
The Ideologies of Theory

Essays 1971-1986

*Volume 1: Situations of
Theory*

Fredric Jameson

Foreword by Neil Larsen

Theory and History of Literature, Volume 48

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The Ideologies of Theory

Volume 1

Theory and History of Literature

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An die Nachgeborenen:
Seth, Anne, Justin, Jenny

Wenn die Verknüpfung der Einzelphänomene zum
Kategorienproblem geworden ist, so wird durch
ebendenselben dialektischen Prozess jedes
Kategorienproblem wieder in ein geschichtliches Problem
verwandelt . . .

When the problem of connecting isolated phenomena has
become a problem of categories, by the same dialectical
process every problem of categories becomes transformed
into a historical problem . . .

Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*

Foreword

Fredric Jameson and the Fate of Dialectical Criticism

Neil Larsen

The radical literary and cultural criticism of Fredric Jameson has today a currency among North American intellectuals in the humanities which no other Marxist criticism has enjoyed since the 1960s, and perhaps even since the pre-Cold War period. Jameson's book-length works, especially *Marxism and Form* (1971), *The Prison House of Language* (1972), and *The Political Unconscious* (1981), have achieved a virtual textbook status both as broadly appealing arguments for a Marxist, or dialectical, theory of literature and as themselves among the best practical guides to contemporary non-Marxist critical theories. One cannot dispute the historic importance of these works, especially *Marxism and Form*, in establishing the legitimacy of Marxist aesthetic theory among broad sectors of the literary critical profession—and in guaranteeing that the interest in precursors such as Lukács and the Frankfurt School theoreticians, rekindled during the student revolts of the 1960s, would survive to the present. Despite their considerable topical range, the many "occasional essays" collected in these volumes and punctuating the appearance of the longer works (the records, to use a phrase of Jameson's, of more "local skirmishes") all bear the marks of the same intellectual campaign. At almost no point in the varied pages herein contained does the particular argument cease to function as a general one *for* the method being applied. Jameson's occasional name for this method is "metacommentary," a term introduced in the opening essay and for which Jameson adduces mainly theoretical and even philosophical advantages. But surely the space across and beyond which commentary was and is to carry us has also been a historical space with its own set of coordinates.

How is this new legitimacy to be explained, particularly in view of our present ideological climate, which, if the standard wisdom holds true, shows a hostility to Marxism reminiscent of that seen during the depths of the Cold War? To be sure, "legitimacy" may be an overly generous word for a phenomenon limited to the academic circuits where books like Jameson's are read. But as evidenced by the publication in recent years of feature articles in newsweeklies on the subject of Marxist professors in the universities and by the formation of groups such as Accuracy in Academia, this phenomenon is significant enough to have rattled a few extra-academic cages. A partial answer may be sought in the theory of literature and the humanities as the "weakest link" in the chain of ideological workshops engaged in the reproduction of subjects required by contemporary bourgeois society. Jameson himself, writing with James H. Kavanagh, has invoked this notion in a contribution to the second volume of *The Left Academy*.¹ Then there is the familiar generational hypothesis, surmising that the entry into the professoriat of student radicals from the 60s has supplied the real base for a Marxist renaissance. Surely there is some truth in this as well, and the important concluding essay of *The Ideologies of Theory*, "Periodizing the 60s," may be read as in some ways Jameson's own testament to both a generation and a conjuncture preconditioning his own somewhat later discursive moment.

But there is a deeper anomaly in Jameson's success. This is the ironic and perhaps tragic condition of all "Western Marxism" diagnosed by Perry Anderson in his much read little book² as the divorce of Marxist theory, following on the defeats of proletarian revolution in Germany and Central Europe between the world wars, from mass revolutionary practice and its remarriage, or at any rate cohabitational relationship, to major bodies of bourgeois theory as a species of left critique and radical conscience. Whatever may ultimately be its 60s genealogy, Jamesonian Marxism can point to no current surge of broad, open class struggle for which it might serve as theoretical guide post or from which it might draw fresh dialectical insights. Jameson's, too, is a "theoretical practice" that makes no pretense to be anything else, at least for the present.

It is, in some measure, for this reason that, even as Jameson has achieved extraordinary success in gaining for Marxism a theoretical hearing among non-Marxist literary scholars, his own particular claim to a properly Marxian standpoint has, ironically, aroused suspicions among other avowedly Marxist and radical critics. A certain among of this can perhaps be attributed to what has often been a practice of distrusting theory itself, in preference for the more immediately "practical" questions of pedagogy. In its left version, such antitheoreticism typically regards the major theoretical questions as already solved, so that the task of Marxist scholars and intellectuals—questions of organizational type and affiliation aside—becomes one of "bringing theory to the masses" of literature students themselves by the more direct means of,

for example, contesting and revising the established, ideologically dominant canon. Jameson, of course, would hardly be the one to oppose such pedagogical applications.³ Indeed, his books are likely to be included on the syllabus in the classroom struggle for radical interpretive positions. But Jameson's still primarily theoretical stance—which must begin by ascertaining “where the street is in the superstate”⁴—draws into question the very possibility of any local, micropolitical strategy of advancing against a late capitalist system of containment and domination which appears to have proved itself perfectly capable of adapting to the occasional critical encounters with its cultural manifestations. It is possible to invoke and perhaps even to remember historical situations in which the need to go beyond such a purely theoretical stance would require no argument other than events themselves. From a rhetorical standpoint at least, our own present seems not (yet) to be one of those. Sooner or later the debate about the authentically revolutionary character of a Marxist theory historically severed from what ought to be its corresponding revolutionary practice seems to find itself back on the same theoretical ground that it has called into question. Thus, whether or not one ultimately finds it possible to conform with Jameson's theoretical positions themselves, his theoretical posture as such cannot simply be refused.

What often passes for a “left” theoretical opposition to Jameson—“left” here referring to those dissenting positions that on some level identify themselves as either Marxist or sympathetic to a generally anticapitalist politics—has largely been taken up with Jameson's consistent allegiance, throughout his many and far-ranging forays into a variety of modern theoretical discourses, to a classical, Hegelian construction of the dialectic, with its notorious “imperative to totalize.” Jameson is today to be counted as perhaps the most prominent among the small number of contemporary thinkers who continue to work within a tradition of Hegelian-Marxist philosophy and aesthetics stemming from the work of Georg Lukács. One work in particular—*History and Class Consciousness*—has been and remains *fons et origo* in this respect. To be sure, the Freudian moment—via Althusser—may assert a species of semiautonomy within the Jamesonian interpretive and theoretical apparatus, as much so here as in *The Political Unconscious*. But the very fact that it is, in Jameson's scheme of things, a *moment per se*, governing its own proper sphere within the mediated theoretical totality, confirms the Hegelian (via Lukács) perspective as ultimately authoritative and, in its own way, radical.

To render a full account here of the intellectual “left” turn against Lukács and “Hegelian Marxism” is surely unnecessary for any reader who has been either a party or an onlooker to “Western” literary, methodological, and philosophical history in the last two to three decades. Beginning perhaps with the general turn of Western intellectual radicalism toward a Brechtian/Benjaminian left modernism over and against the realist aesthetic championed by

Lukács and a waning Marxist orthodoxy associated with the established Communist parties, the falling out with classical dialectic gathers momentum in the (still ambivalently Hegelian) defense of modernism of the late Adorno, until its great torrential spill into the left wing of structuralism and poststructuralism, as formulated first by Althusser and subsequently by the variety of Althusserian currents presently in circulation. In the course of this broadly ideological shift—with or without its accompanying, mass moment of praxis, depending on how you read the “60s”—the mantle of orthodoxy, though now largely conferred by academies rather than parties, comes to be placed on the shoulders of the onetime dissenters. Representative of this new left-modernist orthodoxy as it has lodged itself in the intellectual and political premises of what is perhaps its first generation of popularizing disseminators are recent works such as Eugene Lunn’s *Marxism and Modernism* (1982), in which Lukács, while allowed his hearing as a singular historical player, is politely consigned to his “Stalinist” leanings. This latter term, always a fashion and a convenience among left intellectuals wary of their good academic standing, becomes increasingly useful as a means of conflating criticisms aimed at classical dialectic with those more mythological and reactionary broadsides against “totalitarianism,” as if this connection were somehow self-evident. At some point Leninism too, though still formally upheld by old-line Althusserians, receives the stigmatizing stroke. Thus Lunn can, with serene condescension, contrast Lukács’ adherence to Leninist party discipline with “Marx’s insistence on the *self-emancipation* of the working class,”⁵ as if the history of the last one hundred years and its practical lessons and problems were somehow unequivocal on this matter. In tracts like Michael Ryan’s *Marxism and Deconstruction* (1982), one can still find honest theoretical arguments for such a position, but one wonders how long it will be before the newly authorized Marx of the Left Academy is himself found to be a “Stalinist,” and the carefully drawn line that is supposed to separate the Lunn from the Lévy and Glucksmans can no longer be plotted.

In the face of repudiation of his philosophical allegiance as unorthodox and tainted by “totalitarian” affinities, Jameson has avoided the more characteristically Lukácsian and Leninist path of open polemics and has instead taken what is in effect the full rhetorical advantage of his methodological stance. Thus he slays his critics (actual and potential) not by exposing their thinking to what one might take to be its reactionary or nonrevolutionary essence, as measured by a “political equivalence” (as, e.g., in Lukács’ equation of expressionist aesthetic doctrine with the ideology of the Independent Socialists⁶), but rather by gathering it directly onto the plane of metacommentary wherein its specific dissension from totalizing dialectic is itself rewritten as a reified and unreflecting aspect. In attempting to assert its own irreducible difference and refusal of mediation, the part expresses only what

has become an unexpected movement of the whole itself, which is History. So, for example, in the course of assessing Hayden White's theory of historical tropes (see "Figural Relativism; or, The Poetics of Historiography"), Jameson expounds the practical interpretive advantages of *Metahistory* but only as conditional on an ultimate recognition of its antihistoricist standpoint as "not complete in itself and . . . intelligible concretely only at the price of its reintegration into the social history of culture as a whole."⁷ The same sort of anticipatory historicizing has also served Jameson in confronting the more aggravated anti-Hegelianism of current left (and right) poststructuralisms, as in the remarkable feat of theoretical parrying whereby the "de-centered subject" and the "schizophrenic flux" are rethematized as reified presentiments of a new, utopian collective subject.⁸ "An 'anti-Marxist' argument is only the apparent rejuvenation of a pre-Marxist idea. A so-called 'going beyond' Marxism will be at worst only a return to pre-Marxism; at best, only the rediscovery of a thought already contained in the philosophy one believes he has gone beyond."⁹ The words here are Sartre's, but they could as well be Jameson's.

But whatever one may think of it, this endlessly adroit discursive maneuvering into positions that have Jameson *mediating* among the theoretical contestants as the very historical self-consciousness of their aporetic fix, far from vanishing into a restored sense of the whole, seems only to draw vexed attention to itself. The mediator, despite his broadly good intentions, is thought to be a meddler, whereas the appeal to a History in which all sides are expected to recognize their own reified frames emerges as the most suspect of notions. The contemporary bystander to this peculiar critical dispute may at length begin to consider whether the Jamesonian critical "moment," if it can be called that, does not reside in the (itself intensely historical) distrust that greets any attempt to invoke a common past, present, or future.

Perhaps the most thoughtful and explicit challenge to Jamesonian dialectic is to be found in Sam Weber's "Capitalizing History: The Political Unconscious,"¹⁰ originally published as a review of Jameson's last major book-length work. Drawing on Louis Hartz' *The Liberal Tradition in America* (1955), Weber proposes to read in Jameson's view of Marxism as ultimate "horizon of interpretation" a covert repetition of paradigmatically North American liberal premises regarding the essentially abstract locus of conflict and difference. North American intellectuals, according to Hartz, inherited Locke without his aristocratic counterparts in questions of moral and political philosophy, and in thus decontextualizing what was a historically determined and relative critique of irrational social privilege, they ended up with a hypostatic model of political and intellectual "freedom" reflecting itself both in the institutions of North American capitalism (from legislatures to universities) and in their respective ideologies, e.g., pluralism. From its position of dominance among domestic intellectuals—including those in the

literary critical profession—the liberal tradition has, according to Weber, reacted with characteristic anxiety at the prospect of rival, nonliberal theories of conflict and conflict resolution, notably orthodox Marxism and more recently poststructuralist theory. Both Marxist and poststructuralist theory are said to insist not only on the legitimacy and inevitability of conflict, but also on the fact that the institutional arenas are or should themselves be “conflictualized.” But this challenge is then met with the predictable ruse, whereby the arbitrary authority of an interpretive claim on the meaning of a given text (the inherently conflictual nature of interpretation) is simply affirmed as conforming to a given “community of interpretation,” which is itself not brought into question (Weber’s example here is Stanley Fish’s *Is There a Text in this Class?*). Or, if this is unsatisfactory, a theory is invoked that, while appearing to transcend the question of institutionally circumscribed consensus in the name of some authentically universal ground, in reality succeeds only in hypostasizing on a “higher” plane. This, in Weber’s reading of *The Political Unconscious*, becomes Jameson’s maneuver. Marxism, which for Weber is or ought to be “a theory not only of the necessity of conflict as an *object* of study, but also as the medium in which thought itself operates,”¹¹ becomes a radical sanction for existing liberal interpretive practice,¹² leaving everything “just as it was” in return for the acceptance of History as the invisible truth-giving Whole. In the end, says Weber, Jameson simply reinscribes at the center of interpretive practice that liberal fetish par excellence—the individual—that Marxism originally sought to undermine. For what is the individual if not the very myth of presence and self-identity that alone enables the totality itself to be thought without simultaneously calling into question the necessarily exterior and synchronic standpoint of the thinker?

What is—or would be—the Jamesonian rejoinder to the charge of a covert liberalism is something we will come to shortly. First, however, it is important to consider for a moment the “metanarrative” within which Weber’s critique—with its claim to represent a postliberal, authentically radical and “conflictualized” politics—lodges itself. Central to Weber’s critical exposure of Jamesonian dialectic is its effort to establish its uniquely “American” genealogy. “America” becomes, in this account of things, a kind of hybrid offshoot from the stalk of European history, synonymous with a form of capitalism cut off from its precapitalist origins and, as a result, unable to form an accurate, fully historical image of itself. We are led to believe that the very *inorganicity* of capitalist society in the United States determines its hypostasis in the minds of its intellectuals. On the other hand, “Europe”—more particularly France—presents an instance of organic growth and development of capitalism out of its feudal “other” as well as an “intellectual tradition” stretching back to and perhaps beyond the bourgeois revolution itself. This fact apparently has prevented “European” intellectuals from

absolutizing their own bourgeois-liberal phase and (by implication) has produced in them a greater propensity to see beyond the fetishes of the marketplace. For Weber this historical privilege is to be measured in the survival of “philosophy” in such ideologically immunized institutions as the Collège de France and the École Normale Supérieure. Hegelian dialectic itself could presumably not have arisen but for this “conflictualized” environment, even if it ultimately sought to deny or erase difference in a final cancellation. Transplanted to the Lethian watered soil of “America,” however, even this inadvertent memory is missing. “American” intellectuals must seek to absolutize and totalize their own standpoint, whether in the name of “consensus” or the “dialectic,” because “American” history, owing to its amputated, grafted origins, can give them no sense of alterity, no standpoint within a differentiated whole which preexists them, thereby obviating the need to reinvent it. Like all colonial societies, “America” is a “people without history”—with Fredric Jameson as its hypostatizing pseudo-dialectician.

Many “American” intellectuals, Fredric Jameson no doubt among them, would not fail to perceive a certain partial truth in such a metanarrative. Quite apart from its curiously Romantic reversion to a nineteenth-century (and itself proto-Hegelian) discourse of the “history of people,” (Weber speaks of the “genius of French society”), however, it seems a fact worth noting that in order to expose the Jamesonian dialectic as somehow generically “American,” Weber’s poststructuralist-inspired criticism falls back on the nondialectical and blatantly organicist idea of the Whole implied in the notion of European capitalism as somehow consciously relativized by its own precapitalist ground. What is perhaps suggested here is that in those rare instances in which poststructuralist thinking is actually caught in a position of having to argue for its own historical conditions of possibility—as in Weber’s effort to out-historicize *The Political Unconscious*—the version of diachrony that emerges does little more than replace the Marxist account of present conditions as linked to an overriding and subsuming contradiction with the vulgar image of a historical immediacy in which national entities and their subsets (intellectual traditions, institutions, etc.) appear as the fundamental realities.

Not the least of the defects in such a historical mythology is its complete failure to consider the effects of imperialism/monopoly capitalism on the liberal paradigm: as both a reflection and an analogue of laissez-faire economics, the myth of a “free marketplace of ideas,” with its own “invisible hand” guiding the conflicting claims of theory and interpretation along the paths of an ultimate and consensual truth, could at least boast a certain objectivity well founded in appearances so long as the marketplace itself did not cease to operate as the more or less effective nexus of social reproduction per se. But with the collapse of liberal, free-market capitalism in the pro-

tracted crisis of 1873-95 and the emergence of consolidated capitalist monopolies able, in partnership with the state, to increasingly assert control over the "free" movements of the market, the basis for even the objective illusion of truth as a spontaneous derivative of "unfettered" debate disappears. Social reproduction becomes more and more a process requiring the techniques of "marketing," a phenomenon that perhaps reaches its clearest cultural and political manifestation in fascism. Classical liberalism, whether "absolutized" or not, survives as little more than an apologia for a monopoly capitalist/imperialist power that can ill-afford even the limited scope of conflict allowed for under "free trade" policies and their intellectual and cultural analogues. Admittedly, the sheer untruth of the liberal paradigm may be harder to glimpse in the contemporary United States than in other more transparently centralized and statified societies—something no doubt linked to the extreme fragmentation of intellectual culture in the United States and the absence of any significant links between that culture and the masses, who remain largely unaffected by the debates, real or imagined, that grip the intellectual professions. But Weber's reduction of *The Political Unconscious* to the working out of some would-be *pensée sauvage* of the American intellectual tribe seems in many ways (as one might expect, given its odd redolence of a nineteenth-century European discourse of colonial exploration) to be based on a romanticized view of the United States as one huge barbaric marketplace. A more credible sociology of "metacommentary" and the "American" impulse to schemes of dialectical totalization might see here the drive to offset the effects of extreme intellectual fragmentation and atomization (a condition, unlike "conflict," that denotes an absence of connection between intellectual entities) through the elaboration of a new theoretical and interpretive division of labor. And whatever the ultimate validity of Jameson's particular division, it at least appears to constitute a discursive space, a kind of intellectual universe, in which one is not immediately forced to choose between one or another of the various methodological autisms. Weber mistakes for liberal accommodationism and the comfort of being on the winning side of the game what may be simply the relief experienced in the avoidance of self-willed isolation. Jameson's is after all a discourse that *talks* to the reader even as it cajoles, somehow suggesting the existence of a common predicament, rather than some absolute and inscrutable philosophical ban.

Despite the anachronism that frames his critique, Weber does raise the inevitable question with respect to the practice of Jamesonian "metacommentary": what accounts for the possibility of the stance of the metacommentarist as at once part of and exterior to the reified world s/he surveys? "As ideological criticism," Weber writes, "Marxism is 'simply' the place of the imperative to totalize, nothing more, nothing less. But is that place so simple to find, especially if its name can often be distorted or disguised by forms

of Marxism that themselves must be subjected to the 'imperative to totalize?'"¹³ And again,

Viewed from a formal perspective . . . Jameson's defense of marxism is caught in a doublebind: it criticizes its competitors as being ideological in the sense of practicing "strategies of containment," that is, of drawing lines and practicing exclusions that ultimately reflect the particularities—the partiality and partisanship—of special interests seeking to present themselves as the whole. But at the same time, its own claim to offer an alternative to such ideological containment is itself based on a strategy of containment, only one which seeks to identify itself with a whole more comprehensive than that of its rivals.¹⁴

Jameson's way out of this "doublebind," his discovery of a ground upon which the supervallidity of Marxian interpretation with its vision of the whole can be claimed to rest, is to appeal to the experience of History as sheer Necessity, History as—in Jameson's now memorable phrase—"what hurts," thus finally resisting all attempts to reclassify it as just another master narrative. Weber is quick to renew the charge of hypostasis at this final movement to arrest the proliferation of interpretive claims:

The reader is thus led to reflect on the tension that pervades *The Political Unconscious*, between the "struggle" that is said to constitute the ultimate subject matter of texts and of their interpretations, on the one hand, and on the other, an essentially "constative" or "contemplative" conception of the process of interpretation itself."¹⁵

Here again, Weber's particular theoretical grounds for rejecting this appeal to History—itself an ahistorical hypostasis of "conflict" and nonidentity that rather slyly attempts to award itself Marxist credentials by redefining Marxism as a Nietzschean belief in the "necessity of conflict" (but *what* conflict, fought out by *what* opponents, and with *what* outcome?)—are a cure considerably worse than the disease. As with much of contemporary neo-Nietzschean thought, seeming left-wing goals rest on right-wing premises. Nevertheless, Weber's observation of the above-mentioned tension between the experience of History, which itself is fraught with struggles and the uncertainty of their outcomes, and the seemingly untroubled, self-warranting theoretical stance that pronounces all this as in accord with the laws of Necessity is undeniably acute.

Marx sought a solution to this tension or contradiction in the objective, historical existence of the proletariat. Reduced to the status of a commodity in a bourgeois society that is itself summed up in the internal contradiction of the commodity form, the proletariat becomes conscious of the whole of which it is a part by virtue of its own simultaneous precontainment of the whole. In

contemplating itself, the proletariat views the social totality, as it were, from within. And yet the proletariat does not remain stationary and contemplative in this objective/self-knowledge, but “heralding the dissolution of the existing order of things, the proletariat merely announces the secret of its own existence because it *is* the *real* dissolution of this order.”¹⁶ Lukács, then, will build upon this fundamental principle of historical materialism an explicit epistemology, whereby the adoption of the “standpoint of the proletariat” as “identical subject/object of history” comes to constitute the material, historical ground from which the “knowledge of society as an historical totality”¹⁷ becomes possible. Without entering into the various objections that have been raised against aspects of this particular “inversion” of Hegel, from the later self-critical Lukács himself to Althusser, it must still be observed that with it the problem of exteriority as raised by Weber is itself exposed as requiring a metaphysical solution to what is already revealed as a concrete, historical contradiction. The terms of Weber’s critique become those of a “pre-Marxist” standpoint (recalling Sartre), seeing *aporias* where a materialist dialectic perceives the maturing contradiction of a capitalism that produces its own “gravediggers.” It is surely a measure of Weber’s poststructuralist Marxism (if that is what it is) that it never so much as entertains the question of the “standpoint of the proletariat,” much less refutes its claim to supply an epistemological ground from which to build a dialectics of the whole.

But then so too is it a measure, albeit more ironic and contradictory, of Jameson’s Marxism itself, which in a sense calls forth the charge of hypostasis for the very reason that it has often seemed unwilling to openly acknowledge the standpoint implicit in its claims as a methodology. In place of the dynamic, fully partisan, yet scientific impulse to dialectical thinking posited by historical materialism—the thesis that the proletariat is *driven* toward a dialectical thinking of its own situation by the very historical forces that have engendered it—Jameson falls back on an orthodox Hegelian notion of a second, self-conscious reflection. Thus in *Marxism and Form* Jameson characterizes dialectical thinking as

a moment in which thought rectifies itself, in which the mind, suddenly drawing back and including itself in its new and widened apprehension, doubly restores and **regrounds** its earlier notions in a new glimpse of reality; first, through a coming to consciousness of the way in which our conceptual instruments themselves determine the shape and limits of the results arrived at (the Hegelian dialectic); and thereafter, in that second and more concrete movement of **reflection** which is the specifically Marxist form, in a **consciousness** of **ourselves** as at once the product and the producer of history, and of the profoundly historical character of our socio-economic situation as it informs both solutions and the problems which gave rise to them equally.¹⁸ (emphasis added in bold face type)

From a descriptive standpoint there is certainly nothing to object to in this. But when the inevitable question is posed as to how this “dialectical and historical self-consciousness” that is Marxism is itself historically determined, one is left with the notion of some inexorable correction of nondialectical thought by a History that, in its very fateful and transcendent agency, seems to have severed itself from the real forces, agents, and events to which the concept is simultaneously held to refer.

Why this omission to claim for the dialectical method what Lenin once called the “partisanship of objectivity”? And what would the effect be on Jamesonian Marxism if the implications of the “standpoint of the proletariat” were to be worked back into its presuppositions? In answer to the first question, one may immediately point to the long prevailing view among sectors of both the North American and the European New Left that the proletariat—if indeed it any longer exists in anything like its industrial capitalist form in current “postindustrial” late capitalism—has shown itself unlikely to be, if not incapable of being, raised to a revolutionary class consciousness, and that in its place have arisen new revolutionary, or at least rebellious, social groupings (ethnic minorities, women, gays, and other countercultural and marginalized subjects) that cut across the now blurred lines of traditional class affiliation. Since publication of *Marxism and Form*, Jameson has consistently shown his affinities for this revised, essentially countercultural politics, although always carefully stipulating what may be its “exceptional” status as regards both past and (in “Periodizing the 60s”) future struggles. Indeed, Jameson’s writings, though classed formally as “theory,” come as close as anyone’s to being a general philosophy of the cultural and intellectual anticapitalism that grew out of the general social crisis of the “60s,” and which, though diminished in scope and energy, still persists. Perhaps one could go even further and suggest, again along the lines of *History and Class Consciousness*, that the very tendency for the interconnectedness of capitalist relations to be revealed in sudden catastrophic form in conditions of economic crises accounts for the reemergence of a theoretical concern for totality in Jamesonian criticism. The apparent hypostasis of this dialectical consciousness, insofar as it can only account for its own historical genesis through the abstract postulate of a second reflection brought about through the seemingly fortuitous collision of thought with an absolute limit called History, might then be seen as a theoretical reflection of this catastrophic appearance of capitalist crisis (here the onset of the full-blown decline of United States imperialism) in the minds of intellectuals who, given the previous relative absence of any clear revolutionary analysis, are largely unprepared for its occurrence.

As its readers are well aware by now, Jameson’s most recent work (not included in the present volumes) has sought to address the problem of “standpoint” by raising the question of third world literature and culture and their