

The Postmodern Return, With a Vengeance, of Subjectivity

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Jameson is postmodern in his retreat from an aesthetics of modernism and in his throttling of what might be Other to make it speak with meaning. The central concern of this essay is to show that the form in which this retreat occurs reveals it as a further regression to dominating, masterful, and reified subjectivity. Jameson is thus postmodern in his regression behind an aesthetics of modernism that at least paid homage to the ideal of the non-subjective. This is not to imply, however, that modernism is the final form of aesthetic production but only that an aesthetic theory that refuses any potential opposition to reigning social relations destroys what has been, at least since Kant, the peculiar character of aesthetic artifacts, experience, and theory.

Jameson is an unwitting theoretical sponsor of a complacency with those aesthetic objects and articulations that are but the echo of subjectivity. He propounds an aesthetic theory that shrinks back from the dialectic in Adorno's conception of modern artworks (which reveals modernist works as simultaneously autonomous and social) and enters into a position from which a frightened subjectivity can once again assert that it is master—because everything turns out to be comprehensible, including aesthetic objects. But despite their social character, aesthetic objects retain an autonomy and exist as ciphers for an alterity that is never subsumed by a logic of comprehension. This is the fundamental insight of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*: subjectivity constitutes itself (and this is pleasurable) via an aesthetic judgment which cannot (yet nonetheless does) subsume a particular under a universal concept. Aesthetic judgment is thus the originary transformation of reason into cunning. The impossibility of articulating the content of the beautiful or the sublime is the subjective recognition of the alterity at the heart of subjectivity itself.

Jameson subsumes the entire category of aesthetic experience under a valorized subjectivity, which thereby serves to efface the very possibility of any opposition to reified subjectivity. Subjectivity can now rest, before its next onslaught against nature and itself, assured that everything artifactual does possess meaning, even those modernist works that refused their birthright to meaning. Jameson facilitates a return of a master subject—a subjectivity that doubles its mastery over self and nature by extending its reifying sway over that which opposes it—through an aesthetics of content. In his diligent pursuit of an aesthetics of meaningfulness that colonizes the space in which some sign of what might stand beyond subjectivity could come to appearance, Jameson functions as the avant-garde of dominating subjectivity. An alternative aesthetics would be one that cuts against the grain of subjectivity—an aesthetics that sought to restore the primacy of the object within subjective production, and not the primacy of a desiring subjectivity, whatever the content of its desire.

I. The Destruction of Form by Ideology

In *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Jameson writes, "The assertion of a political unconscious proposes that we ... explore the multiple paths that lead to the unmasking of cultural artifacts as socially symbolic acts" (PU, 20). History, as both past experience and the presentation of past experience, becomes a cultural artifact and exists within each artifact. The political unconscious is the locale

where history comes into being as narrative. The political unconscious, in other words, is the first and primary cultural artificer; it is the maker of both cultural artifacts and of culture per se. The generation of the appearance of history by the political unconscious and history as transcendent *noumenon* is described in Jameson's discussion of Althusser and Lacan:

history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and ... our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious. (PU, 35)

Since History and the Real cannot be approached, let alone apprehended, except in the narratives produced by the political unconscious, the focus shifts to the symbolic act of narrative. The limitation here is to see narrative as solely symbolic in order to discern the content of both its symbolic function and the symbols themselves. Yet once any artifact is construed as symbolic, i.e., as a carrier of meaning, there is no further impediment to disclosing its meaning.

Narratives are social mediations which, as such, are at least in principle accessible to the constituting subject. The problem of the status of meaning arises not just when the constituting subject is alienated—at which time meaning becomes no longer accessible because it *seems* to be other—but rather in the subjective supposition that some originary meaning within any and all aesthetic objects exhausts the content and form of those objects. This supposition is the "unconscious" recognition of the loss of meaning and a reactionary attempt to posit and entrench meaning. This supposition is thus the reflex of a self-preservation that regresses behind the concept of culture: "culture—as that which goes beyond the system of self-preservation of the species—involves an irrevocably critical impulse toward the status quo and all institutions thereof" (Adorno, "Culture and Administration," 99-100). The "critical impulse" directed against the social and subjective status quo is precisely what falls by the wayside in Jameson's ideal of the transparency of aesthetic production and objects. Adorno remarks on such an ideal that, "The materialistic transparency of culture has not made it more honest, only more vulgar" (*Prisms*, 34).

Jameson tries to extend this tautology within meaning a step further: there should be no impediment to disclosing the meaning, the source of the production of meaning itself. He moves from the content of a particular narrative (meaning) to form (narrative) to content (meaning) of aesthetic form. It is this third and final move that is unwarranted by the nature of form and by the peculiar character of form in modernism. The social meaning of aesthetic form cannot be fully articulated—form itself cannot be exhausted by meaning.

Adorno's premise of aesthetic form as both autonomous and a *fait social* is the specification of the non-subjective and social aspects of those objects which Kant found underlying the possibility of aesthetic judgment. The autonomy of aesthetic form is what separates its products from every other form of social production. This autonomy is the recognition of Kant's insight that aesthetic objects resist and oppose the progress of subjectivity's instrumental rationality via concepts and meaning. Jameson forgets, despite

his apparent recognition of the inarticulable nature of form as "unconscious," that form is necessarily opaque: it is the organization and positing of meaning which nonetheless implicitly opposes it. Although History and the Real may be approached via narrative, they are not genuinely symbolic since they cannot be apprehended in and of themselves. Instead of representing them, symbols are ciphers of their displacement. Although symbols stand in place of History and the Real, they do not stand for them: they point toward or away from them, not, as Jameson suggests, toward a precise referent.

What is specifically regressive for aesthetic theory, in Jameson's program of a political unconscious, is that he proposes to supply the referent for that which Kant and Adorno theorized as exceeding subjectivity. By locating subjectivity as the ultimate referent and source of an affirmative meaning, Jameson seems to grant to subjectivity a lost and longed for legitimacy. That this seeming restoration of the "meaning" of subjectivity (through Jameson's discovery of the "meaning" of its products) is but a further reification and defrauding of subjectivity is captured in a passage from *Negative Dialectics*: "The concept of meaning involves an objectivity beyond all 'making': as a made thing meaning is already fiction. Meaning duplicates the subject, however collective, and defrauds it of that which it appears to grant" (Adorno, 376, translation amended).

Jameson's enterprise should be judged in terms of whether he respects the autonomy of cultural artifacts or, alternatively, imposes a direction on them from above. Adorno writes, "The artifact is a monad, yet it is not; its elements, as such of a conceptual kind, point beyond the specific object in which they gather themselves" ("The Essay as Form," 162). Unfortunately, Jameson has broken off the dialectic of cultural artifacts in the "ideology" of their form. Adorno's statement should not be construed as describing a one-step move in which artifacts point beyond a specific object and then take up a static residence in some second object, i.e., meaning. This interpretation regresses to a time at least before Horkheimer and Adorno's transformation of ideology critique in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and perhaps to a time before Nietzsche revealed the source and inadequacy of the appearance/essence dichotomy.

Where is the Jameson who warned in 1969, "The mind tends inevitably towards illusions of its own autonomy, if only because it is impossible to be self-conscious all the time, if only because thought inevitably tends to forget itself and to sink itself in its object" ("Introduction to T. W. Adorno," 142). Isn't the political unconscious just such an example of thought having forgotten itself in an illusion of autonomy, the usurpation of an autonomy that once belonged precisely to those things that opposed the ubiquity of thought? The political unconscious is not just thought sunk into its object but, more dangerously, subjectivity sunk into itself. It should come as no surprise when, with subjectivity collapsed into itself, one or another impulse of subjectivity is judged genuine, for there is no longer the possibility of some sign which might point away from subjectivity. Jameson continued his warning: "Then there comes into being an illusion of transparency, in which the mind looks like the world, and we stare at concepts as though they were things." Jameson has succumbed to precisely this illusion by transforming cultural artifacts, via the political unconscious, into pure transparency. Subjectivity, however, has a history—it cannot be reduced to an essentialism which posits one or another Utopian desire as genuine, a desire that in turn serves as the *a priori* source of all its artifacts and forms of production.

To place these questions in the context of Adorno's aesthetics would be to ask whether narrative, as the (although artificial) form of expression, nonetheless does justice to silent, absent History and the Real.

Jameson offers an analysis limited to the symbolic structure of aesthetic artifacts, which depends upon a conflation of symbol and ideology that reduces the former to the latter. He reduces symbol to ideology by presuming Levi-Strauss as an anthropological authority to make judgments concerning aesthetic phenomena. This analysis, however, is founded on a category mistake: that aesthetic artifacts may have a symbolic component (or even, following Jameson, be wholly symbolic) does not warrant the inference that any symbolic artifact is therefore aesthetic. Indeed, a minimal requirement for judging something aesthetic may just be that an artifact exist as something more than a symbol, if we take for example Nelson Goodman's argument that anything can be made to symbolize anything else without, I might add, making everything that symbolizes aesthetic. (This is, again, the premise of Kant's *Third Critique*.) But for Jameson it is the symbolic character of any mode of production that qualifies it as both aesthetic and ideological.

Consider Jameson's conclusion following a discussion of Levi-Strauss' interpretation of face painting among the Caduveo Indians as the symbolic resolution of social contradictions:

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. (PU, 79)

A nagging question here is why Jameson chose Caduveo face painting as an example of aesthetic production. One is tempted to suppose that Caduveo face painting was a ripe candidate for aesthetic analysis because it is a kind of painting and, as everyone should know, painting is an aesthetic activity. And house painting? Perhaps house painters are after all agents "with the function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions." What if Caduveo face painting is more like house painting than fine arts painting; that is, what if it is not symbolic as Jameson and Levi-Strauss assume? I want to leave unanswered this formulation of the question concerning the character of cultural production and grant willingly that all cultural production is to some degree symbolic, which is to grant no more to cultural production than that it may have meaning, without however granting that meaning exhausts or is equivalent to aesthetic form.

The referent of symbolic Caduveo face painting, as a socially meaningful action, is no more inaccessible to the Caduveo than is Levi-Strauss' interpretation. Although the referent may not be transparent to the Caduveo, there is in principle nothing that bars them from it. Indeed, as Peter Winch has shown in his book, *The Idea of a Social Science*, in order for Levi-Strauss to see Caduveo face painting as symbolic, that is, meaningful

activity, the Caduveo must, in principle, be capable of seeing their own activity as symbolic.

The analogy here for Jameson would be not just to our symbolic production but also, since they are one and the same for him, to aesthetic form. All aesthetic artifacts, and the form in which they issue, are interpretable and transparent based on the warrant of the interpretability of Caduveo symbolic production as aesthetic production. If we understand the social function of symbolic activity, we have captured aesthetic form. But this collapse of aesthetic form into symbolic production is hardly justified by Jameson's use of the Caduveo example. Jameson claims that "the aesthetic act is itself ideological" and "aesthetic ... form is to be seen ... with the function of inventing imaginary or formal 'solutions' to unresolvable social contradictions." Yet it does not follow that this ideology or function is aesthetic. Can we not readily grant that Caduveo activity is symbolic (and ideological), even that its symbolic character has the function of inventing solutions, without being compelled to add that this activity and this function are aesthetic?

Consider an example a little closer, unfortunately, to home. Within an analysis of the social function of capital, one can readily admit that auto workers in Detroit are engaged in two realms of symbolic production, i.e., the production of commodities and, when not selling their labor power, the use of "leisure time" as the symbolic production of a solution to the unresolvable social contradictions in which they find themselves caught. Yet autoworkers are not evidently engaged in aesthetic production in either of these two forms of symbolic production. If one were inclined to entertain the possibility of either of these forms being aesthetic, that of leisure time would appear the more likely candidate. Leisure time might be construed as having one of the features of the aesthetic: an imaginary solution to contradictory social relations. But leisure time does not stand opposed to the social relations it intends, imaginary or not, to resolve. The contemporary industrialization of leisure time and the ease of its susceptibility to colonization by industry reveal the character of leisure time as being no more nor less than that of the symbolic and ideological production that delivers commodities. Hence leisure time is not only populated by commodities but is itself one.

The genuine criterion for judging the aesthetic potential of leisure time in Detroit or of Caduveo face painting is whether the solution, imaginary or not, stands in opposition to unresolvable social relations. But this is precisely what Jameson's conception of aesthetic form as thoroughly ideological cannot allow. In effect Jameson argues that symbolic production is ideological production and we should call them both aesthetic in order to disallow any possibility of some sort of production that might oppose the production of meaning and ideology. This leads to the heart of Jameson's use of "unconscious," and the profound contradiction within any attempt to locate aesthetic production there. If the unconscious is, as Freud asserted, incapable of any negation, it cannot be argued that solutions—which by definition stand opposed to the status quo—issue from the unconscious. The negativity (read autonomy) of aesthetic form must have another source.

When Jameson writes that "the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right," he presents the political unconscious as the basis of an ideology production that cannot help but taint all of its products, i.e., narratives, with ideology. Or, to put it more strongly, the political unconscious is the

source of ideology. Insofar as all symbolic activity is founded within this unconscious, all meaningful activity is thoroughly ideological, and aesthetic form constitutes the most ideological cultural artifact. At first glance nothing would be lost by granting this point to Jameson, since it might amount to nothing more than the recognition of what Marcuse called the affirmative character of culture, except that Jameson insists that it is form itself which constitutes the ideological character of aesthetic artifacts. It is precisely this characterization of form that marks Jameson's break with Adorno's aesthetics and underpins his refusal to distinguish legitimate art (i.e., successful according to its own terms, living up to its own concept, aiding the non-identical, etc.) from illegitimate art. If Jameson instead argued that the *content* of symbolic artifacts (i.e., meaning) is necessarily ideological, he would be in agreement with Adorno's analysis of the illusory character of meaning. But Jameson's position here leaves unexplained the historical transformations not only of narrative but also within aesthetic form. If aesthetic form is always an ideological expression of a legitimate Utopian impulse—and this impulse is timeless within the boundaries of culture—what account can explain the changes of form within any culture?

The ideological character of aesthetic form is easiest to discern, according to Jameson, in a particularly reified example such as the genre novel. "Genres are essentially literary *institutions*, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact" (PU, 106). In the case of genre then, it is not the political unconscious which gives rise to the genre form, at least not in contemporary society. The genre novel is not subject to an unconscious form-giving mechanism but is instead the object of the most explicit social "contract." How then is this particular aesthetic form to be regarded? Since genre narratives are no longer products of unconscious political machinations, what becomes of the genre form? To press further, since narrative is generated by the unconscious, can genre novels be construed as narratives at all?

The answers to these questions depend on a willingness to make distinctions between various kinds of aesthetic form. Jameson is unwilling to distinguish reified from non-reified aesthetic form. This is why he cannot, in turn, substantively distinguish modernism from mass culture.

One is tempted to speculate that the source of this unwillingness lies in a misplaced populism, a desire to legitimate what once was called folk culture by finding Utopian impulses within its contemporary, transformed products. But this is truly audacious; can Jameson really suppose that the reading public, i.e., the marketplace, determines which genre novels it shall read? Is there a contract, then, between the reading public and publishers?

Jameson claims that "genre is essentially a socio-symbolic message, or in other terms ... form is immanently and intrinsically an ideology in its own right" (PU, 141). Adorno's essay, "Lyric Poetry and Society," is directed at the same object of inquiry as Jameson's book, that is, at an understanding of the sociological content of aesthetic artifacts secured through an investigation of a single reified aesthetic form. Instead of the genre novel, Adorno examines lyric poetry, just as in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* he and Horkheimer examine the epic. In both cases, Adorno's analysis discloses a particular

aesthetic form—not as a static and explicit contract but as an embodiment of cultural contradictions and, more importantly, as containing within it the transition to a new aesthetic form and a new subjectivity. The *Odyssey* is at once a recapitulation of the birth of subjectivity through domination, and a critique of bourgeois subjectivity that presages the transition to the novel form. That the artwork achieves this transcendence of itself and its conditions can be asserted only if its form is distinct from its ideological aspect and from its content. Adorno writes:

It [ideology] manifests itself in the failure of art works, in their own intrinsic falsehood, and can be uncovered by criticism. To say, however, of great works of art, which fix real existence in determinate forms and thus lend its contradictions a purpose-carrying reconciliation—to say of such works that they are ideological not only belies the truth which they contain: it falsifies the idea of ideology as well ... The concept of ideology seeks rather to unmask false thought and at the same time to grasp its historical necessity. The greatness of works of art lies solely in their power to let those things be heard which ideology conceals. Whether intended or not, their success transcends false consciousness. ("Lyric Poetry and Society," 58)

For Jameson, ideology is simply concealment and delusion reified as form. Jameson penetrates behind this concealment and delusion, behind aesthetic form, and posits there a legitimate Utopian impulse as its originating impetus. There are two objections to this penetration. The first is that the inaccessibility of the Real as agent of history, and History as thing-in-itself proscribe any speculation of an originating cause that lies behind historical and aesthetic phenomena. The second and (for aesthetic theory) crucial objection is the destruction of aesthetic form as the place where "those things [could] be heard which ideology conceals." Form, as pure ideology, is transparent; but it is this transparency which conceals the very things that form allows to be heard. It is not the sounds of subjectivity, no matter how Utopian or legitimate its impulses, which are to be heard in form but precisely the opposite: the objective sounds of opposition to the contradictions subjectivity has imposed upon itself and nature. For Jameson ideology is instead just the obfuscation of some contradiction and its imaginary solution, to which we have no other means of access—it is a closed totality of the subject.

The philosophic-historical context of Jameson's account of ideology and form becomes apparent in a dispute with Northrop Frye's conception of the romance genre. Frye understands romance not as the substitution of an ideal for mundane reality, but as the transformation of ordinary reality. Jameson is committed to the conception of any aesthetic form, but especially genre, as wholly artificial. Jameson writes:

Frye is therefore not wrong to evoke the intimate connection between romance as a mode and the 'natural' imagery of the earthly paradise or the waste land, of the bower of bliss or the enchanted wood. What is misleading is the implication that this 'nature' is in any sense itself a

'natural' rather than a very peculiar and specialized social and historical phenomenon. (PU, 112)

In other words, what Jameson cannot conceive is the possibility that aesthetic form is itself the constitution of a second nature, or at least the means for such a constitution. He cannot accede to the implication of Frye's statement that "the quest-romance is the search of the libido or desiring self for a fulfillment that will deliver it from the anxieties of reality but will still contain that reality" (PU, 110). Jameson cannot accept the possibility of a second nature, since it would mean that within aesthetic artifacts, and by extension within aesthetic form, the very reality they reject will be both contained and opposed. If aesthetic form were to contain some aspect of the reality it negates, aesthetic form would no longer be mere artifice or wholly ideological. For Jameson, the unacceptable corollary of Frye's statement is the implication that ordinary life "must already have been conceived, not as some humdrum place of secular contingency and 'normal' existence, but rather as the end product of curse and enchantment, black magic, baleful spells, and ritual desolation" (PU, 110-111). Since Jameson posits normal existence as the given, he cannot help but see the dichotomy of good and evil, inscribed in one fashion or another in romance, as having no basis nor counterpart in experience.

The central fault of Jameson's book lies in his account of experience and the form of subjectivity. The positing of mundane experience as a given precludes Jameson from seeing what Adorno has called the entwinement of myth and enlightenment. The misunderstanding of the form and history of experience leads Jameson to assert that the twin poles of every aesthetic artifact, ideology and Utopia, are in fact simultaneous and profoundly interdependent. This might be put more strongly even while staying wholly within Jameson's conception: ideology and Utopia are inseparable, interchangeable, and indistinguishable components of every artwork. They are, in effect, one and the same. The solution to the problem of form lies in the *a poria* of art prescribed by the very polarity of Utopia and ideology, the Utopian can only be expressed within a form that is necessarily ideological while all ideology contains a genuine Utopian impulse.

The coexistence, within the artwork, of a Utopian impulse and ideology, is the solution Jameson offers to the traditional Marxist formulation of the problem of the identity of the artwork:

How is it possible for a cultural text which fulfills a demonstrably ideological function, as a hegemonic work whose formal categories as well as its content secure the legitimation of this or that form of class domination—how is it possible for such a text to embody a properly Utopian impulse, or to resonate a universal value inconsistent with the narrower limits of class privilege which inform its more immediate ideological vocation? (PU, 288)

The traditional formulation asks, in other words, how it is possible for a text to be both Utopian and ideological. The traditional response solves this dilemma, but inadequately, by depending on the presupposition of liberalism that construes politics (i.e., the Utopian impulse) and ideology as secondary and artificial aspects of authentic and primary

"private" life. The problem with this solution is that it relegates both politics and ideology to artificiality. Jameson reverses this schema by placing the artificial as primary and then asserting that this artificiality is somehow connected to the Real and History.

He does so by first showing the ubiquity of ideology and Utopia: "all ideology in the strongest sense, including the most exclusive forms of ruling-class consciousness just as much as that of oppositional or oppressed classes—is in its very nature Utopian" (PU, 289). He next argues for the authenticity of ideology despite its basis in strategic domination:

even hegemonic or ruling-class culture and ideology are Utopian, not in spite of their instrumental function to secure and perpetuate class privilege and power, but rather precisely because that function is also in and of itself the affirmation of collective solidarity. (PU, 291)

In other words, ideology is authentic because it is the expression of an authentic Utopian affirmation of collective solidarity (even though it does require some use of the imagination to view class identity as the product of an impulse toward the collective, rather than the selective; indeed, the necessity of "imagination" here captures just that function of the political unconscious). Ideology is inauthentic, however, because it finds expression, takes form, only through the political unconscious that transforms it into a symbol. Our contention has been that Jameson mistakenly supposes that aesthetic artifacts can be nothing but symbols.

If all ideology contains a moment of Utopia, then there is nothing distinct about the artwork's Utopian ideology. The conclusion here is that the artwork is just another artifact of ideology or class-consciousness. Although artworks, as Adorno shows, have an ideological component, they cannot be reduced to ideology, even with the proviso that their ideology is Utopian. If artworks are to be distinguished from every other human artifact, what may make them distinct is their unwillingness to be symbolic, to have and be exhausted by meaning.

Jameson's only hesitation in collapsing the distinction between ideology and Utopia, and thus between class identity and collective solidarity (finally the distinction between aesthetic form and every other social artifact), is contained in his warning that the Utopian impulse is to be read "allegorically" and as a "figure" of a potential future, "concrete" and Utopian, collective. But to construe narrative and hence aesthetic form as exhausted by meaning (especially an originary, collective and Utopian one) is to treat all aesthetic artifacts as symptoms rather than critical diagnoses of, and potential interventions in, the status quo. If all cultural production becomes the symptomatic reproduction of the "progress" of civilization—founded on self-preservation and domination—the concept of culture loses its specificity as that which, minimally, holds in check the barbarism immanent to the movement of civilization. It thus is no accident that Jameson affirms the "allegory" of a collective ideology at the heart of all social production and reproduction of the social. His affirmation is recognition of the loss of the critical function of culture in a false social totality. The purpose of the notion of a political unconscious is to place a socially affirming motor at the source of the generation of all social and cultural production. The immanent critique of the project of *The Political*

Unconscious can be made by judging the social products and forms that issue from a collectivity-desiring subjectivity. The falsity of this desire is revealed in the necessity of Jameson's use of the term allegory: the "allegorical" character of all manifestations of subjective (especially genuine and Utopian) desire is the implicit recognition of a disjunction between desire and its products. That social and aesthetic forms are only a "figure" of the genuine collective desire of subjectivity, implies a necessary mis-identity, and hence falsehood, within subjectivity itself. This mis-identity results not from the clash of something external to subjectivity (e.g., capital, exchange relations, a supposed economy of scarcity, etc.) and subjectivity's Utopian impulse, but proceeds rather from the immanent falsehood of a desiring subjectivity as originary source of all production.

The "autonomy" of the aesthetic, as nonetheless a category of social and ideological production, is the nagging reminder of an alterity within any desiring subjectivity—regardless how genuine, collective, and Utopian. Kant's figure of the sublime, and that of natural beauty, is the cipher for what exceeds the grasp of subjectivity. Jameson's aesthetics of a political unconscious locates the subject as the source of that which potentially exceeds it, and thereby collapses all production and potential objectivity into the bad infinity of a self-affirming and regressive subjectivism. This effacement of the critical character of aesthetic objects—and thus the denial of the oppositional function of culture per se—is effected by Jameson through a recapitulation of the same move that Hegel makes in trying to overcome Kant's aesthetic theory. Hegel's dismissal of any notion of natural beauty is the model, within the history of aesthetic theory, for Jameson's dismissal of all aesthetic artifacts as the fallen expressions of an originary collective subjectivity.

Jameson has succeeded in effecting a collapse and a reversal within two key elements of Adorno's aesthetic theory. He has managed to collapse the dialectic of myth and enlightenment and to reverse the position where genuine experience may take place. Myth and enlightenment are entwined, but they cannot be reduced to one another; their successive overcoming of each other in aesthetic artifacts is not a mere circularity—something more (*das Mehr*) is produced. This does not mean however that this more, which aesthetic artifacts point toward and infer, can be expropriated from the aesthetic realm and placed within social relations or history, nor does it mean that the dialectic of myth and enlightenment outside the aesthetic produces progress. Finally, the more that issues from successful artworks does not have its source in subjectivity. The production of the more leads Adorno to write that art has an internal history and thus there may be progress in art even when there is none in social relations or anywhere else. The collapse of the distinction between myth and enlightenment within artworks would presuppose that myth and enlightenment, along with Utopia and ideology, are one and the same, when they are not.

The further problem here is the location of ideology. Although Adorno would agree with Jameson as to an ideological component within all artworks, he would not locate that component within the form of the artwork but rather in the content which proclaims that it contains meaning. To Adorno it is precisely the form of the artwork which allows the possibility of transcending its ideological content.

Because Jameson allows that form itself is ideological, he cannot allow any possibility of transcending the ideology or Utopia that artworks embody. And because he

cannot allow this transcendence he must find something recoverable and authentic within the ideology of the artwork. This he attempts by defining the Utopian impulse as authentic and then equating it with ideology. What is to be recovered is not nature or subjectivity but the authenticity which led to ideology, i.e., domination. For Jameson, nature cannot be recovered except as a prior form of subjective experience. Within this prior form of experience we are to recover the authentic Utopian impulse toward collectivity. The collective impulse, excused without argument from being an expression of domination, is judged authentic and Utopian. Jameson writes in the concluding paragraph to the book that "within the symbolic power of art and culture the will to domination perseveres intact" (PU, 299). This would concur with Adorno's aesthetic theory except that by reducing all aesthetic production to the symbolic it relegates aesthetic appearance to the realm of the symptomatic. For Adorno the dynamic within aesthetic appearance is precisely the movement that attempts—through domination—to exceed the totality of domination, that is, it is a movement against the symptomatic and symbolic. Adorno's interpretation of modernism does not leave domination "intact" but instead explodes it in the shudder of subjectivity, which, we should add, would also be the shudder of the collective impulse.

For Jameson, the will to domination perseveres within the artwork because the symbolic dynamic continues to obscure and deform the authentic collective impulse and make it appear only as ideology. The implication here is that without the symbolic apparatus, i.e., without form, experience would be transparent and thereby render domination impossible. Authentic non-dominating experience is possible only outside the form imposed by the political unconscious as artwork. Jameson has reversed Adorno's contention that aesthetic experience today holds the only possibility for genuine experience. Aesthetic experience is thus not the recapitulation of subjectivity and experience but its deformation. The return to authentic non-dominating experience can be effected, for Jameson, not through or by means of aesthetic experience but only by the refusal of it.

Jameson's reduction of aesthetic experience to ideology is best revealed in his comments on the alleged failure of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Jameson claims that in this book the Utopian hermeneutic is

obscured by an embattled commitment to high culture; yet it has not sufficiently been noticed that it has been displaced to the succeeding chapter of that work ... in which ... anti-Semitism is shown to be profoundly Utopian in character, as a form of cultural envy which is at the same time a repressed recognition of the Utopian impulse. (PU, 288)

The two presuppositions which allow Jameson to reduce art to ideology are: 1) that a Utopian impulse within any cultural artifact, aesthetic or not, is evidence of ideology; 2) that an artifact is ideological because it is false in the same way and about the same things as any other artifact. Both these presuppositions rely on the initial equation of Utopia and ideology which depends, in turn, on a mistaken notion of ideology and the contradiction within Jameson's conception of form—hence the impossibility of locating the source of aesthetic form in an unconscious. Ideology (but especially aesthetic ideology) is not just

falsehood; it contains within itself the possibility of recovering something true. While Jameson allows for something recoverable in his concept of ideology, it is precisely that which is recoverable, the collective impulse, which is false. Paradoxically enough, it is precisely Jameson's insertion of a political unconscious at the source of all ideology that serves to eviscerate just that form of subjectivity that he wishes to preserve. As Adorno writes: "The more abundantly a universal is equipped with the insignia of the collective subject, the more tracelessly do the subjects disappear within it" (*Negative Dialectics*, 338, translation amended). Jameson's implicit recognition of the loss of cultural meaning is not only not compensated for by the re-assertion of a subjective source of meaning, but this very attempt at compensation serves to further ideologize and reify whatever traces of opposition remain within a subjectively constituted culture. The paradox of Kant's aesthetics—of a subjectivity that constitutes itself on the basis of that which it cannot attain—is not resolved by Jameson's assertion of a subjectivity that fills the lack upon which it constitutes itself.

Social life will not be redeemed through a recovery of a form of social life that is still based on domination, even though that domination is made transparent by disclosing its impulse toward collectivity. What needs to be recovered is not a pre-ideological social life but rather a subjectivity whose relationship to nature is non-dominating. Genuine social life depends not on a subject whose motives toward other subjects are transparent, i.e., non-ideological and non-symbolic, but on a subjectivity whose mimetic relationship to nature is not dominated by fear, which is the more likely candidate for the source of ideology. Jameson comes surprisingly close to realizing the centrality of fear in ideology-production when he writes in the "Conclusion" of *The Political Unconscious* that

Colin Tumbull's description of pygmy society suggests that the culture of pre-political society organizes itself around the external threat of the non-human or of nature, in the form of the rain forest, conceived as the over-arching spirit of the world. (PU, 290)

This "pre-political" social organization points not to a *political* unconscious as the origin of the desire for the collective, but instead to an unconscious that constitutes the desire for the social—as a mechanism of self-preservation—in opposition to the *fear* of an "external threat of the non-human or of nature." The political unconscious is the "civilized" heir of this fear. But what if the totality ("the over-arching spirit of the world"), against which fear arises and around which "society organizes itself" is itself only a mechanism for legitimating a social totality whose own continuation depends, in turn, on the legitimacy of the fear that spawned and sustains it?

The Political Unconscious is an attempt to provide a rational and enlightened account of the impulse toward the social—an account which thereby serves to legitimate it. The book is an object lesson in the dialectic of myth and enlightenment; in locating the source of the social within a genuine and Utopian subjective desire (founded in turn on a supposed legitimate fear of nature, that is, the non-human), it "enlightens" the myth of the social by entrenching and extending it. It is not a diagnosis but a symptom of the postmodern condition.

The program of this "unconscious" and symptomatic book becomes a self-conscious diagnosis of postmodernism in the well-known 1984 essay, "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." It is in this essay that Jameson extends the tendency we discerned in *The Political Unconscious* to efface whatever is specific and potentially autonomous in aesthetic artifacts. The subjective totality of meaning only dimly perceived in *The Political Unconscious* becomes explicit and more fully total in the later essay. The essay argues that capital is the source of the totality of opaque reflections. These reflections prescribe a subjectivity that has not yet come about (this is the point of Jameson's discussion of the Bonaventure Hotel). There is then an artifactuality that exceeds what is human. The crucial difference between Jameson's book and essay is that the former disallowed this possibility by locating the source of aesthetic production (form and meaning) within subjectivity. (The "unconscious" is, after all, presumably a human characteristic.) But the essay locates the source of aesthetic production outside human consciousness and unconsciousness; the simulacrum, as that without source, is the best expression of this transformation.

Curiously enough, this transformation to an explicit post-modernism seems to fulfill the sublime desire of modernism to transcend human meaning via aesthetic artifacts. (The judgment of the success of postmodernism is based on the success of this mimicry of modernism.) Given Jameson's argument that all postmodern images are reflections of capital, should we not say that capital has successfully usurped the supposed real source of cultural production: the political unconscious? But perhaps the political unconscious was nothing but capital itself.

Jameson's inclination toward the pre-modern is revealed in *The Political Unconscious* in his positing of the one meaning within and behind all artworks, in the overarching meaning of all aesthetic phenomena. This inclination might be seen as the attempted evisceration of any and all meaning except that Jameson insists on positing a meaning (desire) behind all "meaningful" activity. Meaning is then, in the essay, theorized as that which is exceeded only by that structure which is non-human, i.e., capital. It seems that Jameson should then argue that it is capital which truly expresses the genuine collective and Utopian impulse.

The Political Unconscious argues that the meaning of all cultural production is accessible via the mechanism of the unconscious. Once the form and location of this unconscious is discovered, the meanings of all cultural artifacts—as Utopian aspirations for the collective—disclose themselves. Jameson thus effects a bridging of the distance between artifact and meaning. Once the principle of mediation between cultural artifact and meaning is explicitly formulated, the relationship between artifact and meaning ceases to be a mediated one and becomes immediate. Paradoxically enough, it is just this immediacy that allows Jameson to state the "meaning" of cultural production in general (thus his appeal to Levi-Strauss and Turnbull).

In the essay on postmodernism we find Jameson arguing that it is precisely this lack of "depth" between artifact and meaning that characterizes the postmodern. The Political Unconscious is a symptom of postmodernism insofar as it generates a false totality of meaning in the effacement of any distance ("depth") between artifact and meaning. Although Jameson argues for the necessity of an allegorical reading—which

recognizes the insistence of meaning—his positing of a political unconscious does away with the entire category of specific meanings. The imperialism of Jameson's position here is that he insists on doing away with the very possibility of those cultural artifacts which themselves insist on the specificity and autonomy of their meanings. This latter insistence was perhaps expressed most strongly in modernism, which was nevertheless not an expression that avoided the ambivalence and ambiguity inherent to this insistence. I want to suggest that Jameson's own description of postmodernism reveals it as a successful but unwitting imitation of his notion of a political unconscious. Further, it is in the character of this imitation or reflection that the falsity of the political unconscious is exposed. Finally, does Jameson's diagnosis of postmodernism, as reflection and imitation of Adorno's concepts of the culture industry and totality, succeed in exceeding them?

An earlier version of this essay was published under the title "Jameson and Habermas" in *Telos*, 75 (Spring 1988), pp. 103-123.