

evaluation that are frequently invoked as "reflecting" its value and therefore as being evidence of it. In other words, what are commonly taken to be the *signs* of literary value are, in effect, its *springs*. The endurance of a classic canonical author such as Homer, then, owes not to the alleged transcultural or universal value of his works but, on the contrary, to the continuity of their circulation in a particular culture. Repeatedly cited and recited, translated, taught and imitated, and thoroughly enmeshed in the network of intertextuality that continuously *constitutes* the high culture of the orthodoxly educated population of the West (and the Western-educated population of the rest of the world), that highly variable entity we refer to as "Homer" recurrently enters our experience in relation to a large number and variety of our interests and thus can perform a large number of various functions for us and obviously has performed them for many of us over a good bit of the history of our culture. It is well to recall, however, that there are many people in the world who are not—or are not yet, or choose not to be—among the orthodoxly educated population of the West: people who do not encounter Western classics at all or who encounter them under cultural and institutional conditions very different from those of American and European college professors and their students. The fact that Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare do not figure significantly in the personal economies of these people, do not perform individual or social functions that gratify their interests, *do not have value for them*, might properly be taken as qualifying the claims of transcendent universal value made for such works. As we know, however, it is routinely taken instead as evidence or confirmation of the cultural deficiency—or, more piously, "deprivation"—of such people. The fact that other verbal artifacts (not necessarily "works of literature" or even "texts") and other objects and events (not necessarily "works of art" or even artifacts) have performed and do perform for them the various functions that Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare perform for us and, moreover, that the possibility of performing the totality of such functions is always distributed over the totality of texts, artifacts, objects, and events—a possibility continuously realized and thus a value continuously "appreciated"—commonly cannot be grasped or acknowledged by the custodians of the Western canon.

1988

---

FREDRIC JAMESON

b. 1934

Although it flourished during the 1930s, Marxist aesthetics and literary criticism all but vanished from critical discourse in the United States after World War II. The cold war consensus stigmatized everything associated with communism, and the dominant methods of the New Criticism practiced by CLEANTH BROOKS and others focused on internal features of works rather than external connections with society, politics, and history. Even when radical cultural criticism revived in the social tumult of the 1960s, its main roots were not in Marxism but in new social movements such

as feminism, black power, and environmentalism. Against this current, Fredric Jameson almost single-handedly revived Marxist literary studies within the American academy, principally with *Marxism and Form* (1971), which recovered major figures in the Western Marxist tradition, and with his landmark *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981), which outlined his methods for a Marxist literary criticism. An ambitious synthesis of contemporary structuralist theory and Marxism, *The Political Unconscious*, from which we take our first selection, argues that political and economic history form the subtexts and allegorical meanings of literary works. Jameson broadened his focus to examine contemporary culture, and "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" (1988), our second selection, encapsulates his widely influential views on postmodernism, in particular on the relation of art to present-day capitalist production.

Born in Cleveland, Ohio, Jameson was educated at Haverford College, receiving his B.A. in 1954, and at Yale University, where he earned a doctorate in French and comparative literature in 1959. He also spent a formative year in Germany on a Fulbright Fellowship at the Universities of Munich and Berlin (1956-57). After teaching at Harvard University from 1959 to 1967, Jameson moved to the newly created University of California at San Diego, where he encountered Herbert Marcuse, guru for many student radicals and a surviving figure from the Frankfurt School (of which THEODOR ADORNO was a central member). Thereafter Jameson held positions at Yale University (1976-83) and the University of California at Santa Cruz (1983-85), settling at Duke University in 1986 as distinguished professor of comparative literature and director of the graduate program in literature and of the Center for Critical Theory.

By the mid-1970s, Jameson and TERRY EAGLETON were being hailed as the most significant Marxist literary critics and theorists in the Anglophone world, but it was not until the publication of *The Political Unconscious* that the originality of Jameson's project became clear. Opening with the famous exhortation "Always historicize!" he sets out the methodological approach he calls "metacommentary," which provides a theoretically sophisticated answer to the perennial question of the relation of aesthetics to social history. In contrast to those practicing more conventional forms of historical criticism, Jameson not only situates cultural texts in relation to their immediate historical context but also approaches them from the vantage point of hermeneutics, exploring the interpretive strategies that shape how we understand individual works. Unlike other modern theories of interpretation, such as the reception theory of HANS ROBERT JAUSS, Jameson's stresses that its object is a Marxist analysis of ideology and that Marxism encompasses all other interpretive strategies, showing that their explanations of a text's meaning are only partial.

Jameson holds that a critic wishing to decipher the meaning of a text must proceed through a series of distinct phases, embodied in the text and uncovered through systematic decoding. He draws on a wide array of twentieth-century theoretical sources to do this, from NORTHROP FRYE's four levels of interpretation (which ultimately derive from the medieval interpretive schema of THOMAS AQUINAS), to JACQUES LACAN's theory of the unconscious, to LOUIS ALTHUSSER's account of ideology. Jameson sees Marxist criticism not as exclusionary or separatist but as comprehensive, assimilating a compendium of sources and thereby achieving greater "semantic richness." The critic should examine in turn the political history to which a text refers, social history (conceived in traditional Marxist terms as the history of class struggles), and the history of modes of production. These approaches do not displace but are embedded in each other, building to higher levels of generality and deeper layers of historical causation.

To interpret a text within the horizon of political history, Jameson, borrowing from KENNETH BURKE's theory of symbolic action, focuses on "the individual work . . . grasped essentially as a *symbolic act*." For instance, one can read Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (ca. 1606) as a presentation of the burning political issue of its historical

moment, royal succession. Shakespeare's contemporaries would have recognized this both as the play's obvious theme (Macbeth as the murderous usurper; Malcolm as the legitimate but feckless heir) and as a matter of immediate political concern—the play was performed at court not long after James VI of Scotland had assumed the English throne as James I, a Stuart supplanting the Tudor dynasty. Details of plot, character, and thought are in this reading understood as allegorical signs referring to historical figures and to Renaissance doctrines about royal power and its legitimacy.

For the second phase of interpretation, the object of investigation is "the *ideologie*, that is, the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes." To take another example from Shakespeare, in a number of the history plays, such as the two parts of *Henry IV* (ca. 1597, 1599), as well as in several of the tragedies, such as *Hamlet* (ca. 1600) and *King Lear* (ca. 1605), the dramatic struggle between the major characters stages the ideological conflict between older, medieval ideals of kingship and the state and the modernizing tendencies of an emergent absolutist power that advances the interests of the bourgeoisie against the prerogatives of powerful feudal landlords. This sociological interpretation does not cancel out the first; one can still recognize the political allegory in *Henry IV*, which justifies Tudor rule by showing the superiority of the modernizing Tudors (embodied in Prince Hal) over both the rebellious English barons and the effeminate French monarchy.

The outermost circle of interpretation, "the ideology of form," links the literary work with the mode of production (characterized, according to KARL MARX, as tribal hordes, Neolithic kinship societies, Oriental despotism, ancient slaveholding societies, feudalism, capitalism, and finally communism). This criticism subsumes prior levels, probing what Jameson calls "the symbolic messages transmitted to us by the coexistence of various sign systems which are themselves traces or anticipations of modes of production." Thus Hamlet's "problems" (famously elaborated by T. S. ELIOT) do not indicate Shakespeare's dramatic failure (as Eliot argued) but rather signify a historical tension between the feudal ideals embodied in Hamlet's father, ideals to which Hamlet owes one sort of allegiance, and the modern habits imbibed by the prince through his university education at Wittenberg. These latter include Hamlet's tendency toward obsessive individualistic reflection, which prevents his carrying out the revenge that his father decreed against the usurping Claudius. This conflict is visible in the play's dramatic form, which overlays a modern psychological drama onto its older source material governed by the conventions of revenge tragedy (a popular form in Shakespeare's day). The play stands, thematically and formally, on the cusp of a major historical transformation—the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Hamlet's fatal actions at the end do not resolve the play's ideological and formal contradictions because no resolution was imaginable in 1600; the triumph of capitalism over feudalism in Britain would not be achieved until near the end of the seventeenth century, with remnants of feudal ideologies persisting long after.

The imaginative limits imposed on an author or a text by its historical moment reveal the operation of history itself, which "sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis." And though its causes might not be immediately apparent, we can apprehend history in its effects, which are "inaccessible to us except in textual form." Here Jameson espouses a distinctly poststructuralist view, that—as articulated by PAUL DE MAN—"the bases for historical knowledge are not empirical facts but written texts, even if these texts masquerade in the guise of wars or revolutions"; however, he departs from de Man in stressing the text's ideological over its linguistic import.

In "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," which anticipates his magisterial study *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Jameson expands his consideration of the ideology of form, moving beyond the literary canon to contemporary culture—including film, experimental poetry, popular fiction, art, and architecture. He identifies two causal conditions for postmodernism across the arts:

first, its products "emerge as specific reactions against the established forms of high modernism"; and second, it results from the "erosion of the older distinction between high culture and so-called mass or popular culture." These essentially aesthetic determinations, however, are not postmodernism's ultimate cause. In classically Marxist fashion, Jameson looks to the underlying economic formation: postmodernism "expresses the inner truth of that newly emergent social order of late capitalism," sometimes also called consumer, postindustrial, or multinational capitalism, which arose in the immediate aftermath of World War II and reached both its fulfillment and a moment of crisis during the 1960s. For Jameson, "postmodernism" names a historical period, not just a new style or aesthetic. As modernism was a result of the imperial stage of capitalism, so postmodernism is the distinctive "ideology of form" of the contemporary period of consumer capitalism.

Postmodern works exhibit a range of distinctive formal features, such as pastiche, simulation, and, in architecture, what Jameson terms "hyperspace." Focusing on what he calls "the nostalgia mode," Jameson describes the peculiar dehistoricized depthlessness of certain postmodern works, such as the popular film *American Graffiti* (1973) and novels like E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1975). In a postmodern world, we "seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about the past, which itself remains forever out of reach." Jameson goes on to analyze one of the exemplary monuments of postmodern architecture, John Portman's Bonaventure Hotel (1977) in downtown Los Angeles. Showing how space is configured in disorienting new ways by Portman's structure, Jameson argues that postmodern architecture—emblematic of other postmodern arts—embodies an objectively new kind of bewildering hyperspace, which we lack the necessary perceptual and cognitive tools to understand. He concludes by returning to the contrast between high modernist and postmodern works, reemphasizing modernism's oppositional stance toward the dominant culture of the bourgeoisie. About postmodernism, Jameson is more tentative; he suggests that it may be more than the reflection or reproduction of consumer society or late capitalism, but he ultimately declines to answer the question he has posed about its critical potential.

Recognized as the leading contemporary Marxist critic in the United States as well as a major practitioner of poststructuralist theory, Jameson has drawn both a large following and a great deal of criticism. Some have charged that his writing is overly difficult, obscure, and inaccessible. Theoretically attuned critics have variously questioned his "totalizing" allegorical method of interpretation, his eclectic borrowing from diverse theories, his reductive scheme of historical periods leading to postmodernism, his disregard of feminism and gender dynamics, and his lack of concrete attention to ongoing political struggles. From the Marxist Left, Terry Eagleton questions the connection between theory and politics, pointedly asking of one of Jameson's readings in *The Political Unconscious*: "How is a Marxist-structuralist analysis of a minor novel of Balzac to help shake the foundations of capitalism?" Although Eagleton allows, quoting Althusser, that it contributes to the "class struggle at the level of theory," he concludes that the relation is unclear. Jameson himself answers in an interview that his intention is to make Marxism a central concern in intellectual circles, as well as to redefine it in light of contemporary thought. Though his work may not immediately translate to concrete political practices and policies, Jameson has been a tireless analyst of "the ideology of form" in literary and cultural works, and he is arguably the most influential proponent of Marxism in contemporary criticism.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Largely focused on stylistics rather than Jean-Paul Sartre's Marxist politics, Jameson's first book, *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* (1961), a revision of his doctoral dissertation, offered scant indication of his subsequent work. The two major studies of the early

1970s, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (1971) and *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (1972), respectively introduced the work of the Frankfurt School and other European Marxists and the work of the Russian formalists and early French structuralists to the English-speaking world before much of it was available in translation. After writing a short book on the English modernist Wyndham Lewis, *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (1979), Jameson captured the attention of Anglophone intellectual circles with *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981), which solidified his position as the leading representative of Marxist theory. It was followed by a two-volume collection of previously published pieces, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays, 1971–1986* (1988), which includes his succinct “Metacommentary” (1971) and his programmatic reflections on historical method, “Marxism and Historicism” (1980). *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the Persistence of the Dialectic* (1990) extends his survey of Marxist figures begun in *Marxism and Form*.

In the 1990s Jameson turned increasingly to film and popular culture. *Signatures of the Visible* (1990) collects writings on film, concluding with an important essay theorizing its development from the silent era onward. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) has had wide influence in defining the postmodern era and its art. There followed a collection of essays on the capitalist world system as represented in contemporary cinema, *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (1992). Jameson also published two books assembled from lectures: *The Seeds of Time* (Wellek Library Lectures, 1994), and *Theory of Culture: Lectures at Rikkyo* (1994). The useful collection *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983–98* (1998), which includes “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” records his developing views on postmodernism. *Brecht and Method* (1998) takes the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht (rather than Adorno) as an exemplary figure for reviving Marxism in the era of late capitalism. Jameson also edited an anthology with Masao Miyoshi, *The Cultures of Globalization* (1998). *The Jameson Reader*, edited by Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks (2000), provides an excellent selection of work spanning Jameson’s career.

Jameson’s writings have drawn a substantial though uneven body of criticism. For an interesting early response from Kenneth Burke, see “Methodological Repression and / or Strategies of Containment,” *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1978). Perhaps the best early accounts are by Terry Eagleton, “The Idealism of American Criticism” (1981) and “Frederic Jameson: The Politics of Style” (1982), both collected in his *Against the Grain: Selected Essays* (1986). Two critical journals devoted special issues to *The Political Unconscious: Diacritics* 12 (1982), which includes essays by the historian Hayden White, Eagleton (cited above), and others, and an illuminating interview with Jameson; and *New Orleans Review* 11 (1984), which includes a response by Jean-François Lyotard, “The Unconscious, History, and Phrases: Notes on *The Political Unconscious*.” In “Frederic Jameson’s Marxist Hermeneutics,” *Boundary 2* 11 (1982–83), the African American social critic Cornel West points to Jameson’s roots in the work of György Lukács. Mike Davis offers a celebrated challenge to Jameson’s account of postmodern architecture in “Urban Renaissance and the Spirit of Postmodernism,” *New Left Review*, no. 151 (1985). *Imaginary Relations: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Theory of Historical Materialism* (1987) by the Marxist critic Michael Sprinker offers a useful analysis of Jameson’s historicism. *Postmodernism / Jameson / Critique*, edited by Douglas Kellner (1989), gathers diverse essays as well as Jameson’s response to his critics. A famous riposte, Aijaz Ahmad’s “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory’” (1987), polemically critiques Jameson’s notion of third world literature; it has been reprinted in Ahmad’s *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (1992). Perry Anderson’s *Origins of Postmodernity* (1998) is an excellent guide, covering the breadth of Jameson’s career. Steven Helmling, in *The Success and Failure of Fredric Jameson: Writing, the Sublime, and the Dialectic of*

*Critique* (2000), traces Jameson's thought, focusing on his work from *The Political Unconscious* on.

Sean Homer, *Fredric Jameson: Marxism, Hermeneutics, Postmodernism* (1998), is a useful introduction, and contains a bibliography of primary and selected secondary texts. *The Jameson Reader* includes a comprehensive bibliography of Jameson's writings.

## From The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act

### Preface

Always historicize! This slogan—the one absolute and we may even say “transhistorical” imperative of all dialectical thought<sup>1</sup>—will unsurprisingly turn out to be the moral of *The Political Unconscious* as well. But, as the traditional dialectic teaches us, the historicizing operation can follow two distinct paths, which only 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 that more intangible historicity of the concepts and categories by which we attempt to understand those things. In the area of culture, which is the central field of the present book, we are thus confronted with a choice between study of the nature of the “objective” structures of a given cultural text (the historicity of its forms and of its content, the historical moment of emergence of its linguistic possibilities, the situation-specific function of its aesthetic) and something rather different which would instead foreground the interpretive categories or codes through which we read and receive the text in question. For better or for worse, it is this second path we have chosen to follow here: *The Political Unconscious* accordingly turns on the dynamics of the act of interpretation and presupposes, as its organizational fiction, that we never really confront a text immediately, in all its freshness as a thing-in-itself. Rather, texts come before us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations, or—if the text is brand-new—through the sedimented reading habits and categories developed by those inherited interpretive traditions. This presupposition then dictates the use of a method (which I have elsewhere termed the “metacommentary”<sup>2</sup>) according to which our object of study is less the text itself than the interpretations through which we attempt to confront and to appropriate it. Interpretation is here construed as an essentially allegorical act, which consists in rewriting a given text in terms of a particular interpretive master code. The identification of the latter will then lead to an evaluation of such codes or, in other words, of the “methods” or approaches current in American literary and cultural study today. Their juxtaposition with a dialectical or totalizing, properly Marxist ideal of understanding will be used to demonstrate the structural limitations of the other interpretive codes, and in particular to show the “local” ways in which they construct their objects

1. In Marxist theory, thought that links ideas and cultural forms to their economic foundations.

2. See “Metacommentary” (1971), included in

Jameson's *Ideologies of Theory: Essays, 1971–1986*, vol. 1, *Situations of Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

of study and the "strategies of containment" whereby they are able to project the illusion that their readings are somehow complete and self-sufficient.

The retrospective illusion of the metacommentary thus has the advantage of allowing us to measure the yield and density of a properly Marxist interpretive act against those of other interpretive methods—the ethical, the psychoanalytic, the myth-critical, the semiotic, the structural, and the theological—against which it must compete in the "pluralism" of the intellectual marketplace today. I will here argue the priority of a Marxian interpretive framework in terms of semantic richness. Marxism cannot today be defended as a mere substitute for such other methods, which would then triumphalistically be consigned to the ashcan of history; the authority of such methods springs from their faithful consonance with this or that local law of a fragmented social life, this or that subsystem of a complex and mushrooming cultural superstructure.<sup>3</sup> In the spirit of a more authentic dialectical tradition, Marxism is here conceived as that "untranscendable horizon" that subsumes such apparently antagonistic or incommensurable critical operations, assigning them an undoubted sectoral validity within itself, and thus at once canceling and preserving them.

Because of the peculiar focus of this retrospective organization, however, it may be worth warning the reader what *The Political Unconscious* is not. The reader should not, in the first place, expect anything like that exploratory projection of what a vital and emergent political culture should be and do which Raymond Williams<sup>4</sup> has rightly proposed as the most urgent task of a Marxist cultural criticism. There are, of course, good and objective historical reasons why contemporary Marxism has been slow in rising to this challenge: the sorry history of Zhdanov prescription<sup>5</sup> in the arts is one, the fascination with modernisms and "revolutions" in form and language is another, as well as the coming of a whole new political and economic "world system," to which the older Marxist cultural paradigms only imperfectly apply. A provisional conclusion to the present work will spell out some of the challenges Marxist interpretation must anticipate in conceiving those new forms of collective thinking and collective culture which lie beyond the boundaries of our own world. The reader will there find an empty chair reserved for some as yet unrealized, collective, and decentered cultural production of the future, beyond realism and modernism alike.

If this book, then, fails to propose a political or revolutionary aesthetic, it is equally little concerned to raise once again the traditional issues of philosophical aesthetics: the nature and function of art, the specificity of poetic language and of the aesthetic experience, the theory of the beautiful, and so forth. Yet the very absence of such issues may serve as an implicit commentary on them; I have tried to maintain an essentially historicist perspective, in which our readings of the past are vitally dependent on our experience of the present, and in particular on the structural peculiarities of what is sometimes called the *société de consommation* (or the "disaccumulative" moment of late monopoly or consumer or multinational capitalism), what Guy

3. According to the German social and political philosopher KARL MARX (1818–1883), all social, political, and cultural forms are part of a society's superstructure, which interacts with but ultimately depends on its economic base.

4. British literary and cultural critic (1921–1988;

see above).

5. The censorship by Andrey Zhdanov (1896–1948), a Bolshevik leader during the Russian Revolution who later, as a member of the Soviet Politburo, tightened the guidelines for cultural activities.

Debord<sup>6</sup> calls the society of the image or of the spectacle. The point is that in such a society, saturated with messages and with "aesthetic" experiences of all kinds, the issues of an older philosophical aesthetics themselves need to be radically historicized, and can be expected to be transformed beyond recognition in the process.

Nor, although literary history is here everywhere implied, should *The Political Unconscious* be taken as paradigmatic work in this discursive form or genre, which is today in crisis. Traditional literary history was a subset of representational narrative, a kind of narrative "realism" become as problematic as its principal exemplars in the history of the novel. The second chapter of the present book, which is concerned with genre criticism, will raise the theoretical problem of the status and possibility of such literary-historical narratives, which in *Marxism and Form* I termed "diachronic<sup>7</sup> construct"; the subsequent readings of Balzac, Gissing, and Conrad<sup>8</sup> project a diachronic framework—the construction of the bourgeois subject in emergent capitalism and its schizophrenic disintegration in our own time—which is, however, here never fully worked out. Of literary history today we may observe that its task is at one with that proposed by Louis Althusser<sup>9</sup> for historiography in general: not to elaborate some achieved and lifelike simulacrum of its supposed object, but rather to "produce" the latter's "concept." This is indeed what the greatest modern or modernizing literary histories—such as Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis*<sup>1</sup>—have sought to do in their critical practice, if not in their theory.

Is it at least possible, then, that the present work might be taken as an outline or projection of a new kind of critical method? Indeed it would seem to me perfectly appropriate to recast many of its findings in the form of a methodological handbook, but such a manual would have as its object *ideological analysis*, which remains, I believe, the appropriate designation for the critical "method" specific to Marxism. For reasons indicated above, this book is not that manual, which would necessarily settle its accounts with rival "methods" in a far more polemic spirit. Yet the unavoidably Hegelian<sup>2</sup> tone of the retrospective framework of *The Political Unconscious* should not be taken to imply that such polemic interventions are not of the highest priority for Marxist cultural criticism. On the contrary, the latter must necessarily also be what Althusser has demanded of the practice of Marxist philosophy proper, namely "class struggle within theory."

For the non-Marxist reader, however, who may well feel that this book is quite polemic enough, I will add what should be unnecessary and underline my debt to the great pioneers of narrative analysis. My theoretical dialogue with them in these pages is not merely to be taken as yet another specimen of the negative critique of "false consciousness"<sup>3</sup> (although it is that too, and,

6. French critic (1931–1994), author of *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), in which he coins these phrases. *Société de consommation*: consumer society (French).

7. Dealing with change over time (a term common in structuralist linguistics, and often paired with the *synchronic*, which focuses on phenomena at one moment of time). *Marxism and Form* was published in 1971.

8. Joseph Conrad (1857–1924), Polish-born English novelist. Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850), French novelist. George Gissing (1857–1903),

English novelist.

9. French Marxist philosopher (1918–1990; see above).

1. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1946), by the German literary critic Auerbach (1892–1957).

2. Characteristic of GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL (1770–1831), German idealist philosopher.

3. A Marxist term referring to an individual's tendency to view reality in ways congruent with the interests of the dominant orthodoxy rather than in ways that reflect his or her own class interest.



indeed, in the Conclusion I will deal explicitly with the problem of the proper uses of such critical gestures as demystification and ideological unmasking). It should meanwhile be obvious that no work in the area of narrative analysis can afford to ignore the fundamental contributions of Northrop Frye, the codification by A. J. Greimas of the whole Formalist and semiotic traditions, the heritage of a certain Christian hermeneutics, and above all, the indispensable explorations by Freud of the logic of dreams, and by Claude Lévi-Strauss<sup>4</sup> of the logic of "primitive" storytelling and *pensée sauvage*, not to speak of the flawed yet monumental achievements in this area of the greatest Marxist philosopher of modern times, Georg Lukács.<sup>5</sup> These divergent and unequal bodies of work are here interrogated and evaluated from the perspective of the specific critical and interpretive task of the present volume, namely to restructure the problematics of ideology, of the unconscious and of desire, of representation, of history, and of cultural production, around the all-informing process of *narrative*, which I take to be (here using the shorthand of philosophical idealism) the central function or *instance* of the human mind. This perspective may be reformulated in terms of the traditional dialectical code as the study of *Darstellung*:<sup>6</sup> that untranslatable designation in which the current problems of *representation* productively intersect with the quite different ones of *presentation*, or of the essentially narrative and rhetorical movement of language and writing through time.

Last but not least, the reader may well be puzzled as to why a book ostensibly concerned with the interpretive act should devote so little attention to issues of interpretive validity, and to the criteria by which a given interpretation may be faulted or accredited. I happen to feel that no interpretation can be effectively disqualified on its own terms by a simple enumeration of inaccuracies or omissions, or by a list of unanswered questions. Interpretation is not an isolated act, but takes place within a Homeric battlefield, on which a host of interpretive options are either openly or implicitly in conflict. If the positivistic conception of philological accuracy be the only alternative, then I would much prefer to endorse the current provocative celebration of strong misreadings over weak ones.<sup>7</sup> As the Chinese proverb has it, you use one ax handle to hew another: in our context, only another, stronger interpretation can overthrow and practically refute an interpretation already in place.

I would therefore be content to have the theoretical sections of this book judged and tested against its interpretive practice. But this very antithesis marks out the double standard and the formal dilemma of all cultural study today, from which *The Political Unconscious* is scarcely exempt: an uneasy struggle for priority between models and history, between theoretical speculation and textual analysis, in which the former seeks to transform the latter into so many mere examples, adduced to support its abstract propositions, while the latter continues insistently to imply that the theory itself was just

4. French structuralist anthropologist (b. 1908; see above), whose works include *La Pensée sauvage* (1962, *The Savage Mind*). FRYE (1912–1991), Canadian literary critic associated with archetypal criticism. GREIMAS (1912–1992), Lithuanian-born French semiotician. SIGMUND FREUD (1859–1939), Austrian founder of psychoanalysis and author of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900).

5. GYÖRGY LUKÁCS (1885–1971), Hungarian literary critic and philosopher.

6. Representation (German).

7. A reference to the theory of literary influence presented by the American critic HAROLD BLOOM in such works as *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973; see above) and *A Map of Misreading* (1975).

so much methodological scaffolding, which can readily be dismantled once the serious business of practical criticism is under way. These two tendencies—theory and literary history—have so often in Western academic thought been felt to be rigorously incompatible that it is worth reminding the reader, in conclusion, of the existence of a third position which transcends both. That position is, of course, Marxism, which, in the form of the dialectic, affirms a primacy of theory which is at one and the same time a recognition of the primacy of History itself.

From *Chapter 1. On Interpretation: Literature as a Socially Symbolic Act*

\* \* \*

### III

At this point it might seem appropriate to juxtapose a Marxist method of literary and cultural interpretation with those just outlined, and to document its claims to greater adequacy and validity. For better or for worse, however, as I warned in the Preface, this obvious next step is not the strategy projected by the present book, which rather seeks to argue the perspectives of Marxism as necessary preconditions for adequate literary comprehension. Marxist critical insights will therefore here be defended as something like an ultimate *semantic* precondition for the intelligibility of literary and cultural texts. Even this argument, however, needs a certain specification: in particular we will suggest that such semantic enrichment and enlargement of the inert givens and materials of a particular text must take place within three concentric frameworks, which mark a widening out of the sense of the social ground of a text through the notions, first, of political history, in the narrow sense of punctual event and a chroniclelike sequence of happenings in time; then of society, in the now already less diachronic and time-bound sense of a constitutive tension and struggle between social classes; and, ultimately, of history now conceived in its vastest sense of the sequence of modes of production<sup>8</sup> and the succession and destiny of the various human social formations, from prehistoric life to whatever far future history has in store for us.

These distinct semantic horizons are, to be sure, also distinct moments of the process of interpretation, and may in that sense be understood as dialectical equivalents of what Frye has called the successive "phases" in our reinterpretation—our rereading and rewriting—of the literary text. What we must also note, however, is that each phase or horizon governs a distinct reconstruction of its object, and construes the very structure of what can now only in a general sense be called "the text" in a different way.

Thus, within the narrower limits of our first, narrowly political or historical, horizon, "the text," the object of study, is still more or less construed as coinciding with the individual literary work or utterance. The difference between the perspective enforced and enabled by this horizon, however, and

8. In the Marxist schema, human history progresses through tribal hordes, Neolithic kinship societies, Oriental despotism, ancient slaveholding

societies, feudalism, capitalism, and finally to communism.

that of ordinary *explication de texte*, or individual exegesis, is that here the individual work is grasped essentially as a *symbolic act*.

When we pass into the second phase, and find that the semantic horizon within which we grasp a cultural object has widened to include the social order, we will find that the very object of our analysis has itself been thereby dialectically transformed, and that it is no longer construed as an individual "text" or work in the narrow sense, but has been reconstituted in the form of the great collective and class discourses of which a text is little more than an individual *parole* or utterance.<sup>9</sup> Within this new horizon, then, our object of study will prove to be the *ideologeme*, that is, the smallest intelligible unit of the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes.

When finally, even the passions and values of a particular social formation find themselves placed in a new and seemingly relativized perspective by the ultimate horizon of human history as a whole, and by their respective positions in the whole complex sequence of the modes of production, both the individual text and its ideologemes know a final transformation, and must be read in terms of what I will call the *ideology of form*, that is, the symbolic messages transmitted to us by the coexistence of various sign systems which are themselves traces or anticipations of modes of production.

The general movement through these three progressively wider horizons will largely coincide with the shifts in focus of the final chapters in this book, and will be felt, although not narrowly and programmatically underscored, in the methodological transformations determined by the historical transformations of their textual objects, from Balzac to Gissing to Conrad.

We must now briefly characterize each of these semantic or interpretive horizons. We have suggested that it is only in the first narrowly political horizon—in which history is reduced to a series of punctual events and crises in time, to the diachronic agitation of the year-to-year, the chroniclelike annals of the rise and fall of political regimes and social fashions, and the passionate immediacy of struggles between historical individuals—that the "text" or object of study will tend to coincide with the individual literary work or cultural artifact. Yet to specify this individual text as a symbolic act is already fundamentally to transform the categories with which traditional *explication de texte* (whether narrative or poetic) operated and largely still operates.

The model for such an interpretive operation remains the readings of myth and aesthetic structure of Claude Lévi-Strauss as they are codified in his fundamental essay "The Structural Study of Myth."<sup>1</sup> These suggestive, often sheerly occasional, readings and speculative glosses immediately impose a basic analytical or interpretive principle: the individual narrative, or the individual formal structure, is to be grasped as the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction. Thus, to take only the most dramatic of Lévi-Strauss's analyses—the "interpretation" of the unique facial decorations of the Caduveo Indians<sup>2</sup>—the starting point will be an immanent description of the formal and structural peculiarities of this body art; yet it must be a description

9. Structural linguistics follows the distinction first made by the Swiss linguist FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE (1857–1913), often retaining his French terms, between the speech of an individual language user (*parole*) and language as an abstract system (*langue*).

1. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*,

trans. C. Jacobson and B. G. Schoepf (New York: Basic, 1963), pp. 206–31 [Jameson's note]. Some of the author's notes have been edited, and some omitted.

2. A South American indigenous people residing in Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil.

already pre-prepared and oriented toward transcending the purely formalistic, a movement which is achieved not by abandoning the formal level for something extrinsic to it—such as some inertly social “content”—but rather immanently, by construing purely formal patterns as a symbolic enactment of the social within the formal and the aesthetic. Such symbolic functions are, however, rarely found by an aimless enumeration of random formal and stylistic features; our discovery of a text’s symbolic efficacy must be oriented by a formal description which seeks to grasp it as a determinate structure of still properly formal *contradictions*. Thus, Lévi-Strauss orients his still purely visual analysis of Caduveo facial decorations toward this climactic account of their contradictory dynamic: “the use of a design which is symmetrical but yet lies across an oblique axis . . . a complicated situation based upon two contradictory forms of duality, and resulting in a compromise brought about by a secondary opposition between the ideal axis of the object itself [the human face] and the ideal axis of the figure which it represents.”<sup>3</sup> Already on the purely formal level, then, this visual text has been grasped as a contradiction by way of the curiously provisional and asymmetrical resolution it proposes for that contradiction.

Lévi-Strauss’s “interpretation” of this formal phenomenon may now, perhaps overhastily, be specified. Caduveo are a hierarchical society, organized in three endogamous groups<sup>4</sup> or castes. In their social development, as in that of their neighbors, this nascent hierarchy is already the place of the emergence, if not of political power in the strict sense, then at least of relations of domination: the inferior status of women, the subordination of youth to elders, and the development of a hereditary aristocracy. Yet whereas this latent power structure is, among the neighboring Guana and Bororo,<sup>5</sup> masked by a division into moieties which cuts across the three castes, and whose exogamous exchange<sup>6</sup> appears to function in a nonhierarchical, essentially egalitarian way, it is openly present in Caduveo life, as surface inequality and conflict. The social institutions of the Guana and Bororo, on the other hand, provide a realm of appearance, in which real hierarchy and inequality are dissimulated by the reciprocity of the moieties, and in which, therefore, “asymmetry of class is balanced . . . by symmetry of ‘moieties.’”

As for the Caduveo,

they were never lucky enough to resolve their contradictions, or to disguise them with the help of institutions artfully devised for that purpose. On the social level, the remedy was lacking . . . but it was never completely out of their grasp. It was within them, never objectively formulated, but present as a source of confusion and disquiet. Yet since they were unable to conceptualize or to live this solution directly, they began to dream it, to project it into the imaginary. . . . We must therefore interpret the graphic art of Caduveo women, and explain its mysterious charm as well as its apparently gratuitous complication, as the fantasy production of a society seeking passionately to give symbolic expression to the institutions it might have had in reality, had not interest and superstition stood in the way.<sup>7</sup>

3. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Russell (New York: Atheneum, 1971), p. 176 [Jameson’s note].

4. Groups whose members intermarry.

5. Other indigenous peoples of the upper Para-

guay River.

6. Marriages outside the group.

7. Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, pp. 179–80 [Jameson’s note].

In this fashion, then, the visual text of Caduveo facial art constitutes a symbolic act, whereby real social contradictions, insurmountable in their own terms, find a purely formal resolution in the aesthetic realm.

This interpretive model thus allows us a first specification of the relationship between ideology and cultural texts or artifacts: a specification still conditioned by the limits of the first, narrowly historical or political horizon in which it is made. We may suggest that from this perspective, ideology is not something which informs or invests symbolic production; rather the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal "solutions" to unresolvable social contradictions.

Lévi-Strauss's work also suggests a more general defense of the proposition of a political unconscious than we have hitherto been able to present, insofar as it offers the spectacle of so-called primitive peoples perplexed enough by the dynamics and contradictions of their still relatively simple forms of tribal organization to project decorative or mythic resolutions of issues that they are unable to articulate conceptually. But if this is the case for pre-capitalist and even pre-political societies, then how much more must it be true for the citizen of the modern *Gesellschaft*,<sup>8</sup> faced with the great constitutional options of the revolutionary period, and with the corrosive and tradition-annihilating effects of the spread of a money and market economy, with the changing cast of collective characters which oppose the bourgeoisie, now to an embattled aristocracy, now to an urban proletariat, with the great fantasies of the various nationalisms, now themselves virtual "subjects of history" of a rather different kind, with the social homogenization and psychic constriction of the rise of the industrial city and its "masses," the sudden appearance of the great transnational forces of communism and fascism, followed by the advent of the 'superstates and the onset of that great ideological rivalry between capitalism and communism, which, no less passionate and obsessive than that which, at the dawn of modern times, seethed through the wars of religion, marks the final tension of our now global village? It does not, indeed, seem particularly farfetched to suggest that these texts of history, with their fantasmatic collective "actants,"<sup>9</sup> their narrative organization, and their immense charge of anxiety and libidinal investment, are lived by the contemporary subject as a genuine politico-historical *pensée sauvage* which necessarily informs all of our cultural artifacts, from the literary institutions of high modernism all the way to the products of mass culture. Under these circumstances, Lévi-Strauss's work suggests that the proposition whereby all cultural artifacts are to be read as symbolic resolutions of real political and social contradictions deserves serious exploration and systematic experimental verification. It will become clear in later chapters of this book that the most readily accessible formal articulation of the operations of a political *pensée sauvage* of this kind will be found in what we will call the structure of a properly political *allegory*, as it develops from networks of topical allusion in Spenser or Milton or Swift<sup>1</sup> to the symbolic narratives of

8. Society of impersonal associations (German); often contrasted with *Gemeinschaft* (a community of organic social relationships).

9. Fundamental factors, such as subject and

object, that generate narrative plot (a technical term introduced by Greimas).

1. All canonical English authors whose works sometimes include topical political references:

class representatives or "types" in novels like those of Balzac. With political allegory, then, a sometimes repressed ur-narrative<sup>2</sup> or master fantasy about the interaction of collective subjects, we have moved to the very borders of our second horizon, in which what we formerly regarded as individual texts are grasped as "utterances" in an essentially collective or class discourse.

We cannot cross those borders, however, without some final account of the critical operations involved in our first interpretive phase. We have implied that in order to be consequent, the will to read literary or cultural texts as symbolic acts must necessarily grasp them as resolutions of determinate contradictions; and it is clear that the notion of contradiction is central to any Marxist cultural analysis, just as it will remain central in our two subsequent horizons, although it will there take rather different forms. The methodological requirement to articulate a text's fundamental contradiction may then be seen as a test of the completeness of the analysis: this is why, for example, the conventional sociology of literature or culture, which modestly limits itself to the identification of class motifs or values in a given text, and feels that its work is done when it shows how a given artifact "reflects" its social background, is utterly unacceptable. Meanwhile, Kenneth Burke's<sup>3</sup> play of emphases, in which a symbolic act is on the one hand affirmed as a genuine *act*, albeit on the symbolic level, while on the other it is registered as an act which is "merely" symbolic, its resolutions imaginary ones that leave the real untouched, suitably dramatizes the ambiguous status of art and culture.

Still, we need to say a little more about the status of this external reality, of which it will otherwise be thought that it is little more than the traditional notion of "context" familiar in older social or historical criticism. The type of interpretation here proposed is more satisfactorily grasped as the rewriting of the literary text in such a way that the latter may itself be seen as the rewriting or restructuration of a prior historical or ideological *subtext*, it being always understood that that "subtext" is not immediately present as such, not some common-sense external reality, nor even the conventional narratives of history manuals, but rather must itself always be (re)constructed after the fact. The literary or aesthetic act therefore always entertains some active relationship with the Real;<sup>4</sup> yet in order to do so, it cannot simply allow "reality" to persevere inertly in its own being, outside the text and at distance. It must rather draw the Real into its own texture, and the ultimate paradoxes and false problems of linguistics, and most notably of semantics, are to be traced back to this process, whereby language manages to carry the Real within itself as its own intrinsic or immanent subtext. Insofar, in other words, as symbolic action—what Burke will map as "dream," "prayer," or "chart"<sup>5</sup>—is a way of doing something to the world, to that degree what we are calling "world" must inhere within it, as the content it has to take up into itself in order to submit it to the transformations of form. The symbolic act therefore begins by generating and producing its own context in the same moment of emergence in which it steps back from it, taking its measure with a view

Edmund Spenser (1552–1599), John Milton (1608–1674), and Jonathan Swift (1667–1745).

2. Prototypical or original story.

3. American literary critic and rhetorician (1897–1993; see above).

4. A technical term from the theory of the French

psychoanalyst JACQUES LACAN (1901–1981); the Real can be studied only in its effects on the Symbolic (and the Imaginary).

5. Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), pp. 5–6 [Jameson's note].

toward its own projects of transformation. The whole paradox of what we have here called the subtext may be summed up in this, that the literary work or cultural object, as though for the first time, brings into being that very situation to which it is also, at one and the same time, a reaction. It articulates its own situation and textualizes it, thereby encouraging and perpetuating the illusion that the situation itself did not exist before it, that there is nothing but a text, that there never was any extra- or con-textual reality before the text itself generated it in the form of a mirage. One does not have to argue the reality of history: necessity, like Dr. Johnson's stone,<sup>6</sup> does that for us. That history—Althusser's "absent cause," Lacan's "Real"—is *not* a text, for it is fundamentally non-narrative and nonrepresentational; what can be added, however, is the proviso that history is inaccessible to us except in textual form, or in other words, that it can be approached only by way of prior (re)textualization. Thus, to insist on either of the two inseparable yet incommensurable dimensions of the symbolic act without the other: to over-emphasize the active way in which the text reorganizes its subtext (in order, presumably, to reach the triumphant conclusion that the "referent" does not exist); or on the other hand to stress the imaginary status of the symbolic act so completely as to reify its social ground, now no longer understood as a subtext but merely as some inert given that the text passively or fantasmatically "reflects"—to overstress either of these functions of the symbolic act at the expense of the other is surely to produce sheer ideology, whether it be, as in the first alternative, the ideology of structuralism, or, in the second, that of vulgar materialism.

Still, this view of the place of the "referent" will be neither complete nor methodologically usable unless we specify a supplementary distinction between several types of subtext to be (re)constructed. We have implied, indeed, that the social contradiction addressed and "resolved" by the formal prestidigitation of narrative must, however reconstructed, remain an absent cause, which cannot be directly or immediately conceptualized by the text. It seems useful, therefore, to distinguish, from this ultimate subtext which is the place of social *contradiction*, a secondary one, which is more properly the place of ideology, and which takes the form of the *aporia* or the *antinomy*:<sup>7</sup> what can in the former be resolved only through the intervention of praxis here comes before the purely contemplative mind as logical scandal or double bind, the unthinkable and the conceptually paradoxical, that which cannot be unknotted by the operation of pure thought, and which must therefore generate a whole more properly narrative apparatus—the text itself—to square its circles and to dispel, through narrative movement, its intolerable closure. Such a distinction, positing a system of antinomies as the symptomatic expression and conceptual reflex of something quite different, namely a social contradiction, will now allow us to reformulate that coordination between a semiotic and a dialectical method, which was evoked in the preceding section. The operational validity of semiotic analysis, and in particular of the Greimassian semiotic rectangle,<sup>8</sup> derives, as was sug-

6. That is, the stone famously kicked by the English critic, essayist, and lexicographer SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709–1784) to refute the theory of the nonexistence of matter espoused by George Berkeley.

7. A contradiction between two statements of apparently equal validity. "Aporia": difficulty, logi-

cal impasse (a term often used in deconstructive criticism to indicate the point in a text where inherent contradictions render interpretation undecidable).

8. Dialectical sets of oppositions through which, Greimas theorizes, narratives generate meaning and which he diagrams in a rectangle. Throughout

gested there, not from its adequacy to nature or being, nor even from its capacity to map all forms of thinking or language, but rather from its vocation specifically to model ideological closure and to articulate the workings of binary oppositions, here the privileged form of what we have called the antinomy. A dialectical reevaluation of the findings of semiotics intervenes, however, at the moment in which this entire system of ideological closure is taken as the symptomatic projection of something quite different, namely of social contradiction.

We may now leave this first textual or interpretive model behind, and pass over into the second horizon, that of the social. The latter becomes visible, and individual phenomena are revealed as social facts and institutions, only at the moment in which the organizing categories of analysis become those of social class. I have in another place described the dynamics of ideology in its constituted form as a function of social class:<sup>9</sup> suffice it only to recall here that for Marxism classes must always be apprehended relationally, and that the ultimate (or ideal) form of class relationship and class struggle is always dichotomous. The constitutive form of class relationships is always that between a dominant and a laboring class: and it is only in terms of this axis that class fractions (for example, the petty bourgeoisie) or ec-centric or dependent classes (such as the peasantry) are positioned. To define class in this way is sharply to differentiate the Marxian model of classes from the conventional sociological analysis of society into strata, subgroups, professional elites and the like, each of which can presumably be studied in isolation from one another in such a way that the analysis of their "values" or their "cultural space" folds back into separate and independent *Weltanschauungen*,<sup>1</sup> each of which inertly reflects its particular "stratum." For Marxism, however, the very content of a class ideology is relational, in the sense that its "values" are always actively in situation with respect to the opposing class, and defined against the latter: normally, a ruling class ideology will explore various strategies of the *legitimation* of its own power position, while an oppositional culture or ideology will, often in covert and disguised strategies, seek to contest and to undermine the dominant "value system."

This is the sense in which we will say, following Mikhail Bakhtin, that within this horizon class discourse—the categories in terms of which individual texts and cultural phenomena are now rewritten—is essentially *dialogical* in its structure.<sup>2</sup> As Bakhtin's (and Voloshinov's) own work in this field is relatively specialized, focusing primarily on the heterogeneous and explosive pluralism of moments of carnival or festival (moments, for example, such as the immense resurfacing of the whole spectrum of the religious or political sects in the English 1640s or the Soviet 1920s) it will be necessary to add the qualification that the normal form of the dialogical is essentially an *antagonistic* one, and that the dialogue of class struggle is one in which

<sup>9</sup> *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson frequently uses Greimassian rectangles in analyzing novels.

<sup>1</sup> See my *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 376–82. The most authoritative contemporary Marxist statement of this view of social class is to be found in E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Classes* (New York: Vintage, 1966), pp. 9–11 [Jameson's note].

<sup>2</sup> Worldviews (German).

<sup>3</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsky's*

*Poetics*, trans. R. W. Rotsel (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1973), pp. 153–69. See also Bakhtin's important book on linguistics, written under the name of V. N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. L. Matejka and I. R. Titunik (New York: Seminar Press, 1973), pp. 83–98 [Jameson's note]. On the Russian theorist BAKHTIN (1895–1975) and the "dialogical" nature of the novel and discourse, see above. Some believe that to circumvent the suppression of his writings, he published some of his books under the name of a colleague, Valentin N. Volosinov (1895–1936).



two opposing discourses fight it out within the general unity of a shared code. Thus, for instance, the shared master code of religion becomes in the 1640s in England the place in which the dominant formulations of a hegemonic theology are reappropriated and polemically modified.<sup>3</sup>

Within this new horizon, then, the basic formal requirement of dialectical analysis is maintained, and its elements are still restructured in terms of *contradiction* (this is essentially, as we have said, what distinguishes the rationality of a Marxist class analysis from static analysis of the sociological type). Where the contradiction of the earlier horizon was univocal, however, and limited to the situation of the individual text, to the place of a purely individual symbolic resolution, contradiction here appears in the form of the dialogical as the irreconcilable demands and positions of antagonistic classes. Here again, then, the requirement to prolong interpretation to the point at which this ultimate contradiction begins to appear offers a criterion for the completeness or insufficiency of the analysis.

Yet to rewrite the individual text, the individual cultural artifact, in terms of the antagonistic dialogue of class voices is to perform a rather different operation from the one we have ascribed to our first horizon. Now the individual text will be refocused as a *parole*, or individual utterance, of that vaster system, or *langue*, of class discourse. The individual text retains its formal structure as a symbolic act: yet the value and character of such symbolic action are now significantly modified and enlarged. On this rewriting, the individual utterance or text is grasped as a symbolic move in an essentially polemic and strategic ideological confrontation between the classes, and to describe it in these terms (or to reveal it in this form) demands a whole set of different instruments.

For one thing, the illusion or appearance of isolation or autonomy which a printed text projects must now be systematically undermined. Indeed, since by definition the cultural monuments and masterworks that have survived tend necessarily to perpetuate only a single voice in this class dialogue, the voice of a hegemonic class, they cannot be properly assigned their relational place in a dialogical system without the restoration or artificial reconstruction of the voice to which they were initially opposed, a voice for the most part stifled and reduced to silence, marginalized, its own utterances scattered to the winds, or reappropriated in their turn by the hegemonic culture.

This is the framework in which the reconstruction of so-called popular cultures must properly take place—most notably, from the fragments of essentially peasant cultures: folk songs, fairy tales, popular festivals, occult or oppositional systems of belief such as magic and witchcraft. Such reconstruction is of a piece with the reaffirmation of the existence of marginalized or oppositional cultures in our own time, and the reaudition of the oppositional voices of black or ethnic cultures, women's and gay literature, "naive" or marginalized folk art, and the like. But once again, the affirmation of such nonhegemonic cultural voices remains ineffective if it is limited to the merely "sociological" perspective of the pluralistic rediscovery of other isolated social groups: only an ultimate rewriting of these utterances in terms of their essentially polemic and subversive strategies restores them to their proper place in the dialogical system of the social classes. Thus, for instance,

3. See Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* (London: Temple Smith, 1972) [Jameson's note].

Bloch's<sup>4</sup> reading of the fairy tale, with its magical wish-fulfillments and its Utopian fantasies of plenty and the *pays de Cocagne*, restores the dialogical and antagonistic content of this "form" by exhibiting it as a systematic deconstruction and undermining of the hegemonic aristocratic form of the epic, with its somber ideology of heroism and baleful destiny; thus also the work of Eugene Genovese on black religion restores the vitality of these utterances by reading them, not as the replication of imposed beliefs, but rather as a process whereby the hegemonic Christianity of the slave-owners is appropriated, secretly emptied of its content and subverted to the transmission of quite different oppositional and coded messages.<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, the stress on the dialogical then allows us to reread or rewrite the hegemonic forms themselves; they also can be grasped as a process of the reappropriation and neutralization, the cooptation and class transformation, the cultural universalization, of forms which originally expressed the situation of "popular," subordinate, or dominated groups. So the slave religion of Christianity is transformed into the hegemonic ideological apparatus of the medieval system; while folk music and peasant dance find themselves transmuted into the forms of aristocratic or court festivity and into the cultural visions of the pastoral; and popular narrative from time immemorial—romance, adventure story, melodrama, and the like—is ceaselessly drawn on to restore vitality to an enfeebled and asphyxiating "high culture." Just so, in our own time, the vernacular and its still vital sources of production (as in black language) are reappropriated by the exhausted and media-standardized speech of a hegemonic middle class. In the aesthetic realm, indeed, the process of cultural "universalization" (which implies the repression of the oppositional voice, and the illusion that there is only one genuine "culture") is the specific form taken by what can be called the process of legitimation in the realm of ideology and conceptual systems.

Still, this operation of rewriting and of the restoration of an essentially dialogical or class horizon will not be complete until we specify the "units" of this larger system. The linguistic metaphor (rewriting texts in terms of the opposition of a *parole* to a *langue*) cannot, in other words, be particularly fruitful until we are able to convey something of the dynamics proper to a class *langue* itself, which is evidently, in Saussure's sense, something like an ideal construct that is never wholly visible and never fully present in any one of its individual utterances. This larger class discourse, can be said to be organized around minimal "units" which we will call *ideologemes*. The advantage of this formulation lies in its capacity to mediate between conceptions of ideology as abstract opinion, class value, and the like, and the narrative materials with which we will be working here. The ideologeme is an amphibious formation, whose essential structural characteristic may be described as its possibility to manifest itself either as a pseudoidea—a conceptual or belief system, an abstract value, an opinion or prejudice—or as a proto-narrative, a kind of ultimate class fantasy about the "collective characters" which are the classes in opposition. This duality means that the basic requirement for the full description of the ideologeme is already given in

4. Ernst Bloch (1885–1977), German philosopher, a Marxist whose "philosophy of hope" sees history ending in utopia, which he calls the *pays de Cocagne* ("land of plenty"; French).

5. Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage, 1976), pp. 161–284 [Jameson's note]. Genovese (b. 1930), American historian.

advance: as a construct it must be susceptible to both a conceptual description and a narrative manifestation all at once. The ideologeme can of course be elaborated in either of these directions, taking on the finished appearance of a philosophical system on the one hand, or that of a cultural text on the other; but the ideological analysis of these finished cultural products requires us to demonstrate each one as a complex work of transformation on that ultimate raw material which is the ideologeme in question. The analyst's work is thus first that of the identification of the ideologeme, and, in many cases, of its initial naming in instances where for whatever reason it had not yet been registered as such. The immense preparatory task of identifying and inventorying such ideologemes has scarcely even begun, and to it the present book will make but the most modest contribution: most notably in its isolation of that fundamental nineteenth-century ideologeme which is the "theory" of *ressentiment*,<sup>6</sup> and in its "unmasking" of ethics and the ethical binary opposition of good and evil as one of the fundamental forms of ideological thought in Western culture. However, our stress here and throughout on the fundamentally narrative character of such ideologemes (even where they seem to be articulated only as abstract conceptual beliefs or values) will offer the advantage of restoring the complexity of the transactions between opinion and protonarrative or libidinal fantasy. Thus we will observe, in the case of Balzac, the generation of an overt and constituted ideological and political "value system" out of the operation of an essentially narrative and fantasy dynamic; the chapter on Gissing, on the other hand, will show how an already constituted "narrative paradigm" emits an ideological message in its own right without the mediation of authorial intervention.

This focus or horizon, that of class struggle and its antagonistic discourses, is, as we have already suggested, not the ultimate form a Marxist analysis of culture can take. The example just alluded to—that of the seventeenth-century English revolution, in which the various classes and class fractions found themselves obliged to articulate their ideological struggles through the shared medium of a religious master code—can serve to dramatize the shift whereby these objects of study are reconstituted into a structurally distinct "text" specific to this final enlargement of the analytical frame. For the possibility of a displacement in emphasis is already given in this example: we have suggested that within the apparent unity of the theological code, the fundamental difference of antagonistic class positions can be made to emerge. In that case, the inverse move is also possible, and such concrete semantic differences can on the contrary be focused in such a way that what emerges is rather the all-embracing unity of a single code which they must share and which thus characterizes the larger unity of the social system. This new object—code, sign system, or system of the production of signs and codes—thus becomes an index of an entity of study which greatly transcends those earlier ones of the narrowly political (the symbolic act), and the social (class discourse and the ideologeme), and which we have proposed to term the historical in the larger sense of this word. Here the organizing unity will be what the Marxian tradition designates as a *mode of production*.

I have already observed that the "problematic" of modes of production is

6. Resentment (French); this theory was developed by the German philosopher FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE (1844–1900).

the most vital new area of Marxist theory in all the disciplines today; not paradoxically, it is also one of the most traditional, and we must therefore, in a brief preliminary way, sketch in the "sequence" of modes of production as classical Marxism, from Marx and Engels to Stalin,<sup>7</sup> tended to enumerate them.<sup>8</sup> These modes, or "stages" of human society, have traditionally included the following: primitive communism or tribal society (the horde), the *gens* or hierarchical kinship societies (neolithic society), the Asiatic mode of production (so-called Oriental despotism), the *polis* or an oligarchical slaveholding society (the ancient mode of production), feudalism, capitalism, and communism (with a good deal of debate as to whether the "transitional" stage between these last—sometimes called "socialism"—is a genuine mode of production in its own right or not). What is more significant in the present context is that even this schematic or mechanical conception of historical "stages" (what the Althusserians have systematically criticized under the term "historicism") includes the notion of a cultural dominant or form of ideological coding specific to each mode of production. Following the same order these have generally been conceived as magic and mythic narrative, kinship, religion or the sacred, "politics" according to the narrower category of citizenship in the ancient city state, relations of personal domination, commodity reification, and (presumably) original and as yet nowhere fully developed forms of collective or communal association.

Before we can determine the cultural "text" or object of study specific to the horizon of modes of production, however, we must make two preliminary remarks about the methodological problems it raises. The first will bear on whether the concept of "mode of production" is a synchronic one, while the second will address the temptation to use the various modes of production for a classifying or typologizing operation, in which cultural texts are simply dropped into so many separate compartments.

Indeed, a number of theorists have been disturbed by the apparent convergence between the properly Marxian notion of an all-embracing and all-structuring mode of production (which assigns everything within itself—culture, ideological production, class articulation, technology—a specific and unique place), and non-Marxist visions of a "total system" in which the various elements or levels of social life are programmed in some increasingly constricting way. Weber's dramatic notion of the "iron cage" of an increasingly bureaucratic society,<sup>9</sup> Foucault's image of the gridwork of an ever more

7. Jameson suggests that "classical Marxism," or a Marxism relying on definite descriptions of classes, class struggle, and so on, was at its height between the time of Marx and his collaborator FRIEDRICH ENGELS (1820–1895) and that of Joseph Stalin (1879–1953), 2d leader of the U.S.S.R. (1924–53).

8. The "classical" texts on modes of production, besides Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877), are Karl Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, a section of the *Grundrisse* (1857–58), and Friedrich Engels, *The Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884). An important recent contribution to the mode of production debate is Étienne Balibar's "The Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism," in Louis Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970), pp. 199–308 [Jameson's note]. Balibar (b. 1942), French political philosopher.

9. "The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. Perhaps it will so determine them until the last ton of fossilized coal is burnt. In [one] view the care for external goods should only lie on the shoulders of the saint 'like a light cloak, which can be thrown aside at any moment.' But fate decreed that the cloak should become an iron cage." Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons (New York: Scribners, 1958), p. 181

pervasive "political technology of the body,"<sup>1</sup> but also more traditional "synchronic" accounts of the cultural programming of a given historical "moment," such as those that have variously been proposed from Vico and Hegel to Spengler and Deleuze<sup>2</sup>—all such monolithic models of the cultural unity of a given historical period have tended to confirm the suspicions of a dialectical tradition about the dangers of an emergent "synchronic" thought, in which change and development are relegated to the marginalized category of the merely "diachronic," the contingent or the rigorously nonmeaningful (and this, even where, as with Althusser, such models of cultural unity are attacked as forms of a more properly Hegelian and idealistic "expressive causality"). This theoretical foreboding about the limits of synchronic thought can perhaps be most immediately grasped in the political area, where the model of the "total system" would seem slowly and inexorably to eliminate any possibility of the *negative* as such, and to reintegrate the place of an oppositional or even merely "critical" practice and resistance back into the system as the latter's mere inversion. In particular, everything about class struggle that was anticipatory in the older dialectical framework, and seen as an emergent space for radically new social relations, would seem, in the synchronic model, to reduce itself to practices that in fact tend to reinforce the very system that foresaw and dictated their specific limits. This is the sense in which Jean Baudrillard<sup>3</sup> has suggested that the "total-system" view of contemporary society reduces the options of resistance to anarchist gestures, to the sole remaining ultimate protests of the wildcat strike, terrorism, and death. Meanwhile, in the framework of the analysis of culture also, the latter's integration into a synchronic model would seem to empty cultural production of all its antisystemic capacities, and to "unmask" even the works of an overtly oppositional or political stance as instruments ultimately programmed by the system itself.

It is, however, precisely the notion of a series of enlarging theoretical horizons proposed here that can assign these disturbing synchronic frameworks their appropriate analytical places and dictate their proper use. This notion projects a long view of history which is inconsistent with concrete political action and class struggle only if the specificity of the horizons is not respected; thus, even if the concept of a mode of production is to be considered a synchronic one (and we will see in a moment that things are somewhat more complicated than this), at the level of historical abstraction at which such a concept is properly to be used, the lesson of the "vision" of a total system is for the short run one of the structural limits imposed on praxis rather than the latter's impossibility.

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

[Jameson's note]. Weber (1864–1920), German sociologist who helped found the discipline.

1. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 26ff. [Jameson's note]. FOUCAULT (1926–1984), French philosopher and historian of ideas.

2. All philosophers who made large claims about historical change: the Italian GIAMBATTISTA VICO (1668–1744) viewed historical change as a cycle;

Hegel proposed a dialectical model of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; the German Oswald Spengler (1880–1936) saw a pattern of decline; and the French GILLES DELEUZE (1925–1995) argued for a Nietzschean repetition modified for differences.

3. French sociologist (b. 1929; see above), who argues that in postmodern society we deal only with simulations of reality (*simulacra*), not representations.

such systems have tended to fall into two general groups, which one might term respectively the hard and soft visions of the total system. The first group projects a fantasy future of a "totalitarian" type in which the mechanisms of domination—whether these are understood as part of the more general process of bureaucratization, or on the other hand derive more immediately from the deployment of physical and ideological force—are grasped as irrevocable and increasingly pervasive tendencies whose mission is to colonize the last remnants and survivals of human freedom—to occupy and organize, in other words, what still persists of Nature objectively and subjectively (very schematically, the Third World and the Unconscious).

This group of theories can perhaps hastily be associated with the central names of Weber and Foucault; the second group may then be associated with names such as those of Jean Baudrillard and the American theorists of a "post-industrial society."<sup>4</sup> For this second group, the characteristics of the total system of contemporary world society are less those of political domination than those of cultural programming and penetration: not the iron cage, but rather the *société de consommation* with its consumption of images and simulacra, its free-floating signifiers and its effacement of the older structures of social class and traditional ideological hegemony. For both groups, world capitalism is in evolution toward a system which is not socialist in any classical sense, on the one hand the nightmare of total control and on the other the polymorphous or schizophrenic intensities of some ultimate counterculture (which may be no less disturbing for some than the overtly threatening characteristics of the first vision). What one must add is that neither kind of analysis respects the Marxian injunction of the "ultimately determining instance" of economic organization and tendencies: for both, indeed, economics (or political economy) of that type is in the new total system of the contemporary world at an end, and the economic finds itself in both reassigned to a secondary and nondeterminant position beneath the new dominant of political power or of cultural production respectively.

There exist, however, within Marxism itself precise equivalents to these two non-Marxian visions of the contemporary total system: rewritings, if one likes, of both in specifically Marxian and "economic" terms. These are the analyses of late capitalism in terms of *capitalogic*<sup>5</sup> and of *disaccumulation*,<sup>6</sup> respectively; and while this book is clearly not the place to discuss such theories at any length, it must be observed here that both, seeing the originality of the contemporary situation in terms of systemic tendencies *within* capitalism, reassert the theoretical priority of the organizing concept of the mode of production which we have been concerned to argue.

We must therefore now turn to the second related problem about this third and ultimate horizon, and deal briefly with the objection that cultural

4. The most influential statement of the American version of this "end of ideology" / consumer society position is, of course, that of Daniel Bell: see his *Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (New York: Basic, 1973) and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic, 1976) [Jameson's note].

5. See, for a review and critique of the basic literature, Stanley Aronowitz, "Marx, Braverman, and the Logic of Capital," *Insurgent Sociologist* 8, nos. 2 / 3 (fall 1978): 126–46 [Jameson's note].

6. The basic texts on "disaccumulation theory" are

Martin J. Sklar, "On the Proletarian Revolution and the End of Political-Economic Society," *Radical America* 3, no. 3 (May–June 1969): 1–41; Jim O'Connor, "Productive and Unproductive Labor," *Politics and Society* 5 (1975): 297–336; Fred Block and Larry Hirschhorn, "New Productive Forces and the Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism," *Theory and Society* 7 (1979): 363–95; and Stanley Aronowitz, "The End of Political Economy," *Social Text*, no. 2 (1980): 3–52 [Jameson's note].

analysis pursued within it will tend toward a purely typological or classificatory operation, in which we are called upon to "decide" such issues as whether Milton is to be read within a "precapitalist" or a nascent capitalist context, and so forth. I have insisted elsewhere on the sterility of such classificatory procedures, which may always, it seems to me, be taken as symptoms and indices of the repression of a more genuinely dialectical or historical practice of cultural analysis. This diagnosis may now be expanded to cover all three horizons at issue here, where the practice of homology, that of a merely "sociological" search for some social or class equivalent, and that, finally, of the use of some typology of social and cultural systems, respectively, may stand as examples of the misuse of these three frameworks. Furthermore, just as in our discussion of the first two we have stressed the centrality of the category of contradiction for any Marxist analysis (seen, within the first horizon, as that which the cultural and ideological artifact tries to "resolve," and in the second as the nature of the social and class conflict within which a given work is one act or gesture), so too here we can effectively validate the horizon of the mode of production by showing the form contradiction takes on this level, and the relationship of the cultural object to it.

Before we do so, we must take note of more recent objections to the very concept of the mode of production. The traditional schema of the various modes of production as so many historical "stages" has generally been felt to be unsatisfactory, not least because it encourages the kind of typologizing criticized above, in political quite as much as in cultural analysis. (The form taken in political analysis is evidently the procedure which consists in "deciding" whether a given conjuncture<sup>7</sup> is to be assigned to a moment within feudalism—the result being a demand for bourgeois and parliamentary rights—or within capitalism—with the accompanying "reformist" strategy—or, on the contrary, a genuine "revolutionary" moment—in which case the appropriate revolutionary strategy is then deduced.)

On the other hand, it has become increasingly clear to a number of contemporary theorists that such classification of "empirical" materials within this or that abstract category is impermissible in large part because of the level of abstraction of the concept of a mode of production: no historical society has ever "embodied" a mode of production in any pure state (nor is *Capital*<sup>8</sup> the description of a historical society, but rather the construction of the abstract concept of capitalism). This has led certain contemporary theorists, most notably Nicos Poulantzas,<sup>9</sup> to insist on the distinction between a "mode of production" as a purely theoretical construction and a "social formation" that would involve the description of some historical society at a certain moment of its development. This distinction seems inadequate and even misleading, to the degree that it encourages the very empirical thinking which it was concerned to denounce, in other words, subsuming a particular or an empirical "fact" under this or that corresponding "abstraction." Yet one feature of Poulantzas' discussion of the "social formation" may be retained: his suggestion that every social formation or

7. Moment in social development at which various antagonistic and sometimes contradictory forces and trends combine.

8. See Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (1867).

9. Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*, trans. T. O'Hagan (London: New Left Books, 1973), pp. 13–16 [Jameson's note]. Poulantzas (b. 1936), Greek political theorist.

historically existing society has in fact consisted in the overlay and structural coexistence of *several* modes of production all at once, including vestiges and survivals of older modes of production, now relegated to structurally dependent positions within the new, as well as anticipatory tendencies which are potentially inconsistent with the existing system but have not yet generated an autonomous space of their own.

But if this suggestion is valid, then the problems of the "synchronic" system and of the typological temptation are both solved at one stroke. What is synchronic is the "concept" of the mode of production; the moment of the historical coexistence of several modes of production is not synchronic in this sense, but open to history in a dialectical way. The temptation to classify texts according to the appropriate mode of production is thereby removed, since the texts emerge in a space in which we may expect them to be criss-crossed and intersected by a variety of impulses from contradictory modes of cultural production all at once.

Yet we have still not characterized the specific object of study which is constructed by this new and final horizon. It cannot, as we have shown, consist in the concept of an individual mode of production (any more than, in our second horizon, the specific object of study could consist in a particular social class in isolation from the others). We will therefore suggest that this new and ultimate object may be designated, drawing on recent historical experience, as *cultural revolution*, that moment in which the coexistence of various modes of production becomes visibly antagonistic, their contradictions moving to the very center of political, social, and historical life. The incomplete Chinese experiment with a "proletarian" cultural revolution<sup>1</sup> may be invoked in support of the proposition that previous history has known a whole range of equivalents for similar processes to which the term may legitimately be extended. So the Western Enlightenment may be grasped as part of a properly bourgeois cultural revolution, in which the values and the discourses, the habits and the daily space, of the *ancien régime*<sup>2</sup> were systematically dismantled so that in their place could be set the new conceptualities, habits and life forms, and value systems of a capitalist market society. This process clearly involved a vaster historical rhythm than such punctual historical events as the French Revolution or the Industrial Revolution, and includes in its *longue durée*<sup>3</sup> such phenomena as those described by Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*—a work that can now in its turn be read as a contribution to the study of the bourgeois cultural revolution, just as the corpus of work on romanticism is now repositioned as the study of a significant and ambiguous moment in the resistance to this particular "great transformation," alongside the more specifically "popular" (precapitalist as well as working-class) forms of cultural resistance.

But if this is the case, then we must go further and suggest that all previous modes of production have been accompanied by cultural revolutions specific to them of which the neolithic "cultural revolution," say, the triumph of

1. That is, the 1966–76 Cultural Revolution, an attempt to stamp out "bourgeois values" that caused great social and economic disruption in China.

2. That is, the aristocracy.

3. Long duration (French), a phrase used by the French historian Fernand Braudel (1902–1985), whose work emphasized large-scale, long-term changes.



patriarchy over the older matriarchal or tribal forms, or the victory of Hellenic "justice" and the new legality of the *polis* over the vendetta system are only the most dramatic manifestations. The concept of cultural revolution, then—or more precisely, the reconstruction of the materials of cultural and literary history in the form of this new "text" or object of study which is cultural revolution—may be expected to project a whole new framework for the humanities, in which the study of culture in the widest sense could be placed on a materialist basis.

This description is, however, misleading to the degree to which it suggests that "cultural revolution" is a phenomenon limited to so-called "transitional" periods, during which social formations dominated by one mode of production undergo a radical restructuring in the course of which a different "dominant" emerges. The problem of such "transitions" is a traditional crux of the Marxian problematic of modes of production, nor can it be said that any of the solutions proposed, from Marx's own fragmentary discussions to the recent model of Etienne Balibar, are altogether satisfactory, since in all of them the inconsistency between a "synchronic" description of a given system and a "diachronic" account of the passage from one system to another seems to return with undiminished intensity. But our own discussion began with the idea that a given social formation consisted in the coexistence of various synchronic systems or modes of production, each with its own dynamic or time scheme—a kind of metasynchronicity, if one likes—while we have now shifted to a description of cultural revolution which has been couched in the more diachronic language of systemic transformation. I will therefore suggest that these two apparently inconsistent accounts are simply the twin perspectives which our thinking (and our presentation or *Darstellung* of that thinking) can take on this same vast historical object. Just as overt revolution is no punctual event either, but brings to the surface the innumerable daily struggles and forms of class polarization which are at work in the whole course of social life that precedes it, and which are therefore latent and implicit in "prerevolutionary" social experience, made visible as the latter's deep structure only in such "moments of truth"—so also the overtly "transitional" moments of cultural revolution are themselves but the passage to the surface of a permanent process in human societies, of a permanent struggle between the various coexisting modes of production. The triumphant moment in which a new systemic dominant gains ascendancy is therefore only the diachronic manifestation of a constant struggle for the perpetuation and reproduction of its dominance, a struggle which must continue throughout its life course, accompanied at all moments by the systemic or structural antagonism of those older and newer modes of production that resist assimilation or seek deliverance from it. The task of cultural and social analysis thus construed within this final horizon will then clearly be the rewriting of its materials in such a way that this perpetual cultural revolution can be apprehended and read as the deeper and more permanent constitutive structure in which the empirical textual objects know intelligibility.

Cultural revolution thus conceived may be said to be beyond the opposition between synchrony and diachrony, and to correspond roughly to what Ernst Bloch has called the *Ungleichzeitigkeit* (or "nonsynchronous devel-

opment") of cultural and social life.<sup>4</sup> Such a view imposes a new use of concepts of periodization, and in particular of that older schema of the "linear" stages which is here preserved and canceled all at once. We will deal more fully with the specific problems of periodization in the next chapter: suffice it to say at this point that such categories are produced within an initial diachronic or narrative framework, but become usable only when that initial framework has been annulled, allowing us now to coordinate or articulate categories of diachronic origin (the various distinct modes of production) in what is now a synchronic or metasynchronic way.

We have, however, not yet specified the nature of the textual object which is constructed by this third horizon of cultural revolution, and which would be the equivalent within this dialectically new framework of the objects of our first two horizons—the symbolic act, and the ideologeme or dialogical organization of class discourse. I will suggest that within this final horizon the individual text or cultural artifact (with its appearance of autonomy which was dissolved in specific and original ways within the first two horizons as well) is here restructured as a field of force in which the dynamics of sign systems of several distinct modes of production can be registered and apprehended. These dynamics—the newly constituted "text" of our third horizon—make up what can be termed *the ideology of form*, that is, the determinate contradiction of the specific messages emitted by the varied sign systems which coexist in a given artistic process as well as in its general social formation.

What must now be stressed is that at this level "form" is apprehended as content. The study of the ideology of form is no doubt grounded on a technical and formalistic analysis in the narrower sense, even though, unlike much traditional formal analysis, it seeks to reveal the active presence within the text of a number of discontinuous and heterogeneous formal processes. But at the level of analysis in question here, a dialectical reversal has taken place in which it has become possible to grasp such formal processes as sedimented content in their own right, as carrying ideological messages of their own, distinct from the ostensible or manifest content of the works; it has become possible, in other words, to display such formal operations from the standpoint of what Louis Hjelmslev<sup>5</sup> will call the "content of form" rather than the latter's "expression," which is generally the object of the various more narrowly formalizing approaches. The simplest and most accessible demonstration of this reversal may be found in the area of literary genre.

4. Ernst Bloch, "Nonsynchronism and Dialectics," *New German Critique*, no. 11 (spring 1977): 22–38. The "nonsynchronous" use of the concept of the mode of production outlined above is in my opinion the only way to fulfill Marx's well-known program for dialectical knowledge "of rising from the abstract to the concrete" (1857 Introduction, *Grundrisse*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm [New York: International, 1965], p. 101). Marx there distinguished three stages of knowledge: (1) the notation of the particular (this would correspond to something like empirical history, the collection of data and descriptive materials on the variety of human societies); (2) the conquest of abstraction, the coming into being of a properly "bourgeois" science or of what Hegel called the categories of the Under-

standing; (3) the transcendence of abstraction by the dialectic, the "rise to the concrete," the setting in motion of hitherto static and typologizing categories by their reinsertion in a concrete historical situation (in the present context, this is achieved by moving from a classificatory use of the categories of modes of production to a perception of their dynamic and contradictory coexistence in a given cultural moment). Althusser's own epistemology, incidentally, is a gloss on this same fundamental passage of the 1857 Introduction, but one which succeeds only too well in eliminating its dialectical spirit (*For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster [London: Verso, 1990], pp. 183ff. [Jameson's note]).

5. Danish linguist (1899–1965).

Our next chapter, indeed, will model the process whereby generic specification and description can, in a given historical text, be transformed into the detection of a host of distinct generic messages—some of them objectified survivals from older modes of cultural production, some anticipatory, but all together projecting a formal conjuncture through which the “conjuncture” of coexisting modes of production at a given historical moment can be detected and allegorically articulated.

Meanwhile, that what we have called the ideology of form is something other than a retreat from social and historical questions into the more narrowly formal may be suggested by the relevance of this final perspective to more overtly political and theoretical concerns; we may take the much debated relation of Marxism to feminism as a particularly revealing illustration. The notion of overlapping modes of production outlined above has indeed the advantage of allowing us to short-circuit the false problem of the priority of the economic over the sexual, or of sexual oppression over that of social class. In our present perspective, it becomes clear that sexism and the patriarchal are to be grasped as the sedimentation and the virulent survival of forms of alienation specific to the oldest mode of production of human history, with its division of labor between men and women, and its division of power between youth and elder. The analysis of the ideology of form, properly completed, should reveal the formal persistence of such archaic structures of alienation—and the sign systems specific to them—beneath the overlay of all the more recent and historically original types of alienation—such as political domination and commodity reification—which have become the dominants of that most complex of all cultural revolutions, late capitalism, in which all the earlier modes of production in one way or another structurally coexist. The affirmation of radical feminism, therefore, that to annul the patriarchal is the most *radical* political act—insofar as it includes and subsumes more partial demands, such as the liberation from the commodity form—is thus perfectly consistent with an expanded Marxian framework, for which the transformation of our own dominant mode of production must be accompanied and completed by an equally radical restructuring of all the more archaic modes of production with which it structurally coexists.

With this final horizon, then, we emerge into a space in which History itself becomes the ultimate ground as well as the untranscendable limit of our understanding in general and our textual interpretations in particular. This is, of course, also the moment in which the whole problem of interpretive priorities returns with a vengeance, and in which the practitioners of alternate or rival interpretive codes—far from having been persuaded that History is an interpretive code that includes and transcends all the others—will again assert “History” as simply one more code among others, with no particularly privileged status. This is most succinctly achieved when the critics of Marxist interpretation, borrowing its own traditional terminology, suggest that the Marxian interpretive operation involves a thematization and a reification of “History” which is not markedly different from the process whereby the other interpretive codes produce their own forms of thematic closure and offer themselves as absolute methods.

It should by now be clear that nothing is to be gained by opposing one reified theme—History—by another—Language—in a polemic debate as to

ultimate priority of one over the other. The influential forms this debate has taken in recent years—as in Jürgen Habermas' attempt to subsume the "Marxist" model of production beneath a more all-embracing model of "communication" or intersubjectivity,<sup>6</sup> or in Umberto Eco's assertion of the priority of the Symbolic in general over the technological and productive systems which it must organize as *signs* before they can be used as *tools*<sup>7</sup>—are based on the misconception that the Marxian category of a "mode of production" is a form of technological or "productionist" determinism.

It would seem therefore more useful to ask ourselves, in conclusion, how History as a ground and as an absent cause can be conceived in such a way as to resist such thematization or reification, such transformation back into one optional code among others. We may suggest such a possibility obliquely by attention to what the Aristotelians would call the generic satisfaction specific to the form of the great monuments of historiography,<sup>8</sup> or what the semioticians might call the "history-effect" of such narrative texts. Whatever the raw material on which historiographic form works (and we will here only touch on that most widespread type of material which is the sheer chronology of fact as it is produced by the rote-drill of the history manual), the "emotion" of great historiographic form can then always be seen as the radical restructuring of that inert material, in this instance the powerful reorganization of otherwise inert chronological and "linear" data in the form of Necessity: why what happened (at first received as "empirical" fact) had to happen the way it did. From this perspective, then, causality is only one of the possible tropes by which this formal restructuring can be achieved, although it has obviously been a privileged and historically significant one. Meanwhile, should it be objected that Marxism is rather a "comic" or "romance" paradigm, one which sees history in the salvational perspective of some ultimate liberation, we must observe that the most powerful realizations of a Marxist historiography—from Marx's own narratives of the 1848 revolution<sup>9</sup> through the rich and varied canonical studies of the dynamics of the Revolution of 1789 all the way to Charles Bettelheim's<sup>1</sup> study of the Soviet revolutionary experience—remain visions of historical Necessity in the sense evoked above. But Necessity is here represented in the form of the inexorable logic involved in the determinate failure of all the revolutions that have taken place in human history: the ultimate Marxian presupposition—that socialist revolution can only be a total and worldwide process (and that this in turn presupposes the completion of the capitalist "revolution" and of the process of commodification on a global scale)—is the perspective in which the failure or the blockage, the contradictory reversal or functional inversion, of this or that local revolutionary process is grasped as "inevitable," and as the operation of objective limits.

History is therefore the experience of Necessity, and it is this alone which

6. See Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon, 1971), esp. Part I [Jameson's note]. HABERMAS (b. 1929), German philosopher.

7. Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp. 21–26 [Jameson's note]. Eco (b. 1932), Italian semiotician and novelist.

8. That is, emphasizing, as does ARISTOTLE in his *Poetics* (ca. 330 B.C.E.; see above), the importance

of form.

9. The uprising in France that overthrew the constitutional monarchy of Louis-Philippe; Marx wrote about it in a series of articles in 1849–50 published together as *Class Struggles in France* (1895).

1. French economist and social scientist (b. 1913), who wrote *Class Struggles in the USSR* (3 vols., 1974–83).

can forestall its thematization or reification as a mere object of representation or as one master code among many others. Necessity is not in that sense a type of content, but rather the inexorable *form* of events; it is therefore a narrative category in the enlarged sense of some properly narrative political unconscious which has been argued here, a retextualization of History which does not propose the latter as some new representation or "vision," some new content, but as the formal effects of what Althusser, following Spinoza,<sup>2</sup> calls an "absent cause." Conceived in this sense, History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its "ruses" turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention. But this History can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force. This is indeed the ultimate sense in which History as ground and untranscendable horizon needs no particular theoretical justification: we may be sure that its alienating necessities will not forget us, however much we might prefer to ignore them.

1981

### Postmodernism and Consumer Society<sup>1</sup>

The concept of postmodernism is not widely accepted or even understood today. Some of the resistance to it may come from the unfamiliarity of the works it covers, which can be found in all the arts: the poetry of John Ashbery,<sup>2</sup> for instance, but also the much simpler talk poetry that came out of the reaction against complex, ironic, academic modernist poetry in the 1960s; the reaction against modern architecture and in particular against the monumental buildings of the International Style, the pop buildings and decorated sheds celebrated by Robert Venturi in his manifesto, *Learning from Las Vegas*;<sup>3</sup> Andy Warhol and Pop art, but also the more recent Photo-realism;<sup>4</sup> in music, the moment of John Cage but also the later synthesis of classical and 'popular' styles found in composers like Philip Glass and Terry Riley, and also punk and new-wave rock with such groups as the Clash, Talking Heads and the Gang of Four;<sup>5</sup> in film, everything that comes out of Godard<sup>6</sup>—contemporary vanguard film and video—but also a whole new style of commercial or fiction films, which has its equivalent in contemporary

2. Benedict de Spinoza (1632–1677), Dutch rationalist philosopher.

1. The present text combines elements of two previously published essays: "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Port Townsend, Wash.: Bay Press, 1983), and "Postmodernism: The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *New Left Review*, no. 146 (1984) [Jameson's note].

2. American poet (b. 1927) whose work is often obscure and demanding.

3. Published in 1972, by the American eclectic postmodern architect Venturi (b. 1925), Denise Scott Brown, and Steven Izenour. International Style: an architectural style, developed in Europe and the United States during the 1920s and 1930s and dominant by midcentury, characterized by rectilinear forms without ornamentation and by con-

struction in glass and steel.

4. An art movement that flourished in the 1970s; it was an outgrowth of pop art, which came to prominence in the 1960s and also focused on everyday subjects from consumer and popular culture, such as the Campbell's Soup cans depicted by Warhol (1928–1987), its best-known American proponent.

5. Jameson names avant-garde musicians: the American composers Cage (1912–1992), Glass (b. 1937), and Riley (b. 1935); and the British punk band the Clash, the American art rock band Talking Heads, and the British Marxist band the Gang of Four, all of whom released debut albums in the late 1970s.

6. Jean-Luc Godard (b. 1930), French film director.