismay at the cognitive state of the public at large, noting how “it seems easier to imagine the ‘end of the world’ than a far more modest change in the mode of production” (Žižek 1994: 1). For Žižek, one symptom of neoliberal capitalism’s triumphant reign is the alleged “return to ethics” that made its way into Western universities, particularly in the humanities. On Žižek’s account, with the return to ethics, the Left’s project of radical democracy has fallen victim to a pervasive type of intellectual blackmail:

The moment one shows a minimal sign of engaging in political projects that aim to seriously challenge the existing order, the answer is immediately: “Benevolent as it is, this will necessarily end in a new Gulag!” The “return to ethics” in today’s political philosophy shamefully exploits the horrors of the Gulag or

Holocaust as the ultimate bogey for blackmailing us into renouncing all serious radical engagement. (Žižek 2000a: 127)

For the humanist liberal, reform – rather than revolution – is the reasonable and moral way of proceeding, a position to which Žižek is entirely opposed. This “return to ethics” – fueled by a fetishization of the cultural other, a gentrified figure of otherness which is, as Jameson sardonically puts it, “merely added mechanically onto some individual psychology,” “evaporat[ing] into Levinassian sentimentalism” – is symptomatic of a more general “culturalization of politics” (Jameson 2006; Žižek 2008a: 140-44).

Two examples of such a depolitization of social reality are postcolonial theory and decolonality. In *Violence*, Žižek faults the postcolonial critique of liberal ideology for its one-sided Marxist lesson, for only demystifying the abstract universality of European modernity. And more recently in *Trouble in Paradise*, Žižek objects to decolonality’s even more categorical denunciation of Eurocentrism. Seeing themselves as correcting postcolonial theory’s Eurocentric biases – lamenting the latter’s all-too-narrow archive, its overt reliance on European modernism and poststructuralism – decolonial theorists like Walter D. Mignolo hunger for the local, a reality uncontaminated by European thought and its capitalist regime;²³ they emphasize “epistemic disobedience” and reject wholesale modernity’s universality (Mignolo 2011a) (although Žižek consistently folds decolonality under the general category of postcolonial theory).

Žižek readily concedes that postcolonial and decolonial critics are fully justified in denouncing the false ideological universality that masks, naturalizes, and legitimizes a racist and neocolonial condition and agenda, but he also insists on the need to go further, seeing these competing progressive movements as limiting themselves to resisting only false universality and abstractions such as “Man” as the bearer of human rights. At best, their intervention constitutes only half of the Marxist critique (its moment of demystification); at worst, it succumbs to “a non-reflective anti-Eurocentrism”

²³ As Ilan Kapoor insightfully observes, “Mignolo... seems to equate non-European particularity with a certain authenticity, as though a distinct or pristine non-European identity can be retrieved in the wake of colonialism and the globalization of capital.” See, Ilan Kapoor (2018) “Antagonism and Politics Now: Three Recent Controversies.” *International Journal of Žižek Studies* Vol. 12, No. 1: 6).

manifested as a depoliticized call to respect authentic difference, an indulgence in a cult of victimhood, a retreat behind communitarian boundaries, or a nostalgic desire for a return to authentic pre-colonial or indigenous realities (Žižek 2014: 183).

In this, Žižek doubles down on a Marxist approach that has come under fire in postcolonial circles, and perhaps most prominently in the debates over Jameson's infamous article "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." Jameson's piece now typically serves as a warning lesson, a cautionary tale for Marxists who would export their critical hermeneutics to the Third World, who would fail, that is, to suspend the impulse to homogenize and translate colonial wounds and nationalist struggles into well-known symptoms of capitalism. Critically reacting to Jameson's argument that third-world texts "are necessarily. . . allegorical, and in a very specific way," that "they are to be read as what I will call national allegories" (Jameson 1986: 69), R. Radhakrishnan underscores the former's simultaneous will to mastery and inattentiveness to his historical differences:

During the course of this essay, Jameson talks all too glibly about "the return of nationalism" in the Third World as though nationalism were enjoying a re-run in the Third World. The confident use of the term "return" suggests that within the universal synchronicity of Western time, nationalism is repeating itself in the Third World, whereas, historically, "nationalism" is new to the Third World. Throughout this essay (in spite of an initial gesture of unease), Jameson has little difficulty in maintaining his official conviction that the Third World histories are a predictable repetition of the histories of the "advanced world"; hence, the masterly confidence with which he "allegorizes" the Third World on its own behalf. (Radhakrishnan 1989: 329)²⁴

²⁴ Edward Said makes a similar argument against Marxist theorists more generally denouncing their "blithe universalism," pointing to their bad record when it came to questions of race and representation (Said 1994: 277).

Does Žižek learn from Jameson's "error"?²⁵ "No" is the short answer. Žižek displays even less interest in investigating the specificities of the postcolonial, or decolonial, condition. Žižek repeats instead Jameson's insistence on the economic, on viewing Third-World national cultures as "locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism – a cultural struggle that is itself a reflexion of the economic situation of such areas in their penetration by various stages of capital, or as it is sometimes euphemistically termed, of modernization" (Jameson 1986: 68).

Critics invested in a cultural politics emphasizing difference and local specificity may find this repetition frustrating or puzzling to say the least, yet if one patiently moves through the layers of Žižek's argument (without, for example, getting shaken by his uncharitable conflation of postcolonial theory with multiculturalism and political correctness), one can observe valid objections to postcolonial and decolonial theories, motivated by a desire to enrich the debate on the Left, as well as a commitment to engage specificity otherwise. As we will see, for Žižek, an effective critique of late capitalism cannot proceed without a commitment to the language and practice of universality. To this, however, he adds the important qualifier: it is a universalism that has learned from and is marked by its violent colonial history. A genuinely anti-colonial, anti-racist critique requires a dialectical next step. Žižek finds the path of universality more rewarding and productive than any rigorous defense of difference, insisting – repeating Jameson's own call – that the Left must move beyond the postcolonial exposure of the processes of othering in Western discourses. If Angela Davis is right in arguing that "any critical engagement with racism requires us to understand the tyranny of the

²⁵ This depiction of Jameson's work is quite widespread, reaching almost a state of consensus. This critique of Jameson's approach to postcolonial or Third-World affairs has not, however, gone uncontested. Ian Buchanan and Imre Szeman mount a compelling defense of Jameson's reading of "national allegory," pointing out the ways the essay has been systematically misread. What is meant by "national allegory" is from the start distorted. Buchanan argues that Jameson's critics dubiously conflate "national allegory" with "nationalist allegory." Jameson never argues that nationalism is the dominant ethos of Third-World literary writers, only that they are "obsessively concerned with the 'national situation' – nationalism would be but one part of this vastly more complex problem" (Buchanan 2006: 174). Literature is an avenue for Third-World writers because, unlike their First World counterparts, literature for them continues to embody a political dimension. Whereas, in the First World, literary production is about "the private rather than the public sphere...individual tastes and solitary meditations rather than public debate and deliberation," in the Third World, such an opposition simply does not exist (Szeman 2006: 192). "National allegory" is really then "political allegory" (Szeman 2006: 200).

universal,” this engagement cannot end with a divestment from universality and a (re)investment in particularity (Davis 2016: 87). The Left must appropriate and harness the gap between formal democracy and the economic reality of exploitation and domination. This appearance – the experience of the gap – must be re-articulated to mean more than an illusion, more than a lie. Žižek posits the pursuit of concrete universality – rather than a reactionary defense of racial or ethnic/religious difference, which can only lead to an ineffective political correctness or a defunct “identity politics” – as the real alternative to abstract, ideological universality.

In opposing the camp of cultural/ethnic difference and championing that of Marxist universality, Žižek arguably returns us to the now classic exchange between Jean-Paul Sartre and Frantz Fanon over the status and long-term viability of the *négritude* movement. “Black Orpheus,” Sartre’s preface to Léopold Sédar Senghor’s 1948 *Anthology of négritude* poetry, and Fanon’s critical gloss of it in his 1952 *Black Skin, White Masks*, stage an encounter between existential-Marxism and anti-colonial theory. Sartre clearly praises Senghor’s anthology, seeing it as a productive form of engaged literature. But Sartre also highlights its shortcomings, namely its philosophical insufficiency, how “Negritude appears as the weak state of a dialectical progression” (qtd. in Fanon 2008: 112). *Négritude* suffers from a “particularistic logic” (Penney 2004: 54). On the road to emancipation, *négritude* is only the point of departure, not the final destination. For Sartre, a truly emancipatory critique does not preserve but dissolves all differences; accordingly, anti-colonialism must “lead to the abolition of racial differences” (Sartre 1988: 296). Fanon objects to Sartre’s paternalistic reading, rejecting Sartre’s “helleniz[ing]” of *négritude*, his “Orpheusizing” of the black colonial body (Fanon 1998: 163). Against Sartre’s interpretive machinery, Fanon affirms the sufficiency of his singular otherness:

The dialectic that introduces necessity as a support for my freedom expels me from myself. It shatters my impulsive position. Still regarding consciousness, black consciousness is immanent in itself. I am not a potentiality of something; I am fully what I am. I do not have to look for the universal. (Fanon 1998: 114)

Fanon's objection to Sartre's dialectical reading is twofold. First, Fanon denounces Sartre for the latter's unmarked and unqualified universal perspective, which, he argues, blinds Sartre to a careful consideration of the specificity of the black lived experience, of "the fact of blackness." He decries that "Sartre forgets that the black man suffers in his body quite differently from the white man" (Fanon 1998: 118). Sartre's intervention, predicated on a European *telos* of history, ends up "destroy[ing] black impulsiveness" (Fanon 1998: 113). Second, Fanon points to a deficiency in the application of the dialectical method. Sartre's cognitive explanatory framework – which dutifully discerns the epiphenomenal from the real determinants, the symptoms from the causes – fails to account for the affects of *négritude*, for the movement's impact on Fanon's psyche: "When I tried to claim my negritude intellectually as a concept, they snatched it away from me. They proved to me that my reasoning was nothing but a phase in the dialectic" (Fanon 1998: 111). That is to say, subjecting *négritude* to a cold dialectical reading neglected to record the movement's affective appeal, the utter joy "in the intellectualization of black *existence*" (Fanon 1998: 116).²⁶

Mignolo might have been thinking of such an exchange in his response to Žižek's 1998 article provocatively titled, "A Leftist Plea for 'Eurocentrism.'" In his dismissal of Žižek's relevance (for decolonial subjects), Mignolo singles out the opening sentence of the essay: "When one says *Eurocentrism*, every self-respecting postmodern leftist intellectual has as violent a reaction as Joseph Goebbels had to culture – to reach for a gun, hurling accusations of protofascist Eurocentrist cultural imperialism" (Žižek 1988: 988), to which Mignolo righteously counters:

A self-respecting decolonial intellectual will reach instead to Frantz Fanon: "Now, comrades, now is the time to decide to change sides. We must shake off the great mantle of night, which has enveloped us, and reach, for the light. The new day, which is dawning, must find us determined, enlightened and resolute. So, my brothers, how could we fail to understand that

²⁶ As Penney puts it, "Fanon held firmly to the view that racially based identity claims on the part of non-European subjects in colonized situations carried an irreducible, cathartic importance" (Penney 2004: 56).

we have better things to do than follow that Europe's footsteps."

(Mignolo 2013a)

In Mignolo's version, Fanon's message for fellow anti-colonialists is loud and clear: Europe is a relic of the past, even a detriment to our intellectual growth. Decolonizing the mind necessitates a rupture with Europe. Whereas Sartre, according to Mignolo, recognized this shift in Fanon, today's Sartre (Žižek) fails to acknowledge the anti-colonial's need for a different path of resistance, one that does not follow the script of modernity. Casting Žižek exclusively as the would-be Sartre of "Black Orpheus," however, only gives us part of the picture, and Mignolo's attempt to recruit Fanon to the cause of decoloniality is, at best, forced or one-sided, and, at worst, self-defeating. Protecting Fanon from Western contamination is a fool's errand. In his rebuttal of Mignolo's reading, Žižek points out that, far from authorizing a decolonial retreat from universality into non-Western particularity, Fanon frequently engaged with European thinkers and was hospitable to Western thought: "Fanon himself. . . dealt extensively and intensively with Hegel, psychoanalysis, Sartre, and even Lacan" (Žižek 2014a: 184). Indeed, making Fanon available only for decolonial identification is arguably un-Fanonian to the extent that it ignores the author's complex intellectual heritage and, more importantly, passes over his investment in a global solidarity that did not exclude Europeans.

A Universalism Otherwise than Exclusionary

Hamid Dabashi defends Mignolo's line of argumentation by saying that there is plenty of Fanon to go around, that Žižek can keep his Europeanized Fanon: "Žižek can have his Fanon all to himself. There is plenty of Fanon left for others" (Dabashi 2015: 7). Yet, this is an odd line of defense, for Dabashi does not then elaborate on what such a decolonial Fanon, a Fanon for the rest of us, really looks like. Is this an essentialist Fanon, whose decoloniality can be neatly decoupled from the European thought he engages? Is this a Fanon who repeats Western discourses before moving away from this error, or is it a Fanon who repeats with a difference, who means something wholly different by the Western concepts he deploys? Though Dabashi's central argument is certainly true – that "the point. . . is not to have any exclusive claim on Fanon, or to fetishize him (or any other non-European thinker for that

matter) as a frozen talisman for Europeans to cite to prove they are not philosophically racist. The point is not to dismiss but to overcome the myth of ‘the West’ as the measure of truth” – this does not advance our understanding of Fanon’s contribution to this overcoming (Dabashi 2015: 8).²⁷ Rather, Dabashi’s suggestion that a “Western” Fanon can be neatly cordoned off from a “decolonial” one again produces something of a decolonial blackmail at work here: either we (the non-Europeans affected by the legacies of colonialism and imperialism) criticize Western modernity and try to escape its hegemonic orbit by reorienting our gaze to non-European thinkers, or else we are celebrating its virtues, turning our back on our specific history and locality. A Žižekian answer to Mignolo’s implicit question, decolonial particularity or abstract universalism? is a resolute, *No, Thanks!*

Rather than advocating identity politics – Mignolo’s wrong answer to a wrong question – Žižek formulates a model of universality that confronts the exclusionary logic of Eurocentrism, a logic that produces subjects who count and others who do not, subjects who benefit from the “Rights of Man” and those who fall outside the liberal umbrella, deemed less relevant, less grievable and so forth. In opposition to an ideological universalism, Žižek turns to Saint Paul’s statement from Galatians 3:28: “There is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Žižek 1998: 1002). To be clear, what Žižek privileges in Paul is not his religious message, that is, his displacement of Judaism with Christianity, but his formulation as an endless source and locus of negativity. It is Paul’s principle of *adiaphora* (ethical indifference toward ethnic and cultural particularities) that Žižek harnesses in his politics of subtraction.

²⁷ Unfortunately, Dabashi also undermines his case against the West as the sole measure of truth, by misattributing to Žižek a quotation that is actually from Fanon: “*I am a man and what I have to recapture is the whole past of the world, I am not responsible only for the slavery involved in Santo Domingo, every time man has contributed to the victory of the dignity of the spirit, every time a man has said no to an attempt to subjugate his fellows, I have felt solidarity with his act. In no way does my basic vocation have to be drawn from the past of peoples of color. In no way do I have to dedicate myself to reviving some black civilization unjustly ignored. I will not make myself the man of any past. My black skin is not a repository for specific values. Haven’t I got better things to do on this earth than avenge the blacks of the 17th century?*” While Dabashi misreads this as a symptom of Žižek’s assimilative Western logic, what Fanon resists here is another form of reductionism: namely, his interpellation as a *black* intellectual, one who could only be responsible for and responsive to black matters. Fanon insists that his fellows include not only blacks but others as well.

Fanon practices this kind of *adiaphora* when he sustains a critical distance from *négritude* and other similar movements, resisting the impulse for rootedness, the phantasmatic impulse to ontologize or homogenize black experience:

No, I have not the right to be black. It is not my duty to be this or that. [...] I acknowledge one right for myself: the right to demand human behavior from the other. [...] The black man is not. No more than the white man. (Fanon 2008: 205-206)

The shift from difference as experiential rootedness (the stuff of tribalism and identity politics) to difference as experiential relatedness helps to revive a universalist humanist framework where what ultimately matters is to be treated humanly. It also might be tempting to read Fanon as offering his own version of Pauline cosmopolitanism: *there is neither White nor Black*. But here we must not forget about the material conditions of colonial life. There is no transcendence of race without the dismantlement of the colonial system, and there is no dismantlement of the colonial system without an affective and cognitive transvaluation of the *difference* of the colonized. Coloniality is not destiny, but it is lived as if it were. A politics of subtraction weakens coloniality's hold on the psyche. This is the Eurocentrism – synonymous with a universalism at odds with (the ideological complacency of) identitarian thinking – that Žižek unabashedly defends.

The Neighbor and the Feminine Logic of the Non-All

But Žižek's investment in the universal does not stop here. He supplements his account of Pauline cosmopolitanism with his Lacanian musings on the neighbor. Žižek turns to the biblical figure of the neighbor, which he considers the “most precious and revolutionary aspect of the Jewish legacy,” stressing how the neighbor “remains an inert, impenetrable, enigmatic presence that hystericizes” (Žižek 2006a: 140-141). Žižek foregrounds the challenge posed by the injunction to “love thy neighbour!” This injunction confounds universalist thinking; it disturbs ethics as such. The biblical injunction might be better characterized as an “anti-ethics” (Žižek 2008b: 16) to the extent that it radically deviates from a humanist orientation, where ethics invests itself in a fetishistic ideal of humanity – a gentrified view

of Man as the bearer of rights, endowed with a moral sensibility and so forth – disavowing any knowledge of suffering or man-made evil in the world. Jewish law, for its part, de-gentrifies the other, calling us to confront the Real of the other in its figuration of the neighbor. If Greek philosophy neglected the hysterical presence of this other (“Nothing is farther from the message of Socrates than *you shall love your neighbor as yourself*, a formula that is remarkably absent from all that he says,” as Lacan says (qtd. in Žižek, Santer, and Reinhard 2006: 4), Jewish law avows the Real of the neighbor, the neighbor as the “bearer of a monstrous Otherness, this properly *inhuman* neighbor” (Žižek 2006a: 162).

The neighbor derails my sovereignty and exposes the fantasy of my masculine logic. In Seminar XX, *Encore*, Lacan implicitly draws a distinction between two modalities or orientations in his discussion of the formulae of sexuation: a “masculine” logic of exception and a “feminine” logic of the “non-all” (*pas-tout*). Rather than referring to anatomical differences, these terms describe instead the ways a subject’s enjoyment (*jouissance*) is organized or structured. For Lacan, the masculine logic of exception takes there to be a subject who has unlimited enjoyment, who stands outside the law of castration that governs social symbolic existence; it is the sovereign exception (Freud’s example of the primal father in *Totem and Taboo*²⁸) that proves the universal rule of castration (Lacan 1998: 79). The feminine logic, by contrast, sees no exception to the law of castration; it declines the illusion of an uncastrated Man (and with it the possibility of absolute *jouissance*), but at the same time takes castration to be non-all, never complete or whole. The non-all articulates the logic of the Real, pointing to what is irreducible to a society’s symbolic representation of reality. Or, as Žižek puts it, “the Real is not external to the Symbolic: the Real is the Symbolic itself in the modality of non-All, lacking an external Limit/ Exception” (Žižek 2003: 69). The non-all gives the lie to society’s phantasmatic and ideological pretention of wholeness. It orients us not only to the harshness of being (the reality of the Real), but also compels us to take an interpretive stance appropriate to a being understood

²⁸ For Lacan, Freud’s primordial father in *Totem and Taboo* “is the father from before the incest taboo, before the appearance of law, of the structures of marriage and kinship, in a word, of culture” (Lacan 1990: 88).

as a *becoming* (a being that lacks), to a social reality that never coincides with the Real.

The neighbor is, then, a concretization or embodiment of the Real, a reminder and remainder of this Real, an intolerable or traumatic stain which remains untranslatable, irreducible to my interpretive mastery and (humanist) universality. From this vision of the neighbor emerges an ethico-political injunction: “to love and respect your neighbor . . . does not refer to your imaginary *semblable*/double, but to the neighbor qua traumatic Thing” (Žižek 2006a: 140). The Real of the other is impossible, but it is an impossibility that paradoxically needs to be sustained:

The Real is impossible but it is not simply impossible in the sense of a failed encounter. It is also impossible in the sense that it is a traumatic encounter that *does* happen but which we are unable to confront. And one of the strategies used to avoid confronting it is precisely that of positing it as this indefinite ideal which is eternally postponed. One aspect of the real is that it's impossible, but the other aspect is that it happens but is impossible to sustain, impossible to integrate. And this second aspect, I think, is more and more crucial. (Žižek and Daly 2004: 71)

The real neighbor is neither assimilable to that which we already know, nor a radical alterity mysteriously exempt from symbolic mediation. For Fanon, similarly, we must guard against the temptation to think the neighbor's singularity outside mediated relation, the temptation to insist on a radical difference that is tantamount to reified sameness, that eschews or denies this encounter, this relation. Singularity comes about through history (through history as non-all), through the particularizing movement of history, and to forget this is to mistake history for destiny, to reify being and renounce the possibilities of becoming: “If the question once arose for me about showing solidarity with a given past, it was because I was committed to myself and my neighbor, to fight with all my life and all my strength so that never again would people be enslaved on this earth” (Fanon 2008: 202, translation modified). Fidelity to a “given past” motivates solidarity and action yet also risks arresting this movement. Fanon's neighbor is not *reducible* to a *semblable* (the other

with whom I share a colonial past). This neighbor's universality is of a different order: the biblical exhortation to love is not grounded in a shared humanity with the other (my imaginary/symbolic counterpart, which always risks congealing around an identity), but in the acknowledgement of the *inhuman* (the inaccessible, untamable, and anxiety-inducing Real) as condition of/for universality:

The most difficult thing for common understanding is to grasp this speculative-dialectical reversal of the singularity of the subject *qua* Neighbor-Thing into universality, not standard "general" universality, but universal singularity, the universality grounded in the subjective singularity extracted from all particular properties, a kind of direct short circuit between the singular and the universal, bypassing the particular. (Žižek 2008b: 16-17)

Conceptualizing the neighbor in this way extends our ethico-political obligations to those who have gone unrecognized as neighbors precisely because they are not sufficiently like us. Sameness or shared humanity need not be pre-requisite to neighborly love; correlatively, we must reconsider who counts as our neighbors, and who has been excluded from that relation.

Solidarity with the Palestinian Neighbor

The question of who counts, and how to relate to their universal singularity, animates Fanon's work. Fanon's solidarity is always supplemented by a universalist orientation; even when accounting for one own's trauma or the trauma of a people, Fanon fights hard against the myopic impulse to fetishize that suffering, to reify the singular into the particular, preferring to orient his discussion toward a universalist framework that takes up the plight of the dispossessed, of those who *do not count*, the "part of no-part."²⁹ Decolonial critics have adopted a narrower perspective on solidarity, however. Mignolo's intervention on the Palestinian question will serve as a case study

²⁹ See, Fanon 1965. "It is inadequate only to affirm that a people was dispossessed, oppressed or slaughtered, denied its rights and its political existence, without at the same time doing what Fanon did during the Algerian war, affiliating those horrors with the similar afflictions of other people. This does not at all mean a loss in historical specificity, but rather it guards against the possibility that a lesson learnt about oppression in one place will be forgotten or violated in another place or time" (Said 1996: 44).

for thinking solidarity today, for imagining solidarity or decolonial relationality beyond universalism and Eurocentrism. In Gianni Vattimo and Michael Marder's edited volume *Deconstructing Zionism*, which also includes an essay by Žižek, Mignolo attends to the dispossession of the Palestinians, laying out a convincing case against Zionism's logic of coloniality, linking the source of the conflict to Zionism's alignment with European thinking, with its unwavering attachment to the idea of the nation-state: "To solve the conflict of Palestine/Israel would require more than peace agreements – it would require decolonizing the form of the modern European nation-state" (Mignolo 2013b: 57). Zionism is the ideological commitment to the slogan "one state, one nation" that forecloses any possibility of co-existence between Palestinians and Israelis. What is needed, for Mignolo, is a decolonization of the State of Israel, which "means first and foremost unveiling the logic of coloniality implicit in the state form, along with its rhetoric of salvation and democracy" (Mignolo 2013b: 60). With the creation of the State of Israel, the formerly dispossessed did not become the purveyors of democracy but rather the dispossessors of the Palestinians, reaping the benefits of "the modern/colonial racial matrix" (Mignolo 2013b: 63). Racialized as Europe's barbaric other, the Palestinian (and the rest of the Arab population) stood on the other side of modernity, dutifully kept in check by Israel – itself racially upgraded and now fully enjoying the privileges of whiteness – as an outpost of European civilization/coloniality.

Phantasmatically shielded by a belligerent messianism – that is, by the myth of a sacred origin and manifest destiny, the return to the Promised Land – Israel, far from being immune to the contradictions of the nation-state, displays (in an amplified form) all the ills and shortcomings of European modernity. It has been plagued from the start with the intractable problem of every modern nation-state: "to look after the well-being of its citizens and to deem everyone else as suspicious or as a lesser human and dispensable in relation to a given nation-state" (Mignolo 2013b: 61). Israel's self-definition as a Jewish State only compounds the problem, or more precisely, reveals and reinforces the ideological lie of European democracy, which is at heart built on exclusionary self-other binaries. There is no solution to the conflict unless Israel frees itself from "the prison-house of religion, the nation, and the

state,”³⁰ unless it jettisons the rhetoric of “one state, one nation” (Mignolo 2013b: 65). This requires “the politicization of civil society” (Mignolo 2013b: 72). But this is where the limitations of decoloniality come into view. Mignolo’s envisioned politicization can only be conceived as a clear break with European thinking and its logic of the nation-state. Palestinians and critics of Zionism must look elsewhere for alternative models of nationalism and co-existence (for example, Ecuador’s or Bolivia’s pluri-national states). Mignolo omits from analysis European counter-discourse to the legacy of nationalism. He talks of the nation-state as if it is withering on its own (“what is known as the form nation-state is nearing its exhaustion”), unaffected, as it were, by any critique *from within* (this is of course not to say that a critique *from within* is sufficient on its own, only that foreclosing it a priori is unhelpful and unwarranted) (Mignolo 2013b:71). In this (European) counter-tradition, for example, the diasporic Jew – anathema to Zionism’s identitarian logic – has been a foil to the organicity of the nation. And perhaps more surprisingly, Mignolo fails to take up the idea of binationalism (likely due to its European origins), the radical alternative to the “two-state solution” (though in 2007 he signed his name in support of the one-state solution).³¹

An alternative model of solidarity and resistance interweaves a critique from within and a critique from without, drawing precisely on a diasporic or exilic mode of critique to conceive of solidarity as a form of radical relationality. In one of his last interviews, Edward Said boldly affirmed such a model of the self in solidarity. Responding to his Israeli interlocutor’s observation that “[he] sound[ed] very Jewish,” Said concurred: “Of course. I’m the last Jewish intellectual. You don’t know anyone else. All your other Jewish intellectuals are now suburban squires. From Amos Oz to all these people here in America. So I’m the last one. The only true follower of Adorno. Let me put it this way: I’m a Jewish-Palestinian” (Said 2001: 458). By adopting and adapting the figure of the diasporic Jew, Said embraces an exilic modality of being, harnessing the force of a Jewishness other than Zionist, of a

³⁰ Mignolo, “Decolonizing the Nation-State,” 60.

³¹ “The One State Declaration,” 29 November 2007. Available at <https://electronicintifada.net/content/one-state-declaration/793> .

Jewishness defined by its negativity, by its power of subtraction. This is precisely what Žižek champions in the Jewish tradition:

The privileged role of Jews in the establishment of the sphere of the “public use of reason” hinges on their subtraction from every state power. Theirs is this position of the “part of no-part” in every organic nation-state community, and it is this position, not the abstract-universal nature of their monotheism, that makes them the immediate embodiment of universality. No wonder, then, that, with the establishment of the Jewish nation-state, a new figure of the Jew emerged: a Jew resisting identification with the State of Israel, refusing to accept the State of Israel as his true home, a Jew who “subtracts” himself from this State, and who includes the State of Israel among the states towards which he insists on maintaining a distance, to live in their interstices. (Žižek 2013: 6)

The “part of no-part,” a notion Žižek freely borrows from Rancière, stand for “true universality,” representing “the whole of society”: “we – the ‘nothing,’ not counted in the order-are the people, we are all, against others who stand only for their particular privileged interest” (Žižek 1998: 988). They challenge the existing order of things. They recognize that the authority of symbolic order is not absolute – “there is no Other of the Other, no ultimate guarantee of the field of meaning” – unsettling political sovereignty à la Carl Schmitt, defined by its capacity to decide the exception, to determine the friend/enemy dyad (Žižek 1994a: 200). The “part of no-part” enacts politics as such. The notion articulates and affirms what Étienne Balibar calls *égaliberté*, equality-freedom, as an unconditional demand (Žižek 1998: 988).

The cosmopolitan Jew who resists interpellation by and identification with the State of Israel comes to occupy “the empty principle of universality” (Žižek 1998: 988). Praise for this “uncanny Jew,” of course, comes with a risk (Žižek 2013: 6). If the praise is done by non-Jews, the charge of anti-Semitism tends to follow. If it is done by Jews, the choice is pathologized as emanating from self-hatred (or in more patronizing terms, the person deemed a “useful

idiot of anti-Semites.”)³² Contemporary Zionists treat any Jew who *disidentifies* with Israel as a “foreign excess disturbing the community of the nation-state” (Žižek 2013: 6). In declining any organicist attachment, this universalist Jew experiences a new form of racism, which Žižek aptly dubs “Zionist anti-Semitism” (Žižek 2013: 6).

Against the attempt to counter Israeli (European) identity with Palestinian (Indigenous) identity, Žižek sees a greater chance for emancipatory politics if Palestinians (like Said) align themselves with those Jews who reject the phantasmatic lure of their insular communities. Palestinians are “today’s ‘universal individual’” (Žižek 2006b: 56). They are the globally excluded, Israel’s historical other, occupying the position of the “part of no-part.” As Jamil Khader rightly observes: “Precisely because Palestinians have been reduced to this undead position in the global capitalist system, Palestinians can be said to represent the truth of the system, its constitutive injustice and inequality. In their inherent exclusion and abjection, therefore, Palestinians can be considered, in Žižek’s words, the ‘very site of political universality’” (Khader 2015). Palestinians are ethically invisible to many Israelis, and for some they are only visible in their destruction, experienced as an utterly obscene source of enjoyment.³³ Palestinian existence thus registers and embodies the void in Israel’s social body, functioning simultaneously as a threat and obstacle to Israel’s Zionist dream of fullness, and as an index (to rest of the West) of Israel’s restless domination and *undemocratic* regime. But the solution to Israel’s democratic woes is not a two-state solution, which would only legitimize and fortify Israel’s regime of ethnocracy, as well as perpetuate its fantasy of wholeness, of a social life without Palestinians (even now the Palestinians legally living in Israel are transfigured as Arab Israelis), keeping Zionist privilege invisible while encouraging Palestinian nativism – a

³² This is how Richard Landes and Benjamin Weinthal labeled Judith Butler after her publication of *Parting Ways* and her comments on Hamas and Hezbollah (Landes and Weinthal 2012).

³³ As Journalist Patrick Strickland notes: “Many Israeli Facebook users have posted violent and disturbing content on their personal accounts. Talya Shilok Edry, who has more than one thousand followers, posted the following ‘status’: ‘What an orgasm to see the Israeli Defense Forces bomb buildings in Gaza with children and families at the same time. Boom boom’” (Strickland 2014).

retreat into identity politics, patriotic fervor or a reactionary defense of difference. The other solution is binationalism.

Binationalism as a Universalist Project

As Judith Butler points out, binationalism originates in the writings of early European Zionist intellectuals (including Martin Buber, Judah Magnes, and Arthur Ruppin), and its relevance as a political position – its answer to the then Jewish question – has been “occluded by the changing history of the meaning of Zionism” (Butler 2016: 185). The sad irony is that now binationalism is an index of anti-Zionism, or even anti-Semitism (Butler 2016: 187). Though binationalism was first introduced in the lexicon by Jewish intellectuals prior to the creation of Israel in 1948, Said re-appropriated the concept – which in its original formulation did not fully break with settler colonialism – deploying it for emancipatory ends in a significantly different context: its status as potential answer to what is now the Palestinian question. Said’s binationalism solicits the labor of decoloniality, calling for a decolonized view of European nationalism and the abandonment of any mythic or transhistorical pretensions of origins and exclusionary claims of rooted identity. You can still live your life as a Zionist (be emotionally attached to the land) but you must not preclude others from sharing and caring for the same land. You must decline the rhetoric of Israeli exceptionalism, disaffiliate from the state’s racist practices, give up your colonial/Zionist privilege, and transform the system that sustains it. Your claim is not metaphysical (the appeal to Scriptures) but *historical*, just like mine. “They can be Zionists,” Said writes, “and they can assert their Jewish identity and their connection to the land, so long as it doesn’t keep the others out so manifestly” (Said 2001: 451).

Similarly, Žižek cautions against phantasmatic appeals to the past: “The lesson is simply that every legitimization of a claim to land by reference to some mythic past should be rejected. In order to resolve (or contain, at least) the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, we should not dwell in the ancient past – we should, on the contrary, forget the past (which is in any case constantly reinvented to justify present actions)” (Žižek 2017a: 130). What the past needs is not fetishization but (re)interpretation:

According to the standard view, the past is fixed, what happened happened, it cannot be undone, and the future is open, it depends on unpredictable contingencies. What we should propose here is a reversal of this standard view: the past is open to retroactive reinterpretations, while the future is closed, since we live in a determinist universe. . . . This does not mean that we cannot change the future; it just means that, in order to change our future, we should first (not “understand” but) change our past, reinterpret it in a way that opens up toward a different future from the one implied by the predominant vision of the past. (Žižek 2017b: 160)

Against the hermeneutics of “manifest destiny,” which interprets historical contingencies teleologically as necessities – and thus solidifies Israel’s past while seamlessly foreclosing Palestinian futurity – Žižek turns to the past in order to demythify it, to dereify it, so as to unsettle the present horizon of possibilities. To open the “determinist universe” of the Palestine/Israel conflict, to combat the cruel optimism of the two-state solution, Žižek returns to the lost cause of binationalism. Against the grain (the common objection that it is not practical; it cannot be done and so on), Žižek points to the current reality that a one-state model is already in place: “What both sides exclude as an impossible dream is the simplest and most obvious solution – a bi-national secular state comprising of all of Israel plus the occupied territories and Gaza. To those who dismiss the bi-national state as a utopian dream disqualified by the long, Manichean history of hatred and violence, one should reply that, far from being utopian, the bi-national state already is a fact” (Žižek 2013: 9).³⁴ Israel and the Occupied Territories constitute a single state, but one that habitually abjects, racializes, and pathologizes Palestinians. Palestinians’ perceived lust for violence and disregard for their own (collateral damage is always blamed on the Palestinian resistance, on their willingness to let their own die) is deemed incompatible with Israel’s European way of life), and thus

³⁴ Butler insists that it is a “wretched fact” that is “being lived out as a specific historical form of settler colonialism” (Butler 2012: 30).

only Israelis count as fully human, and fully citizens. Jewish Israeli lives are in this framework the only liveable and grievable lives.

So, again, we must resist false oppositions. The question is no longer, if it has ever been, a one-state versus a two-states solution, a European versus a non-European solution (for the decolonial critic), but what kind of one-state should prevail. As it stands, Israel as a Jewish State, Žižek argues, aggressively discriminates in access to land and housing, and is wholly incompatible with the universality of democracy, captured by the civil rights slogan, “one person, one vote” – whence the need “to abolish the apartheid and transform it into a secular democratic state” (Žižek 2013: 10). In politicizing *égalité*, Palestinians make clear that they are not satisfied by merely demystifying Israel as a democratic state, by denouncing its rhetoric of equality as a falsehood or an illusion. Rather, they delegitimize Israel as a racist state by performing concrete universality, by transcending local (religious, national) identities.

As an intervention into the hegemonic reality of the Occupation, Žižek proposes something of a thought experiment: What if Jerusalem became a site for such coexistence? What if Israelis and Palestinians severed their phantasmatic attachment to Jerusalem and renounced their exclusive claim to the land? What if Jerusalem became “an extra-state place of religious worship controlled (temporarily) by some neutral international force” (Žižek 2008a: 127)? This would constitute “a true political act,” an act that “renders the unthinkable thinkable,” the impossible possible (Žižek 2008a: 126). Whereas Donald Trump’s decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel only reinforced the predominant vision of the past (despite the cries of Western liberals in the United States and abroad who mistakenly claim that this unilateral action was a game-changer, jeopardizing the protocols of negotiation, the status quo, the pacifying pragmatism of the two-state solution), Žižek’s proposal would derail the logic of sacrifice and compromise: “both parties should experience it as by giving something [political control, religious claim over holy places] we are all gaining” (Žižek 2011: 178). For both Israelis and Palestinians, this political act would entail traversing their fundamental fantasy of an “ethnically ‘pure’ nation-state” (the dream – or rather nightmare – of living without others), and would thus be tantamount to

undoing their ego – a “strik[ing] back at themselves” – to short-circuiting their affective investment in exclusionary nationalism (Žižek 2008a: 127, 126).³⁵

Undoing Sovereignty, or Neighborly Love

I believe Israel’s *refuseniks*, those soldiers who refuse to complete their compulsory military service in the Occupied Territories, give us a glimpse of what a binational reality would look like. Declining to perpetuate Israel’s state of exception, their government’s necropolitics, the *refuseniks* seriously take up, if not fulfill, the impossible injunction to “love thy neighbor.” Their actions call for a reinvention of the Symbolic, and constitute something of a “miracle” in the current socio-political climate:

What the *refuseniks* have achieved is the passage from *Homo sacer* to “neighbour”: they treat Palestinians not as “equal full citizens,” but as *neighbours* in the strict Judeo-Christian sense. And, in fact, that is the difficult ethical test for Israelis today: “Love thy neighbour!” means “Love the Palestinian!” (who is their neighbour *par excellence*), or it means nothing at all. (Žižek 2002a: 116)³⁶

To see the Palestinians as neighbors is, of course, not simply to acknowledge their ontological opacity, to acknowledge, that is, the truth that “we are all opaque subjects” – *it is that and more*. It is to acknowledge their historically particular opacity, their state of “precarity,” or, in other words, the symbolic order’s contingent distribution of vulnerability and unfamiliarity (an unfamiliarity increasingly taken as bestial and threatening).

Moreover, the *refuseniks*, on Žižek’s account, decline the liberal or humanist remedy. They refuse to conceive of the neighbor merely as “equal full citizens,” terms that still rely on a logic of sovereignty, a structure through which a sovereign power dictates who is included in Israel’s modern state (applying the Law of Return), and who is excluded from it (denying the right of return). The enlightened sovereign self decides on the exception; he or she is

³⁵ I pursue these questions in greater detail in Zalloua 2017.

³⁶ Similarly, Žižek observes: “In the electoral campaign, President Bush named as the most important person in his life Jesus Christ. Now he has a unique chance to prove that he meant it seriously: for him, as for all Americans today, ‘Love thy neighbor!’ means ‘Love the Muslims!’ OR IT MEANS NOTHING AT ALL” (Žižek 2002b).

driven to act by a masculine logic. That self would make the Palestinian other grievable on the basis of an implicit identification with the formerly excluded, now brought into the realm of intersubjectivity and sameness, under the umbrella of an inclusive humanism. By contrast, the injunction *to love thy Palestinian neighbor* insists on the challenges posed by the other. The Palestinian as neighbor continues to arouse anxiety, compelling a different kind of affective relationality. The neighborly injunction de-completes Zionist reality, subjects it to a feminine logic of incompleteness. The non-all is figured by an affective excess, a visceral ethical feeling, that is, a non-coincidence between a compulsory hatred of Palestinians (what cultural norms tell soldiers they should feel for the enemy) and how they actually respond to the (real) Palestinians – to these faceless neighbors. Epistemically speaking, then, the example of the *refuseniks* delegitimizes the Zionist/colonizer settler narrative that frames or structures Israeli knowledge and experience of the Palestinians.

If the *refuseniks*, from a position of power, offer one response to this intractable conflict, countering Zionist nationalism with agapic love, and frustrating a nationalist sovereignty obsessed with its securitization by dismantling the friend/enemy dyad, Palestinian writer and poet Mahmoud Darwish proposes another, one that shifts registers from agape to eros, where the question of power is more dynamic and less asymmetrical. In *Memory for Forgetfulness*, a collection of poems dealing with Israel's siege of Beirut in 1982, Darwish's narrator recounts a scene with his Jewish lover, which brings to the forefront the dilemmas involved in relating to your enemy at the erotic register, that is, when that enemy is also your enigmatic lover.

Anxiety permeates the poem: after making love to his Jewish lover, the narrator becomes preoccupied with having to check in with the Haifa police in order to avoid being jailed or permanently banned. This impeding reality along with the more generalized existential knowledge that "*each would kill the other outside the window*" weigh heavily on the narrator. A shared compulsion to return to vexed topics (Do you hate Jews? Do you love Arabs?) only exerts further pressure on the imaginary barrier separating them from the social conflict outside, a barrier immunizing their love from intractable difference. Suspicion and resentment accompany desire and tenderness. When they try

to engage in small talk for example (he asks her what she usually dreams about), her answer sparks a digression to biblical times:

– I usually don't dream. And you? What do you dream about?

– That I stop loving you.

– Do you love me?

– No. I don't love you. Did you know that your mother, Sarah, drove my mother, Hagar, into the desert?

Am I to blame then? Is it for that you don't love me?

No. You're not to blame; and because of that I don't love you.

Or, I love you. (Darwish 1995: 125)

Butler comments on “this final conjunctive disjunction,” on the paradoxical formulation of loving and not loving the other: how the narrator's relation to his Jewish lover entails “both proximity and aversion; it is unsettled; it is not of one mind. It might be said to be the affect, the emotional tenor of an impossible and necessary union, the strange logic by which one wishes to go and insists upon staying” (Butler 2012: 53). Butler at once negates and offers a connection between this version of love and binationalism: “Surely binationalism is not love, but there is, we might say, a necessary and impossible attachment that makes a mockery of identity, an ambivalence that emerges from the decentering of the nationalist ethos and that forms the basis of a permanent ethical demand” (Butler 2012: 53).

I appreciate Butler's hesitation, her reluctance to easily identify love with binationalism. Postcolonial critics might also credit Butler for not repeating Jameson's problematic third-world hermeneutics, which would make reading Palestinian literature as national allegory. And yet Butler arguably closes the door too quickly on national allegory and the connection between binationalism and love. If binationalism is not strictly speaking identical to love, it might be said to be at once the embodiment and the need for a particular kind of love, one that is akin to neighborly love, that is, to a love that interpellates and hysterizes the proximate other. So, we might ask again: What kind of love is binationalism? What kind of love does it solicit from the Palestinians and the Israelis? In this light, reading Darwish's poem as a national allegory *about* binationalism attests to the poem's political saliency and overtones without simultaneously denying its inventiveness and

singularity. The poem's staging of the "national situation" is precisely *not* a repetition of a tired and predictable European narrative (Jameson 1986: 65). Quite the contrary, Darwish's poem does not merely use sexual relationality to talk about national/racial identity. Rather, the two are deeply interwoven in the poem, each affecting and supplementing the meaning of the other.

As Žižek reminds us, "since sexuality is the domain in which we get closest to the intimacy of another human being, totally exposing ourselves to him or her, sexual enjoyment is real for Lacan: something traumatic in its breathtaking intensity, yet impossible in the sense that we cannot ever make sense of it. This is why a sexual relation, in order to function, has to be screened through some fantasy" (Žižek 2006c: 49). But fantasies are not foolproof; they do falter, making dissatisfaction constitutive of sexuality as such. Moreover, Žižek argues each subject is from the start "barred," incomplete: "'Man' and 'woman' together do not form a Whole, *since each of them is already in itself a failed Whole*" (Žižek 1994a: 159-160). Likewise, the enemy – as the "timeless" source of antagonism – is always already within me:

To grasp the notion of antagonism, in its most radical dimension, we should *invert* the relationship between the two terms: it is not the external enemy who is preventing me from achieving identity with myself, but every identity is already in itself blocked, marked by an impossibility, and the external enemy is simply the small piece, the rest of reality upon which we "project" or "externalize" this intrinsic, immanent impossibility. (Žižek 2005: 252)

Failure here is, then, not the result of an incompatibility between two identities or races: *Israelis are from Mars, Palestinians are from Venus*. Rather, the problem is real and structural, both in myself and compounded by my relationality: "there is no automatic, unmediated, or untroubled connection between sexual partners. . . . Because each subject connects with others only through fantasy, no natural coupling of man and woman can take place" (Dean 2001: 26). As a deadlock in the Real, sexual difference is an interpretive impasse that necessitates its own paradoxical hermeneutics/ethics of the Real.

What follows from the impossibility of sexual relationality is not only the lack of a harmonious resolution to amorous relations but the possibility of excess, of love as a supplement: “What makes up for the sexual relationship is, quite precisely, love” (Lacan 1998: 45). Here love as supplement can be read in two ways, mapping onto two ways of understanding binationalism. The first interpretation of love remains purely at the level of the Imaginary. Love phantasmatically covers over the disjunction between sexual partners; love purports to heal, removing the “barredness” of sexual relationality. Love reassures and promises the fusion and union of the lovers. Its correlative version of binationalism reads as follows: it entails a commitment to an ideal, postracial Oneness, a removal of all antagonisms, a healing and resolution of prior wrongs and traumas. This is the version of binationalism that political realists love to dismiss as unreasonable and utopian, a deception or dangerous lure for liberals,³⁷ arguing instead for a pragmatic separation over an idealistic union of the two communities.

The second interpretation of love does not iron out the disjunction. It insists on the Real, on the fact that there is no sexual relationality. Love requires “an acceptance of this truth”; the subject must be “willing to live with the antagonism” (Johnston 2005: 75; Kornbluh 2004: 128). Consequently, for a correlative version of binationalism this lack of relationality does not prompt a reductively pessimistic assessment of human relations (a narcissistic wound – the trauma of realizing that you are not my specular image, that your fantasies are not mine), but enacts the condition for binationalism as such. Binationalism supplements the lack of a harmonious existence between the Palestinians and the Israelis. It is an ethico-political response to the existential fact that “fantasies cannot coexist peacefully” (Žižek 1992: 168). Binationalism fosters a relationality that is non-all, *otherwise than nationalistic*: it is a relationality that, as Said might put it, does not exhaust itself through filiation (relation which “belongs to the realms of nature and ‘life’”) but also insists on affiliation (relation which “belongs exclusively to culture and society”) (Said 1983: 20). It is a form of relationality at odds with a nationalism myopically

³⁷ See, for example, Tamari 2000: 83-87.

defined, a nationalism aligned exclusively with a particularist identity (one nation, one people).

In Darwish's poem, the union of the lovers is socially prohibited (*each would kill the other outside the window*); the Imaginary opens itself as a temptation – their forbidden love functions as a fetish. The world outside can be in ruins as long as they are together. But when the fantasy of immunity falters – he has to return home and resents her people for putting him in that situation; she wants to understand his frustration, but is also narcissistically driven by her own insecurities, and so on – the “barredness” of their relationship takes on a more “real” or permanent dimension. The poem ends with the Jewish lover asking again for the recognition of his love:

– And you don't love me?

– I don't know.

And each is killing the other by the window.

For the decolonial reader, the narrator's doubt could be construed as evidence of his “colonial difference,” producing a kind of subaltern knowledge: knowledge of life under Israeli hegemony, a life that voices its irreducible objections to the coloniality of power, to the colonial order of things (of which his Jewish lover is an agent). What we have here, Mignolo might say, is a shift from Descartes's “I think therefore I am” to the decolonial thesis, “I am where I think.” Whereas Descartes's saying produces a unity in thinking and being, and helps to foster and promote an economy of sameness (we all have the same *cogito*), Mignolo's formulation brings to the forefront Darwish's “border thinking” (“the moments in which the imaginary of the modern world system cracks”), and foregrounds geography in any questions of knowledge and biography (Mignolo 2000: 23). The word “where” pluralizes (= democratizes) meaning, legitimizes subaltern experience, and thus declines “the universality to which everyone has to submit,”³⁸ reorienting us to history and locality, to the narrator's positionality in relation to “the epistemic and ontological racism of imperial knowledge” (Mignolo 2011: 161, 174).

³⁸ Mignolo, “I Am Where I Think: Remapping the Order of Knowing,” in *The Creolization of Theory*, eds. Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shi (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 161.

But if “where” is meant to counter modernity’s fantasy of a universal “I,” Darwish’s poem complicates the decolonial elevation of “where” by figuring place as entangled with the Real. The last line positions the reader in the room, marking a move from the virtual to the actual: each sexual partner now is in the process of killing the other *by* the symbolic window. The threat is no longer coming from the outside but from within, a grasp that the deadlock of sexual difference is *in* the Real. What form of binationalism will supplement the lack of complementarity between Palestinians and Israelis is, I believe, the poem’s allegorical question.

The couple’s failure is of course not yet a fact. They *are killing* each other – they haven’t *killed* each other. The narrator’s doubt, which rewrites his earlier *I don’t love you/I love you*, continues to offer no certainties or guarantees. “I don’t know” indexes the logic of desire, since for Lacan, “so long as I desire, I know nothing of what I desire” (Lacan 2014: 82). Binationalism supplements this situation (Palestinians and Israelis are killing each other) not by offering the certainties and guarantees that are lacking, but by soliciting both communities to will/desire the impossible. Analogous to Žižek’s thought experiment on internationalizing Jerusalem, willing binationalism can be said to constitute an act. It suspends “the reign of the pleasure-reality principle”³⁹ and performs a kind of madness, the madness of the decision: “the moment of decision is the moment of madness’ precisely in so far as there is no big Other to provide the ultimate guarantee, the ontological cover for the subject’s decision” (Žižek 2002a: 142; Žižek 2000b: 258). For the Palestinians, opening themselves to the unknown, giving up what they *cannot not want*⁴⁰ (international recognition of their identity), is what one deciding on binationalism wills. The subject of binationalism is willing to desire something that goes against the interest of their would-be-nationalist ego, against the committed belief that an independent state will put an end to their daily miseries. This subject is willing to traverse the fantasy of the two-state solution: the transparent background for many Palestinians that structures the way they relate to the Occupation and their attitude toward

³⁹ Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 142.

⁴⁰ This is akin to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s formulation of the double bind as “a persistent critique of what we cannot not want” (Spivak 1999: 110).

futurity. This belief that things will get better – the debilitating pragmatism⁴¹ of the two-state solution that grips the Palestinians – must be countered by what Žižek calls the “courage of hopelessness” (a formulation that he borrows from Agamben⁴²). Traversing the fantasy of the two-state solution does not mean to see through it and “perceive the reality obfuscated by it, but to directly confront the fantasy as such... [F]antasy remains operative only insofar as it functions as the transparent background of our experience – fantasy is like a dirty intimate secret which cannot survive public exposure” (Žižek 2014b: 29). Palestinians overcome the fantasy the moment they have the courage to realize that the light at the end of the tunnel is not statehood but more dispossession, killing, and maiming – that is, the moment their attitude toward their current environment and future is effectively denaturalized, taken not as a given (of course, we want a Nation) but as a problem (what does co-existence with my neighbor look like?).⁴³

From the Culturalization of Politics to the Politicization of Culture

But isn't binationalism for all of its radical demands just the last culturalization of politics? To be sure, it might be preferable to the current hegemony of “Levinassian sentimentalism” (to evoke again Jameson's, along with Žižek's, disdain for the subordination of politics by ethics), but isn't it still a superstructural concern that, not unlike the ones emanating from decoloniality, does little to confront society's economic antagonisms? Or to state the question more bluntly: What is the relationship of binationalism to class struggle? We might respond to this question in a couple of ways. First,

⁴¹ The cowardice of pragmatism – ramped up by the dubious saying that the Palestinians have never missed an opportunity to miss an opportunity – captures the ethos that informed the peace process. The Palestinian Authority acquiesced time and time again to the will of Israel and the international community: make compromises (give up more of your land), be a peace partner (don't behave like Hamas), renounce terrorism (don't put up any resistance to Israel's will), and so on. The peace process is currently stalled; the next “breakthrough” (through some maneuvering to get the Palestinians back to negotiations) will most likely return to an earlier horizon of possibilities, which will do little to redress Israel's historic wrongs and current mistreatment of Palestinians.

⁴² See Giorgio Agamben (2014) “Thought is the Courage of Hopelessness: An Interview with Philosopher Giorgio Agamben,” Interview by Jordan Skinner. Verso Books, 17 June. <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1612-thought-is-the-courage-of-hopelessness-an-interview-with-philosopher-giorgio-agamben>. Accessed May 17, 2018.

⁴³ As Žižek puts it, “the true courage is to admit that the light at the end of the tunnel is most likely the headlight of another train approaching us from the opposite direction” (Žižek 2017a: xi-xii).

binationalism can be described as “class struggle at the level of ideas,” to borrow from Terry Eagleton (Eagleton 1991: 80). Binationalism is an *idea* – a lost cause – that possesses the force of a political act, capable of restructuring the very symbolic co-ordinates of one’s situation. At the very least, a superstructural concern can still impact the economic base. Žižek himself revisits Marx’s much-discussed base-superstructure metaphor, and gives it a Lacanian twist, turning again to Lacan’s claim that there is no sexual relationality: “If... there is no sexual relationship, then, for Marxism proper, there is *no relationship between economy and politics*, no ‘meta-language’ enabling us to grasp the two levels from the same neutral standpoint” (Žižek 2006d: 320). Indeed, this is what Žižek calls the “parallax view,” a “constantly shifting perspective between two points between which no synthesis or mediation is possible” (Žižek 2006d: 4). If parallax is commonly understood as “the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in observational position,” for Žižek, the parallax gap signifies far more, enabling him to reconceptualize the interpretive scene itself. As he puts it:

The philosophical twist to be added [to the standard definition of parallax] . . . is that the observed difference is not simply “subjective,” due to the fact that the same object which exists “out there” is seen from two different stances, or points of view. It is rather that . . . subject and object are inherently “mediated,” so that an “epistemological” shift in the subject’s point of view always reflects an “ontological” shift in the object itself. (Žižek 2006d: 17)

In parallax thinking, the classic infrastructure/superstructure couple takes on a new meaning:

We should take into account the irreducible duality of, on the one hand, the “objective” material socioeconomic processes taking place in reality as well as, on the other, the politico-ideological process proper. What if the domain of politics is inherently “sterile,” a theatre of shadows, but nonetheless crucial in transforming reality? So, although economy is the real site

and politics is a theatre of shadows, the main fight is to be fought in politics and ideology. (Žižek 2006d: 315)

Though the economic remains the “ultimately determining instance” (repeating Althusser-Jameson), Žižek allows for the politicization of culture, for superstructure to be a space for critical inventiveness, an engine for genuine transformation (Jameson 2006).

If the idea of binationalism is to mobilize change, and infuse life in today’s “theater of shadows,” Palestinians must remain attentive to the “antagonism *inherent*” in their social structure, and not lose track of their true enemy. Žižek’s cautionary tale is the rise of Nazism and the failure of the German people to identify their true antagonism and enemy: as a result, “class struggle is displaced onto the struggle against the Jews, so that the popular rage at being exploited is redirected from capitalist relations as such to the ‘Jewish plot’” (Žižek 2009). The real antagonism is externalized as a struggle between Aryans and Jews, as “a struggle for *domination* between *us* and *them*, those who cause antagonistic imbalance” (Žižek 1993: 210).

Can we speak of a similarly displaced but irreducible social antagonism in Palestine? How are Palestinians to understand the violence directed toward them? What is the fundamental antagonism spurring the Israeli drive for domination? On the one hand, it is impossible to ignore the reality of Israeli brutalization, and thus the enemy has *not* been misperceived: it is the Israeli government and its unrelenting state violence, described by Žižek as Israel’s “Kafkaesque network of legal regulations” where “the condemnation of ‘illegal’ settlements [Israel’s performance of justice as fairness to the Western world] obfuscates the illegality of the ‘legal’ ones” (Žižek 2009). Here binationalism becomes the culmination of a fight that seeks to end Palestinian racialization, to abolish Israeli apartheid, and to put pressure on the world to see Israel as a neo-colonial regime, as an undemocratic and unjust state. On this account the only enemy is the racist Zionist, the Israeli colonial settlers, fighting for their exclusive right to the land, which the binationlists want to share peacefully. The problem with this account is not with its content, but its *insufficiency*. Naming Israeli governments and colonial settler politics the enemy is at once necessary and incomplete. In this it is reminiscent of the decolonial critique of Israel.

Exposing and criticizing Zionism as an ideology that seeks to *dominate* the Palestinians only gives a partial explanation for the continuing brutality of the Israeli government. Žižek follows Jameson in stressing that the struggle against domination is, as Jameson put it, “an essentially moral or ethical one which leads to punctual revolts and acts of resistance rather than to the transformation of the mode of production as such” (Jameson 2011: 150; qtd. in Žižek 2012: 1003). There is also an important *economic* disincentive to halting Israel’s necropolitics – its regulation of Palestinian death and maiming.⁴⁴ If, according to Israel’s imaginary narrative, Israel would be happy living side by side with its peaceful Arabs, without irritant Palestinians (a stain on its moral profile), Israel’s highly successful and influential military-industrial complex turns the irritant Palestinian into a necessity, a justification for its existence and perpetuation. For to sustain itself, the military-industrial complex needs the Palestinian “threat,” fueling, in turn, a permanent war model, a permanent state of exception. Hamas (an organizational embodiment of the most irritant Palestinian) guarantees Israel’s permanent militarized identity. The eleven-year blockade of Gaza offers Israel a large number of unemployed, disposable, and unassimilable bodies, a racialized surplus population, to test and showcase its latest awesome weapons to a global audience. Yotam Feldman’s 2013 documentary film, *The Lab*, makes a compelling case for economic profit driving hawkish Israeli policies. “Israel’s weapons industry has tripled its profits to more than [US] \$7 billion a year over the past decade, making a country about the size of New Jersey into the fourth largest weapons exporter in the world,” writes Max Blumenthal (2015). Israel’s profitable necropolitics thus complements quite smoothly the Zionist-colonial fantasy of *terra nullius*, as long as it remains purely an ideological fantasy: *it wants a Palestine free of Palestinians – but not quite*.

⁴⁴ Israel’s necropolitics took the form of a spectacle on May 14, 2018, the day of the U.S. embassy opening in Jerusalem. The world watched on split screen the jubilant celebration of mostly white bodies on one side, and the defiant brown bodies of teenagers shrouded by tear gas and subjected to live fire on the other. Israeli Brigadier General Zvika Fogel gave a remarkable justification for the practice of shooting at unarmed civilians, deeming this violence a preemptive measure justified by the future guilt of the victims: “Anyone who could be a future threat to the border of the State of Israel and its residents, should bear a price for that violation.” And the price borne is unambiguous: “His punishment is death” (qtd. in Bennis 2018).

At this juncture, keeping with the economic focus requires a further step, a parallaxic shift on the enemy in order to better apprehend the scene of Palestinian struggle. What sustains the misery of the Palestinians is not only the Israeli government and its draconian policies, but also the economic structures that currently regulate Palestinian life in the Occupied Territories. In *The Battle for Justice in Palestine*, Ali Abunimah warns of the neoliberalization of Palestine, of the ideological traps of political domesticity:

In tandem, with the assistance of the United States and Israel, the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah built a repressive police-state apparatus that sought to suppress and disarm any resistance to Israeli occupation and to crush internal Palestinian dissent and criticism with increasing ferocity. [...] But behind a smokescreen of “state-building” rhetoric and flag-waving, a small Palestinian elite has continued to enrich itself by deepening its political, economic, and military ties with Israel and the United States, often explicitly undermining efforts by Palestinian civil society to resist. This catastrophic assault on Palestinians has been masked with the language of “technocratic” government and marketed as nothing less than the fulfillment of the Palestinian “national” project. [...] If these are indeed the foundations of a future Palestinian state, then a people who have struggled for so long for liberation from Zionism’s colonial assault can only look forward to new, more insidious forms of economic and political bondage. (Abunimah 2014: 78-79)

The consequences of Palestinian neoliberalization are significant. First, by making the status quo economically lucrative for *some* – those in power, those especially in charge of security cooperation with the Israeli government – neoliberalization forecloses, or at least minimizes, possibilities for imagining social reality and co-existence with the Israelis outside the framework of a two-state solution. Second, by opening the Occupied Territories to global capitalism (under the terms set by the Oslo Accords), “economic ‘development,’” as Abunimah alarmingly observes, “has been channeled away from indigenous Palestinian business and into industrial zones where foreign and Israeli exporters can exploit unskilled Palestinian workers cheaply and

without any accountability, a model enthusiastically financed and promoted by the United States, the European Union, Turkey and Japan” (Abinumah 2012).

Taking “capitalism itself as the ultimate horizon of the political situation” enables us to reframe binationalism and the Palestinian question (Jameson 2006). It helps to underscore binationalism as a universalist project, engaged in a fight against domination and exploitation. Seeking economic justice at home invariably links the Palestinian plight to other labor movements in Israel and elsewhere in the region. The solidarity of workers can effectively challenge the interests of the few, *denaturalize* their exploitation (that is, contest the ways exploitation is effortlessly built into the functioning of the economy), and foreground binationalism as a socio-economic project, not limited to its own particularist interests, but “grounded in the ‘part of no-part,’ the singular universality exemplified in those who lack a determined place in the social totality, who are ‘out of place’ in it” (Žižek 2012: 831). If decoloniality and others fetishize the enemy (“the elevation of Zionism into the neo-imperialist racism par excellence”), over-emphasizing his or her exceptionality (Israel as the embodiment of modernity/coloniality and its racist ideology), and thus always risk reifying the antagonism, binationalism, if it is to be transformative, must embrace its role as a supplement to the Palestinian/Israeli antagonism, taking the task of co-existence, of living together with each other’s (real) neighbor, as an urgent ethico-political challenge, fully cognizant that there is no guarantee of success (Žižek 2014a: 108). *And each is killing the other by the window.*

References

Abinumah, Ali (2014) *The Battle for Justice in Palestine*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.

Abinumah, Ali (2012) “Economic Exploitation of Palestinians Flourishes Under Occupation.” *Al Jazeera*, 13 September.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/09/20129128052624254.html> . Accessed May 13, 2018.

Bennis, Phyllis (2018) “Palestinians Are Forcing the World to See Their Humanity: The Gaza Massacre Is a War Crime. And the United States Is Complicit

- Alongside Israel." *In These Times*, 19 May.
http://inthesetimes.com/article/21148/palestinians-gaza-israel-massacre-jerusalem-embassy-donald-trump?link_id=2&can_id=839242f129045dcf95563791cad9b53c&source=email-palestinians-are-forcing-the-world-to-see-their-humanity-a-democratic-spring&email_referrer=email_356268&email_subject=palestinians-are-forcing-the-world-to-see-their-humanity-a-democratic-spring . Accessed on May 19, 2018.
- Blumenthal, Max (2015) "Waiting for the Next Israeli Assault in Gaza." *In These Times*, 16 July.
<http://inthesetimes.com/article/18208/israel-gaza-max-blumenthal>. Accessed May 13, 2018.
- Buchanan, Ian (2006) "National Allegory Today: A Return to Jameson." *On Jameson: From Postmodernism to Globalism*. Eds. Caren Irr and Ian Buchanan. New York: State University of New York Press, 173-88.
- Butler, Judith (2012) *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Butler, Judith (2016) "Versions of Binationalism in Said and Buber." *Conflicting Humanities*. Eds. Rosi Braidotti and Paul Gilroy. New York: Bloomsbury, 185-210.
- Dabashi, Hamid (2015) *Can Non-European Think?*. London: Zed Books.
- Davis, Angela (2016) *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*. Chicago: Haymarket Books.
- Darwish, Mahmoud (1995) *Memory for Forgetfulness*. Trans. Ibrahim Muhawi. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Dean, Tim and Christopher Lane (2001) "Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis: An Introduction." *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis*. Eds. Tim Dean and Christopher Lane. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 3-42.
- Eagleton, Terry (1991) *Ideology: An Introduction*. New York: Verso.
- Fanon, Frantz (1965) *A Dying Colonialism*. Trans. Haakon Chevalier. New York: Grove Press.
- Fanon, Frantz (2008) *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press.
- Harvey, David (2007). *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Jameson, Fredric (1986) "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism." *Social Text* 15: 65-88.
- Jameson, Fredric (1991) *Postmodernism; Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Jameson, Fredric (2006) "First Impressions." *London Review of Books* Vol. 28, No. 17. www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n17/fredric-jameson/first-impressions. Accessed February 18, 2018.
- Jameson, Fredric (2011) *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One*. New York: Verso.
- Johnston, Adrian (2005) "Nothing is Not Always No-One: (a)voiding love." *Filozofski Vestnik* Vol. 26, No. 2: 67-81.
- Khader, Jamil (2015) "The Living Dead in Palestine and the Failure of International Humanitarian Intervention." *Truthout*, 8 November. <https://truthout.org/articles/the-living-dead-in-palestine-and-the-failure-of-international-humanitarian-intervention/> . Accessed June 23, 2018.
- Kapoor, Ilan (2018) "Antagonism and Politics Now: Three Recent Controversies," *International Journal of Žižek Studies* Vol. 12, No. 1: 1-31.
- Kornbluh, Anna (2004) "Romancing the Capital: Choice, Love, and Contradiction in *The Family Man* and *Memento*." In *Lacan and Contemporary Film*. Eds. Todd McGowan and Sheila Kunkle. New York: Other Press. 111-44.
- Lacan, Jacques (1990) "Introduction to the Names-of-the-Father Seminar." in *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*. Ed. Joan Copjec. Trans. Jeffrey Mehlman. New York: Norton, 81-95.
- Lacan, Jacques (1998) *On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973: Encore, The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX*. Trans. Bruce Fink. New York: Norton.
- Lacan, Jacques (2014) *Anxiety: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book X*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller. Cambridge: Polity.
- Landes, Richard and Benjamin Weinthal (2012) "The Post-self-destructivism of Judith Butler." *The Wall Street Journal*, 9 September.
- Mignolo, Walter D. (2000) *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Mignolo, Walter D. (2011a) *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Mignolo, Walter D. (2011b) "I Am Where I Think: Remapping the Order of Knowing." In *The Creolization of Theory*. Eds. Françoise Lionnet and Shumei Shi. Durham: Duke University Press, 159-92.
- Mignolo, Walter D. (2013a) "Yes, we can: Non-European Thinkers and Philosophers." 19 February.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/02/20132672747320891.html>. Accessed 26 March 2018.
- Mignolo, Walter D. (2013b) "Decolonizing the Nation-State: Zionism in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity." In *Deconstructing Zionism: A Critique of Political Metaphysics*. Eds. Gianni Vattimo and Michael Marder. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Penney, James (2004) "Passing into the Universal: Fanon, Sartre, and the Colonial Dialectic," *Paragraph* Vol. 27, No. 3: 49-67.
- Radhakrishnan, R. (1989) "Poststructuralist Politics: Towards a Theory of Coalition," *Postmodernism/ Jameson/ Critique*. Washington: Maisonneuve Press, 268-300
- Said, Edward (1983) *The World, the Text and the Critic*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 183.
- Said, Edward (1994) *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage.
- Said, Edward (1996) *Representations of the Intellectual*. Vintage, New York.
- Said, Edward (2001) "My Right of Return." In *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said*. Ed. Gauri Viswanathan. New York: Vintage, 443-58.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul (1988) "Black Orpheus." In *What is Literature? And Other Essays*. Trans. John McCombie. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 289-330.
- Skinner, Jordan (2014) "Thought is the Courage of Hopelessness: An Interview with Philosopher Giorgio Agamben." Interview by Jordan Skinner. Verso Books, 17 June. <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1612-thought-is-the-courage-of-hopelessness-an-interview-with-philosopher-giorgio-agamben>.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1999) *Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward A History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Strickland, Patrick (2014) "Bombing of Gaza Children Gives Me 'Orgasm': Israelis Celebrate Slaughter on Facebook." *Electronic Intifada*, 13 July.

<https://electronicintifada.net/blogs/patrick-strickland/bombing-gaza-children-gives-me-orgasm-israelis-celebrate-slaughter-facebook> . Accessed May 15, 2018.

- Szeman, Imre (2006) "Who's Afraid of National Allegory?: Jameson, Literary Criticism, Globalization." *On Jameson: From Postmodernism to Globalism*. Eds. Caren Irr and Ian Buchanan. New York: State University of New York Press, 189-211.
- Tamari, Salim (2000) "The Dubious Lure of Binationalism." *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. 30, No. 1: 83-87.
- Zalloua, Zahi (2017) *Continental Philosophy and the Palestinian Question: Beyond the Jew and the Greek*. New York, Bloomsbury.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1992) *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan Through Popular Culture*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1993) *Tarrying With the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1994a) *The Metastases of Enjoyment: On Women and Causality*. New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1994b) "The Spectre of Ideology." In *Mapping Ideology*. Ed. Slavoj Žižek. New York: Verso, 1-25.
- Žižek, Slavoj (1998) "A Leftist Plea for 'Eurocentrism.'" *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 24, No. 4: 988-1009.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2000a) "Class Struggle or Postmodernism? Yes, Please!" In *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. Eds. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek. New York: Verso, 90-135.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2000b) "Da Capo senza Fine." In *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*. Eds. Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek. New York: Verso. 213-62.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2002a) *Welcome to the Desert of the Real! Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*. New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2002b) "Welcome to the Desert of the Real." *Lacanian Ink* 2. <http://www.lacan.com/desertsymf.htm> . Accessed May 13, 2018.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2003) *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

- Žižek, Slavoj (2005) "Beyond Discourse Analysis." *Interrogating the Real*. Eds. Butler Rex and Scott Stephens. London: Continuum, 249-61.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2006a) "Neighbors and Other Monsters: A Plea for Ethical Violence." In *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology*. Eds. Slavoj Žižek, Eric L. Santner, and Kenneth Reinhard. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 134-90.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2006b) "Multitude, Surplus, and Envy." *Rethinking Marxism* Vol. 19, No. 1: 46-58.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2006c) *How To Read Lacan*. New York: Norton.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2006d) *The Parallax View*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2008a) *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. New York: Picador.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2008b) *In Defense of Lost Causes*. New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2009) "The Palestinian Question: The Couple Symptom/Fetish," *Lacan.com*. http://www.lacan.com/essays/?page_id=261.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2011) "What does a Jew Want? on the Film *Local Angel*." *What Does a Jew Want?: On Binationalism and Other Specters*. New York: Columbia University Press, 173-78.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2012) *Less Than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2013) "Anti-Semitism and Its Transformations." In *Deconstructing Zionism: A Critique of Political Metaphysics*. Eds. Gianni Vattimo and Michael Marder. New York: Bloomsbury, 1-13.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2014a) *Trouble in Paradise: From the End of History to the End of Capitalism*. Brooklyn: Melville House.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2014b) *Event: Philosophy in Transit*. London: Penguin Books.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2017a) *The Courage of Hopelessness: Chronicles of a Year of Acting Dangerously*. New York: Allen Lane.
- Žižek, Slavoj (2017b) *The Void of Incontinence: Economico-Philosophical Spandrels*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Žižek, Slavoj and Glyn Daly (2004) *Conversations with Žižek*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Žižek, Slavoj, Eric L. Santner, and Kenneth Reinhard (2006) "Introduction." In *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology*. Eds. Slavoj Žižek, Eric L. Santner, and Kenneth Reinhard. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1-10.

ISSN 1751-8229

Volume Thirteen, Number One

Jameson *avec* or *sans* Žižek: Psychoanalysis, Marxism, and the Impossible Social Bond⁴⁵

Clint Burnham, Simon Fraser University

Clint Burnham is Professor and Chair of the Graduate Program in the Department of English at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, Canada. He is the author of *The Jamesonian Unconscious: The Aesthetics of Marxist Theory* (Duke, 1995), *Smoke Show* (novel: Arsenal Pulp 2005), *The Only Poetry that Matters: Reading the Kootenay School of Writing* (Arsenal Pulp, 2011), *Pound @ Guantánamo* (poetry: Talon, 2016), *Fredric Jameson and The Wolf of Wall Street* (Bloomsbury, 2016) and *Does the Internet Have an Unconscious? Slavoj Žižek and Digital Culture* (Bloomsbury, 2018); he also co-edited, with Lorna Brown, *Digital Natives* (Other Sights, 2011) and, with Paul Budra, *From Text to Txtng: New Media in the Classroom* (Indiana, 2012).

⁴⁵ This paper grew out of a talk at the Marxism and Psychoanalysis conference, Institute for the Humanities, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, December 2017. Many thanks to Alessandra Capperdoni for the invitation to speak.

A common strategy in academic theory conferences is to try to pair up disparate or even discordant paradigms as if to suggest an improbable reconciliation is in the offing: thus Lacan with Deleuze, for instance, or affect theory and psychoanalysis. The grand-daddy for this affectation is Lacan himself, in his essay “Kant with Sade,” which found in Sade the purest expression of Kantian ethic, a libertine purity beyond Kant’s wildest – or most rigorous – dreams (or nightmares). What I want to suggest here is that we must always think the *avec* alongside the *sans*, that in fact a joining together of different theories is also an entertaining of their tearing each other apart. As this last phrase may suggest to my post-punk cohort, my model for this is a late night radio host’s suggestion, in the 1990s, that one should put out a 45 with Trent Reznor doing the Captain and Tenille’s “Love Will Keep Us Together,” backed with PJ Harvey doing Joy Division’s “Love Will Tear Us Apart.”

In my recent book on Fredric Jameson, I averred that while Jameson and Žižek seem to be ideologically aligned, a misperception suggested or affirmed by their frequent citation of each other’s work, these citations were, I argued, a screen that obfuscates more profound differences (Burnham 2016: 10-11). But what *are* those differences? I propose here to lay some stress on what I take to be some important differences between those two projects, in terms of their attitudes towards the dialectic (that is to say, the impossibility of reconciling those antagonisms, but also the importance of that non-reconciliation). Grounding that dialectic via the vicissitudes of the Lacanian “non-relation,” I then turn to the question of historicism or historicity, articulated via contrasting readings of Jeff Wall’s 1994 photograph *Untangling* that allegorize via the pictorial not so much mark making (as Walter Benn Michaels would have it) but looking as labor – the labor of the clinic with or without the labor of the workshop.

The Non-Relation; or, Dialectics

Dany Nobus's recent book *The Law of Desire: On Lacan's 'Kant with Sade'* provides an exhaustive (Sadean?) bibliographic annotation on the publication history of Lacan's essay, which originates in his remarks on Kant and Sade in Seminar VII. In a footnote, Nobus develops an important concept of the non-relation (which he, following Lacan's introductory comments to Seminar VIII, calls "subjective disparity"), arguing that "the principle of non-reciprocity ... applies to how Lacan himself plays out Sade against Kant in his text. Whilst he employs Sade as an instrument for performing certain critical tasks on Kant, he does not draw on Kant when it comes to exploring the limits of Sade" (Nobus 2017: 22n). There are three implications of this methodological, or even metaleptic, turn. First, we should take into account Žižek's remark, *au contraire* Nobus, that Lacan's thesis is not that Kant is Sadean but Sade is Kantian: "Far from 'besmirching' Kant, Lacan 'purifies' Sade: the sadist Will-to-enjoy is the exemplary case of a pure, non-pathological desire" (Žižek 2007: 173). Then we should consider the career of Lacan's *il n'y a pas de rapport sexuel* – there is no sexual relation – all the way up to how both Žižek and Alenka Zupančič have turned that proposition around to "there IS a non-relationship" (Žižek 2012: 794-802), or "that sexual difference precedes the two sexes," and the non-relation is "*the inherent (il)logic (a fundamental 'antagonism') of the relationships* that are possible and existing" (Zupančič 2017: 24; italics are the author's). As Zupančič makes clear, this non-relation also pertains to the class struggle, and so we can finally take that form of logic to think, first, of how Žižek's and Jameson's dialectics differ (but are also the same, for surely the great danger is to fall into the narcissism of small differences, a warning against which stretches from Freud to those two present-day hair-splitters, Larry David and Donald Trump) and then, again reflexively, of how those differences and similarities help us to think about Marxism and psychoanalysis. (Perhaps the proper name for one, and the disciplinary apparatus for the other, is a place to start.)

Or another avenue would be to contrast what it means to read Jameson *avec* Žižek (to read Jameson in terms of Žižekian theory or reading practices) *versus* what it means to read Žižek *avec* Jameson (to read Žižek via Jameson's interpretive praxis) and, then, to consider what it means to read

each of them “alone” (which signifier, a typo just reminded me, is very close to “along” or alongside), or *sans*, but only *after* reading them *avec*. That is, and here I anticipate my discussion below of how Jameson understands Žižek’s dialectic in *Valences* (to compress the coal of Jameson’s argument into a diamond for our present drill: “stupid first impression as the appearance, ingenious correction in the name of some underlying reality or ‘essence’ ... a return to the reality of the appearance [which] was ‘true’ after all” [Jameson 2009: 57]), Žižek *sans* Jameson or Jameson *sans* Žižek is not simply the appearance of each theorist shorn of any reference to the other, but instead what we think of their work, or read in their work *after* reading them together. AND, that “together” is not a symmetrical reading, but a non-relation (which is to say, is itself dialectical, a dialectical subroutine, let’s put it, part of the grand dialectic figured in the quotation from *Valences*), for, after thinking of what both Jameson and Žižek have to say about “Kant with Sade,” we now have two “togethers,” one of which is reading, as I said at the beginning of this paragraph, Jameson *avec* Žižek (to read Jameson in terms of Žižekian theory or reading practices), while the other means to read Žižek *avec* Jameson (to read Žižek via Jameson’s interpretive praxis).

I should like now to work through these different positions (and perhaps venture a semiotic rectangle *avec* the formula of sexuation), but also first to acknowledge that I may seem to be stacking the deck in Jameson’s favor: is he not, we all agree, the better reader than Žižek, whether we think of reading as reading a book, literature, a written text, or whether we think of reading in its cultural studies/metaphorical sense of reading a film, a painting, a political scene? That may well be for a certain canonical Jameson (by canon we always mean what we read in graduate school) – so, *The Political Unconscious* and *Marxism and Form* certainly feature bravura passages of reading (of Conrad and Balzac in the former, on Adorno and footnotes in the latter, say). Frequently, reading for critics of my generation still means *close reading*, where distant and machine reading is what we leave to *our* students (whom we expect to then provide us with the glosses and short cuts – but hopefully not short-circuits). There are, however, some important and different kinds of reading that Žižek offers us throughout his work, ranging from his comments on Kant and sentimental literature (but also Joyce and Kafka) in

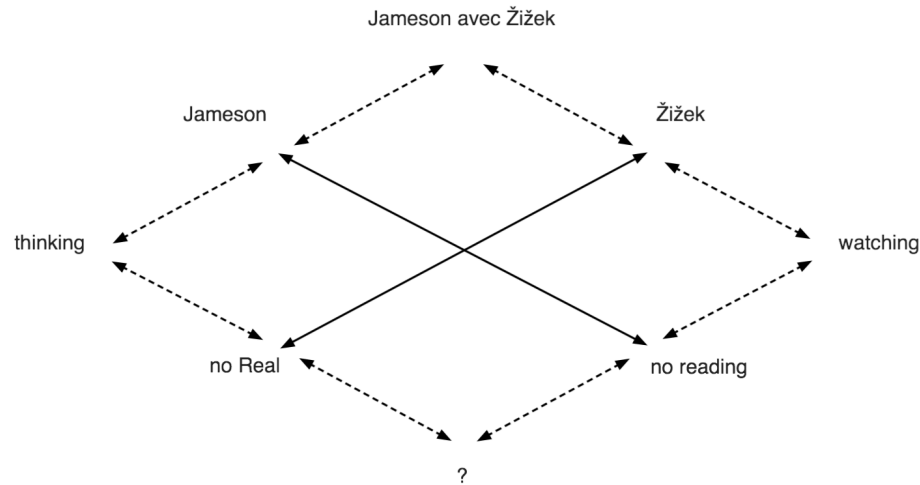
Looking Awry, and his readings of Edith Wharton and Henry James in *The Parallax View*, to his use of Pierre Bayard in *Less than Nothing*. In *Looking Awry*, Žižek reads Kant with Colleen McCollough, arguing not only that McCollough's novel *An Indecent Obsession* continues the tradition of courtly love, and that it helps us to understand what Kant did not know, that duty itself was "the most indecent of all obsessions," but, key to our argument here, the novel itself is nonetheless "completely unreadable" and indeed appeared in a French series called *J'ai lu* or "I've read it" (Žižek 1991: 160). The logic, Žižek seems to imply, is that if a book is unreadable it is better to say you have read it, without, presumably, having done so. *Oh yeah, we say, I've read that. One and done. Ticked the box.* This question of reading then leads in two directions: on the one hand, we have the infamous proposition or manual of Pierre Bayard, *How to Talk about Books You Haven't Read*. Žižek refers to that text (which, who knows, he may not have even read beyond the title) in *Less than Nothing*, arguing that "in order to really formulate the fundamental insight or achievement of a book, it is generally better *not* to read it at all – too much data only blurs our clear vision" (Žižek 2012: 279-80). But there is the opposite proposition, floated scandalously in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited*, when Anthony Blanche (who had been "cured ... of an Oedipus complex in Vienna"!) tells the narrator that he had "just bought a rather forbidding book called *Antic Hay*, which I knew I must read before going to Garsington on Sunday, because everybody was bound to talk about it, and it's so banal saying you have not read the book of the moment, if you haven't" (Waugh 1945: 48). So we have two kinds of reading: not reading but nonetheless discussing, analyzing, etc., that is, acting as if you have read it, and reading but claiming not to have read (although my neighbor Paul Kingsbury's reading is that Blanche reads it so he does *not* have to claim he has not read it); these all turn out to be the same: posing a break between action and claim.

What I have argued in the past few pages is a trial run at the question of reading via Žižek with and without Jameson. To clarify: we first of all would have Jameson, the theorist who brought Marxism to America; who introduced a formidable tripartite hermeneutic of the text as symbolic act/ideologemes figuring class struggle/genre and its ideology in relation to history in its

broadest strokes; the *maître penseur* of postmodernism, pop culture, and film; and the late period Jameson alternating between massive tomes on utopia and the dialectic and minimalist monographs on Marx, Hegel, Chandler. A thinker, that is, of the USAmerican academy *par excellence*, his career characteristic of the reception/production of theory, but also one whose ideas resist any neat narrative of neoliberal excess or presidential periodization (this last captured so well in Chandler's *The Lady in the Lake*).⁴⁶ With Žižek, we have the theorist of the Real, wedded to Lacan, explaining the graphs of desire and the *sinthome* at the start of his career; inserting an exotic Balkan presence into the European and then American academic discourses while claiming universality; bringing psychoanalysis and German idealism to bear not only on middle-brow Hollywood and trash novels but epochal events from 9/11 to Occupy; an inveterate and irreverent gadfly online, from YouTube and podcasts to the *Guardian* and *Al Jazeera* and *Russia Today*; pontificating on the refugee crisis and trans rights and the royal wedding in the same tenor and tone.

Then, if Žižek *avec* Jameson is what I outlined in my discussion of reading (that is, thinking of Žižek's practice in terms more usually associated with Jamesonian interpretation, or, to adopt Nobus' formulation from above, employing Jameson as an instrument for performing certain critical tasks on Žižek), how would it work the other way around, and could it? How could we use Žižek as an instrument for performing certain critical tasks on Jameson? There is a certain attraction here to say "I would prefer not to," and instead to assert a non-symmetry (as Nobus notes is present in Lacan's "Kant with Sade"), to declare that one cannot bring the Slovenian to bear on the giant of, um, Cleveland. Instead, let us jump to the following semiotic rectangle:

⁴⁶ "He wore the same clothes he had worn that afternoon, with the addition of a leather jerkin which must have been new once, say about the time of Grover Cleveland's first term" (Chandler 1976: 60).



Following Nobus' logic of "subjective disparity," or "the principle of non-reciprocity," *the diagram reveals that in this essay's pairing, Jameson is Kant and Žižek is Sade*. In this reading, the diagram is both my unconscious and my toolkit. The former, diagram as unconscious, means in a psychoanalytic way it reveals, or is a symptom (a *sinthome*) of, the non-relation between psychoanalysis and Marxism, but also leads us to see the social link that obtains between those two emancipatory theories, as a later iteration of the diagram in this essay will show. The latter, the diagram as toolkit, a Jamesonian theory of the semiotic rectangle, embraces the Silicon Valley/Digital Humanities tool talk & masculinist solutionism as a Utopian figure of precisely the blue collar worker that such a fantasy forecloses, a way of situating the role of the Greimassian rectangle in Jameson's theory. I return to such "workerist" themes in this essay's closing discussion of Jeff Wall.

Jameson is Kant and Žižek is Sade. That is, Jameson without or *sans* Žižek is Jameson without the Real (which is both the sexual Real and the Real of the class struggle), reduced to pure Reason, speculation, thinking, and Žižek *sans* Jameson is Žižek without reading, unable to interpret a film, only able to watch it (which is the argument Russell Sbriglia makes, in an article discussed below, with respect to a Žižekian-fetishist reading, one that is post-interpretation [Sbriglia 2017: 112-113]). But, again, *sans* is only possible after *avec*. And so this section of my paper is arguing not that Jameson is Žižekian but Žižek is Jamesonian for, far from "besmirching" Jameson, I "purify" Žižek: the sadist Will-to-enjoy (from dragging the Real back in from the dead, late

Lacan to trampling over the refugee, the trans person, but also Jordan Peterson) is the exemplary case of a pure, non-pathological desire (which is to say the magisterial, dialectical-sentence-machine that is Jameson's praxis). This last logic then is the following: the very reversal that is a hallmark of Žižek's theory, from his juxtaposition of, say, the sublime and *Titanic* to the way he has made the counter-intuitive his jam, not simply his argument but his premise, is surely the reified kernel of Jameson's dialectical sentence (which I took apart exhaustively in my first book, *The Jamesonian Unconscious*).⁴⁷ Think of a sentence near the opening of the second part of *A Singular Modernity*. Jameson has proposed to build a theory of totality, which edges to the unrepresentable, and then he turns back onto his proposition, writing the dialectical counterpart to that very *enunciación*: "But since the premise of the preceding discussion [the first half of the book] has been that of the preliminary requirement to reconstruct the situation of modernism, it seems appropriate to start with that, and to propose the hypothesis that what we call artistic or aesthetic 'modernism' essentially corresponds to a situation of incomplete modernization" (141). You see what he's doing here – Jameson is not only countering or contradicting the previous statement, but this sentence is also contradicting itself: a "situation of modernism" turns out to be a "situation of *incomplete* modernization." Thus modernism is a symptom of the lack in modernization, and that argument (which is then fleshed out in the Warwick Research Collective's remarkable book [2015]) *emerges via the dialectic*. Here we have an argument that is constructed by the sentence-machine of Jameson's writing, an argument that is then taken as a premise (or at least

⁴⁷ Žižek's counter-intuitive strategy (what Jameson [2009: 59] calls his "paradox effect") is perfected in two places in *Less Than Nothing*: as mentioned earlier, when he argues that even while there no sexual relation, there is a non-relation (Žižek 2012: 173), and when he declares that Hegelian universality is actually an expression of the concrete particular (Žižek 2012: 359). In the conclusion to his review of *The Parallax View* (Žižek 2006a) in the *London Review of Books*, Jameson wonders if or fears that this paradoxical thinking is in danger of becoming its own theory (Jameson 2006: unpaginated), reminiscent of his own remarks, in *Late Marxism*, that "the concept of reification is itself reified" (Jameson 1990: 22; see, for my comments on this passage, Burnham 1995: 32-33). Related, too, to our present inquiry is Jameson's contention that Žižek's "paradox effect is designed to undo that second moment of ingenuity which is that of interpretation" (Jameson 2009: 59; see also this essay's discussion of Sbriglia 2017).

formally) by Žižek (as when, say, he draws on Jameson's *bouleversement* of Hemingway, in *Absolute Recoil* and elsewhere).⁴⁸

But where does that dialectical sentence-machine come from? One possible and hardly implausible source is Adorno.⁴⁹ A recent favorite argument of Adorno's comes in his essay "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis," where, commenting on activists who trashed an overly diligent student's room, he says: "The thinking denigrated by actionists apparently demands of them too much undue effort: it requires too much work, is too practical" (Adorno 2005: 263).⁵⁰ So thought itself is eminently practical, a neat solution *avant la lettre* of today's Bartlebian forbearance – "I would prefer not to" becomes "I prefer to think it over, give me a minute." And not simply, Adorno says, is thought more practical than the actionists recognized, but it is *too practical*. Perhaps thought steals (the *jouissance* of) practicality from the actionists?).⁵¹

But the purpose of this turn to Adorno was, of course, to seek to find a source for Jameson's dialectics – and perhaps, in their very compression (in Adorno, that is), we arrive at the unexpected conclusion that Žižek is more Adornoan than Jameson, another version of the purity of his Sadism perhaps

⁴⁸ See my discussion of same in Burnham 2018: 51. Jameson's signal reading of Hemingway occurs in the final pages of *Marxism and Form*: "one is wrong to say that Hemingway began by wishing to express or convey certain basic experiences; rather, he began by wishing to write a certain type of sentence, a kind of neutral *compte rendu* of external displacements" (Jameson 1971a: 411). But see also, from the same year, his "Metacommentary," where Jameson effectively defamiliarizes interpretation, seeing it as a kind of optical illusion (a figure with great resonance in *Marxism and Form*), but also, tellingly, as a paradox: "we are condemned to interpret at the same time that we feel an increasingly repugnance to do so" (Jameson 1971b: 11).

⁴⁹ I am driven by an anxiety not to plagiarize from my own graduate students' work and hence told one, Ed Graham, who has an essay in the present issue, that I did not want to read it before finishing my own (even though his essay is also work for a course I am directing). And yet, my mantra is I do *not* learn from my students – I always find it disingenuous, or perhaps admitting too much, when academics claim that – but I do *steal* from them. So I did, it turns out, read Graham's essay.

⁵⁰ "Actionists," not "activists," making me wonder if Adorno was somehow knowledgeable about the Vienna Actionists. Their critique of the university, in the *Kunst und Revolution* action of 1968, however, can hardly be thought of in Adorno's anti-intellectual terms. But it was a crazy time, and alliances that seem self-evident to us today were often obscure in the historical moment/present. Please see Parent (2018) on the Actionists and Adorno, and, for a discussion of the Adorno passage from "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis," Jeffries (2016).

⁵¹ Three final ways of reading this Adorno patch: note that Adorno immediately refers to "giving way to a regressive and distorted form of the pleasure principle"; throws in another dialectical gimme – "it is more comfortable to swim with the current, even when one declares oneself to be against the current"; and adds, in a footnote, that the "concept of the traitor comes from the eternal reserves of collective repression, whatever its coloration may be," all of which may turn out to be a guide to dealing with today's various social media/millennial shitstorms (as Han [2017] puts it).

also explicable when we recall, with the help of Rebecca Comay, the twinning of Kant and Sade already at work in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.⁵²

Historicism and the Symptom

Let us take the question of historicity next, for this is surely the bedrock of both Jameson's thought (via his imperative, in *The Political Unconscious*, to "always historicize!", even if his tripartite levels of analysis demonstrated how complex that hermeneutic will inevitably be) and Marxism proper, although historicism has, as Kirk Boyle argues, become "a conviction institutionalized by the theoretical technique turned ideological doctrine" (Boyle 2014: 118) whereas, for Todd McGowan, "[h]istoricism assumes an unbroken continuity between the text itself and the historical context that establishes the choices from among which a text emerges" (McGowan 2017: 97). For McGowan, historicism, in reacting against the mythopoetic or humanist paradigms that characterized literary studies before the theory revolution, sought a closure of sorts by shackling the text to the social order of its historical milieu. Recall, as an extreme Althusserian version of this paradigm, Terry Eagleton's LMPs (Literary Modes of Production) and GI (General Ideology) in his *Criticism and Ideology* (1978). The debate over the past decade in cultural studies has been between the false choice of historicist or "symptomatic" readings versus "surface readings" (now that distant reading has turned out to be not very distant after all), whereas both methodologies, Russell Sbriglia argues, rely on a disavowal of surplus enjoyment, a Kantian renunciation that "conceals an obscene superego injunction *Enjoy!*" (enjoy the racist slavery text or the misogyny in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the better to denounce it): "the historicist can never be historicist enough for ... one thing will always elude historical analysis, the *objet petit a*, the unhistorical kernel of the Real" (Sbriglia 2017: 113-114).

⁵² In "Adorno avec Sade," Comay parses first of all Adorno and Horkheimer's excursus on "Juliette, or Enlightenment and Morality" in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and then, by way of contrast, Lacan's essay. While for Adorno, "Sade serves to expose the logic of reason's ultimate short circuit" (Comay 2006: 7), Lacan's split subject, *if we do not ontologize loss*, helps Comay to arrive at the argument that "the historicization of lack may be matched ... by an implicit hypostatization of utopia" (Comay 2006: 14) – but for the question of Adorno and utopia, see Graham's essay in the present issue.

But I would like to dwell a bit on Boyle's argument that historicism has become "a conviction institutionalized by the theoretical technique turned ideological doctrine," that is, not simply a matter of recognizing the importance of the contingent to Žižek's critique.⁵³ And so here we might consider both that institutionalization, in which Greenblatt and Jameson give rise to a generation of scholars, a raft of PDFs, a plethora of colloquy, and the way in which the contingent turns out to be an event, with or without the majuscule. Or perhaps this patriarchal metaphor is misleading, and, like Phillipe Bourgeois among the crack dealers we can taste the forbidden fruit of historicism to, well, historicize the rise of historicism in the 1980s and 90s academy. Discussing "the belief that historical phenomena can always and only be explained in terms of the contingent factors ushering them into existence," Boyle argues that for Žižek, this *belief* is the problem, for that belief then is the "conviction institutionalized by the theoretical technique turned ideological doctrine Žižek alternatively calls *radical historicism* and *historicist relativism*" (Boyle 2014: 118). So the initial, "reductionist," belief or conviction is then "institutionalized" – but how?⁵⁴ By a technique turned doctrine – which is to say, the reification of the concept qua praxis, with the attendant social rewards for commitment to this praxis while other commitments are disparaged or at best marginalized. But how did the belief or conviction become a technique – or is this all too chicken and egg? And where did the contingent go, and why are we talking about contingent factors ushering historical phenomena into existence, and not (or not also) the role that historical factors play in the creation of cultural objects (Boyle begins his article on "Historicism/Historicity" with a setpiece on how new historicism informed our understanding of Shakespeare)?

The reader will be forgiven if she wonders whether by "historical factors" that play a role "in the creation of cultural objects" I mean, say, the role of colonialism in our understanding of *The Tempest* or the role of Reaganism in the institutionalization of New Historicism and cultural studies in the 1980s American academy. But perhaps we can speak about both – first about how, as

⁵³ Perhaps also provoking the discomfort of that same Boyle, who is the editor of the present issue? But I approach Boyle's analysis here as a mere "cut-out" for Žižekian critique in general.

⁵⁴ Belief must always be reflexive, no? Here Žižek on the reflexivity of communication, in *How to Read Lacan*, is instructive (Žižek 2006b: 16), as is Jameson on reflexivity as a sub-category of dialectics, self-consciousness that is eventually a matter of ideology-critique (Jameson 2009: 281-286).

Alberto Toscano recently argued, in *The Tempest* it isn't so much that Shakespeare has borrowed from, in a *détournement*, Montaigne's *Des Cannibales*, "the least original, the most conventional of Montaigne's musings on the philosophical lessons of Brazilian anthropophagy," but rather that the play stages an imaginary colonization that "projects onto 'savage' colonized lands, spatializing [those lands], a European desire for the negation of his own civilization" (Toscano 2017). That is, both Toscano and Margaret Hodgen (1952) argue that ancient ideas of barbarism and "the other" informed colonial attitudes during the Renaissance – and so, are "ushering historical phenomena into existence," as Boyle puts it in his paraphrase of Žižek, *and* are among the "factors [that] play in the creation of cultural objects," as I demanded.

Does the same reconciliation of history and culture obtain when we think about the institutionalization of historicism? Here the Žižekian argument I am reconstructing from Boyle's essay is the following. We begin with a conviction or a belief, a belief in the role of contingent historical events in contributing to cultural phenomena. Beliefs are reflexive, they are a belief *for the other*. In this case, this methodological belief is a fantasy, an answer to the debilitating *Che vuoi?* question that so troubles the academic or intellectual. All forms of intellectuals' guilt trips (as Jameson notes in his "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" essay [1992b]),⁵⁵ or imposter syndrome, or representations of academics in popular culture (who are either philanderers as in Zadie Smith's [2005] novel *On Beauty* or ivory tower self-loathers as with Tim Robbins' character in the recent HBO series *Here and Now* [Ball 2017]) come down to this paradoxical question: what is my academic Thing? And if my academic Thing is historicism, how has that reflexive belief or conviction become a theoretical methodology or technique? How has Boyle's *institutionalization* taken place? And did that institutionalization (which we can use the Althusserian shorthand of social reproduction to demarcate) mean a matter of syllabi, teaching strategies, article vetting, and conference planning – which is to say, the habitus of the advanced society's university professional? And yet this is to ignore the *point-de-capitonnage* at work in Boyle's sentence: he is not

⁵⁵ "Populist radicals are also intellectuals, so that this position ["a widely based sense that high culture is an establishment phenomenon"] has suspicious overtones of the guilt trip" (Jameson 1992b: 9).

saying that our academic Thing (in this case, historicism) then becomes institutionalized (bad, very bad) when the “theoretical technique” (discussing, say, the relationship between the anamorphic death’s head in Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* and a silver skull brooch on one of the ambassadors in the painting, as Greenblatt does in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* [1980: 18-21]) turns or is turned into an ideological doctrine, an orthodoxy, a rigid worldview (again, bad, very bad). Boyle isn’t saying this in part because orthodoxy is Žižek’s (and Jameson’s) wheelhouse, but also because this analysis (from sublime belief to academic sterility) is precisely the narrative of the lost object that Žižekian critique warns us against. Rather, it is the (reflexive) belief or conviction that is already the problem, that already lacks, the reductive belief “that historical phenomena can always and only be explained in terms of the contingent factors ushering them into existence.” And that *lack* is then institutionalized – isn’t this how *habitus* works? By taking our lack and giving it its own colloquy, an institute, a tenure line or research grant? Finally, “a theoretical technique turned ideological doctrine” means that the technique itself was already doctrinal. Even before Greenblatt finished his book, the notion of a historicist hegemony was a *fait accompli*:

It is only when one takes leave of this world – quite literally takes leave by walking away from the front of the canvas – that one can see the single alien object, the skull. The skull expresses the death that the viewer has, in effect, himself brought about by changing his perspective, by withdrawing his gaze from the figures of the painting. For that gaze is, the skull implies, reality-infering; without it, the objects so lovingly represented in their seeming substantiality vanish. To move a few feet away from the frontal contemplation of the painting is to efface everything within it, to bring death into the world. (Greenblatt 1980: 20)⁵⁶

You can see in those lines how close Greenblatt is to Lacan, with a reading that is as uncanny as Lacanian anamorphosis, before heading off in the other direction – or in the “other other” direction, back to the painting, back to

⁵⁶ Greenblatt is the paradigm evoked by McGowan, who discusses two of his works, crucially for the conservative notions of the masterpiece that I argued were already there in Greenblatt’s discussion of Holbein. Thus, McGowan counters Greenblatt’s argument for the “half-hidden cultural transactions through which great works of art are empowered” (Greenblatt 1988: 4) responding that a “masterpiece is not a work of art which transcends its time but one that changes the symbolic coordinates of its time” (McGowan 2017: 99).

representation, back to the imaginary. It is in this sense that we can return to the notion of the contingent floated above. Contingency is a rather ... *random* ... form of historical causality, no? And yet it is there throughout Žižek.⁵⁷

Consider this commentary on Lenin in *Incontinnence of the Void*: “One usually associates Hegel with linear teleology and progressive ‘historical necessity’ – but the basic lesson Lenin drew from Hegel was exactly the opposite one: the complex contingency of the historical process, overdetermination of every ‘basic’ tendency by an intricate network of specific conditions where ‘the exception is the rule’” (Žižek 2017a: 241).

This contingency or randomness – this turn to the anamorphic Real away from the imperial pleasures of the Holbein painting, say – is the form of Žižekian or Lacanian historicity that allows us to understand the importance of the left aligning itself with the energies of the alt-right, the incels and red pill manosphere, which I take to be the proper, Utopian lesson of Angela Nagle’s *Kill All Normies* (2017) – not to bemoan the “bad infinity” that sees the Tumblr left mirroring the subreddit right, but instead to seize that very convergence. Here is Lenin on a similar moment, quoted by Žižek just before the comments above:

The socialist revolution in Europe *cannot* be anything other than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all and sundry oppressed and discontented elements. Inevitably, sections of the petty bourgeoisie and of the backward workers will participate in it – without such participation, *mass* struggle is *impossible*, without it no revolution is possible – and just as inevitably will they bring into the movement their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses and errors. But *objectively* they will attack *capital*, and the class-conscious vanguard of the revolution, the advanced proletariat, expressing this objective truth of a variegated and discordant, motley and outwardly fragmented, mass struggle, will be able to unite and direct it, capture power, seize the banks, expropriate the

⁵⁷ And the contingent is throughout Lacan, not only conceptually – the *tuché* – but also in the way in which random, everyday events made their way into the Seminars, including, notably, the testing of the microphones in *Seminar XXIII*, although not in the official versions sanctified by Jacques-Alain Miller (Lacan 2016) – rather, in the Cormac Gallagher pirate translation (Lacan 1975-76). Fred Moten notes that “Lacan’s voice irrupting into these texts he calls seminars ... [is] full of the scandal/chance” (Moten 2004: 285-6).

trusts which all hate (though for different reasons!). (Lenin 1916:
unpaginated)

Here we have to note two concepts not unrelated to the dialectics of, let's call it Zed & Fred. First, the contingent here is not only Lenin's acceptance of the petty-bourgeois "slag" (as he quickly refers to such fellow-travellers, noting as well that the victory of socialism, "will by no means immediately 'purge' itself" of said slag) but how that correlates to today's populist right, with its hatred of elites, banks, and experts ("though for different reasons!").⁵⁸ That is, the *social link* at work in Žižek's embrace of the alt-right is also a recognition of the *short circuit* operant in the Jordan Peterson ideology. Then, we can also entertain a parallel, or is it parallax, between Žižek's provocations and Jameson's less incendiary, perhaps, arguments for the utopia of Wal-Mart (let alone universal militarization) or the "eBay imaginary" (as in his *New Left Review* article on William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* [Jameson 2003: 108]). These all embrace the contingent, with what Lenin calls "their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses and errors," as if he were describing the analysand. Or a student, today's millennial!

My reading of Boyle's argument, via Žižek, Greenblatt, and Lenin, then, is that historicism is an academic Thing which unwittingly reveals or revels in the irruption of the Real via the contingent. If this is so, a problem with considerations of contingency versus historicism, or cause and effect, lies in the question of where, exactly, we locate that history? Where does one begin and end the analysis? What sets the parameters, history or the dialectical machine itself? Does history lie in the period of a literary text's creation, its writing, thereby entailing a Wikipedia-like expansion of the author's biography to timelines, encyclopedic entries, and on to Greenblatt's "half-hidden cultural transactions"? Then, how does all of this history cause a text to happen, or is it to be found in that historical milieu qua effect (McGowan's argument)? If that last formulation is so, then where does that effect take place – in the historical context proximate to the literary text, or in that of the critical intervention (leaving alone the problematic that a literary text has a chaotic life)? When, for

⁵⁸ In the same regard, we also care about the popular, about such a celebrity narratives as the Kate Spade or Anthony Bourdain suicides or the Pusha-T/Drake rap beef, "though for different reasons!"

example, does the condition of slavery stop being a cause or effect of a text? 19th century slavery in the US no doubt is part of the cause of, say Frederick Douglass' *Narrative* or Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but is it properly a *cause* of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* or Octavia Butler's *Kindred*? Or are those two last texts' more proximate causes late 20th century culture; are they responses to the Civil Rights movement, to neoliberal governmentality? Then, if *Beloved* is a masterpiece, is it because it stages Sethe's "impossible act," as McGowan argues – the killing of her daughter to save her from a return to slavery, a reorienting of the symbolic? McGowan's is similar to the reading that Sheldon George develops, in fine detail, in *Trauma and Race*, when he aligns Sethe with the Lacanian reading of *Antigone* in *Seminar VII*: "Like Antigone, Sethe believes that her life can only be lived from what Lacan calls 'the place of that limit where her life is already lost, where she is already on the other side'" (George 2016: 83). Crucially, George adds a few pages later, "[w]hat Sethe strives for, both for herself and for her children, is precisely what the subject can never fully have in life: freedom from the signifier" (George 2016: 87). That is, George does not make the mistake Lacan warns us against: seeing the ethical actions of Antigone or Sethe as some subversive act. Here we can read Octavia Butler avec Morrison, and contrast the science-fiction plot of the former's *Kindred*, in which Dana, an African-American woman living in 1970s Los Angeles, will suddenly "return" to early 19th century Maryland, with the historical novel qua genre of Morrison. For Dana's return (to slavery: those who do not remember are condemned to repeat, etc.) is arguably the very thing (or Thing) that Sethe is motivated to avoid for her children. But, given again our historicist proclivity for reading texts in their social context, can both returns not be seen as a working through of Žižekian enjoying of that symptom, or what Wendy Brown calls "wounded attachments"? And, to be even more provocative, can such a reading be aligned with Kanye West's wretched attempts, in spring 2018, to urge African-Americans to stop obsessing over slavery ("that sounds like a choice")? So the charge against historicism is that it is random in its origin and telos, even though it may share the *tēchnē* of a dialectical approach, whether that approach be Marxist or psychoanalytic. The latter differentiate themselves from historicism proper by holding fast to the category of necessity. That is, and this is to anticipate the following section of

my essay, antagonism, negativity, or the non-relation are the necessary “absent cause” for the appearance of that which is contingent.

Jameson Dialecticizes Žižek

I want now to take account of Jameson’s discussions of dialectics in *Valences of the Dialectic*, and in particular his argument, in the book’s opening chapter, that incommensurability, of the kind theorized by Lacan, may be a symptom of the dialectic. A quick succession of propositions (or syllogisms) then follow: so Lacan’s “there is no sexual relation” as mark of the incommensurable, must lead to a dialectical rejoinder, which, sure enough it does, with Žižek’s innovation: “there *is* a non-relation.” That non-relation, that hypostatization of the negative, then can be transferred to the big Other, which does not exist, except that it exists as “there is a *non* big Other.”⁵⁹ But before we allow these syllogisms to continue proliferating, it is worth looking more closely at Jameson’s argument, which takes place in chapter one of *Valences*, a chapter called “Three names of the dialectic” (Jameson 2009: 3-70) Those three names are “the dialectic” (or Marxism), “a dialectic” (readings that examine binary oppositions, antinomies, and other structuralist motifs), and, finally “it’s dialectical!”, or the dialectic as adjective, “when the problem becomes the solution” (Jameson 2009: 51). Jameson situates, in the second section (“a dialectic”), the Lacanian triad I/S/R as indicative of the third term (the Real) added to a binary (the Imaginary and the Symbolic). That third term, he adds, comes to found an entire subfield of Lacanian theory: first the *objet petit a*, then the sinthome, and finally gender on one hand and knots on the other. Jameson holds himself back here from more on Lacan’s “prodigious theoretical journey,” the “Lacanian adventure” but not without “mention[ing] the theory of the four discourses as another illustration of Lacan’s virtuosity as a thinker of incommensurables and discontinuities.” For:

... suffice it to underscore the new vocation this trajectory has opened for the dialectic itself. Now we may begin to hazard the guess that something like the dialectic will always begin to appear when thinking approaches the dilemma of incommensurability, in whatever form; and that the dialectic

⁵⁹ Here I am returning to arguments in my recent book on Žižek, *Does the Internet Have an Unconscious?*, esp. chapter 7 and the conclusion (Burnham 2018).

henceforth seems to be the shift in thinking on to a new and unaccustomed plane in an effort to deal with the fact of distinct and autonomous realities that seem to offer no contact with each other.

(Jameson 2009: 24)

Jameson will shortly add that the solution to the problem of incommensurability (he also calls on Lyotard's *différend*) of the "identity of opposites," is no solution at all. But surely what is so important here is how Jameson provides a dialectical reading of the non-relation.⁶⁰

There are, furthermore, three sets or theoretical ensembles of dialectics that Jameson elaborates upon in *Valences*: the opening chapter which sets up *the, a, adjectival* and as a Lefebvrian filigree, the *spatial*; in a later chapter,⁶¹ dialectics is considered in terms of reflexivity, the temporal, and contradiction (Jameson 2009: 278-90); in the book's finale, theories of history and literature (from Braudel to Ricouer) are given an oddly Aristotelian structure that retains dialectics as a machinic method. (Jameson 2009: 475-612)

Consider, for example, Jameson's assertion in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, that Alexander Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse* (1988), via its imaginary resolution of a real contradiction – that between magic realism and the Soviet new wave – manages to bring together two genres: the fiction feature and the documentary. Musing, in a footnote, that footage in the film appears to have been lifted from an abandoned documentary film about Turkestan, Jameson opines: "*Eclipse* thereby not merely unites two distinct generic aspects of his extraordinary talent – the narrative-fictional and the observational – but also dialectically allows one to batten off the other: the fairy tale drawing unexpected new strength from this *ciné-verité* and vice versa" (Jameson 1992a: 112n5). Now, formally, one does not even have to reach for Žižekian antagonisms (Adorno's negative dialectic will do in a pinch) to see how far from Žižek's dialectics lie Jameson's notion, here at least, of two formal or generic tendencies in a film strengthening each other, rather than, say, positing an

⁶⁰ Part of the problem is that we read Jameson differently than we do Žižek. The first in terms of style (and then ideas) the second in terms of ideas, for the style is seen not in a literary way.

⁶¹ It is worth noting that chapter 11, "Persistencies of the Dialectic: Three Sites," like chapter 15, "Actually Existing Marxism," was published in 1993, and so before much of the book, which mostly appeared in volumes and journals in the first decade of the 21st century.

absolute difference. Here we might remember, as well, Jameson's slogan from the 1980s: difference relates.

Such a difference that relates can be seen if we consider the most recent Žižek/Jameson collaboration, the latter's essay "An American Utopia" and the collection of essays in response, edited by Žižek. Jameson's essay here is an attempt to bring together the secular & theological Utopias he has been mapping since he began writing on Bloch. But that "imaginary resolution of a real contradiction" is where Jameson's dialectic can stall. Consider how, in *Valences of the Dialectic*, Jameson, commenting on Brecht's quip that in Hollywood, heaven serves "the prosperous, unsuccessful/As hell", adds "A true dialectic; a true unity of opposites!" (Jameson 2009: 410). No statement could be more un-Žižekian, and even perhaps un-Adornoan in its insistence on that "true unity," were it not for what Jameson immediately asks: "Will it be possible to untangle the negative from the positive...?" This figure, of untangling immediately seems more psychoanalytic – for which, by way of further illustration, we can turn to Jeff Wall's lightbox photograph *Untangling* (1994).

(But first, a brief digression. Whether Jameson's "untangling" of the negative and the positive is a matter of a unity of opposites, we can certainly contrast Žižek's method which, remarkably, insists on fetishizing the antagonism *qua* unbreachable gap. And so Jameson brings to our attention the "perversity" with which Žižek stages a "stupid first impression" to be followed not only by its dialectical opposite, but then a further, paradoxical, return to that stupid first impression "accompanied by a new knowledge of the errors involved in the second moment" [Jameson 2009: 58]. Consider how the psychotic forecloses the big Other, refusing the necessity for an external authority, whilst remaining fascinated with that big Other, when the foreclosed returns as the voices that speak to one. This condition remains, from the *Ur*-psychotic, Daniel Paul Schreber, to today's Bluetooth user. For the Bluetooth user, consider how our "stupid first impression" is that someone is talking to himself, is walking around gesticulating like a madman. But we correct that impression when we realize that, no, he is on his phone, he has that triangular thing hanging off his ear. He is using the Bluetooth technology. And then that second impression itself is corrected, and we go back to the first representation, which now includes wireless technology in the larger picture of daily life as madness.)



Fig. 1. Jeff Wall, "Untangling" transparency in lightbox, 189.0 x 223.5 cm, Courtesy of the artist

And it is from that fantasy of wireless technology that we turn to Jeff Wall's artwork. In that photograph, a man sits in a workshop or basement of some kind, in the midst of untangling a giant knot of thick ropes. The task is Sisyphean to be sure – it is a form of labor captured by the photographer. And the photograph also suggests the work of psychoanalysis (thus in *The Interpretation of Dreams*: it is from the latent content, "and not the dream's manifest content, that we disentangle its meaning" [Freud 2001: 277]). I want to stay with this image because of how it allows us to think through some of the respectively Jamesonian and Žižekian motifs, for how it allegorizes the "difference [that] relates" between these two dialecticians. First of all, we have to distinguish between the dreamwork and labor proper; then we have to distinguish between that labor and the work of the clinic. Finally, because this is a picture, a photograph, a work of art, we have to think about how it thematizes its own looking (as surely as it will mark-making): consider the two different kinds of looking here – the downcast gaze of the main figure, on the left, and the tilted-back head of the figure at the back, on the right (and, too, as if hypostatizing our antagonism, the wall of shelving that lies between them). The figure on the left

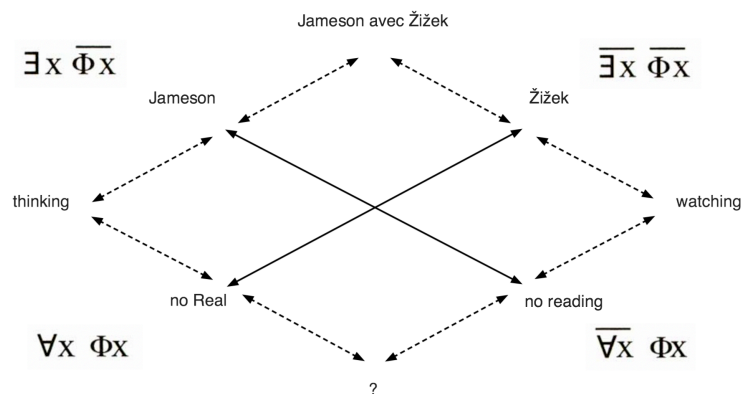
looks down, with an abject gaze, because merely holding onto the ropes, merely using his hands, or doing manual labor, is not enough for the task at hand. He has to look, to see, to distinguish between which rope leads where, and whether to run this one under the other, and so on. His looking is part of his labor, the labor of untangling – a Freudian labor, but no, strike that, surely a late Lacanian labor – this is the knot of all knots!⁶² The figure on the right tilts his head back – why? Because his ballcap’s brim will otherwise shade his eyes and he will not be able to read the label of the box in front of him – or he will not be able to distinguish which machine part he is looking at, or the label on the machine. Unlike the figure on the left (who, we have to admit, also looks as if he were “lost in thought”), the figure on the right is looking at something we cannot see. Or, perhaps, he is looking at the drillpress (which is closer to the front of the room, towards us as viewing subjects). But I would speculate that this figure is looking *for* something – that is to say, searching, while the main figure is looking *at* something – that is to say, inspecting, ruminating (lost in thought, trying to follow his train of thought, follow the ropes or knots). So on the one hand we have the proverbial needle in a haystack – which means, in digital Lacanese, Google as the “subject supposed to know,” and on the other hand we have the unconscious of labor itself, of the Marxist project.

Conclusion

This phrase or concept, “the unconscious of labor itself,” suggests the two ways in which I characterized my semiotic rectangle in the first section of this essay: as unconscious, but also as toolkit. By way of conclusion, I would like to return to that rectangle, but adding to it in order the better to stress the non-relation of the dialectic. That is, with the addition of the formulas of sexualization, keeping in mind that, Jameson without or *sans* Žižek is Jameson without the Real, which is both

⁶² That is, the later Lacan of the 1970s, of the Borromean knots and their complications from Seminar XXIII onward, would think of knots not as that which must be untangled *à la* Freud but rather knots are what hold our Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real together. Discussing this picture with Vancouver photographer Kelly Wood, I was told to consider “the time signature of the picture,” how “the task (labor) of untangling implies a length of time, one that cannot be present in the image, but, is the whole of the narrative in the fraction of the second of the photo,” and that the “laborer endeavors to return to the first cause (of failure, you could even say); he reverses time, and trouble, to begin again, likely tomorrow, as human attempts to conquer the world are always unnatural, inelegant and badly designed” (email, July 2018). Can we not bring Wood’s reversal of time into the question of tangling and untangling? Or even the dialectic of the same?

the sexual Real and the Real of the class struggle – in our diagram, the phallic function $[\Phi]$ is akin to the split subject $[\$]$ qua economic castration):



But by the same token, Žižek with or without Jameson is Žižek who does not read, who cannot be bothered with – not with interpretation, for obviously he does nothing but interpret. But that isn't right either, for it's an interpretation without reading, an interpretation that is just watching. Žižek will say he does not watch films either (and yet that probably is usually untrue) – but for this diagram let “watching” stand in for a riff, say, on a moment in a film, such as the dialogue at the end of the film *Wind River* which Žižek has been commenting on recently in lectures and in his essay on *Blade Runner 2049*.⁶³

What, then, do Lacan's formulae of sexuation bring to this diagram? If we accept that the phallic function is also a marker of economic castration – which is to say, the class struggle qua non-relation – then on the upper left we have the position of the primal father (“there exists someone who is not subject to the phallic function”). This corresponds, in my argument, not exactly to Jameson as patriarch of US theory, but to that fantasy position of Jameson both with and without Žižek – by which I mean, both the Jameson of pure thought *and* the Jameson of the Real. Getting to have your cake and eat it to: the impossible-Real. Dare we say, the Utopian Jameson? Then, on the upper right corner, “there does not exist anyone who is not subject to the phallic function”: or, again, Žižek with *and* without Jameson, or Žižek who is able to read but would prefer not to. The Žižek of Bartlebian withdrawal qua

⁶³ Notably, Žižek claims that we should not read the text that comes up at the end of *Wind River*, which aligns the film with the question of missing and murdered Indigenous women in the U.S. (Žižek 2017b: unpaginated).

revolutionary act (perhaps this thinking that turns out to be practical after all, to recall Adorno?). But what of the two final positions, and why haven't I said anything about the question mark in the bottom of the diagram, the dystopian position? This position, I suggest, is that of the reader. We begin on the lower left, and so the reader, who is, after all, neither Jameson nor Žižek, is aligned with the castrated subject, the split subject, \$. The reader is universal, is all subjects – all are subject to the phallic function, all are subject to the economic. But, just as I argued at the beginning of this paper that we can only read Jameson *sans* Žižek after reading them together, so we can only conceptualize the reader *after* moving clockwise through the diagram, after reading Jameson *with* Žižek and without, reading Žižek *avec* Jameson and *sans*, ending, that is, with the reader as not-All: “not-All are subject to the phallic function.” That is the position of the revolutionary subject: the feminine not-All.⁶⁴

References

- Adorno, T. (2005) *Critical Models*, trans. by H. W. Pickford, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ball, Al. (2017) [TV] *Here and Now*, HBO.
- Boyle, K. (2014) “Historicism/Historicity,” in R. Butler (ed.) *The Žižek Dictionary*, Durham: Acumen.
- Burnham, C. (1995) *The Jamesonian Unconscious: The Aesthetics of Marxist Theory*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Burnham, C. (2016) *Fredric Jameson and The Wolf of Wall Street*, New York: Bloomsbury.
- Burnham, C. (2018) *Does the Internet Have an Unconscious? Slavoj Žižek and Digital Culture*, New York: Bloomsbury.
- Chandler, R. (1976) *The Lady in the Lake*, New York: Vintage.
- Copjec, J. (1994) *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists*, Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Eagleton, T. (1978) *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*, London: Verso.
- Freud, S. (2001) *The Interpretation of Dreams (I)*, trans. J. Strachey, London: Vintage.

⁶⁴ In a generous reading of an earlier draft of this essay, Paul Kingsbury (Geography, SFU) drew comparisons with the conclusion to Joan Copjec's *Read My Desire*, and in particular where she calls for “an ethics proper to the woman” (Copjec 1994: 236).

- George, S. (2016) *Trauma and Race: A Lacanian Study of African-American Identity*. Waco: Baylor University Press.
- Greenblatt, S. (1980) *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Greenblatt, S. (1988) *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Han, B-C. (2017) *In the Swarm*, trans. by E. Butler, Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Hodgen, M.T. (1952) "Montaigne and Shakespeare Again," *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 16.1, 23-42.
- Jameson, F. (1971a) *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Jameson, F. (1971b) "Metacommentary," *PMLA* 86.1: 9-18.
- Jameson, F. (1990). *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, The Persistence of the Dialectic*, London: Verso.
- Jameson, F. (1992a) *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Jameson, F. (1992b). "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Signatures of the Visible*, London: Routledge, 9-34.
- Jameson, F. (2003) "Fear and Loathing in Globalization," *New Left Review* 23: 105-114.
- Jameson, F. (2006). First Impressions. Available at <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n17/fredric-jameson/first-impressions>. Accessed August 22nd 2018.
- Jameson, F. (2009) *Valences of the Dialectic*, London: Verso.
- Jeffries, S. (2016) *Grand Hotel Abyss: The Lives of the Frankfurt School*, London: Verso.
- Lacan, J (1975-76) *The Sinthome*, trans. by C. Gallagher. Available at: <http://www.lacanireland.com/web/translations/seminars/>. Accessed August 24, 2018.
- Lacan, J. (2016) *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XXIII: The Sinthome*, trans. by A.R. Price, London: Polity.
- Lenin, V.I. (1916) The Discussion On Self-Determination Summed Up. Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jul/x01.htm>. Accessed May 15th, 2018.
- McGowan, T. (2017) "The Bankruptcy of Historicism," in R. Sbriglia, ed., *Everything You Wanted to Know about Literature but Were Afraid to ask Žižek*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Moten, F. (2004) *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Nagle, A. (2017) *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the Alt-right and Trump*, Winchester: Zero Books.
- Nobus, D. (2017) *The Law of Desire: On Lacan's 'Kant with Sade.'* London: Palgrave.
- Parent, V. (2018) *History, Myth and the Worker Body: Vienna Actionism within the Longue-Durée of 1848*, Department of Art History, Visual Art, and Theory, University of British Columbia.
- Sbriglia, R. (2017) "The Symptoms of Ideology Critique; or, How We Learned to Enjoy the Symptom and Ignore the Fetish," in R. Sbriglia, ed., *Everything You Wanted to Know about Literature but Were Afraid to ask Žižek*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Smith, Z. (2005) *On Beauty*, London: Hamish and Hamilton.
- Toscano, A. (2017) "The Invention of the Savage: Philosophy's Colonial Histories," lecture, SFU Institute for the Humanities, Vancouver, delivered Feb. 24.
- Warwick Research Collective. (2015) *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Waugh, E. (1945) *Brideshead Revisited*, Boston: Little, Brown.
- Žižek, S. (1991) *Looking Awry*, Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Žižek, S. (2006a) *The Parallax View*, Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Žižek, S. (2006b) *How to Read Lacan*, London: Granta.
- Žižek, S. (2007) *The Indivisible Remainder: on Schelling and Related Matters*, London: Verso.
- Žižek, S. (2012) *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*, London: Verso
- Žižek, S. (2017a) *Incontinence of the Void: Economico-Philosophical Spandrels*, Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Žižek, S. (2017b) *Blade Runner 2049: A View of Post-Human Capitalism*. Available at <https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/blade-runner-2049-a-view-of-post-human-capitalism/>. Accessed August 31st, 2018.
- Zupančič, A. (2017). *What IS Sex?* Cambridge: MIT Press.

ISSN 1751-8229

Volume Thirteen, Number One

Hegel with Beckett: The Persistence of Abstraction

Slavoj Žižek

Fredric Jameson is best known for applying to social and cultural life the motto: historicize every phenomenon, locate it in its concrete historical totality. What I want to do in this brief reflection is to elaborate a properly dialectical reading of this motto, a reading which recognizes *abstraction itself as a concrete historical power*. What Marxism calls “antagonism” is precisely the persistence of abstraction in social reality itself.

Madness, Sex, War

While every social edifice is held together by a thick texture of mores (*Sitten*), its stability is not threatened only from the outside (war with other states) since this external threat (of war) is what sustains a civilization from within (as Hegel knew very well). This is why a Möbius-strip reversal complicates today's urgent task to civilize (the relationship between) civilizations themselves (as Sloterdijk put it). Until now, each culture disciplined/educated its own members and guaranteed civic peace among them in the guise of state power, but the relationship between different cultures and states was permanently under the shadow of potential war, with each state of peace nothing more than a temporary armistice. As Hegel conceptualized it, the entire ethics of a state culminates in the highest act of heroism, the readiness to sacrifice one's life for one's nation-state, which means that the wild barbarian relations *between* states serve as the foundation of the ethical life *within* each state. Is today's North Korea with its ruthless pursuit of nuclear weapons and rockets to hit distant targets not the ultimate example of this logic of unconditional nation-state sovereignty? However, the moment we fully accept the fact that we live on a Spaceship Earth, the task that urgently imposes itself is that of civilizing civilizations themselves, of imposing universal solidarity and cooperation among all human communities, a task rendered all the more difficult by the ongoing rise of sectarian religious and ethnic "heroic" violence and readiness to sacrifice oneself (and the world) for one's specific Cause. Therein lies the catch: we cannot directly "civilize civilization" by way of simply expanding the peaceful relations guaranteed by the rule of law into the global sphere of international relations (this was Kant's idea of a world-wide republic); what is missing is, as Hegel knew, the barbarian core (war, killing enemies) in the heart of each civilization which sustains its ethical edifice.

Here we encounter the Möbius strip reversal: if we progress to the center of the ethical edifice of a state, we find ourselves on the opposite side, in the brutal battle for survival with external edifice, and each individual's readiness to participate in this barbarism is the ultimate support of the state's ethical edifice. How to resolve this deadlock? The standard desperate procedure here is to offer another war-like struggle to replace war between

states, another struggle which would overcome nation-state constraints and function as universal: from class struggle (“warfare”) which unites all individuals struggling for emancipation independently of their national belonging, up to the fight against ecological threats (which demands world-wide unity and coordinated efforts) or even war against possible alien attacks (Reagan evoked this possibility to Gorbachev when the Cold War was ending).

Back to a more general level, the twisted structure we are dealing with here was best encapsulated by Schelling in his “formula of the world” (*Weltformel*) from the third draft of his *Weltalter* fragments:

$$\left(\frac{A^3}{A^2 = (A = B)} \right) B$$

A and B stand here for the ideal and real aspect of every process in our reality: B is the contractive force of material density, and A is the counter-force of its idealization, “sublation” in higher and higher spiritual structures. Matter is thus gradually “idealized,” first in forces of magnetism, then in plant life, then in animal life, finally in spiritual life, so that we move further and further from immediate brutal materiality. However, this entire process is rooted in an external point of extreme singular density (the Ego as the ultimate self-contraction), in the same way that the social edifice of higher and higher ethical forms is sustained by the brutal violence of war.⁶⁵

This means that, in the Hegelian edifice, abstraction (the excess of abstract negativity which cannot be sublated into a concrete totality) persists. It is not only war that plays this role of abstract negativity threatening to undo the rational social order: war is the third term in the triad of madness—sexuality—war. As Hegel puts it in proto-Foucauldian terms, madness is not an accidental lapse, distortion, “illness” of human spirit, but something which is inscribed into individual spirit’s basic ontological constitution: to be a human means to be potentially mad:

This interpretation of insanity as a necessarily occurring form or stage in the development of the soul is naturally not to be understood as if we

⁶⁵ For a more detailed explanation of Schelling’s formula, see chapter 1 of my *The Indivisible Remainder*, London: Verso Books 1996.

were asserting that *every* mind, *every* soul, must go through this stage of extreme derangement. Such an assertion would be as absurd as to assume that because in the *Philosophy of Right* crime is considered as a necessary manifestation of the human will, therefore to commit crime is an inevitable necessity for *every* individual. Crime and insanity are *extremes* which the human mind *in general* has to overcome in the course of its development.⁶⁶

Although not a factual necessity, madness is a formal possibility constitutive of human mind: it is something whose threat has to be overcome if we are to emerge as “normal” subjects, which means that “normality” can only arise as the overcoming of this threat. This is why, as Hegel puts it a couple of pages later, “insanity must be discussed before the healthy, intellectual consciousness, although it has that consciousness for its *presupposition*.”⁶⁷ Hegel here evokes the relationship between the abstract and the concrete: although, in empirical development and the state of things, abstract determinations are always-already embedded in a concrete Whole as their presupposition, the notional reproduction/deduction of this Whole has to progress from the abstract to the concrete: crimes presuppose the rule of law, they can only occur as their violation, but must be nonetheless grasped as an abstract act that is “sublated” through the law; abstract legal relations and morality are de facto always embedded in some concrete totality of customs, but, nonetheless, the *Philosophy of Right* has to progress from the abstract moments of legality and morality to the concrete Whole of customs (family, civil society, state). The interesting point here is not only the parallel between madness and crime, but the fact that madness is located in a space opened up by the discord between actual historical development and its conceptual rendering, i.e., in the space which undermines the vulgar-evolutionist notion of dialectical development as the conceptual reproduction of the factual historical development which purifies the latter of its empirical insignificant contingencies. Insofar as madness de facto presupposes normality, while, conceptually, it precedes normality, one can say that a “madman” is precisely

⁶⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*, vol. 3, *Philosophy of Mind*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1970, par. 410.

⁶⁷ Op.cit., *ibid*.

the subject who wants to “live”—to reproduce in actuality itself—the conceptual order, i.e., to act as if madness also *effectively* precedes normality.

Next comes sexuality which, in its extreme form, can also be characterized as a specific figure of madness. Far from providing the natural foundation of human lives, sexuality is the very terrain where humans detach themselves from nature: the idea of sexual perversion or of a deadly sexual passion is totally foreign to the animal universe. Here, Hegel himself commits a failure with regard to his own standards: he only deploys how, in the process of culture, the natural substance of sexuality is cultivated, sublated, mediated—we, humans, no longer just make love for procreation, we get involved in a complex process of seduction and marriage by means of which sexuality becomes an expression of the spiritual bond between a man and a woman, etc. However, what Hegel misses is how, once we are within the human condition, sexuality is not only transformed/civilized, but, much more radically, *changed in its very substance*: it is no longer the instinctual drive to reproduce, but a drive that gets thwarted as to its natural goal (reproduction) and thereby explodes into an infinite, properly meta-physical, passion. In this way, the civilization/Culture retroactively posits/transforms its own natural presupposition: culture retroactively “denaturalizes” nature itself. This is what Freud called the Id, libido. This is how, here also, in fighting its natural obstacle, opposed natural substance, the Spirit fights itself, its own essence.⁶⁸

The underlying true problem is the following one: the standard “Hegelian” scheme of death (negativity) as the subordinate/mediating moment of Life can only be sustained if we remain within the category of Life whose dialectic is that of the self-mediating Substance returning to itself from its otherness. The moment we effectively pass from Substance to Subject, from Life(-principle) to Death(-principle), there is no encompassing “synthesis,” death in its “abstract negativity” forever remains as a threat, an excess which cannot be economized. Does this mean that we are back at the standard *topos* of the excess of negativity which cannot be “sublated” in any reconciling “synthesis,” or even at the naive Engelsian view of the alleged contradiction

⁶⁸ For a more detailed deployment of these claims, see Interludes 2 and 3 of my *Less Than Nothing*, London: Verso Books 2012.

between the openness of Hegel's "method" and the enforced closure of his "system"? There are indications which point in this direction: as was noted by many perspicuous commentators, Hegel's "conservative" political writings of his last years (like his critique of the English Reform Bill) betray a fear of any further development which will assert the "abstract" freedom of civil society at the expense of the State's organic unity, and open up a way to new revolutionary violence.⁶⁹ Why did Hegel shrink back here, why did he not dare to follow his basic dialectical rule, courageously embracing "abstract" negativity as the only path to a higher stage of freedom?

This brings us to the third figure of the excess of abstract negativity, war as social madness. Hegel may appear to celebrate the *prosaic* character of life in a well-organized modern state where the heroic disturbances are overcome in the tranquility of private rights and the security of the satisfaction of needs: private property is guaranteed, sexuality is restricted to marriage, the future is safe. . . In this organic order, universality and particular interests appear reconciled: the "infinite right" of subjective singularity is given its due, individuals no longer experience the objective state order as a foreign power intruding on their rights, they recognize in it the substance and frame of their very freedom. Gérard Lebrun asks the fateful question here: "Can the sentiment of the Universal be dissociated from this appeasement?"⁷⁰ Against Lebrun, our answer should be: yes, and this is why war is necessary—in war, universality reasserts its right against and over the concrete-organic appeasement in prosaic social life. Is the necessity of war thus not the ultimate proof that, for Hegel, every social reconciliation is doomed to fail, that no organic social order can effectively contain the force of abstract-universal negativity? This is why social life is condemned to the "spurious infinity" of the eternal oscillation between stable civic life and wartime perturbations—the notion of "tarrying with the negative" acquires here a more radical meaning: not just to "pass through" the negative but to persist in it. In social life, this means that Kant's universal peace is a vain hope, that *war* forever remains a

⁶⁹ Hegel died a year after the French revolution of 1830.

⁷⁰ Gérard Lebrun, *L'Envers de la dialectique: Hegel à la lumière de Nietzsche*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil 2004, p. 214.

threat of total disruption of organized state life; in individual subjective life, that *madness* always lurks as a possibility.

This is also how we should reinterpret the young Marx's rather unfortunate formula of the reconciliation between man and nature: the becoming-man of nature and the becoming-nature of man (*Menschwerdung der Natur und Naturwerdung des Menschen*). Marx's meaning is pretty straightforward and humanist: in Communism, when the self-alienation and class division of humanity are abolished, not only will nature lose its threatening character of an external force and be totally humanized, but humanity will also be totally naturalized, harmoniously immersed into nature. Our reading is radically different: humanity is "reconciled" with nature when it realizes that its own antagonisms, its own estrangement from nature and its processes, are "natural," that they continue in a higher potency the antagonisms and imbalances that define nature itself—in short, man is united with nature precisely in what appears as its estrangement from nature, its disturbance of natural order.

Another lesson of this persistence of abstraction is that there is nothing more foreign to Hegel than the lamentation of the richness of reality that gets lost when we proceed to its conceptual grasping—recall Hegel's unambiguous celebration of the absolute power of Understanding from his Foreword to *Phenomenology*: "The action of separating the elements is the exercise of the force of Understanding, the most astonishing and greatest of all powers, or rather the absolute power."⁷¹ This celebration is in no way qualified, i.e., Hegel's point is not that this power is nonetheless later "sublated" into a subordinate moment of the unifying totality of Reason. The problem with Understanding is rather that it does not unleash this power to the end, that it takes it as external to the thing itself—like, in the above-quoted passage from *Phenomenology*, the standard notion that it is merely *our* Understanding ("mind") that separates in its imagination what in "reality" belongs together, so that the Understanding's "absolute power" is merely the power of our imagination which in no way concerns the reality of the thing so analyzed. We pass from Understanding to Reason not when this analyzing, tearing apart, is

⁷¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977, p. 60.

overcome in a synthesis which brings us back to the wealth of reality, but when this power of “tearing apart” is displaced from “merely our mind” into things themselves, as their inherent power of negativity.

This point can also be made apropos of the properly dialectical notion of abstraction: what makes Hegel’s “concrete universality” infinite is that *it includes “abstractions” into concrete reality itself, as their immanent constituents*. That is to say: What, for Hegel, is the elementary move of philosophy with regard to abstraction? To abandon the commonsense empiricist notion of abstraction as a step away from the wealth of concrete empirical reality with its irreducible multiplicity of features: life is green, concepts are grey, they dissect, mortify, concrete reality. (This commonsense notion even has its pseudo-dialectical version, according to which such “abstraction” is a feature of mere Understanding, while “dialectics” recuperates the wealth of reality.) Philosophical thought proper begins when we become aware of how *such a process of “abstraction” is inherent to reality itself*: the tension between empirical reality and its “abstract” notional determinations is immanent to reality, it is a feature of “things themselves.” Therein resides the anti-nominalist accent of philosophical thinking—say, the basic insight of Marx’s “critique of political economy” is that the abstraction of the value of a commodity is its “objective” constituent. It is life without theory which is grey, just a flat, stupid reality—it is only theory which makes it “green,” truly alive, bringing out the complex underlying network of mediations and tensions which makes it move. Such an approach provides a different accent in the reading of Hegel: the properly Hegelian reconciliation is not a peaceful state in which all tensions are sublated or mediated but a reconciliation with the irreducible excess of negativity itself.

Beckett as the Writer of Abstraction

To recapitulate, the “empty” Cartesian subject (\$) is not just the agent of abstraction (tearing apart what in reality belongs together), it is itself an abstraction, i.e., it emerges as the result of the process of abstraction, of self-withdrawal from its real-life context. This is why the “materialist” demands to localize a subject into the texture of its “concrete” historical situation misses the key point: what disappears if we do it is the subject itself. And, again, this

does not mean that subject is a kind of user's illusion which persists only insofar as it doesn't know fully its concrete material conditions: the network of "concrete material conditions" is in itself incomplete, it contains cracks and inconsistencies which are the points of the rise of subjects. In his detailed reading of Schubert's *Winterreise*, Ian Bostridge⁷² deploys the implications of the fact that, as we learn in the very first lines of the first song, the narrator comes and leaves the house as a stranger. We never learn the reason why he leaves: was he thrown out by the prohibitive father of the family, was he rejected by the girl, did he escape out of fear of marriage promulgated by the girl's mother? This vagueness which creates anxiety is a positive feature in itself: it positively defines the narrator as a kind of empty place between parentheses, as a barred subject in the Lacanian sense of $\$$. This emptiness is constitutive of the subject, it comes first, it is not the result of a process of abstraction or alienation: the barred/empty subject is not abstracted from the "concrete" individual or person fully embedded in its life-world, this abstraction/withdrawal from all substantial content constitutes it. The "fullness of a person," its "inner wealth," is what Lacan calls the fantasmatic "stuff of the I," imaginary formations which fill in the void that "is" subject. Here also enters what Lacan calls *objet a*: *objet a* (as the stand-in for a lack) is the objectal correlate of the empty subject, that which causes anxiety. Back to *Winterreise*: *objet a* of the narrator is not the secret true reason why he had to leave the house, it is the very cause/agent of the narrator's "emptying" into a stranger whose true motivations are obscure and impenetrable. As such, *objet a* is the object which would have been lost the moment we were to learn the "true" particular cause of why the narrator left the house.

The abstraction enacted by subject is not the end result, it is the point of passage to a new concretion. There is a passage in Proust's *Recherche* in which Marcel uses a phone for the first time, speaking to his grandmother; her voice, heard alone, apart from her body, surprises him – it is a voice of a frail old woman, not the voice of the grandmother he remembers. And the point is that this experience of the voice isolated from its context colors Marcel's entire perception of the grandmother: when, later, he visits her in person, he

⁷² See Ian Bostridge, *Schubert's Winter Journey*, London: Faber and Faber 2015.

perceives her in a new way, as a strange mad old woman drowsing over her book, overburdened with age, flushed and course, no longer the charming and caring grandmother he remembered. This is how voice as autonomous partial object can affect our entire perception of the body to which it belongs. The lesson of it is that, precisely, the direct experience of the unity of a body, where voice seems to fit its organic whole, involves a necessary mystification; in order to penetrate to the truth, one has to tear this unity apart, to focus onto one of its aspect in its isolation, and then to allow this element to color our entire perception. Such a “re-totalization” based on violent abstraction is what we should call “concrete abstraction,” abstraction which grounds its own concrete totality.

Another case of violent re-totalization is provided by movie actors who are as a rule identified with a certain screen persona: neither the character(s) they play in a film nor what they really are as private “real” persons but a certain personality that transpires through multiple roles as the “type” an actor is playing again and again. Humphrey Bogart was playing the same cynical and wounded but honest character, Gary Cooper played the same terse and abrupt courageous type, Cary Grant played the same hectic hyper-active type, etc. There is, however, usually in their career at least one film in which they play a type running against their screen persona. Henry Fonda continuously played a strictly honest and highly moral character, but late in his career, he made an exception – he decided to play the main bad guy, a brutal sadistic killer working for the rail company in Sergio Leone’s *Once Upon a Time in the West*. The interesting thing is how this role (and Fonda plays it with obvious pleasure!) retroactively changed our perception of his standard screen persona and enabled us, spectators, to perceive cracks in it – say, to discern traces of brutality and arrogance in the way he played the great heroic figures from Abraham Lincoln to Colonel Thursday in John Ford’s *Fort Apache* who causes a massacre of his soldiers when he leads them to an hasty attack.

Or let us take Ben Kingsley; the role that defined his screen persona was that of Gandhi in Attenborough’s rather boring “masterpiece” – a dull and preaching agent of justice, equality and Indian independence. However, just a couple of years later, Kingsley excelled in *Love Beast* where he plays a brutal

mob enforcer bursting with evil wit and irony. So, perhaps, the fact that two big movie roles of Ben Kingsley are Gandhi and the ridiculously-aggressive English gangster do bear witness to a deeper affinity: what if the second character is the full actualization of the hidden potentials of the first one? If we look back at Gandhi from this standpoint, we are forced to bring out the weird and very problematic features of his character ignored by the media hagiography... (There is another role played by Kingsley which breaks out of this duality and moves to a totally different dimension: in 1988 TV drama *Lenin: The Train*, Kingsley gives a very sympathetic portrayal of Lenin on his legendary train voyage from Zurich to Petersburg in the Spring of 1917, with Dominique Sanda as Inessa Aemand and the old Leslie Caron as Nadhezda Krupskaya.)

Our last example in these series is Tom Cruise. His exception – the exception to his standard screen persona – is what I consider by far his best role, that of Frank Mackey, a motivational speaker peddling a pick-up artist course to men, in P.T.Anderson's *Magnolia*. What is so striking is the obvious pleasure with which he plays this extremely repulsive character, an extrovert hard-talking guy who teaches his pupils how it is all about fucking women and how to dominate them. (Later in the film his character gains some complexity, but what we get is just the twisted inner life of a vulgar corrupted person.) Again, if we look back at his other roles from this vantage point, we can easily discern the immanent vulgarity of his screen persona which transpires even in his “socially-critical” roles like that of playing the anti-war activist Ron Kovic in Oliver Stone's movie adaptation of Kovic's memoir, *Born on the Fourth of July*. We can perceive the vacuity of his arrogant sarcasms in *The Color of Money* or in *A Few Good Men*, the vain pretentiousness of *Vanilla Sky*, up to the flat and unconvincing heroism of his Stauffenberg in *Valkyrie*. The point is not that this is his “real person” but that it is the reality beneath his screen persona. In short, the old Marxist and Freudian rule holds here also: the exception is the only way to universal truth.

But the great writer of abstraction is Samuel Beckett, and to a partisan of the standard Marxist concrete historical analysis of the works of art in the style of Lukács, the way he practices abstraction in his work cannot but appear as resolutely “anti-Marxist.” When he depicts the subjective

experience of terror, loss, suffering and persecution, he does not endeavor to locate it into a concrete historical context (say, making it clear that it is a moment of Fascist terror in an occupied country, or of the Stalinist terror against dissident intellectuals). Beckett does (almost – not quite, of course) the exact contrary: he puts particular forms of terror and persecution which belong to different contexts and levels (Fascist terror, the “terror” of anti-Fascist revenge, administrative “terror” of regulating the repatriation of refugees and prisoners) into a series and blurs their distinctions, constructing an abstract form of de-contextualized terror, one can even say: a Platonic Idea of terror. Why this? Shouldn’t we locate every terror within its concrete historical situation and distinguish between Fascist terror, authentic revolutionary terror, Stalinist terror, consumerist terror, etc.? Why is Beckett’s abstraction from concrete social context not only psychologically (a victim experiences his situation as abstract), but also ontologically, with regard to social totality itself, more truthful than a “concrete” realist image of social totality? Let’s take a closer look at how Beckett proceeds. He does not simply erase echoes of historical reality – abstraction is in his writing a process, not a state. As Emilie Morin perspicuously noticed:

on the surface, there is little about his destitute characters that might suggest an aspiration to political theorising or political action. And yet they partially function as political metonymies: the political order to which they belong, sketched in the shadows and recesses of the texts, materialises precisely as they struggle through ruins, mud, deserted landscapes, empty rooms and other residues of a historical horror escaping categorisation.⁷³

Beckett is often seen as the exemplary apolitical writer, dealing with basic existential deadlocks and dilemmas. However, a close reading of his works makes it clear that Beckett’s entire opus is impregnated by (traces of and echoes to) political events: the political turmoil in Ireland around 1930, the struggle between Fascism and anti-Fascism through the 1930s, Resistance against Fascist occupation, the struggle for Blacks emancipation against apartheid (his only financial donation to a political party was to ANC), Algerian

⁷³ Emilie Morin, *Beckett’s Political Imagination*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2017, p. 3.

war of independence (apropos French colonial war in Alger, he coined the term “Murderous Humanitarianism” in order to designate the truth of the French “civilizing” colonialism), Vietnam war, Palestinian resistance, defense of persecuted writers... all is there, but not directly (“realistically”) represented. A gap persists between the two levels perfectly rendered by Beckett who wrote: “The material of experience is not the material of expression.” The “material of experience” are the historical data, social events; the “material of expression” is the universe depicted in Beckett’s world; and the passage from one to the other is abstraction. It is in this precise sense that Beckett called for “an art of *empêchement* (impediment or hindrance), a state of deprivation that is material and ontological in equal measure”⁷⁴: an invisible obstacle renders impossible the continuous transition from abstract experience to concrete social totality. This obstacle acts like the Lacanian Real/Impossible which makes reality (the reality of social totality, in this case) incomplete, cracked. The persisting unfreedom, uneasiness, and dislocation in a modern formally “free” society can be properly articulated, brought to light, only in an art which is no longer constrained to the “realist” representative model. The modern uneasiness, unfreedom in the very form of formal freedom, servitude in the very form of autonomy, and, more fundamentally, anxiety and perplexity caused by that very autonomy, reaches so deep into the very ontological foundations of our being that it can be expressed only in an art form which destabilizes and denaturalizes the most elementary coordinates of our sense of reality.

Perhaps the exemplary case of Beckett’s procedure of abstraction is his *Malone Dies* whose entire topic and details clearly relate to the French peripeties during the German occupation and its aftermath: the Nazi and collaborationist control, terror and oppression, the revenge against collaborationists and the way refugees were treated when returning home and recuperating. What gives such a power to the novel is precisely that these three domains are condensed into a single suffocating experience of an individual lost in the web of police, psychiatric and administrative measures. However, Beckett’s procedure of abstraction reaches its peak in *Catastrophe*

⁷⁴ Morin, op.cit., p. 239.

(1982), a late short play which may appear to violate his rules: it is a “realist” play staging the rehearsal of a theatre play on the brutal interrogation of a nameless prisoner, and it shamelessly relies on a parallel between oppressive interrogation and the ruthless domination of a theatre director over his actors in rehearsing a play. *Catastrophe* can thus be read “as a solipsistic reflection upon the dispossessed body; as a rumination on the mechanics of theatrical spectacle; as an exposition of the tyranny practised by Soviet Communism; as an examination of the enduring power of dissent in the face of oppression.”⁷⁵ All these disparate levels are condensed into one, the Idea of the mechanics of oppression, and the ambiguity affects even the conclusion:

The play can be viewed as an allegory on the power of totalitarianism and the struggle to oppose it, the protagonist representing people ruled by dictators (the director and his aide). By “tweak[ing] him until his clothing and posture project the required image of pitiful dejectedness,” they exert their control over the silenced figure. “The Director’s reifying of the Protagonist can be seen as an attempt to reduce a living human being to the status of an icon of impotent suffering. But, at the end of the play, he reasserts his humanity and his individuality in a single, vestigial, yet compelling movement”⁷⁶ – in an act of defiance, the man looks up into the audience (after having been looking down the entire time). In answer to a reviewer who claimed that the ending was ambiguous Beckett replied angrily: “There’s no ambiguity there at all. He’s saying, you bastards, you haven’t finished me yet.”⁷⁷

In short, he is making Beckett’s standard point of persisting in resistance: “Try again. Fail again. Fail better.” However, what we should bear in mind here is that, in this case, “bastards” are also members of the public who enjoy the show, and “you haven’t finished me yet” also means: I will not resign myself to play the suffering victim in order to satisfy your humanitarian needs. Although Beckett dutifully signed petitions in solidarity with the artists persecuted in “totalitarian” (mostly Communist) countries, he was also aware of “what

⁷⁵ Op.cit., p. 243.

⁷⁶ James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, London: Bloomsbury 1996, p. 679

⁷⁷ Quoted from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catastrophe_\(play\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catastrophe_(play)).

becomes of solidarity under the imperative to transform suffering into spectacle. The play offers a rebuke to the expectations of an imagined audience attending a charity event, awaiting a predicted performance of hardship in exchange for its donation.”⁷⁸ *Catastrophe* was first performed precisely as part of such a public spectacle of solidarity with Vaclav Havel (imprisoned in Czechoslovakia), so that when, in the play’s very last moment, the victimized Protagonist raises his head and takes a direct look at the audience, this gesture should definitely be read also as addressing the public with a message like “don’t think you are much better than what is portrayed in my short play, the anonymous prosecutor terrorizing the Protagonist, and the theatre director terrorizing the actor – you are part of the same hypocritical game, enjoying the spectacle of suffering which makes you feel good in your solidarity with the victim.” This is the art of abstraction, of reduction to form, at its most radical, brought to the self-referential extreme: with regard to content, it slides metonymically from the terror of totalitarian interrogation to the terror exerted by theatre directors on performers, and from there to the terror exerted by the benevolent humanitarian public on the theatre ensemble itself. Nobody is simply innocent, nobody is totally exempted.

⁷⁸ Knowlson, op.cit, ibid.

ISSN 1751-8229

Volume Thirteen, Number One

Afterword: On Eurocentric Lacanians

Fredric R Jameson

The most productive theoretical contribution I can make to this topic is to explain my thoughts about the by now rather traditional Freudo-Marxist project and to assess Lacanianism in that light. It will be understood that in this form which approximates that of the interview – my positions will be little more than opinions, a form of ideological expression I don't much care for. Nor will I even try to give an opinion of Slavoj Žižek's extraordinary production, which I admire, learn from, and above all consider energizing, this last being certainly the ultimate aim of intellectual work.

What such a discussion demands is rather a statement about the place of Lacan and Lacanian psychoanalysis in a contemporary Marxist framework. I have elsewhere been happy to criticize the old Freudo-Marxist project, which involves, in my opinion, a bad concept of synthesis, and tends to turn Freud into a kind of psychology, if it does not turn Marx into a kind of culture-critique. This is evident even in the most intellectually sophisticated and ambitious versions of the Frankfurt School, where the obligatory theory of Nazism is inevitably reduced to yet another theory of human nature. Horkheimer and Adorno certainly hit on something when they denounced the principle of self-preservation as the barrier to any kind of Utopian social arrangement: but that is a negative and privative theory, which is quite different from the assertion of anything like an "authoritarian personality" or a human nature dominated by the Oedipus complex, embittered by repression, avid of leaderliness, and frustrated by puritanism and economic crisis (Reich, whose theory of character structure was important for Lacan, was however far more militant and aggressive in his early work, but knew a tragic destiny).

The slippage of these theories into psychology is important to denounce (the great strength of psychoanalysis is that it is not a psychology), and it was probably encouraged by a bad conception of synthesis. In addition, psychoanalysis moved uneasily towards a systematic philosophy (something one should also reject), that is, a generalized theory of nature and of human nature. In that sense, for me systematic philosophy has a more than family relationship to metaphysics on the one hand and ideology on the other (hence my resistance to a certain conception of "dialectical materialism" as a philosophy - something which will come up again later on). Meanwhile, that Lacanianism is subject to the same structural temptation seems evident to me, for whom the more ecstatic celebrations of the so-called death drive resemble nothing quite so much as the old-fashioned life force. I should add, however, that for me the proper opposite of philosophy is not "science" in that quaint old Marxist usage, but rather theory, as an ad hoc self-destructing philosophical and ideological critique: fanatical readers of my texts will have noted, for example, that I read Hegel's *Phenomenology* as theory, which the philosopher himself later converted into a full-dress philosophy (a form from which I then part company); and that I read Deleuze as a professional

philosopher who mostly does theory under the mask or pastiche of this or that classical philosopher.

But what made Lacan's extraordinary and ambitious elaboration a partner for Marxism is his transformation of the Freudian complex, such as that which carries the name of Oedipus, into a desire: now the Other is inserted into the psyche in a constitutive way as something like an ontological dimension (Sartre is an unavoidable reference here), and the ambiguity of the "desire of the Other" opens up a space for collectivity that so far only René Girard was able to transform, cunningly, into a religious *Weltanschauung* and a method all at once. Thus the social becomes in Lacanianism a constitutive element in the psyche, and not some external addition to the individual (or the family). At any rate, my own interest in the problems of conceptualizing collectivities passes very centrally through this matter of collective envy, about which Slavoj has also had many useful things to say: Europe in general, the Balkans in particular, are as good a place as the United States in which to observe this particular phenomenon. Meanwhile, the recent study of the Neighbor (in which Slavoj centrally participated) is a very pertinent Brechtian estrangement-effect and a good example of the productiveness of the Lacanian positioning of the other, as opposed to the pious humanism of Levinassian meditation.

At any rate, Lacan was not a philosopher either, however much he might have been tempted; nor was he always a psychoanalyst. The French 60s were for me an extraordinary rich explosion of all kinds of new theories and theoretical developments (one of the most important differences between my work and that of Slavoj is my own background as a Sartrean moving into Greimassian semiotics, without abandoning a Marxist orientation; I think that Slavoj never felt the pull of structuralism in the same way, but probably emerged from Heidegger rather than Sartre as a philosophical background).

Reading Lacan's seminars in the years since then, I have come to appreciate how almost everything in this immense field of radical difference that was the French 60s and 70s in fact ultimately originated with Lacan. His passing references sent his followers out to read the books, if not actually to translate them, sometimes for the first time; and his own prodigious culture, which emerged from surrealism but also passed through the Sartrean force

field, served as an inescapable model for French theorists who had long since already become political intellectuals.

The papers included in this collection are full of interest and of stimulating ideas, few of which I care to reject; and the nuanced differentiations between my work and Slavoj's are always worth pondering. I do have an interest in periodizing and in long-term history which I don't think he shares; I'm not much interested in religion, which as a Lacanian he finds as fascinating as any case study; he is an exciting and provocative commentator on the current situation (didn't he tell us that the election of Trump would shake things up and release a host of new possibilities?). I'm interested in the possible construction of socialism in ways a European who has lived through "actually existing socialism" might not find productive. But we certainly unite under the slogan of Hegel and Hitchcock, and many of our alleged differences arise from different interests rather than different conceptual positions. At any rate Kirk Boyle's essay underscores these divergences with some precision.

Matthew Flisfeder's essay is an immensely wide-ranging further account of all this and of the period itself. I would tend to accept his angle – that both our surface and our deeper differences reflect a tension between historical materialism and dialectical materialism, with the historical qualification I have suggested above, namely that Slavoj's version of the latter is not exactly to be construed as a return to Engels, and probably also does not appeal to a "philosophy of nature" and a dialectical view of science in quite so old-fashioned a way as the old party debates used to. But to be sure, they are revived in our time in the form of neuro-science and conjectures about the physical brain – projects about which I remain as stubbornly skeptical as I think he is. Meanwhile, my own emphasis can perhaps be cast in a different light by the dilemmas of the diachronic and the synchronic of the 1960s, which still live on in the historical projects that interest me in ways that probably do not excite Slavoj very much, but which do still awaken the spirit of that historical materialism of which Karl Korsch was perhaps the last defender.

As for Adorno, Ed Graham's ostensible topic, I oscillate between admiration and exasperation. Nothing he ever wrote lacked brilliance, but that could in itself be a source of annoyance. I'm currently teaching a course on Brecht and Adorno as mortal enemies; I've revisited both their old houses in

Santa Monica, of course (they lived only a few streets away from each other), and could only imagine the Tui-type armchair radical Adorno figured in Brecht's mind until I learned that the families had dinner together once a week. It would also be important to read into the record Adorno's early enthusiasm for the *3-Penny Opera* and *Mahagonny*.

For myself, it is rather the knee-jerk evocation of universal suffering which spoils my pleasure in Adorno's writing; and the enthusiasm for Beckett also wears less well today, or so it seems to me. But certainly this squares a little with Slavoj's supremely pertinent diagnosis of an absence of jouissance. But I think it is a mistake to reduce Adorno to a thinker of "non-identity," a theme in any case that is for all practical purposes an anti-Marxist one. Whatever the corner into which Adorno painted himself in his quest of an Archimedean point from which to exercise a dwindling negativity, he cannot be considered a post-Marxist of the Laclau variety. (I mean no disrespect to my late friend Ernesto for putting it that way.) As a negative, critical, destructive figure, however, Adorno at his best is surely unparalleled; and the Utopian problem puts all this in the right perspective.

As for the piece by Clint Burnham, always the most dazzling and exciting of my commentators, besides the mysterious Gibsonian Ohio city and the always stunning intervention of an image by Jeff Wall, it breaks new ground by linking the Greimas square with Lacan's theory of gender, where the affirmation that there is no sexual relationship mobilizes a very curious negative indeed. I now rather regret that my old proposal for a new slogan, "Difference relates!", never caught on. We will surely (or at least I will) be ruminating this rich essay for some time – as indeed with all the other essays in this collection.

With Zahi Zalloua we enter different territory; and I hope I may be permitted a quick word about the evocation of my so-called infamous Third World Allegory essay, in the spirit of historical precision. I wrote it in the era of what were then called Wars of National Liberation, an imprecise term which tended to be limited in political use to the period of decolonization which began with Ghana in 1957 (or earlier, Vietnam), reached its climax with Cuba and Vietnam, and ended with the liberation of the Portuguese colonies in Africa in 1975. I appreciate the welcome corrections of footnote 3, but in fact I

would continue to characterize the collective consciousness I was there analyzing as nationalism, with this qualification (in which I agree with Deleuze) that it is a question of nationalism before the latter comes to power, a popular unity forged around the project of national liberation and the achievement of the nation state, a political structure (admittedly European!) which generally did not turn out so well, particularly inasmuch as historically it was on the point of being superceded by a world economy (so-called globalization) unaccompanied by any new political form.

I dealt with that first small shelf of Third World classics which began to emerge in the 1960s, and which has since been superceded by all kinds of other group literatures, often ethnic or tribal, or gender-based, or racially or linguistically self-identified. My argument was that every kind of new group consciousness (today I would identify the theory of that, insofar as we have one, with what Ibn Khaldun called *asabiyyah*) finds its privileged expression in essentially allegorical structures. ("Third World" is by the way also a historical term, today superceded, but then proudly used by the inheritors of the Bandung conference of 1955.) The point is that group allegory has not disappeared from these literatures but that they are mostly no longer "national" in the sense of my old essay.

A few more observations about the slogan of Eurocentrism, an essentially political slogan which I consider to be ill-advised. I am always initially a little bewildered why it is not Americano-centrism which is stigmatized here, since it is the U.S. that has the power and U.S. mass culture which is the foremost wave of standardization over the world and very much in non-European countries (think only of music and film, if you don't want to include computer culture).

Then, too, I wonder which Europe is in question here. Surely not the current E.U. of the bankers and the utterly undemocratic power structure of their internal accords, which regulate non-organic genetically modified foods and farming, certainly, but which also regulate and suppress any kind of labor legislation a half-way social-democratic European government might be tempted to pass and enforce; and all this not even to speak of immigration.

I suppose that it is our current imprisonment in an ahistorical present, however, that causes us to forget that all the same issues arose within the

older Europe of the nation states. I believe, for one thing, that the increasing absorption of superstructures by the base has given real content to Stuart Hall's idea of "discursive struggle," one powerful form of which (it explains Trump!) is called political correctness, which has had some very positive effects on our political consciousness. Edward Said's pathbreaking *Orientalism*, for example, sensitized us to realities we had only been too ready to ignore in the past (beginning with Homer's *Iliad*, an epic of orientalism if there ever was one!). But you would have to be historically ill-informed not to remember that for a provincial Germany, France (and to a lesser extent England) was precisely that advanced "civilization" which gave Central Europe – the Orient of its time – its bellicose inferiority complex (look at Thomas Mann's World War I *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man*); and beyond that, to ignore the status of the "undeveloped" Balkans for the rest of some so-called Europe. Indeed, as you look ever more closely at this history the very entity called Europe dissolves into a microcosm of national rivalries, cultural envy, racisms and collective hatreds of exactly the same kind that Said denounced for our stereotypes of the Middle East (for I think Said's Orient did not go much further than the boundaries of Islam, nor did it take the continent of South America into consideration). So at that point "Eurocentrism" becomes a wildly inaccurate target and a very imprecise way of sorting out friends and foes.

Meanwhile, I would imagine that all this is limited to the Left. I do not really see much right-wing or conservative polemic about Hayek, for example, and his geographic origins (in the name, say, of America First!); I do not see centrist liberals taking their stand on deviations from the ancient traditions of the Magna Carta or the Ur-Germanic tribes and their democratic assemblies. I imagine that they are better placed to understand that what is called Eurocentric is in reality capitalism itself.

So the denunciations are quarrels on some very enlarged Left, and it is my experience that they almost always concern left intellectual traditions if not so-called state power. The anarchist denunciations of this last from Foucault to James Scott are less worried about transnational monopolies than about the (now defunct) Soviet party state or even the social-democratic nanny state. And as for the intellectual and cultural polemics, they always end up

denouncing Marx and Marxism. I think these battles on the left are unproductive politically and intellectually (Mariátegui or Fanon versus Althusser or the Frankfurt School!), and I think I must beg to abstain, with but a concluding reminder that Islam is the very climax of the Western tradition in this Renaissance sense; and also that I myself was always considered a staunch pro-Palestinian and Third-Worldist in the days in which this label still meant anything politically.

The binational solution, however, if it is one, is only a subset of a much larger political and conceptual dilemma, which is that of federalism as such. As the world population expands, it organizes itself (most often involuntarily) into large or small groups which might be called clans, but which range from the "identity" groups to the "national" ones (most often based on language, religion, and physical appearance ("race" being as we know an utterly unscientific pseudo-category)). When these groups are organized territorially, then we have the civil wars, movements of secession, wars of national independence and so forth (which are today pursued on virtually microscopic levels, as in Aceh for example). When the groups are intermingled, in urban-type agglomerations, then ideals of citizenship, multiculturalism and the like are floated as ideologies and attempt to capture some institutional status and a fetishistic hold on the unconscious. But no one has effectively theorized a solution suitable for all these situations; the old idea of world government sounds like something out of the 1950s (Karatani has revived it, however, and surely ecology makes some such thing unavoidable), while the word "federalism" stands as a problem rather than a solution; and it is a conceptual and philosophical problem on a par with that of the definition of the group as such. I think myself that language is as important here as race and religion and is insufficiently focused in these discussions, whose scandalous basic text remains Rousseau's *Social Contract*, and against which anarchism inevitably emerges as a psychic reaction. Let's try to make the pessimism that is inevitably inspired by such reflections an energizing rather than a demobilizing one.

Special Issue:
Repeating Jameson?



Guest Editor: **Kirk Boyle**
IJŽS Vol 13 n. 1 (March, 2019)