



The Future of Totality

Fredric Jameson and the Prospects of Critical Theory

Nicholas Brown, Maria Elisa Cevalco,
Fabio Akcelrud Durão, and Robert T. Tally Jr.,
editors

THE

FUTURE

OF

TOTALITY

Edited by Nicholas Brown, Maria Elisa Cevasco,
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Fredric Jameson
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DUKE

Duke University Press
Durham and London

2026
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PRESS

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Project Editor: Livia Tenzer

Designed by A. Mattson Gallagher

Typeset in Arno Pro by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Brown, Nicholas, [date] editor | Cevasco, Maria Elisa

editor | Durão, Fabio, [date] editor | Tally, Robert T., Jr., editor

Title: The future of totality : Fredric Jameson and the

prospects of critical theory / edited by Nicholas Brown, Maria

Elisa Cevasco, Fabio Akcelrud Durão, and Robert T. Tally Jr.

Other titles: Fredric Jameson and the prospects of critical theory

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2026. | Includes

bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2025044683 (print)

LCCN 2025044684 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478038832 paperback

ISBN 9781478033967 hardcover

ISBN 9781478062455 ebook

Subjects: LCSH: Jameson, Fredric—Criticism and interpretation |

Marxist criticism | Motion pictures—Philosophy |

Critical theory

Classification: LCC PN75.j36 F88 2026 (print) | LCC PN75.j36

(ebook) | DDC 801/.95092—dc23/eng/20260310

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2025044683>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2025044684>

Cover art: Rainer Ganahl, *Fredric Jameson, Modernity, Modernism, and Late Modernism*, UCLA, Los Angeles, 4/26/2001. This picture is part of the artist's ongoing Seminar/Lecture series (ganahl.info, commedesmarxists.com). © Rainer Ganahl, NYC 2025.

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Foreword | Jameson Maestro

KIM STANLEY ROBINSON

In the winter quarter of my sophomore year at UC San Diego, I took a class called French 11. It was the first French class for me that ventured beyond conversational practice; it had a syllabus and reading list (figure F.1). I remember this class by way of strong impressions. My French was not adequate to the task. Professor Jameson spoke entirely in French, except for rare translations of words or phrases to English, perhaps two per class. So I had to understand him, and I did. Sort of. He spoke slowly and distinctly. He was very attentive to us; he discussed the texts we were reading, he explained them. He asked questions of us and listened to what we replied. There were about twenty of us, gathered on the ground floor of a building at Muir College that at that time was called 2C. I checked recently and found that that room has been subdivided into offices.

The class was in effect an introduction to existentialism, as can be seen in the reading list. Short plays with small vocabularies; compared to the reading lists of later classes I took from Jameson, this corpus of work was simplicity itself. I read the texts and understood them. And I understood Jameson as he talked about them. Pretty often the class members discussed the plays in just the way one hopes classes will, but seldom do. I was surprised at how interesting it was. I realized at one point that the class was interesting because existentialism was interesting. And so was Jameson.

What makes all this especially memorable, in some kind of negative way, is that I couldn't translate any of it into English. When I tried to tell my friends about this interesting class, and they asked me what it was about, I was stumped. Nothing means anything! I would say. We have to make it all up! We have to find our project!

Well, duh, they would say. Obviously.

It was 1972, so maybe it was obvious; maybe it was the water we swam in. And my friends are smartasses.

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FRENCH 11

Winter Quarter 1972-1973

TEXTS:

Jean-Paul Sartre, Theatre (Gallimard)

Albert Camus, Caligula & Le Malentendu (Livre de poche)

Jean-Paul Sartre, Reflexions sur la question juive, (Collection Idées)

SCHEDULE:

January:	8	10	12
	Introduction	Le Malentendu,	acts II & III
	15	Act I	
	Caligula, I-II, 3	17	19
		II, 3-III	Act IV
	22		first paper
	Les Hanches, I	24	due
		Act II	26
			Act III
	29	31	Feb. 2
	(Les Hanches)		Hour exam
February:	5	7	9
	Huis clos, 127-147	147-164	164-182
	12	14	16
	(Huis clos)		Second paper
	19	21	due
	holiday	Morts, 1e &	23
		2e tableaux	3e tableau
	26	28	March 2
	Morts, 4e	Putain, 1e	P., 2e
	tableau	tableau	tableau
March:	5	7	9
	(Putain r.)	Reflexions,	Reflexions,
		pp. 7-40.	40-88
	12	14	16
	Reflexions,	Reflexions,	Final paper
	88-134	134-185	due

Students are also recommended to read Camus' main philosophical work, The Myth of Sisyphus in English or in French.

There will be a lecture every Monday, and section meetings Wednesdays and Fridays.

F.1 Syllabus for Prof. Jameson's winter 1972-73 French literature course.

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No, no, I would say, it's more interesting than that. It's not so obvious! Read on, *mon-sewer*, they would reply. Tell us more when you return from that foreign country.

I didn't return. I felt I was having a private experience, in a language I didn't know. That feeling has never really changed for me.

That was it for me and Jameson in my undergraduate years, but in the fall of 1975 I returned to UCSD for graduate studies and took a graduate seminar he was running on the history of Marxist literary criticism. Even after a year of graduate studies at Boston University, this for me was the deep end of the pool. I understood even less than I had in the French class. The readings were voluminous. I can't find my syllabus, but I still have many of the texts themselves: Plekhanov, Lukács, Althusser, Williams, Bakhtin, Goldman, Bloch, Genette, Benjamin, Adorno, Gramsci, Ricoeur, Brecht, Foucault, Barthes, Greimas.

Recently, at social science conferences, I've been startled to learn that there are many scholars who have scarcely even heard of these writers. Really? Aren't these people therefore rather poorly educated? I think maybe so.

On the other hand, there are those for whom this list is the canon itself, forming the basis of Western Marxism, or theory. Often this group is made up of people who have been taught by Jameson, or by his students, or his students' students. How do you change the world? There are many ways. One of them is to change how history and literature are understood and taught in the universities. This might be an example of Williams's "long march through the institutions," or perhaps something like the scientific revolution.

So over the decades, in the same way that Bruno Latour changed science studies, Jameson changed literary and cultural studies. In science studies people speak of Latourization, making a joke on the word *pasteurization*. Has there been a Jamesonification of the humanities? Yes, there has. It has been worldwide, with particular emphases in China, because of Jameson's residence there in the 1980s, and in the Global South, where scholars and artists have had to take on Jameson's insistence that they can't escape their historical fate, and must make art and theory out of their own national situations—just like everyone else.

In this long march, it might be the case that the science studies community, investigating as it does at the social embedding of the sciences, has also used

Jameson's methods, as it needed not just anthropology, but also literary theory. Science is also an ideology, after all, in that it is another imaginary relationship to the real situation. Its particular power in the world comes from its reiterated and quantified hypotheses, to the point where agreement with some of its assertions is essentially forced by demonstration, in Galilean style. The world confirms certain hypotheses by way of evidence; this is not empiricism, but rather a materialism that contains within it (as always) an imagined element. Science is therefore an under-theorized and semiconscious utopian political act, and it can be seized by other social forces, of course, but always continues its own long march. This is what I see, looking into my own stories, and if that makes an intervention in the larger project, good. I hope so.

Naturally, in this curated group of writers of Jameson's, I learned to know my favorites. I was selective and partial from the start, as I suppose everyone is.

And it was during that first seminar that I began to read Fred's own books. I found them quite clear compared with those of some of the writers he had assigned. I'm thinking of Lacan and Derrida here, but the list could be greatly extended. I think Jameson makes many writers better than they are in their originals, by way of his emphases and clarifications and contextualization. He is a very generous and creative reader. This impression, that Jameson orchestrates this crowd into a higher and more powerful assemblage, has been often reaffirmed through the years. It may be a heresy, or a personal disability, but it is a powerful feeling. Think of Jameson as the conductor of an orchestra that includes several players who are in many ways quite terrible on their instrument, but somehow add something crucial to the mix, making for a wild Charles Ives-type symphony.

By the time of this early seminar, I was busy writing and selling science fiction stories, so my graduate work had become strictly utilitarian, in two senses: it paid my bills, and it helped me write stories. I was trying to improve my fiction, thinking hard about both form and content (and how I loved Jameson's discussions of the form of the content and the content of the form). Always I applied a test from Dr. Johnson: When you turn from book to life, what from the book can be put to use?

Because of that practical test, I may be the student of Jameson's most taken by Gérard Genette, especially his book *Narrative Discourse*. I studied that little white book, I marked it up. I was writing on Proust at the time,

and the way Genette described every structural move that novels can make by using examples taken only from *In Search of Lost Time* made me laugh. It was a good joke and gave me ideas for things to try.

From the other writers in Jameson's canon, particular concepts stuck with me and got put to use. Althusser's definition of ideology; Williams on structures of feeling, and the residual/emergent; Bakhtin on the dialogic novel; Bloch on hope. Marx on capital and class. The Greimas rectangle.

Then also, from Jameson's own work, I took an appreciation for the dialectic, that endless cranking of reconsideration; for "always historicize"; for the renunciation of moralism, and the usefulness of all kinds of disparate and seemingly objectionable material in the larger symphony. For the interest in and value of utopia. And for what he eventually called cognitive mapping. Was this term a coded way of referring to ideology, or a metaphor for Marxism? It didn't matter; it was a great image for describing the sense of getting oriented in History that felt so strong to me.

This feeling of orientation came to me cumulatively, over decades. It came in part, a very significant part, from reading Jameson's work, which has served as some kind of platting for my map, or maybe its compass north. Many other elements were involved, but it all got fitted into a cognitive map that had a Jameson projection—like the Mercator projection, but better.

And it's not just a map. It's a shield; no one can condescend to me, I am too well-educated. It's also a sword; and there's some fighting to be done.

At some point during that first graduate seminar in 1975, I visited Fred in his office hours, and told him that I was reading and writing science fiction, and had sold some short stories to Damon Knight. Fred was pleased to hear it and encouraged me to read and write more. He said to me, "Philip K. Dick is the greatest living American novelist," which, since I had only read *Galactic Pot-Healer* at that time, surprised me quite a bit. But when Fred urged me to read more of Dick's work, I took the suggestion. Fred also asked me if I knew about *Locus* magazine, and I confessed that I didn't, and he took an issue of that fanzine from the crowded stacks in his office and gave it to me. At that time it was still mimeographed and stapled together.

After that I visited him during his office hours whether I had a class with him or not. I showed him my stories, and a year or so later took a class he offered in science fiction. This class had a truly immense reading list, in the usual Fred style; three or four books per class, the Platonic ideal of a reading list, as if we had dropped into a space-time bubble in which there was time to read everything. Around then he agreed to be my PhD advisor,

and I agreed that I would write about Philip K. Dick for my dissertation. As Fred pointed out, there would be a lot to say. I could do my dissertation with my right hand, while writing science fiction with my left. (Yes, I am left-handed.)

I remember very distinctly the moment when Fred told me he was leaving UCSD to take a position at Yale. I recall where we were on campus, walking north from Revelle toward the natatorium and Muir. I could see immediately that he was concerned for my academic fate; then, as the conversation went on, I saw him grow even more concerned for my obvious ignorance of how much this might mean for my academic career. I learned how serious that might be in that very moment, from the look on his face: concerned, solicitous, then curious, startled at my naivety. But he assured me he would stay on my dissertation committee, and support whoever took over as my advisor, and continue to support me after I got my degree.

So off he went, and my undergraduate advisor Donald Wesling took over as my PhD advisor, and Fred continued to help by correspondence. All went well, Donald was a wonderful advisor, and I got my PhD a few or several years later. I intended to send a copy of my dissertation to Philip K. Dick, thinking he might like to know that someone had gotten a PhD writing about his work (questionable); but he died two months before I finished it.

That could have been that, but in the years that followed, I stayed in touch with Fred. This was occasional but intentional, and kept happening. I kept reading his books, and he kept reading mine. We began to exchange our books in manuscript. I can tell you what I said to every one of his manuscripts: This is awesome, Fred, keep it up. He was similarly encouraging to me, and every once in a while made practical suggestions that were very helpful. One went something like this: The voice inside your frame tale sounds too much like the voice outside your frame tale. Another: If you're going to use a whole gamut of forms in one book, let the reader know right away, in the second chapter.

He gave me a great blurb for *Red Mars*, and he would also send along various things to read he thought might help, such as an essay by Andre Gunder Frank when I was writing *The Years of Rice and Salt*. And as the decades passed and my novels got more idiosyncratic, he recommended or sent me novels that he thought I should read, given the nature of my own. I have a small shelf of these Fred suggestions, such as Walter Scott's *The Heart of Midlothian*, Mario Vargas Llosa's *The War of the End of the World*, Boleslaw Prus's *The Doll*, and Vasily Grossman's *Life and Fate*.

I saw him give a lecture on Conrad at UC Irvine and visited him once or twice during his brief stint at UC Santa Cruz, and then visited from time to time after he moved to Duke. I kept reading him and writing to him. Always for me this felt like a student-teacher thing, as in: I have this ongoing teacher, a kind of advisor; he teaches me things, I learn them, sort of; it's good. In fact, it's very important, because at that point and for many years I was an *isolato*, off working by myself.

Later still, we taught a daylong seminar together; another time I spoke at the celebration of his retirement from his administrative position at Duke. Several times we met for a meal. Once we left a Derrida lecture at half-time and went to get Greek food. And since the pandemic, I've been dropping by his home in Connecticut as I drive back and forth across the country with my wife, Lisa, to see him and his wife, Susan. These are treasured visits, a reversal of the pandemic pattern of going virtual; after years of correspondence, finally some time together in person.

Just recently, meaning this morning in my garden, I was listening to Fred talk as I weeded—this on my iPhone, because I have access to the recordings of his classes at Duke. I've listened to all of them, they are great; I only wish they had been recording him all along, but whatever, there are about ten of his classes recorded now. And in this particular hour, he was talking for a while about family and friendship, about the uncle as a bit of both friend and family, about the absence of models for friendship, how friendship is some kind of Deleuzian no-thing (Fred likes Deleuze) and I was thinking, Fred is my friend now, a treasured friend, but in a unique way, having been my teacher also, for fifty-three years now. That's a long time.

This new "podcast" manifestation of Fred in my life, as a voice in my ear, is wonderful. Fred gives his lectures with close attention to form as well as content, playing with what a lecture is, because it's not writing, and it's not conversation. It's a genre or an art form in itself, pedagogy as theater, as improv, but not free-form, it's structured. He likes it as a form and gives it his full attention, just like I saw in that class in 1972, and it is surely one of the best things about modern technology that I can hear all these lectures in different places and times.

I am thinking now that every long-term student of Jameson's must have a story much like mine. Or—difference and identity being always a dualism, a same difference—I feel there are a lot of us. Mine is not a unique story, or even unusual, except for the fact that I write science fiction. I am Fred's science fiction writer, which is fun to feel, but genre differences aren't that

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important compared to what's similar among us. Many of Fred's students are wonderful writers and powerful thinkers in their own right, as the rest of this volume of celebratory essays will show. I have indulged here in a personal reminiscence, which is not by any means Fred's favorite mode, indeed far from it; but from each according to their capabilities. And I am no critic. Even my novels come from somewhere else. Kim writes the novels.

This too is probably not an unusual experience. Indeed in this same lecture this morning in my garden, I was enjoying Fred's explication of Žižek's taxonomy of stupidity, divided into the idiot, the moron, and the imbecile. I decided I was either in the imbecile class, or else, given the Greimas rectangle's mysterious fourth category, I felt there could be a fourth term that could be called the fool. I think that's a tarot card, right? The Fool? Who is in some tarot way both lucky and smart? I will claim it, right to the cap and bells. I ran into Fred when I was young; that was lucky. I stuck to him like a burr; that was smart. He makes life bigger, and more coherent. That's an unusual combination; a rare gift; a great teacher; a good friend.

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Introduction | Writing from Jameson

NICHOLAS BROWN, MARIA ELISA CEVASCO,
FABIO AKCELRUD DURÃO, AND ROBERT T. TALLY JR.

Overtaken by events, this book has been handed two tasks it was not meant to accomplish. In April 2024, we organized a four-day online symposium devoted to exploring the virtualities of Fredric Jameson's work. Fred was a respondent throughout the symposium. On September 22—as our participants were turning their contributions into the chapters of this book—Jameson died, at ninety years old. In November of that same year, the United States held an election that portended something like a “special period” not only for the United States, but for those parts of the globe affected by it—which is to say, for much of the world. The times call both for a eulogy and for an analysis of the new dispensation. This book is neither.

But if the dialectic teaches us anything, it is that continuity and discontinuity are not alternatives; they are aspects of any historical process. A world without Fredric Jameson is epochally different than a world with him—but a no less capitalist world, and therefore a world no less in need of Marxism (“the science of capitalism”) and of dialectical thinking, which it was Jameson's singular historical mission to continue into undialectical times.¹ Meanwhile, our special period is characterized by austerity, the privatization of public goods, the brutal discipline of labor and of laboring populations, the enclosure or neglect of the commons, illegal attacks on workers' rights, the cynical manipulation of immigrant flows, the mobilization of identitarian divisions in pursuit of the destruction of popular solidarity, and a renewed if desperate hope that the replacement of living labor with machinery will inaugurate a new cycle of accumulation. All of these projects have a history. Their origins can be traced to attempts to manage the social effects of the economic downturn that began in the last quarter of the twentieth century, and they have not been pursued exclusively by the parties officially of the Right. No doubt public viciousness

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and stupidity have quickly reached unexpected new heights, but finding recent precedents is shooting fish in a barrel.

For those of us whose work it is to write and teach in or about the United States, the breathtaking contempt for thinking and for the institutions that sustain it carries, like a long-prohibited industrial byproduct, a whiff of novelty. But as Gerry Canavan's and Phillip E. Wegner's contributions to this volume remind us, neither is this something new. The retreat from funding public education and the galloping commodification of educational goods in general that follows as its consequence—not to mention the resentment that attaches naturally to a luxury good that was formerly accessible, especially if that luxury good is marketed as a necessity—are decades-long processes. Here too credit for the devastation cannot be laid exclusively at the feet of the self-described Right. But our response should not then be to indulge in the reflexive anti-intellectualism of the intellectual Left. Rather it is a moment for the intellectual Left to assert its centrality, its civic necessity, since nothing that has happened was not foreseen. As Jameson put it many years ago, when social democracy of a certain order still seemed to be on the table: "We must support social democracy because its inevitable failure constitutes the basic lesson, the fundamental pedagogy, of a genuine Left."²

Indeed—turning over the coin from base to superstructure—our "postcritical" moment predates and prefigures the postliberal one. Ours is not the first antidialectical era. In the conservative aftermath of the revolutions of 1848, Marx tells us, the "tiresome, arrogant, and second-rate camp-followers who [then held] sway" in intellectual circles treated the dialectic and Hegel as a "dead dog."³ Then as now, it is not only the reactionaries who are conservative. The breathtakingly naive positivism that predominates in our own moment—one in which something called "surface reading" (as if there were any other kind!) can be taken seriously as a critique of the Jamesonian "political unconscious" (which is, like all interpretation, nothing more or less than an attempt to account for the surface)—understands itself as the counterweight to a hermeneutics of suspicion that, when it is not a fantasy-substitute for dialectical interpretation, is its decadent form. The last antidialectical tendency worthy of serious engagement, poststructuralism similarly emerged from a failed revolution, whose failure was masked in this case by a successful putsch within it, namely the rise of the New Left. The historical irony that reactionary identitarianism views critical poststructuralism and postcritical "left" identitarianism as the same thing—and that thing is, astonishingly, "cultural Marxism"—is only

an amplification of another historical irony, which is that postcritique can't tell the difference between poststructuralism and Marxism.

Despite the relative popularity of such dogmatic naivety, certain Jamesonian concepts refuse to be banished. Among these we would count “cognitive mapping,” “the political unconscious,” and the “spatial dialectic.” The first is the redoubt of a commitment to Lukácsian realism when realism itself has apparently been relegated to the lumber room of degraded generic raw material. The second continues that commitment into realms where literary appearances do not readily yield up their historical content, requiring a kind of nonsupplemental supplement—something like Adorno's distinction between “appearance” and “apparition,” which on some understandings of the literary text will appear paradoxical.⁴

As for the last of these (to which Andrew Cole dedicates his essay in this volume), Jameson can be thought of here as joining forces with another strand of Marxism, developed in São Paulo in the 1960s and represented in literary theory most strongly by Antonio Candido and Roberto Schwarz. Ericka Beckman will pursue the implications of that convergence in these pages. It should also be understood that Hegel's dialectic was already spatial. One shape of Spirit may be emphatically “downhill” from another—one shape will tend to resolve to the other, as to a tonic chord or a lower energy level—while others may be merely adjacent conceptually. Other shapes may be temporally discontinuous but conceptually continuous; occasionally their presentation order and conceptual, “downhill” movement is even reversed from the historical order. In the *Lectures on Fine Art* Hegel frequently admits that we must “cast about” geographically for a shape of Spirit that is, in terms of its presentation, temporally “next.”⁵ And as Aisha Karim conversely reminds us in her essay, even apparently spatial, geographical terms like *Third World* reveal not only historical but also conceptual content.

If these and other Jamesonian bywords are as vital as ever, it would be less productive to attempt to synthesize them into something like a Jamesonian method. Leaving aside the question of whether cultural analysis is even amenable to a method *stricto sensu*, it seems clear that to try to formulate Jameson's approach as a kind of recipe or procedure would tend in the direction of reification and commodification. (On the other hand, several versions of what Jamesonian methods, plural, might look like are to be found in these pages: See Xudong Zhang, Eleanor Kaufman, Ericka Beckman, and Eric Cazdyn). Nor is this the place to catalog the elements of a Jamesonian thematics: allegory (tripartite, fourfold, and national),

ideology and utopia, postmodernism and late capitalism—all of which have received ample commentary, some by the contributors to this volume, and which see substantial representation in these pages (see Aisha Karim and Ericka Beckman, Clint Burnham and Gerry Canavan, and Ian Buchanan).

It might be more productive to think in terms of a Jamesonian stance toward or bearing on the object. This stance can claim no transcendent justification that would satisfy its critics; it must instead find its confirmation and ground in the object itself. In its relation to the object there is, however, nothing merely subjective or individual, since the insights it yields enter at once into the oft-cited “Homeric battlefield” of conflicting interpretations.⁶ It is in their attunement to Jameson’s limber axiomatics, rather than subscribing to a rigid or prescriptive method or simply developing Jamesonian themes, that the authors in this volume all write “from Jameson.”

If we are right that there is a Jamesonian axiomatics, “Always historicize!” is surely its first axiom. And yet hardly had those words been written when bourgeois criticism discovered a way to historicize ahistorically, referring historical homologues to the operation of a synchronic structure. In its most attractive form this structure was referred to an anthropological constant, namely power. Its problem does not really lie, however, in the bugbear of anthropological constants. Class struggle is not quite one of those, since whatever “all hitherto existing society” might have contained, Marxism’s wager is on a “henceforth” without it.⁷ But it is hard to do away with anthropological constants altogether. As Jameson suggests in his next breath, we are at every moment both subjects in a world of meanings, and objects in a world of forces.⁸ It is difficult to conceive a recognizably human society where this would not be the case, and it is in this sense that “the human adventure is one,” and can be conceived as a “collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom,” or meaning, “from a realm of Necessity,” or force.⁹ Without some constant referent for the word “human,” Marx’s maxim “nothing human is alien to me” would be meaningless.¹⁰

Jameson’s slogan is however presented as a paradox, “always” seeming to contradict “historicize.” Jameson does not issue the exhortation in his own voice. It is rather the “imperative of all dialectical thought,” an imperative that Jameson is following rather than assigning. So we are dealing not with history in the abstract—any number of critical practices can be understood as “historicizing” in one sense or another—but in the concrete sense of being bound up with the dialectic of freedom and necessity. This is not the place to rehearse the derivation of the Hegelian dialectic—outlined with unusual concision in the brief introduction to

Phenomenology of Spirit—but it is worth reminding ourselves that Hegel’s is the first philosophy for which time appears as a solution rather than as a problem.¹¹ The difficulty faced by synchronic accounts and bourgeois historicisms alike—how to get from one historical period or synchronic structure to another—does not emerge, because every structure, from the most elementary cognition to entire social formations, is a structure in contradiction. (In fact, “structure in contradiction” is a decent practical definition of the category of totality, to which we shall return.) A structure in contradiction is a problem awaiting a solution, and the appearance of a solution—which will produce its own problems—is the appearance of history. Jameson’s imperative emerges not out of nowhere, nor from a subjective whim, but from the dialectic itself, which alone can account for appearances—which alone can account, in its materialist form, for the movement of history, driven by the dialectic of class struggle.

Class analysis and the struggle over modes of production are then the practical definition and theoretical core of Jameson’s materialism. Before we get there, we would suggest that Jameson’s materialism exists on at least three levels. The materialist commitment of the Hegelian dialectic is the claim that “the essence must appear.”¹² There is no beyond or beneath that appearances would express or obey; the logic that accounts for surfaces is immanent to the surface itself. The logic of linguistic abstraction is entirely present in the utterance of the word *here* (Hegel). The logic of the commodity form is entirely present in the act of capitalist exchange (Marx). The logic of reification is entirely present in the legal code (Lukács). The logic of petty-bourgeois class consciousness is entirely present in the pages of Wyndham Lewis’s *The Childermass* (Jameson). This is the fundamental claim of immanent critique. It is not to suggest that these logics are available from immediate experience, any more than classical mechanics is immediately graspable from the parabola of a thrown ball. It is, rather, to insist that interpretation is built into the world itself; better put, that without interpretation, there is no world (nor any text) in the first place.

Jameson pointed out repeatedly that the Hegelian dialectic is already materialist in another way. As Lukács was the first to emphasize, it is a philosophy of practice, where what counts is always the register of what endures—*das Bleibende*—in the form of institutions, the humanized environment, or works of art. Hegel himself delighted in reminding his readers that “materialism” is already an idea, already an attitude toward the world, and therefore a confirmation of idealism—so that “idealism” and “materialism” do not, in their abstract forms, designate alternatives. Despite the

characteristically paradoxical form of the claim, it is confirmed every time we are confronted with a “new materialism.” Whether this be of the body, of language, of affect, of actor-networks, or of the latest retreat of fin-de-siècle empirio-criticism, they all soon enough reveal themselves to rest on ideas—and from there on down, turtles. (New Materialism shows its kinship with New Historicism and New Formalism by being neither new nor materialist.) The claim of the dialectic, on the other hand, is to rest on neither concepts nor first principles but on contradictions to be discovered in what endures. No doubt this too is a stance toward the world, one among infinite possible stances—but one whose criterion of validity is grounded in normative accounts of appearances that are available to anyone, rather than in “our own bright ideas.”¹³

This is not to say that Marx’s materialist rectification of a dialectic that, in the time of Hegel’s followers, had been turned on its head, is without content. Something like a mode of production crops up from time to time in Hegel—recall for example that the “fate” of Greek society is determined on Hegel’s account in large part by the limitations imposed by the material organization of the Greek city-state.¹⁴ As is well known, class struggle is powerfully unfolded in the lord and bondsman dialectic. But neither of these achieve a systematic place in Hegel’s account of historical change. Symptomatically, Hegel is entirely innocent of the dynamic of capitalism. In *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel notes a direct causal link between the “luxury and extravagance of the business classes” and the “dependence and poverty of those bound to . . . labor.”¹⁵ But he could neither account for it nor propose a solution. Like today’s free traders (who lack the excuse of his historical innocence), Hegel throws up his hands in perplexity and pins his hopes on foreign markets.

Jameson, on the other hand, teaches us that *Capital I* is “a book about unemployment”; its “conceptual climax” is the elaboration of the logic of the increasing organic composition of capital as a way to account for the appearance of the unemployed—the same “rabble” (*Pöbel*) that Hegel identifies without being able to account for. The result is, in Jameson’s words, “an overwhelming mass of potentially uninvestable capital on one hand, and an ever-increasing mass of unemployed people on the other.”¹⁶ This fundamental dynamic, the class violence of mechanization and labor-saving in general, has been repeatedly dismissed by the chattering classes, who thought they were safely this side of the intellectual division of labor—right up to the day capital invented a chattering machine.

This is the specific sense in which Jameson’s materialism is vital today: in his commitment to the mode of production—of the production and

reproduction of human life—as the fundamental force field in which the fates of societies are decided. It is this commitment that justifies his scandalous claim that Marxism remains the “untranscendable horizon” of critical discourse.¹⁷ The insistence on the mode of production as base entails an emphasis on the relations of production—that is, on the centrality of class analysis. The demotion of the Marxist category of social class to sociological status, economic inequality, or identity—not to mention the specifically neoliberal variant, in which every worker is a self-employed capitalist—has been a liberal project for as long as there has been a working-class movement to oppose it. But in the kind of “winner loses” twist that Jameson often identified, the success of this project is its failure. The parties nominally of the Left, having abandoned institutions of class power in favor of the management of inequality as a technocratic problem, are stunned to discover that the working class has abandoned them.

Since the 1990s, the favored term for the liberal project in the fields of cultural and social analysis has been *intersectionality*, and it is worth spending a moment to examine what is contained in it. “Intersection” as a stance toward the object is a prohibition on mediation.¹⁸ One might think of “intersection” as the “new totality,” since the whole attraction (or Utopian moment) of the term is that there is nothing that in principle cannot be found at an intersection with other things. Even class can be found at the crossroads, on the condition that it be understood as an abstract identity rather than a concrete structure. (As Alberto Toscano points out in his contribution to this book—and which present history amply confirms—the conversion of a social class into an identity group is always a project of the Right.) Precisely because it can include anything, an “intersection” is a contingent relationship, not a determinate one. No concept mediates an intersection. A determinate relationship involves not an intersection, but a logic. The moment one produces a determinate relationship—the moment one includes, as Kathi Weeks does in these pages, the heteropatriarchal nuclear family as an aspect of the mode of production, or, with Carolyn Lesjak, articulates land-based Indigenous struggles with resistance to capitalist accumulation—one is no longer thinking of an “intersection,” but rather of a structure in contradiction: that is, of a totality.

With the question of totality we come to the vexed question of the relationship between social totality and aesthetic totality, or social form and artistic form. We don’t propose to catalog the available solutions here, nor even to try to establish whether Jameson’s own approach is always consistent or if it rather follows a trajectory of some kind. We would rather

point out, first, that virtually Jameson's entire body of work is concerned not to solve the question once and for all, but to keep the question at the forefront of the discipline of literary criticism and cultural analysis. And second, that beyond the most general conceptual framework, useful solutions tend to confine themselves to the concrete, for reasons it may be worthwhile briefly to rehearse.

Somehow an age that has devised (or at least proclaimed) its own "new" formalism has, by and large, no conception of aesthetic form. *Form* is of course an ordinary word and its definitions can be found in dictionaries. As a concept, however, aesthetic form would have to be distinguished from other kinds of form, or else it would not be worth talking about. One can speak of culture in ways that touch on form without approaching a concept of aesthetic form. One might describe, for example, fourteenth-century northern European culture as "notably pointy," or observe that radio music from the 1980s across genres, styles, and national contexts is dripping with gated reverb. The specificity of aesthetic form, as opposed to mere shape, color, tonality, configuration, ratio, trope, and so forth, is that aesthetic form is nothing without content or meaning; it cannot be understood as distinct from these. Aesthetic form is in the last analysis content itself, understood under a particular aspect. "Each work is the end result of a kind of inner logic or development of its own content," writes Jameson, and for this reason "it evolves its own categories and dictates the specific terms of its own interpretation."¹⁹

It is for this reason that there is not much more that can be said in advance about the form-content relation besides what emerges in the analysis of the work—which is perhaps why the concept remains opaque to contemporary fast theory. It remains to be said, however, that "the adequation of form to content" is precisely what varies from work to work, and is therefore a "precious index" of what in earlier times we would have been comfortable calling a work's quality, success, or realization.²⁰ Jameson reminds us, finally, that what falls under the name *content* is fundamentally historical. Therefore our concrete judgments about artworks, when they have their basis in the work itself, already take us to the social side of the problem, since "form is itself but the working out of content in the realm of the superstructure."²¹

New Historicism, New Materialism, New Formalism: At this point it must occur to us that taken together the old historicism, the old materialism, and the old formalism—and the old totality, if one is willing to

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8 Brown, Cevalasco, Durão, and Tally

accept that intersectionality is the new one—were simply Marxism. From this standpoint contemporary theory begins to look less like a pluralistic sandbox and more like a conservative project—and Marxism, more than ever, its untranscendable horizon.

In his comments to one of the seminars of our symposium, Jameson tackles the central question for committed thinking: What is to be done? As he put it,

We always did have a vague idea of what is to be done: to study the current situation, as Lenin called it, to analyze it, cognitive mapping in other words. But now, mass culture and cosmological objectivity gives us another word for our vocation as intellectuals, it is “the path of totality.” This is what we should be looking for: discovering its temporalities and its spatiality, making predictions if not giving diagnoses, when does it intersect with our daily realities, and whose realities does it intersect, because we know that the path of totality in this Lukácsian sense doesn’t surface all the time, or every day, even though the sun is always there and the moon as well.

The Future of Totality aims at taking two complementary directions. One is the path of continuity, in which authors explore how far one can take the dialectical project that is central to Jameson’s life work. The other is the path of innovation, of putting to use his findings to pursue new directions.

Between essays recalling Jameson as a teacher and mentor (Kim Stanley Robinson and Richard Dienst), *The Future of Totality* is divided into four parts. It is an index of the richness of the contributions and the arbitrary aspect of such divisions that in editing the manuscript we went through several different attempts at organizing them, and that virtually all the chapters (including the bookending essays, which are far more than reminiscences) were at one time or another assigned to different parts.

The first part, “Theory,” gathers contributions under a heading that for Jameson is virtually synonymous with non-reified thinking. After the rise of affect as an object of study, Sianne Ngai reconsiders the question, raised by Jameson in *Marxism and Form* and elsewhere, of a phenomenology of interpretation. Xudong Zhang recursively mines Jameson’s account of Brecht as a method for the dereification of thought. Focusing on a 1967 essay by

Althusser, Eleanor Kaufman brings Jameson's dialectic and Althusser's critique of Hegel closer than one would have credited. Andrew Cole unfolds the Hegelian origins and Marxist potentialities of a spatial dialectic. And Phil Wegner triangulates three related essays by Jameson for what they have to say about the state of intellectual labor in late neoliberalism.

Our second part, "New Forms," pursues the essential Jamesonian project—to discern in cultural forms the shape of the present—into uncharted territories. Returning Jameson's engagement with psychoanalysis to the forefront, Anna Kornbluh demonstrates, through an engagement with a formal outlier in the climate-fiction subgenre, the productiveness of totality thinking for an era of environmental emergency. Ian Buchanan and Clint Burnham, in their respective essays, enter rare cultural territory untrodden by Jameson: Buchanan explores the formal potential of the jukebox musical, while Burnham maps the affordances of TikTok. Eric Cazdyn proposes a new filmic apparatus and practice—the "blindspot machine"—and a theory to accompany it.

The third part, "The Present and the Future," brings together contributions that seek to locate the movement of contemporary history. Kathi Weeks leverages the debate over the future of the nuclear family to illuminate the difficulties in scaling up from the individual to the collective, difficulties that must be overcome in order to open a window onto the future. Turning to Jameson's work on Wyndham Lewis, Alberto Toscano shows how Jameson's analysis of protofascism illuminates the contemporary strategies of the Right. Gerry Canavan imagines a Utopian ending for the "bad new days" of the neoliberal university. From the famous-or-infamous essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," Ericka Beckman derives the program for a revitalized discipline of comparative literature.

Finally, our fourth part, "Extrapolations," gathers contributions that take Jameson's thought as the point of departure for unforeseen new projects. Carolyn Lesjak confronts Jameson's diagnostic criticism with the questions raised by Indigenous resistance movements, a problematic that puts Marxist presuppositions under pressure. In his analysis of the "tax-form," Michael Denning pulls surprising political, social, and historical complexity from a social form that has become naturalized. Aisha Karim develops from the "Third-World Literature" essay an account of the contemporary world novel in which the Third World persists as "a desire without a people." Framing the issues with a discussion of 1930s Brecht-Lukács debate, Henry Schwarz uncovers the aesthetic complexities and political

possibilities of Budhan Theatre, whose mission is to oppose the ongoing genocide of India's stigmatized "De-Notified Tribes."

On the whole, the contributors to *The Future of Totality* engage in what might be called "writing from Jameson," not so much writing about Jameson or his ideas as engaging with Jameson's work, finding in it a starting point for future projects and the basis for new forms of dialectical criticism and theoretical practice.

Our gratitude goes first to Fred, for over well over a cumulative century's friendship, comradeship, and mentorship. His presence in the world has been a support—not only for us but for many of our contributors—for our entire intellectual lives. It is not incidental that without Fred we would likely not know each other, or many of our friends and comrades in this volume. We are also grateful to have encountered the Graduate Program in Literature at Duke University—Fred's institutional creation—at different points in our education. This book could not have come to be without the generosity and responsiveness of our contributors, and of the attendees and participants in the 2024 symposium, *Fredric Jameson at 90: A Celebration of Theory*. Finally, we would like to express our deep gratitude to Ken Wissoker of Duke University Press for his enthusiasm for this project.

The Future of Totality does not take Jameson's work as a completed whole. Rather, it presents a series of interventions made in the imperative mood. The task they enjoy is, as ever, to interpret the world in order to change it.

NOTES

- 1 Jameson, "Five Theses," 1.
- 2 Jameson, "Lenin as a Political Thinker," 299.
- 3 Marx, *Das Kapital*, 27. Our translation.
- 4 See, e.g., Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, 137, where Adorno uses the English *apparition* in contrast to *Erscheinung*.
- 5 Hegel has us "umzublicken," for example, for an art form that can be "inserted into this transition" out of Classical art. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik II*, 120.
- 6 Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 13.

- 7 The reference is of course to the *Manifesto*. Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 482.
- 8 Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 9.
- 9 Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 19.
- 10 See Blumenberg, “Ein unbekanntes Kapitel aus Marx’ Leben,” 108. The epigram, quoted in Latin, is from Terence.
- 11 See Hegel, “Introduction,” *Phenomenology of Spirit*, especially §84.
- 12 “Das Wesen muß erscheinen.” Hegel, *Wissenschaft der Logik II*, 124.
- 13 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 54.
- 14 See Hegel, “Dissolution of Classical Art in Its Own Sphere,” esp. 510.
- 15 Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 153, 149–50, translation modified.
- 16 Jameson, “A New Reading of *Capital*,” 10.
- 17 Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 10.
- 18 Jameson, “*History and Class Consciousness* as an Unfinished Project.” See especially the section titled “The War on Totality,” 210ff.
- 19 Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 333.
- 20 Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 329.
- 21 Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 329.

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