"POST"-ING MARXISM:

A TOTALIZING CRITIQUE OF FREDRIC JAMESON

AND ERNESTO LACLAU

by

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ABSTRACT

First, this thesis is a comparison of the critical positions of Fredric Jameson and Ernesto Laclau; specifically, of Jameson's dialectical criticism and Laclau's social logic of hegemony. Second, the evaluation of the relationship between Jameson and Laclau represents an attempt to reframe contemporary debates between the theoretical discourses of Marxism and post-Marxism. The analysis concludes with the argument that it is possible to conceptualize the relationship between these two schools of thought as something other than one of opposition or mutual exclusivity.

To set the stage for the comparison of Jameson and Laclau, a history of the debates between Marxism and poststructuralism (the latter as the intellectual tenor in terms of which most of Laclau's post-Marxist arguments are oriented) is sketched, followed by close, exegetical readings of the critical formulations of Jameson and Laclau, respectively.

Despite several epistemological distinctions between Jameson's Marxism and Laclau's post-Marxism, a common set of theoretical dilemmas and configurations are demonstrated to exist between them, undermining an "either/or" representation of their work.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Darren Phillips,
and to Joan and Hugh Best for
showing me the old cartwheel trick.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONTENTS

"...where... it is asserted... that this or that mode of looking at things is now definitively outmoded, we may confidently expect the putatively extinct specimens to reappear in the lists in the near future."

Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism*

Introduction

This thesis attempts to provide grounds for a re-evaluation of the relationship

between the critical positions associated with Marxist and post-Marxist discourses.[1] More

specifically, it represents a rudimentary attempt to shake up an almost conventionalized

opposition between an intellectual and political Marxist tradition and the theoretical

interventions of what might more precisely be called poststructuralism. One of my

concerns over a reified Marxism-poststructuralism opposition is that the two sides have

since come to represent a whole host of theoretical dichotomies which line up roughly

under the banners 'universalism' *vs.* 'particularism' (i.e., collectivity-individual, global-local,

essentialist-antiessentialist, necessary-contingent, centred-decentred, etc.). I am in

accordance with Seyla Benhabib who denounces this situation as a form of intellectual

division of labour and calls for a more subtle understanding of the relationships between

theoretical positions before they are reduced to sets of no longer compelling dichotomies.[2]

This reification of the terms of the debate has caused instances of stagnation in

social/political/cultural theory, as well as, a superfluous antagonism amongst theorists

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[1]   The template for this sentence can be found in a book by Asha Varadharajan
called, *Exotic Parodies: Subjectivity in Adorno, Said and Spivak*, Minneapolis:
University of Minnesota Press, 1995, p.xi. My project bears rudimentary similarities to
Varadharajan's, except that she is investigating the critical positions occasioned by
postcolonialism through a comparison of Adorno's dialectics and Derridean
deconstruction.
[2]   Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in
Contemporary Ethics*, New York and London: Routledge, 1992, p.26.

'speaking from' different traditions and alliances whose ideas might otherwise be fruitfully brought into contact with each other.

My strategy, therefore, for shaking up said reified opposition consists of a "staged confrontation"[3] between the ideas of one Marxist and one post-Marxist, namely, between Fredric Jameson's dialectical criticism and Ernesto Laclau's theory of hegemony. My reason for choosing to look at one theorist associated with the Marxist[4] and post-Marxist "schools of thought", respectively, seems obvious. I have more specific reasons, however, for choosing to look at Jameson and Laclau. Because I want to argue *both* for maintaining the substantial strengths of the Marxian analytical framework *and* for the importance and usefulness of many poststructuralist critiques *for* Marxism and for the analysis of social formation in general, in my research I have looked for theorists who attempt to find (whether successfully or not, in my estimation) ways of negotiating the tenets of Marxism and poststructuralism rather than authorizing "either/or" formulations. The scarcity of such attempted negotiations reflects the difficulty of the task. It is generally easier to be sceptical of the potential inconsistencies of either universalistic or particularistic formulations than it is to reconceptualize the dichotomy in a formulation which confronts and incorporates those scepticisms. The work of Jameson and Laclau represents two such attempts at reconceptualizing the relationship between the theoretical

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[3]   *Op. cit.*

[4]   The diversity of positions which constitute the history of Marxist thought makes the choice of any one theorist to represent the tradition as a whole problematic. While there may be more "mainstream" Marxists than Fredric Jameson, I have chosen to focus on Jameson's work because it, nonetheless, fits as squarely within the Marxist tradition as any other, and because his forwarding of a totalizing method was the inspiration for the shape of the analysis in this thesis in the first place.

positions of universalism and particularism which are reflected in the Marxism-poststructuralism debate as something other than hostile opposition or mutual exclusivity. Therefore, I have chosen to look at Jameson and Laclau as offering two (what I call in the body of this thesis) "models of undoing" the reified dichotomies which circulate through social/political/cultural theory, while hoping that my own project, here,--i.e., the 'staged confrontation' between Jameson and Laclau--can be offered as yet a third model of the same.

I should specify that this Marxism-poststructuralism debate, to which I have been referring rather vaguely, actually has quite specific historical origins. And, while the sketching of these historical origins is the task of chapter one of this thesis, I will say something briefly about them here. Soon after WWII, Western Leftist social and political theorists became increasingly critical of existing socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. A range of debates ensued over the usefulness of Marxism for socialist or other radical projects. Jameson, for example, observes 'Althusser's attack on Marxist historicism and classical hermeneutics in *Reading Capital* (1968), Foucault's systematic repudiation of historicism in *The Order of Things* (1966) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Deleuze and Guattari's repudiation of interpretation in the *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and the work of the *Tel Quel* group (Derrida, Barthes, Lyotard, Baudrillard)[5] as some of the watershed moments of a heterogeneous, yet decided, intellectual tenor to question the central categories of Marxist thought and, in some instances, to displace completely the authority of the Marxian analytical framework. Some

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[5]   Fredric Jameson, "Marxism and Historicism", *The Ideology of Theory, Volume 2*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p.148.

of the more vigorously pursued targets of this 'Nietzsche-inspired anti-interpretive assault,[6] the protagonists of which have since been uneasily grouped under the flag of "poststructuralism", were the Marxian concepts of totality, universality, historicism, representation, transcendental critique, the centrality of class as an interpretive category, and the concept of the centred, self-transparent and self-adequate, ethico-political subject. Debate over the explanatory power (or lack of it) of Marxism continues 30 years afters its initial theoretical "crisis" in France; debate made even more exasperated as the political Left becomes more and more emaciated on a local and global scale. Arguably, the climactic collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, the rise of the Right in the first and third worlds, and the virtual globalization of Western capitalism have been the culmination of a gradual weakening of Leftist political forces and structures over the past four decades causing theorists on the Right and Left, alike, to question the fate of the political Left as we approach the millennium.

Given the context of the 'crisis of Marxism' which I have just sketched above, it seems urgently important that, without shutting down debate in any way, we maintain an effort to locate what common ground exists between the various analyses, perceived modes of existing, organizing, and proceeding which exist within the Left at this moment. This thesis is offered as one very small step in that direction.

The structure of the present 'staged confrontation' between Jameson and Laclau is quite straight forward. As I have already mentioned, chapter one is an historical analysis of what has come to be known as the poststructuralist critique of the Marxian framework,

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[6]   David Shumway, "Jameson/Hermeneutics/Postmodernism", *Postmodernism Jameson Critique*, Washington DC: Maisonneuve Press, 1989. p.182.

and situates Laclau and Jameson, specifically, in terms of the history of this debate. Laclau's post-Marxism, I will argue, is a legacy of poststructuralist theoretical *and* empirical concerns which formed during this time. Chapters two and three shift the angle of the analytical lens quite dramatically to offer close, detailed, exegetical readings of Jameson, with respect to his dialectical criticism and, Laclau, with respect to his theory of hegemony. In a way, everything up to this point of the thesis (chapters one to three) functions as preparation and introduction to the fourth and final chapter, until which time the comparison of Laclau and Jameson is postponed.

My method of comparison in chapter four is inspired by Jameson's dialectics. Jameson proposes that with a certain hyperactive self-reflexivity--which he often refers to as "thought to the second power"--problems or moments of impasse, depending on how they are offered for consideration, can turn into their own solutions: that is, "with the proper combination of alertness and receptivity, problems may be expected to pose themselves in a way that allows us to make a detour around the reifications of current theoretical discourse".[7]

In the first chapter of his book, *Seeds of Time*, Jameson explicates this method--a version of 'thought to the second power'--in a concise way:

> The first chapter, on the antinomies of contemporary thought and ideology, ignores the discontinuities of separate opinions and positions and searches out crucial points at which even opposing positions seem to share a common conceptual dilemma, which is nowhere brought to light and reflected on in its own terms. The working fiction here is therefore that a host of specific positions and texts (in themselves more or less coherent and self-contained)

[7]   Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991, p.182.

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share an unrepresentable ground that can only be conveyed as a mass of logical paradoxes and unresolvable conceptual paralogisms. These cannot, of course, be "solved" from any higher perspective, and I imagine that there exist many more of the antinomies than those enumerated here.... What it seemed to me useful to do, in an ambitious idea that here remains the merest sketch, is to suggest an outside and an unrepresentable exterior to many of the issues that seem most crucial in contemporary (that is to say, postmodern) debate. The future lies entangled in that unrepresentable outside like so many linked genetic messages. This chapter, then, is an experiment at giving a certain representation to the way in which contradiction works, so that it might be called *dialectical* on one use of that term, even though what it sets out from is a stalled or arrested dialectic.[8]

I will not claim to have represented, here, the degree of subtlety which Jameson commands for his own analysis. Nonetheless, I, too, start out from what I have perceived as a sort of "stalled or arrested dialectic", namely, the "competing" philosophical positions of Marxism and poststructuralism. I, too, want to argue that by purposely putting aside the epistemological distinctions between Laclau and Jameson, a common ground--a 'common set of conceptual dilemmas'-- can be revealed to exist between them, serving to demonstrate that a conceptualized relationship other than one of reified opposition, hostility or mutual exclusivity can be the result of theorizing the meeting of Marxist and poststructuralist thought.

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[8]   Fredric Jameson, *Seeds of Time*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p. xiii.

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Chapter One

The Crisis of Marxism, or, a History of the Poststructuralist Challenge to the Traditional Left

The purpose of this first chapter is to situate, historically, the contemporary opposition between the philosophical positions of Marxism and poststructuralism. Western Europe (predominantly France) during, roughly, the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s is the geographical and temporal context for the initial poststructuralist intervention into Marxian social analysis. Of course, the poststructuralist critiques of Marxism originating at this time and place had their own intellectual and critical antecedents which, in turn, reference a long and indefinite philosophical genealogy which reaches far beyond the scope of this chapter. However, the time frame of the present discussion will extend back to a generation before the poststructuralist turn, not only in order to trace the development of certain critiques which become central to poststructuralism, but because the period between the end of WWII and the late 1960s in France saw a particularly dynamic "war of positions" take place within the perimeters of Marxist theory. The Marxism-poststructuralism confrontation is especially interesting during the period in question because the major theorists and texts who have since become identified with poststructuralism (Barthes, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Lyotard, Kristeva, Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari) have, to at least some extent, intellectual roots in Marxist soil.

In conducting my review, I shall limit discussion only to poststructuralist critiques in relation to the Marxist positions and categories they take directly or indirectly as their objects, and only as is relevant to an understanding of the current and continuing Marxist-poststructuralist divide. I will not attempt to analyze the wide range of theoretical positions and debates—Marxist, poststructuralist or otherwise—introduced at this time. My reason for averting the more difficult task of evaluation, aside from the rather obvious one that a balanced and thorough critique of these debates would take up several volumes, is that the remaining three chapters of this thesis are concerned, precisely, with a close reading of several central Marxist and poststructuralist formulations as they are animated in the work of Fredric Jameson and Ernesto Laclau, respectively.

A final note regarding methods: To speak of a 'crisis of Marxist theory',[1] brought on by the post-Enlightenment, anti-interpretive assaults of a nascent poststructuralist critique, strictly as a history of philosophical interventions is to tell only part of the story. For this philosophical narrative—the crisis of Enlightenment values and universal categories, the displacement of the classical concept of social class, the theorizing of new subjects of history, the privileging of particular, local histories as opposed to grand, totalizing ones—significant in itself, is also a representation of a material situation, of a set

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[1]   The concept of a 'crisis of Marxism' (or a 'so-called crisis of Marxism') has been used at least twice before to describe the same set of philosophical debates which I am investigating, here: by Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, London, 1983, p.29-30; and by Fredric Jameson, *The Ideology of Theory, Volume 2: The Syntax of History*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p.181, 205, 208 [All references to Jameson in this chapter are from this text]. This concept is related to, but not synonymous with, the crisis of Marxism announced by Althusser in 1977 as an expression of the theoretical and political scepticism he experienced near the end of his intellectual career. For a discussion of Althusser's crisis of Marxism, cf. Gregory Elliot, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*, London and New York: Verso, 1987, chapter 6.

of political, economic and cultural circumstances. As Jameson argues, "it would be idealistic to suppose the deficiencies in the abstract idea of social class, and in particular in the Marxian conception of class struggle, can have been responsible for the emergence of what seem to be new nonclass forces" [Jameson, 181]. Similarly, I want to argue, here, that the intellectual shifts which are my object in this chapter cannot be adequately understood outside of their material conditions of possibility. With this formulation in mind, I will attempt in this chapter to frame the discussion of certain intellectual debates with an account of relevant historical circumstances.

Existentialism, Humanism and Soviet Marxism

At the end of World War II, the Communist Party of France (PCF) represented one of the most vital Leftist political forces in Western Europe with a membership of half a million and the support of one quarter of the French electorate (1945). [2] Popular support of the PCF can be understood, in part, in light of the French experience of German occupation. Many PCF members had participated in the Resistance and joined the party after the war as an action taken against Nazism [3] as well as in the spirit of socialist fidelity. The strong allegiance of the PCF to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union meant, for the most part, that the former modelled itself on the latter. The Soviet Union represented the antithesis of the fascist nightmare which had so recently and so violently been the fate

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[2] Gregory Elliott, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory*, p.21. All references to Elliott are from this text.

[3] Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France*, Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975, p.212. All references to Poster are from this text.

of Western and Central Europe. A large number of politicians, the voting public, as well as, intellectuals invested the Soviet Union with "dreams of emancipated humanity" [Poster, 38]. Marxism was a dominant intellectual paradigm in Western Europe at this time, and Stalin had great influence over intellectuals at least until the mid-1950s [Poster, 37-8]. The "official" Marxism of the PCF, for example, took its cue from Stalin and fashioned itself on its Soviet counterpart. The character of Marxist philosophy under Stalin, however, had become closed, dogmatic, formulaic and reductionist [Poster, 39-40]. "Official" Marxism in France (i.e., PCF Marxism) shared many of these characteristics and was forwarded by PCF intellectuals as a scientific and positivistic theory--as a type of research methodology [Poster, 37].

However, from 1945 on, PCF theorists, to their dismay, were not the only ones in France interested in the explanatory capacity of Marxist theory. Intellectuals of various persuasions--humanists, Catholics, moralists, existentialists--were affiliating themselves with Marxism and incorporating Marxist tenets into their work in ways of which the PCF did not approve [Poster, 50-1]. A kind of "mass enthusiasm" [Poster, 50] over Marxism was underway in France from the mid-40s to the mid-50s--an enthusiasm which was by no means homogenous. For example, for many of the non-PCF intellectuals who were attempting to integrate their work with Marxist analysis, Soviet and PCF Marxism was guilty of economic reductionism [Poster, 52] and unable to account for the complex history of capitalism in Western Europe [Poster, 41]. In fact, the "error" of economic reductionism was regarded by some not just as an aberrant Stalinist formulation but as a more inherent problem of the theory, itself. Marx, himself, some argued, had already

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'reduced human value and human expérience to economic value and work experience' [Poster, 64]. Interestingly, this critique is redolent of the post-Marxist critique of Marxism which will surface almost three decades later.[4] Furthermore, the shift in emphasis which comes out of this critique, away from the concept of a determining mode of production towards the concept of human freedom, agency and subjectivity, similarly foreshadows, for example, the emphasis on agency and human responsibility which Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe demonstrate in their post-Marxist formulations.

Most of the rereadings of Marx taking place outside the Party during the 40s and 50s were the projects of humanist philosophers associated with the various influential schools of phenomenology and existentialism who were attempting to combine a Marxist critique of capitalism with a theory of freedom, agency, creativity, choice and responsibility wherein history is emphasized as the product of human action.[5] According to Mark Poster, the somewhat "on again, off again" project of existential Marxism, as an example of one such humanist Marxism, was, nonetheless, persistent in its substantial intellectual and, to a degree, popular purchase up to the end of the 1960s [Poster, vii]. Poster describes the convergence of existentialism and Marxism (orchestrated most famously in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty) as,

> ...a non-Leninist Marxism that... looks at all the relations of daily life, not just relations of production, to make society intelligible; that picks up from

[4]   The critique of economism is not new to this time, of course. For example, the issue was taken up fairly extensively by the "Western Marxists", Georg Lukács, Ernst Bloch, Marcuse and the Frankfurt School, and by Antonio Gramsci as much as two decades earlier.

[5]   Kate Soper, *Humanism and Anti-Humanism*, London, Melbourne, Sydney, Auckland, Johannesburg: Hutchinson and Co. Ltd., 1986, p.12, 16. All references to Soper are from this text.

existentialism the effort to capture human beings in the moment of their
active creation of their world, in their subjectivity; and, finally, that rejects
the attempt to have a closed theory complete within itself.   [Poster, ix]

The existential Marxists were greatly influenced by the work of the "Western Marxists",

especially that of Georg Lukács which was introduced to the French philosophers by

Lucien Goldmann and lauded, particularly, by Merleau-Ponty [Poster, 44]. The concept

of alienation which was central to Lukács' work, but which was suppressed by Soviet

doctrine as a philosophical and anti-scientific residual of Marx's early and less intellectually

mature work and, therefore, ignored by the PCF intellectuals, became central, also, to the

various humanist Marxisms. The concept of alienation became the key to articulating

Marxism with the most pressing concerns of the humanists/existentialists (freedom,

agency, history, etc.) [Poster, 51]. Because this concept was associated with Marx's

earlier work, while his more "scientific" work appeared to be produced later in Marx's life,

Marxist debate in France came to be polarized not only between the communists and the

humanists, but between the "two Marxes"; between the mature, scientific and

revolutionary Marx forwarded by the communists, and the young, philosophical Marx

forwarded by the humanists [Poster, 68-9].

While the dialogue between Marxism and other contemporary philosophies

appeared to be thriving amongst the humanists, Party intellectuals were much more

territorial and tended to suppress such dialogue [Poster, 112]. Sartre, for example, who

spent a great part of his career attempting 'to synthesize philosophy (existential freedom)

and politics (Marxist community)' [Poster, 78], was explicitly rejected by the Party and his

work severely criticized as individualistic, nihilistic, 'and as precluding an association with

socialist politics and radical social theory' [Poster, 72]. Sartre, on the other hand, argued that Marxism and existentialism converge in a significant way: both claim that subjects create their own destiny; both are philosophies of action [Poster, 109]. And while Marxism lacks a theory of revolutionary subjectivity, according to Sartre, existentialism could supplement it in this regard [Poster, 126].

The existentialists were not the only ones at the time offering rereadings of Marx while critiquing the official Marxism of the PCF and Soviet Union. Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort, two leading figures from a small group of Marxists who created the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, were also attempting to establish a Marxist theory and practice separate from the Soviet Union [Poster, 202]. The *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group (Jean-Francios Lyotard would later be a member), hostile to Sartre and the existentialists for their attempts at *rapprochement* with Party communism, targeted what they saw as the oppressiveness of Stalinist bureaucracy [Poster, 202], arguing "that state ownership of the means of production [had] led to the emergence of an exploiting [bureaucratic] class".[6] While the journal began in 1949, the work of Castoriadis and Lefort (the latter a student of Merleau-Ponty) would remain relatively obscure until the mid-1960s when it would be taken up by many of the rebels involved in the events of May '68 who found significant their concept of *autogestion* (worker self-management) and their concept of 'remaining revolutionary by rejecting Marxism' [Soper, 85]. I will discuss May '68 in more detail later on.

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[6]   Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p.131. All references to Descombes are from this text.

While these "earlier" reformulations and critiques of Marxist thought by the existentialists and the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group may seem a long way from the poststructuralist critiques of Marx which began to surface less than a decade later, I have discussed them, here, because they anticipate, in several significant ways, contemporary post-Marxist critiques and, in particular, that of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe which is much more often associated with the "post-humanist" writings of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan. Laclau and Mouffe, themselves, refer to the great influence which the arguments of Claude Lefort have had on their work. And while neither Laclau nor Mouffe, to my knowledge, identify Sartre or other existentialists as predecessors, Sartre's emphasis on "the contingency of experience" [Poster, 132], human agency and creativity, and his goal of formulating "a new kind of radicalism" [Poster, 78] indicates interesting convergences between their theoretical positions. Kate Soper points out that the French humanists (phenomenologists and existentialists) did not envisage a universal human nature or essence but, instead, recognized the "historicity of human culture" [Soper, 17]. Given, for example, Laclau's emphasis on agency, history, and facticity, as well as, his configuration of social change as the outcome of choices made by contingent and historical subjects, Laclau appears to owe a debt as much to French humanism as he does to poststructuralism.

De-Stalinization and the New Subjects of History

The historical events of 1956 translated into momentous reterritorializations of

Marxist thought. In a secret speech to the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist

Party, Stalin's successor Khrushchev, responding to a party wounded by the revelations

concerning the atrocities associated with Stalin's dictatorship, announced the

de-Stalinization of the Soviet Union. De-Stalinization entailed the condemnation of

"dogmatism ('an ideological error') and the violations of socialist legality ('a political

error')" [Descombes, 126]. Back in France, the movement towards de-Stalinization

translated into a more open and less doctrinaire PCF, as well as, a Marxism which was

more open to *rapprochement* with "external" intellectual schools, including the various

forms of humanist thought. And while such an opening up might have led to a renewed

enthusiasm for Western communism, a second event of 1956, namely the Soviet invasion

of Hungary, undermined any such outcome. Instead, many intellectuals and party

members, once faithful to the PCF, abandoned it at this time. Sartre rejected the Party

completely while maintaining an intellectual and political belief in Marxism separate from

any communist party [Poster, 184]. Merleau-Ponty abandoned the Party and Marxism,

both [Poster, 145].

While the popularity of the PCF amongst many intellectuals declined significantly

after 1956, the late 1950s remained a dynamic period for Marxist theory, with much

dialogue and interaction between Leftist philosophical positions [Poster, 209]. For the

first time, Marxism and existentialism did not appear to be in direct confrontation [Poster,

209]. A new journal, *Arguments*, appeared in 1956 which was conceived by Roland Barthes and Edgar Morin and founded by many ex-communists, including Henri Lefebvre, who had left the Party but were unwilling to retreat from radicalism [Poster, 211-12]. The *Arguments* group is significant for the present discussion because, as Poster argues, it represented the "opening up of Marxism toward new intellectual currents and social phenomena" and, as such, provided much of the intellectual ground for the rebels of May '68 and the politics of the New Left in France as well as many of the post-Marxist arguments which followed [Poster, 212-13]. That the *Arguments* group is one of the antecedents of certain post-Marxisms is discernible in Poster's description of the former's ideology as, "self-imposed incompleteness, demanding that thought be kept open so that it could be related to practice. Their theories *preserved the necessary incompleteness* of Marxist thought, refusing to become a closed system" [Poster, 263].

Intellectually, the early 1960s are equally as crucial as 1956 for this discussion; meanwhile, the charting of several historical circumstances of the late 1950s and early 1960s is necessary in order to understand the adventures of Marxism and radical theory at this time--circumstances which reach beyond the borders of France. For example, Mao Tse Tung's denunciation of Soviet de-Stalinization as the betrayal of a scientific and revolutionary political will led to the split of world communism between Russia and China in 1960. For many Western Marxist intellectuals (including, as we shall see, Althusser and the *Tel Quel* group), Mao became an important symbol for a Left-oriented critique of the Soviet Union which did not abandon the concept of revolutionary politics and which did not succumb to revisionism. This was particularly the situation in France where many

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perceived the integration of the PCF and the Gaullist regime to be taking place [Poster, 340]. Maoism became an alternative for left-oriented intellectuals as well as an influence on many of the May '68 rebels.[7]

Many of the reformulations of Marxist thought which were being undertaken in the West at this time were focusing on the emergence of that which they perceived to be "new subjects of history of a nonclass type" [Jameson, 181]; as if the categories of social class and class struggle were exhausted and were now a drag upon newer and more radical social theory. Jameson demonstrates that there are several political and economic circumstances which "overdetermine" this perception. In the US, the combination of Khrushchev's de-Stalinization and McCarthyism was a major factor in the disappearance of the "small but significant" American Communist Party [Jameson, 182]. It can be argued, according to Jameson, that the disappearance of this particular political force was partly responsible for the fragmentation of worker's liberation struggles from those of women and ethnic minorities. For example, Jameson argues that the absence of the Communist Party from the American labour movement "consolidated the new antipolitical 'social contract' between American business and the American labor unions, and created a situation in which the privileges of a white male labor force take precedence over the demands of black and woman workers and other minorities" [Jameson, 182]. As the latter are no longer represented within classical working-class institutions, they were, similarly, no longer able to represent themselves within the category of social class and were set adrift "to find new modes of social and political expression" [Jameson, 182].

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[7]   Patrick Ffrench, *The Time of Theory: A History of Tel Quel (1960-1983)*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.10. All references to Ffrench are from this text.

The surfacing of new historical subjects identified in other than class terms can also

be situated in relation to the most often violent processes of decolonization taking place

between the first and third worlds around this time. The identification of new

philosophical subjects represented a period in history (late 1950s through the 1960s)

when, in Jameson's words, "natives" became human beings [Jameson, 181]. It is not a

coincidence, for example, that philosophical questioning of the "universality" of the white,

male, European perspective as, in fact, particular, or the recognition of once supposed

"natural" privileges as ideological privileges, corresponded with the extinction of

European colonial empires [Descombes, 137]. Belden Fields makes the interesting point

that mass student movements took place in the US and France in part because these two

countries were involved in colonial wars (with Algeria and Vietnam) "aimed precisely at

stemming the new revolutionary forces in the third world [cited in Jameson, 180]. This

process, as Jameson argues, was not only taking place in the third world in relation to the

first, but also amongst the "internally colonized" of the first world with the civil rights

movement [Jameson, 180-1]. However, even a situation so seemingly wholly

"progressive" as the decolonization of the third world was not without its "regressive"

elements. For the imperial presence of the first world in the third was almost immediately

replaced by the presence of multinational corporations and the neo-imperialist activities

associated with the green revolution, the IMF and the World Bank; so that the passage

from colonialism to decolonization led, in fact, to the neo-colonization of the third world

through the global expansion of advanced capital.

Meanwhile, in Western Europe, the expansion and transformations of capitalism taking place at this time were also involved in the rethinking of the category of social class and the emergence of new historical subjects. France of 1960 was a very different place than France of 1945: the former was witnessing the consolidation of consumer culture, the ever more commanding presence of the mass media, technological innovation, a more materially comfortable working class and a seemingly more affluent society generally [Poster, 210]. Clearly, the working class of a decade before seemed to have empirically changed in a way for which the PCF's steadfast theory of "increasing pauperization" could not account [Poster, 362]. New social and political theories reflected these social changes, offering representations of a new working class and displacing the classical conception of the unified proletariat. Furthermore, critics began to offer representations of new social struggles altogether, the arenas for which were traditionally considered non-political spaces, such as, the sphere of culture or the more banal spaces of everyday life. The work of Guy Debord and the situationists comes immediately to mind: in *The Society of the Spectacle*,[8] Debord (a student of Lefebvre) argued that by the "creation of situations" through the spontaneous interruption of routine social patterns and activities one can defamiliarize and potentially subvert that which Debord perceived as the alienation of modern society [Poster, 257; Ffrench, 105]. That many of these 'daily subversions' were taking place in the realm of cultural production and in other areas of life conventionally considered to be non-political spheres, explains, in part, the 'seductive quality' which Mao's cultural revolution had for intellectuals after 1966 [Ffrench, 10].

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[8]   Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Detroit: Black and Red, 1977.

Structuralism, Anti-humanism and Psychoanalysis

However, the intellectual current which entailed the celebration of new subjects and new subjectivities, the theory of spontaneity and human creativity, and the foregrounding of subjective experience, came up against a formidable opponent in the early 1960s, one of whose projects included the exposing of all these above moments as ideology, along with the various forms of humanist thought which inspired them. *Structuralism*, as humanism's *other* came to be known, developed in various shapes and forms depending upon the theorist and the discipline in question (Saussure in linguistics, Lévi-Strauss in anthropology, Lacan in psychoanalysis, Barthes in literary theory and semiotics, Althusser and Poulantzas in Marxist theory). Still, there were common philosophical formulations amongst these forms which allow one to speak of structuralism as a relatively coherent intellectual "movement" (and despite, for example, Althusser's denial, at the time, of his membership in this movement) [Poster, 347]. Structuralism sought a new scientific and objectivist status for social theory which was in direct opposition to the subjectivist character of the various humanisms and humanist Marxisms of the day, securing for the former the label of "anti-humanism".[9]

Structuralism is characterized by its foundational appropriation of the insights of the 19th Century linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure, inspiring what contemporary theorists have called a "revolution" in linguistic theory, argued that individual phonemes and, in combination, words exist in specific relationships to each other forming the

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[9] Structuralism and poststructuralism, together, generally make up what is referred to as French anti-humanist thought.

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structure which we call language. It is *the structure of language*--the totality of the relationships between individual phonemes/words and the rules which govern these relationships--which allows subjects to make linguistic meaning. Meaning is an effect of the structure of language, not the creation of individual subjects. In other words, subjects do not express themselves through language; language expresses itself through subjects, displacing the intentional individual from the centre of the linguistic process [Poster, 309].

Lévi-Strauss was one of the first theorists to transport Saussure's formulation to the terrain of social/anthropological theory. Society, too, Lévi-Strauss (and Althusser) argued, is a "structure" like language is a structure. Similarly, individuals do not make meaning through the social structure; the social structure (or social totality) generates meaning through individual subjects. Meaning is an *effect* of the social structure/totality, not the effect of individual creativity. In light of this configuration, Lévi-Strauss proceeded to centre his research around the concept of the "unintelligibility of intentionality", arguing that behind meaning is the non-meaning of structure [Poster, 310]. In the context of structuralist thought "society [is]... decentred from the whirl of human subjectivity and shifts to the objectivity of structure" [Poster, 311], while 'the intentional, conscious subject is removed from the centre of social activity' [Poster, 318].

The tension which would, and did, exist between structuralism and humanist formulations becomes clear from this short description. This tension was not incidental; Sartre and the existentialists, as well as, humanist Marxism were direct targets of structuralist attacks. Lévi-Strauss' "slogan of the decade" that the "goal of the human sciences [is] 'not to constitute but to dissolve man'" was directed specifically at Sartre and

his formulation of the Marxist dialectic in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason,*[10] wherein Sartre theorized "history as a specific domain of human existence to be comprehended only by the means of dialectical reason" [Soper, 98]. Put simply, the debate between Lévi-Strauss and Sartre, like the debate between structuralists and humanists, in general, centred around the question of how to understand history. Was history something "produced" by creative and intentional subjects (Sartre), or was it a 'process *without* a subject' [Soper, 98]--as the structure which functions behind the backs of subjects to determine their actions and the meaning of those actions (Lévi-Strauss)? Poster argues that, to a degree, the success in the 1960s of the structuralist interpretation of history and social formation can be understood 'in terms of the failure of existential Marxism to adequately account for the concept of structure' [Poster, 312].

Just as the interpretation of history, human agency, and social formation is central to Marxist thought, the humanist/anti-humanist dispute of the 1960s included debate over what to consider the "correct" reading of Marx [Soper, 12]. At this time, as today, structuralist Marxism was most often associated with the name of Louis Althusser, a member of the PCF whose philosophical position was greatly influenced by both the project of de-Stalinization and the Sino-Soviet split of 1960. Althusser, who was himself critical of Stalinism, viewed Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, however, as a critique inspired by right-wing sympathies and an attempt to move the Communist Party to the right; a perspective reinforced by the Chinese rejection of the same process.[11] Humanist

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[10]   Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, trans. A. Sheridan-Smith, ed. Jonathan Ree, London, 1976.
[11]   Margaret A. Majumdar, *Althusser and the End of Leninism?*, London and East Haven, Connecticut: Pluto Press, 1995, p.9. All references to Majumdar are from this

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Marxism, therefore, which acquired intellectual and political purchase in the spaces opened up by de-Stalinization, also represented, for Althusser, a move to the political right, while his own work represented, according to Althusser, the only true left-wing critique of Stalinism [Majumdar, 9]. Althusser's project was to rescue Marxism from its appropriation by reactionary, "alien" discourses [Elliott, 67], and return it to its most scientific and objectivist apogee. For Althusser, this project meant purging Marxist thought of all Hegelian and humanist attributes. This, in turn, meant purging Marxism of the Hegelian dialectic—for structuralists, that supreme example of the totalitarian "logic of identity" [Descombes, 75]: "that form of thought which cannot represent the *other* to itself without reducing it to the *same*, and thereby subordinating difference to identity" [Descombes, 75]. The enemies of Marxism, therefore, according to Althusser, are twofold: "Stalinism (economism), on the one hand, and... social democratic reformism (Hegelian-humanism), on the other" [Soper, 88].

As far as humanism was concerned, much of Althusser's dissatisfaction with this school of thought can be explained through an examination of his theory of ideology. Reflecting the intellectual turn towards linguistics and theories of representation of the 1960s, Althusser strictly observed a distinction between a concept or an object of thought and "real" objects. In Poster's words, for Althusser, "[i]deas [do] not co-mingle with the objects they [seek] to represent" [Poster, 342]. Nonetheless, 'real objects', including "complex" objects such as society or the social totality/structure, history, relations of production and other material conditions, cannot be known *directly*, but only through

text.

concepts or "knowledge-objects": "concepts actively created by thinkers [are] the preconditions for the knowledge of any experience" [Poster, 342-3]. According to Althusser, the fact that the concrete social world can only be observed and analyzed through its abstraction and objectification is the fundamental insight of scientific Marxism, allowing the theorist to proceed in a detached and disinterested relationship to her/his object of study [Poster, 343]. The later, scientific Marx, Althusser argued, understood that the function of the value form, for example, cannot be discerned from a phenomenology of the worker or industrialist but only by discovering (through abstraction) the "hidden structure" of value as it exercises its effects outside of the scope of the immediate consciousness of those concerned. Only "via the 'detour' of abstraction" can the concrete relations of production be grasped [Soper, 108]. Empiricism, which conflates object and thought, and humanism, which grants a truth value to subjective human experience, abnegate disinterestedness, according to Althusser, and are, hence, ideological [Poster, 343].

And, yet, there is one sense of the concept of ideology in Althusser's work in which the 'ideological point of view' is, in the last instance, unavoidable. Here, ideology is a term used by Althusser to describe those 'abstract representations of our relationship as individual human beings to our real conditions of existence'. In other words, ideology describes those *necessary* abstractions through which we mediate ourselves and the concrete external (social) world. Furthermore, these abstract mediations take place in the form of subjectivity; that is, an individual's sense of subjectivity is an effect of--constructed through--ideology [Soper, 101]. On the one hand, according to Althusser, we are not to

conflate the concrete human individual with "subjectivity" which is a social construct and ideological. On the other hand, "we cannot but think of ourselves *as subjects*" and are, therefore, always already "in" ideology [Soper, 102; emphasis mine]. If subjectivity is ideological, there can be no "universal essence of man [*sic.*]" (*contra* empiricism), and social knowledge cannot be derived from subjective experience [Soper, 102]. The "error" of positing a 'universal essence of man', Althusser argued, is that committed by the "humanist type structure" [Soper, 102]:

> ...bourgeois philosophy, we learn, despite its various guises, conforms
> throughout to a 'humanist type structure'... Any theory... which invokes
> the category of the subject as if it were epistemologically fundamental (as
> if subjects *could* arrive at knowledge) is itself ideological, since it takes the
> subject to be the source of that which is reflected in its 'knowledge'.
>
> <div align="right">[Soper, 102]</div>

The structuralist project of "decentring" the intentional, unified subject was not only taking place within the context of social and political theory but also, ironically, within a field whose primary terrain is the formation of human subjectivity, namely, psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis was already experiencing a great popularity amongst both Marxist and humanist thinkers at the time who turned to Freud in order to formulate more nuanced theories of ideology and revolutionary subjectivity to supplement Marxist institutional analyses [Poster, 260]. Whether the subject was being constituted or dissolved, placed in, or displaced from, the centre of social/historical processes, theories of subjectivity were exploding; so much so, that Keith Reader argues that the "greatest single change in the French intellectual landscape since the beginning of the 60s is the vastly increased prominence of psychoanalysis".[12] The structuralist movement (and the

poststructuralist movement, as well), however, was specifically associated with the work of psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan who, while Althusser was undertaking a "structuralist" reading of Marx, was undertaking something of a structuralist reading of Freud [Elliott, 64].

According to Lacan, one of Freud's most important contributions was to demonstrate that the individual is *not* centred on an ego or consciousness; "that the human subject is de-centred, constituted by a structure which has no 'centre' either, except in the imaginary misrecognition of the 'ego', i.e. in the ideological formations in which it 'recognizes' itself" [Elliott, 64]. It is striking how similar Lacan's formulation was to that of Althusser: for both theorists, the individual necessarily (mis)recognizes him/herself as subject/ego in ideology. Lacan, like Althusser, targeted the concept of the irreducible subject, arguing that the source of an individual's conscious thought, language, even her/his most intimate desires, is actually located beyond the individual's reach [Soper, 126].

Poststructuralism

The passage from structuralism to poststructuralism was constituted both by the extension of certain structuralist tenets as well as the critique and subsequent rejection of others. In the case of structuralism, it is not difficult to understand how the jettisoning of certain structuralist formulations by their inheritors led to new poststructuralist

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[12]   Keith Reader, *Intellectuals and the Left in France Since 1968*, London: Macmillan Press, 1987, p.61.

formulations. In the case of poststructuralism, why the extension of one system of thought (structuralism) should generate a whole new system of thought, frequently referred to as the former's "post-system", is understood best through Fredric Jameson's explanation of the dialectical shift from quantity to quality, wherein the change in "amount" of something, after a certain degree, also produces a change in "kind". In Jameson's words, "the *same* force, reaching a certain threshold of excess, in its prolongation now produces qualitatively distinct effects and seems to generate a whole new system" [Jameson, 200]. Given the limits which I've set myself for this chapter, it won't be possible to sketch out the "emergence" of poststructuralist thought in great detail. Rather, I will focus only on those elements of poststructuralism which contribute to an explanation of the present perception of irreconcilable opposition between poststructuralism and Marxist thought. These elements may not be too difficult to locate. For example, in Martin Jay's opinion, "the poststructuralists [were] the *main reason* for... 'the stagnation of Marxism, followed by its complete disappearance from the French scene' in the 1970s".[13]

One element of structuralism which the poststructuralists preserved and, in fact, carried to a new level, was the emphasis on language, referred to by this time as the "semiotic revolution" [Jameson, 197]. Describing the latter merely as a 'linguistic turn' may be an understatement. According to Kate Soper, for example, poststructuralism has been characterized by an "*obsession* with language as the key to understanding all aspects

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[13]   Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984, p.512, emphasis mine. All references to Jay are from this text.

of individual and social being" [Soper, 17; emphasis mine]. Saussure's structural concept

of the *sign*, constituted by the now familiar distinction between the signifier (the sound or

printed image) and the signified (the thought concept) precipitated poststructuralist

critiques of representation which emphasized the inability of sign systems to refer to a

"reality" beyond their linguistic borders. According to poststructuralists, philosophical

systems, which are, in fact, sign systems, have been mistakenly perceived as passages

leading to a truth or meaning beyond themselves [Jameson, 194]. With respect to this

critique, the relationship between a signifier and a signified (and between a sign and its

referent) is arbitrary and, therefore, historical. Accordingly, whichever sign is matched

with whichever referent is strictly a matter of convention and not a matter of some *a priori*

design. Therefore, for poststructuralists, it is considered idealistic and ideological to

perceive the relationship between a philosophical discourse like Marxism or

phenomenology (a sign system) and the "truths" to which this discourse makes reference

(the referent) as ahistorical or as somehow able to transcend the throws of convention.

Marxism's "guilt" of a commitment to a transcendent concept of the truth of

human experience, according to some poststructuralists, is a residual of its overall

orientation to Enlightenment ideals (Universalism, Truth, Reason, Progress, Will, etc.).

One sense in which poststructuralism departed from structuralism is in the central place

which Nietzsche's thought takes in the former; so much so, that Robert Resch argues that

by the early 1970s, "Nietzsche [had] replaced Marx as the central reference for French

intellectuals".[14] The poststructuralists' critique of the metaphysical tradition and rejection

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[14] Robert Resch, *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1992, p.232. All references to Resch are

of Enlightenment ideals reflect the importance of Nietzsche for poststructuralist thought [Jay, 510]. William Dowling points out that the 'neo-Nietzschean demand for immanence was particularly distressing for Marxists who claimed to be *the* practitioners of immanent critique and non-transcendent criticism'.[15]

The work of Jacques Derrida, who is most often situated (likely to his chagrin) as an initiator of the poststructuralist current, is an example of the critique of the transcendent pretences of Western metaphysics, Marxism included. According to Derrida, Western metaphysics has privileged as absolute, concepts such as Reason or Truth. This creates a dilemma, namely, that reason can only be proved absolute by appealing to itself for a critique of itself, that is, one can only critique reason *through* reason [Descombes, 138]. If reason is to be critiqued, it must be transcended and cannot, therefore, be absolute. If reason is absolute, it cannot be proved as such. Nevertheless, the "recurrent dream" of Western philosophy, rejected by Derrida and others, is "[that] consciousness can be present to itself in the light of pure reason, delivered from the snares of opaque textuality" [Christopher Norris in Reader, 99]. For Derrida, the problem of Marxism's use of concepts such as truth, progress and reason is not the concepts *per se* but that their 'validity should be accepted as transcendental proof of themselves': "To elevate any concept... to the status of unquestioned epistemological or political touchstone is to fall back into the trap of Western metaphysics... and thereby to undercut the materialist basis of Marxist philosophy at the very moment one might appear to be asserting it" [Reader,

from this text.
[15]   William Dowling, *Jameson, Althusser, Marx: An Introduction to the Political Unconscious*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984, p.103.

99]. Derrida's strategy (which he calls, amongst other things, deconstruction) in the face of this dilemma was to play the "double agent" [Descombes, 138]: on the one hand, to expose the duplicity of philosophical language—the immanence/transcendence antinomy which lies at its foundation—and to 'denounce its pretensions to univocity' while, on the other hand, to continue to use philosophical language because one has no choice; to "commit, *knowingly*, the fault" of perceived linguistic transparency and self-adequacy [Descombes, 140; emphasis mime].

The critique of self-adequacy—also known as 'decentring the subject' or, marking Nietzsche's influence, the "death of the subject"—central to poststructuralist thought was, partly, a carry-over from structuralism and, partly (though, they are related), an element of poststructuralism's rejection of Enlightenment ideals, including "the supreme philosophical Subject, the cogito but also the *auteur* of the great philosophical *system*" [Jameson, 187]. Yet, structuralism, too, was denounced by poststructuralists for its claims to scientificity, objectivity and truth; again, evidence of an Enlightenment hangover.[16]

Poststructuralism's critique of the rational, self-adequate Enlightenment Subject was further buttressed by the contemporary flourishing of psychoanalytic theory. In terms of the latter, writers such as Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, advocated what came to be known as a "micropolitics of desire" over against a Marxian macro-revolutionary politics predicated on a refuted notion of unified subjectivity [Kellner, 46]. Denouncing as 'humanist' all interpretations of Marx, including

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[16]   Douglas Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989, p.90. All references to Kellner are from this text. Cf. also Soper, 17, 90.

Althusser's [Soper, 120], Lyotard argued that the critique of power had to incorporate a critique of the *logos* and the repression of desire [Descombes, 171]. In the *Anti-Oedipus* (1972),[17] Deleuze and Guattari responded to the call for "a political analysis of desire" [Descombes, 173; Ffrench, 189], arguing that the collectivist orientations of socialism serve to repress individual desire in a puritanical way while capitalism has, at least, released the individual from the authoritarianism of collective existence [Soper, 130].

The poststructuralist rejection of the self-transparent, intentional subject tended to focus the poststructuralism-Marxism "debate" around a familiar question: Who, if anyone, makes history? Or, in Kate Soper's words, "is it valid for persons to conceive of themselves as conscious political agents whose decisions and actions have decisive effect on the course of history?" [Soper, 146]. For Baudrillard, the answer was decidedly "no": the belief that the masses are the "raw material of revolutionary social change" was an example, according to Baudrillard, of "the unbelievable naivety... of socialist thinking" [Reader, 131, 133]. Baudrillard, whose earlier work maintained a "critical" or "revolutionary" (Marxist) orientation, eventually abandoned "radical political gestures" altogether [Kellner, 54]. For Baudrillard, in the "society of simulations", the social has imploded into the black hole which is 'the masses', whose only power is that of a passive inertia [Reader, 133; Kellner, 84].

The journal, *Tel Quel*, founded in 1960, tended to be a microcosm of the French intellectual scene with respect to the adventures of Marxist and poststructuralist thought during the 60s and 70s [Ffrench, 125]. In Patrick Ffrench's words, "[t]he history of *Tel*

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[17]   Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, New York: Viking, 1977.

Quel's Maoism is the story of the deterritorialization of the topos of Marxism... by the *dérive* of writing" [Ffrench, 186]. Julia Kristeva and Philippe Sollers are the names most often connected to *Tel Quel*, however, Derrida, Baudrillard, Lyotard, Deleuze and Guattari, and Foucault were all associated with the journal at certain points in its history [Ffrench, 189]. Originally philosophically Marxist and (uneasily) in sympathy with the PCF, *Tel Quel*'s movement towards Maoism by the mid-1960s marks the initial reformulation/dissolution of the Marxist framework for the journal, fuelled, in part, by psychoanalysis and the new 'theories of desire' [Ffrench, 125]. Even into the 1970s, the theme most visited by *Tel Quel* contributors was a familiar one, namely, the relationship between system and subject [Ffrench, 201]. *Tel Quel*'s continued movement away from Marxism throughout the 1970s paralleled the growing disillusionment in France with existing Leftist political forces as a result of several historical circumstances: the publication of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* (1974), the Khmer Rouge invasion of Cambodia (1975), revelations concerning Maoism after Mao's death (1976), the continued fallout from the events of May 68, and the rise of the New Philosophers (to be discussed later) [Ffrench, 207].

I have already briefly mentioned the new prominence which the concept of "cultural politics" acquired during the 1960s. Traditionally, Marxists tended to subsume a theory of the cultural sphere and cultural practices within political and economic discussions. However, more and more, culture was seen as necessary for the reproduction and expansion of capital, while the cultural sphere became regarded as a site of radical social struggle [Kellner, 7]. Culture had already been a concern for Western and humanist

Marxists (Bloch, Benjamin, the Frankfurt School theorists, Lefebvre, Barthes, the situationists, Sartre), however, the explosion of consumer society rendered the significance of culture more overt [Kellner, 7]. As part of the new cultural politics, the micropolitics of many of the poststructuralists focused "on the practices of everyday life": lifestyle, discourse, sexuality, family life, consumption, leisure, mass media and communication [Kellner, 46]. Not only was the cultural sphere given a new priority in this context, in the work of some poststructuralist critics (Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst,[18] Deleuze and Guattari), all connections between the cultural sphere and that of the political or the economic were severed completely. At this point, Althusser's concept of the semi-autonomy of the levels of experience dissolves into their *complete* autonomy, and neither the "levels" nor the practices and struggles associated with them (political practices/struggles, economic practices/struggles, cultural practices/struggles, etc.) can be related in any way [Jameson, 192]. As Jameson argues, "[w]ith this ultimate 'meltdown' of the Althusserian apparatus, we are in the (still contemporary) world of microgroups and micropolitics", where the new "molecular" movements of the 60s and 70s—the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the gay rights movement, the various student movements, Third Worldist and anti-colonialist movements—were theorized, amongst other things,[19] as a challenge to "old-fashioned class and party politics of a 'totalizing' kind" [Jameson, 192].

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[18]   Cf., for example, Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975.
[19]   As one of these "other things", the "new social movements" were also theorized as the empirical evidence of the emergence of the 'new subjects of history' which I discussed earlier.

A *totalizing perspective*,[20] characteristic of dialectical/Marxist criticism, which would endeavour to locate what unifying elements or common ground exists between the diverse and localized social movements, was rejected by poststructuralist critics as repressive of difference and as a silent partner in the "tacit hegemony of white, heterosexual, patriarchal males" [Jay, 532] through their historically consistent assumption of the role of the 'Universal Subject of History'. In fact, Martin Jay argues that if the poststructuralists, whose work formed an, otherwise, diverse and heterogeneous catalogue of arguments, had one thing in common, it was "their unremitting hostility towards totality" [Jay, 515]. This quotation from Andreas Huyssen expresses the sensibility entailed in the poststructuralist critique of totality (totality, here, associated with Habermas' project of modernity):

> ...the very idea of a wholistic [*sic*] modernity and of a totalizing view of history has become anathema in the 1970s, and precisely not on the conservative right. The critical deconstruction of enlightenment, rationality and logocentrism by theoreticians of culture, the decentering of traditional notions of identity, the fight of women and gays for a legitimate social and sexual identity outside of the parameters of male, heterosexual vision, the search for alternatives in our relationship with nature, including the nature of our own bodies--all these phenomena, which are key to the culture of the 1970s, make Habermas' proposition to complete the project of modernity questionable, if not undesirable.   [Jay, 512-13]

The work of Michel Foucault represented one of the most sustained and influential challenges to a Marxist and dialectical concept of totality, particularly in terms of his critique of conventional historiography [Jay, 516]. Foucault rejected the idea that to any one vantage point is available a vision of history as a coherent whole [Jay, 521]. Such a

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[20]   The characterization of "totality" and of a totalizing perspective will be one of the primary tasks of my discussion of Jameson in chapter 2.

transcendent and "suprahistorical perspective" [Foucault in Jay, 521], according to Foucault, is only capable of approaching the diversity and particularity of human experience and history by way of its domination and reduction to an overriding identity. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969),[21] Foucault wrote,

> ...the essential task [is] to free the history of thought from its subjection to transcendence.... My aim [is] to analyze this history, in the discontinuity that no teleology would reduce *in advance*; to locate it in a dispersion that no pre-established horizon would embrace; or allow it to be deployed in an anonymity on which no transcendental constitution would impose the form of the subject...
>
> [Jay, 338-9]

More interesting, to Foucault, than a totalized vision of history were the marginal and contingent elements--fragments of history [Poster, 339]--which a total history must necessarily efface, and which serve to "challenge the transcendental dimension" [Foucault in Poster, 339]. Foucault theorized political practice in terms of "anarchistic struggles" [Soper, 140] as opposed to revolutionary movements; the latter referencing that which Foucault considered an illusory unified and coherent collective purpose concealing the plurality of conscious and unconscious motivations. Furthermore, if by giving priority to empirical particularities over totalizing abstractions Foucault left himself open to the charge of positivism, it was a critique which, for Foucault, was worth its weight: "If, by substituting the analysis of rarity for the search for totalities, the description of relations of exteriority for the theme of the transcendental foundation, the analysis of accumulations for the quest for the origin, one is a positivist, then I am quite happy to be one" [Foucault in Jay, 522].

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[21]   Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, New York: Pantheon, 1972.

Given the relative "stability" and "industrial prosperity" of France at the time, on the surface, the student uprising and mass strike of May, 1968, seem to have been unpredictable [Poster, 370]. Below the surface, however, latent conflict was about to explode, set off by the accumulating "symptoms" of the 'new advanced society': rising unemployment, shrinking wages, and the complete colonization by bureaucratic capitalism of "the traditionally non-integrated private worlds of leisure, family life, and consumption" [Poster, 370-1]. Initiated by students rebelling against the "arbitrary hierarchies" and "needless alienations" [Poster, 371] of the university establishment, the uprising spread to the working class who targeted not only the new corporatism and the Gaullist regime as the enemy but, significantly, the PCF as well, whose bureaucracy, they argued, had only served to 'stifle the workers' discontent' in the past [Poster, 383]. That the initiators of the rebellion were students who had come from bourgeois families confounded the PCF [Descombes, 169] which revealed its conservatism by denouncing the students and the upheaval as counter-revolutionary and "as a Gaullist plot to split the workers from their 'vanguard' organizations" [Poster, 373-4, 376]. The spirit of May 68 was decidedly hostile towards the PCF, "official Marxism" and the traditional Left--all viewed by the rebels as repressive forces [Soper, 131]. By contrast, the radicalism of May 68 was more in tune with the philosophy of Sartre and Lefebvre, if anyone; espousing the concepts of freedom, creativity, human agency, anti-authoritarianism and "Lefebvre's notion of unalienated

festivity" [Poster, 384] while rejecting the pessimism and determinism of the structuralists [Reader, 8].

The political and philosophical legacies of May 68 are intertwined. Kate Soper argues that one of the political legacies entailed the formation of groups around issues that previously had been relegated to a cultural and hence marginal realm such as feminism and environmentalism [Soper, 90], reflecting the philosophical shift towards microgroups and molecular politics mentioned earlier. Another legacy which had both political and philosophical consequences was the spirit of "settling accounts with Marxism" which prevailed after the events as both the authority of traditional Leftist institutions and "the validity of the Marxist analysis of power" and social transformation came under fire [Soper, 121]. In Soper's words,

> Not only did the May protest challenge the standard Marxist account of
> the genesis and agency of any movement seeking revolutionary change
> within advanced capitalist society; it also exposed in the starkest possible
> manner how inflexible and dogmatic the attitude of the official communists
> really were--since, rather than offer an analysis of the 'concrete conjuncture'
> in all its contradictory aspects, they preferred to cling to the shibboleths of
> Marxist doctrine and to force events to conform to their 'truth'.
>
> [Soper, 121]

The spirit of 'settling accounts with Marxism' was taken to its extreme in the work of the "New Philosophers". While the term "new philosophy" did not arrive on the French intellectual scene until 1976 [Reader, 108], the work of the New Philosophers, such as André Glucksmann and Bernard Henri-Lévy, is considered to have been inspired, in part, by the critiques of Marxism which surfaced during the events of May 68, by the formulations of the poststructuralists (of which they presented thin and almost caricatured

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versions), and by Solzhenitsyn's account of Stalinism published in 1974 [Reader, 95, 114].

The critiques of the New Philosophers were characterized by 'a hostility to Marxism'

which they considered 'a practice and philosophy of domination' [Reader, 108].

Considering themselves as the "guardians of the spirit of May 1968", they offered

'sweeping and generalized' repudiations of socialism which they "unqualifiedly identified"

with Stalinism [Soper, 131]. The great degree of celebrity these intellectuals enjoyed

together with the rapidity with which they disappeared again by the end of the 70s makes

the story of the New Philosophers appear more like that of the rise and fall of the latest

pop-stars than the development of a particular tenor of social criticism [Reader, 108].

Conclusion

While the narrative ends arbitrarily, here, with the reactionary pessimism (or

optimism, depending on one's view of things) of the New Philosophers, I have,

nonetheless, attempted during the course of this chapter to demonstrate how the

contemporary perceived opposition between Marxism and poststructuralism, and between

Marxism and post-Marxism (the social/political critique inspired by the tenets of

poststructuralism) can be understood as the legacy of a fertile history of debate with

Marxism within the intellectual Left. I have tried to show that the intellectual crisis of

Marxism in post-war France--a situation which I identify with the series of

poststructuralist arguments with Marxism in the 1960s and early 70s--was the eventuality

not only of an insulated set of philosophical developments but of particular political,

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economic and cultural circumstances (the expansion of capital into traditionally private spheres of life, the burgeoning consumer society, the practices and politics of traditional Leftist institutions of the West, as well as, those associated with 'actually existing socialism' at the time (Stalinism, Mao's cultural revolution), the events of May 68, etc.). Furthermore, I believe that those factors contributing to this crisis must be identified not only in terms of the poststructuralist challenges to Marxism but within the context of Marxist theory and practice as well, wherein, to the chagrin of many Marxists (then and now), spaces for reformulations were opening up. As Gregory Elliott points out,

> ...the crisis of Marxism, and concomitant twilight of Western Marxist idols, cannot solely be attributed to panic reactions among (fashion conscious) intellectuals to the vicissitudes of contemporary history... For Marxism has precisely proven fallible in the face of the intractable questions and tests posed it by the twentieth century. [Elliott, 11]

Finally, I want to say something about how the work of Fredric Jameson and Ernesto Laclau relates to this narrative. Many of the principle figures influencing Jameson's Marxist, dialectical criticism have been discussed above: the Western Marxists, especially Lukács, Sartre (Jameson was a student of Sartre), and Althusser. Jameson's intellectual history reflects a complete immersion in the debates I have sketched above; his major works include a study of the dialectic and Western Marxism (*Marxism and Form*), a study of structuralism (*The Prison House of Language*), and a dialectical analysis/historiography of the relationship between poststructuralist discourses and Marxism ("Periodizing the 60s"). In addition to French Marxist thought, Jameson is equally influenced by the German Marxist tradition and especially the work of Theodor

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Adorno. In fact, it could be argued that the particular character of Jameson's method of writing and analysis is a result of his developing, intellectually, at the cross-roads of German and French Marxist thought. In this chapter, however, I have discussed only the French tradition as this was primarily the context for the debates between Marxism and poststructuralism.

A chronology of Laclau's work also reveals a central preoccupation with the debates in question. In fact, Laclau's earlier, more overt Marxist orientation (*Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*) and subsequent movement towards poststructuralist and psychoanalytic themes, culminating in his influential and controversial post-Marxist formulations (*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, with Chantal Mouffe; *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*), mirrors, in many ways, the general movement from, and dynamic between, Marxism and poststructuralism outlined in this chapter. I believe that many of the specific intellectual debts both Jameson and Laclau owe to this intellectual history and its corresponding participants, as well as, how Jameson and Laclau have carried this legacy into the present will become clear in the close readings of their work which I undertake in the following chapters.

Chapter Two

From Individual to Totality and Back: Mapping Fredric Jameson's Dialectical Criticism

In her book, *Situating the Self*, Seyla Benhabib denounces the canonization of an

intellectual or disciplinary subdivision of labour, arguing that the debate between the

various philosophical positions of universalism and particularism has been rigidified into a

set of no longer compelling dichotomies, such as, "universalism vs. historicity, an ethics of

principle vs. an ethics of contextual judgement", revolutionary struggle vs. localized

resistance, formal equality vs. pluralism, essentialism vs. antiessentialism, practice vs.

theory, idealism vs. materialism, modernism vs. postmodernism.[1] Persuaded by Benhabib's

depiction of this unproductive trend in critical theory, I would argue that as a result of this

same trend there exists the pressing necessity on the part of social/political/cultural

theorists to find or imagine models of undoing these reified dichotomies in the context of

critical theory that will facilitate more subtle and productive understandings of social

formations. In this chapter I argue that one such potential 'model of undoing' can be found

in the dialectical criticism rendered in Fredric Jameson's *Marxism and Form*,[2] written two

decades before Benhabib's articulation of the problem. Fredric Jameson's "response" to

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[1]   Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, New York: Routledge, 1992, p.26. I have expanded Benhabib's original list of dichotomies.

[2]   Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971. All page references will be from here unless otherwise specified.

Benhabib is that not only must the attempt to resolve these *apparent* theoretical contradictions catalogued above be dialectical in character, but that the key to their resolutions is located in the representation of the contradiction itself. What follows will be an attempt to explain what might be meant by the rather cryptic preceding notion, as well as, a more general characterization of Jameson's method of dialectical analysis as he lays it out in *Marxism and Form*, predominantly.

The relevance of looking closely at the ideas in *Marxism and Form*, now, more than twenty years after its publication, can be felt, I think, in the almost exasperated sentiments of Seyla Benhabib above. For the terms or categories represented as frozen dichotomies (subject/object, abstract/concrete, idealistic/materialistic, intrinsic/extrinsic, self/other, public/private...) and which, Jameson explains, are the very signposts around which dialectical analysis takes its form, continue still to be preserved and politicized as the banners under which rally various theoretical "camps". This situation both comes out of and reproduces the division and specialization amongst disciplines, and various theoretical approaches within disciplines, that can and have caused stagnation in some areas of social/political/cultural theory (I would assume other areas, also), as well as, a superfluous antagonism amongst theorists "representing" various traditions and alliances whose ideas might otherwise be fruitfully brought into contact with each other. The usefulness, therefore, of a method such as Jamesonian dialectics which proceeds by refiguring this fragmented and hindering way of seeing the world becomes clear.

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A description of Jameson's dialectical criticism[3] cannot be a "straightforward" one

for the reason that there are several obstacles which hinder the attempt to *describe*

dialectical analysis in a comprehensive way. Particularly notable in this regard is the great

complexity of Jameson's dialectical thinking. The breadth and complexity of this

genealogy leads from Hegel to Marx, from Lukács to the Frankfurt School and to

Althusser, as well as the intellectual milieu of each, with lines extending to almost every

moment of the history of Western Marxism and Existentialism.[4] Other obstacles to a

description of dialectical thought are more epistemological in character and, I would

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[3]   The present discussion of Jameson's use of the dialectic treats the latter as an epistemological category as opposed to an ontological one. This is not to say that the epistemological and ontological dimensions exist completely autonomously from each other in Jameson's work. Instead, Jameson represents the relationship between the epistemological and the ontological as one of (an Althusserian) semi-autonomy; where something is autonomous (epistemology) only in terms of something else (ontology) which the former can situate as outside itself—something whose "necessary" relation to the former thing undermines its absolute autonomy: "the [epistemological], as an 'autonomous' unity in its own right as a realm divorced from the [ontological], can preserve that initial autonomy... only at the price of keeping a phantom of [ontology] alive, as the ghostly reminder of its own outside or exterior, since this allows it closure, self-definition, and an essential boundary line" [Fredric Jameson, "Periodizing the 60s", *The Ideology of Theory, Volume 2: The Syntax of History*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p.197-8]. As will become clear in the following chapters, a strikingly similar formulation is to be found in Ernesto Laclau's work.

[4]   Even though Jameson cites the intellectual participation of many theorists in the evolution of dialectical thought, it is clear that for Jameson the two foundational pillars of dialectical thought, and all subsequent versions of it, are Hegel and Marx. His own method, Jameson states, as proposed in *Marxism and Form*, "represents a co-ordination of Hegelian and Marxist conceptual operations" [361]. While an important part of Jameson's method is the understanding of the similarities, differences, and the relationship between Marxist and Hegelian dialectics, the articulation of this understanding is beyond the scope of this chapter.

argue, immanent to the terms of Jameson's dialectical method, itself. Paradoxically, therefore, to explain what hinders a description of dialectical thought, one must first *describe* dialectical thought.

Jameson argues that dialectical thinking requires a continuous shifting of the register of thought to include the analyzing process itself along with whatever object, phenomenon, situation, etc., is being analyzed. How the analyst is able to position her/himself in relation to an object of study--*how s/he is able to think about* that object (synchronically or diachronically, the categories through which s/he conceptualizes, the *a priori* postulates to which s/he is oriented, etc.)--is incorporated itself into the analyst's "new, expanded" object of study. Jameson describes this theoretically self-conscious move, to which he refers as "thought to the second power" [307], as

> an intensification of the normal thought processes... as though in the midst of its immediate perplexities the mind had attempted, by willpower, by fiat, to lift itself mightily up by its own bootstraps.... dialectical thought tries not so much to complete and perfect the application of [nonreflective operative procedures] as to widen its own attention to include them in its awareness... This is indeed the most sensitive moment in the dialectical process: that in which an entire complex of thought is hoisted through a kind of inner leverage one floor higher,... standing outside its previous exertions in such a way that it reckons itself into the problem...   [307-8]

> [D]ialectical thinking is... a thought about thinking itself, in which the mind must deal with its own thought process just as much as with the material it works on, in which both the particular content involved and the style of thinking suited to it must be held together in the mind at the same time. [45]

Very simply put, dialectical thought can be brought to bear on dialectical analysis, itself, in an attempt to discern its own limits, presuppositions and potentialities. Not only is this move a possibility, it is one of dialectical thought's defining moments, wherein the

field of analysis widens to incorporate the analyzing process itself like a centrifugally expanding circle. This characteristic can also be likened to the filmic or photographic notion of the *mise en abyme*, or a picture within a picture. For example, a woman stands on a beach holding a postcard. On the postcard is the same image of the woman on the beach, once again, holding a postcard. On this postcard is the same image of the woman, and so on, our view contracting infinitely. If, instead of contracting, we expand our view in the opposite direction, we realize that our "first" image of the woman is, itself, a picture on a postcard held by a woman on a beach, and so on, expanding infinitely. Similar to the *mise en abyme*, then, dialectical analysis has no formal beginning or end; instead it is a process which continues to expand and contract, shift registers and revolutionize itself in relation to its object.

Finally, it becomes clear how this characteristic of dialectical criticism hinders its description. Dialectical analysis does not exist as a static structure or system which can be isolated and looked at apart from its object: it only exists as a form in relation to some content, thwarting the attempt to represent it outside the context of some particular application. However, because dialectical analysis is constantly changing in the course of its application, any attempt to describe its method will always already be a *failure* in that at the moment of pinning it down, dialectical analysis has already changed into something else. Hence Jameson's claim that it is "this antisystematic thrust which makes...[dialectical thought] such a complicated matter....every systematic presentation of it falsifies it in the moment in which it freezes over into a system" [362].

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One final factor complicating the attempt to describe dialectical thought, has to do with what Jameson calls the its "holistic and totalizing character" [306]. This extremely important and distinguishing characteristic refers to the theorist's ability to conceive of a heretofore "isolated" phenomenon in a "non-isolated" way, that is, in its expanded historical and contextual field so that its interconnectedness to all other phenomena becomes apparent. The dialectical conception of a "larger context of being" [375] is also entailed in the movement of 'thought to the second power' and is likewise accompanied by the "epistemological shock" that is the "mark of an abrupt shift to a higher level of consciousness" [375]. Possibly the most theoretically practical and defining moment of dialectical criticism is its attempt to figure the relationship between particular phenomena and their historico-social field. The *difficulty in describing* this type of *gestalt*-like vision is that it tends to thwart the linear, step by step presentation of artificially isolated themes and examples. For example, in preparing this chapter I isolated various themes associated with dialectical criticism -- totality, mediation, reversal, tautology, form/content -- none of which I found could easily be discussed outside of the context of the knowledge of all the rest. As Jameson states, it is "as though you could not say any one thing until you had first said everything" [306].

Form and Content

However, the fact that the totalizing character of dialectical analysis presents an obstacle for its description is not something accidental or external to dialectical thought as

a phenomenon. At several points in *Marxism and Form*, Jameson explains that the relationship between form and content is, itself, a dialectical one; meaning, that structure is immanent to, limited by, and evolves out of its content. In Jameson's words, "content through its own inner logic, generates those categories in terms of which it organizes itself in a formal structure..." [335]. Form is not some autonomous mould into which one can plug different contents. For example, the fact that dialectical thought is the content of this chapter, presents certain potentialities and limitations in terms of how the form of its representation will manifest. The form of this chapter as it has evolved, and continues to evolve, out of its specific content entails that each "theme" I have identified as an element of dialectical criticism throughout the chapter comes to the surface (in some cases, several times) and then fades into the next theme just as the discussion of "totality", above, faded into a discussion of "form/content". The point is that the identification of various "isolated themes" associated with dialectical criticism is as necessary as it is a distortion of their interdependence.

It is not a coincidence that the discussion of form/content above should lead into the concept of this chapter progressing, evolving and transforming because, as Jameson explains, the very motor of dialectical transformation can be identified in the contradiction of form and content. First of all, like every dialectical relationship, the relationship between form and content is never static. For example, as form evolves out of content, and because the content of dialectical criticism--its object of analysis--is continuously expanding or contracting, the form of the analysis evolves, as well. Secondly, not only do form and content continuously transform, they transform into each other, back and forth.

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The image of the *mise en abyme*, once again, can illustrate this concept: A postcard (form) has on it a picture of a woman on a beach (content). If our view of this object expands, we find that the postcard is, itself, part of a picture found on another postcard. Therefore, the "first" postcard as old form becomes the new content for the "second" postcard as new form (the same transformation occurs in the opposite direction when our view of the object contracts). While my example of the postcard seems oversimplified, as Jameson argues, this same dynamic has revolutionary implications because it is at the heart of social/political/economic change:

> we might also have expressed [a temporal sequence] as a contradiction between a form and its content: for the new is to the old as latent content working its way to the surface to displace a form henceforth obsolete. [In] this distinction... the reader will recognize Marx's model of revolution-ary change... [The conventionally aesthetic context of] the distinction between form and content... is, indeed, the secret of [the latter's] enormous force in Marx's hands: for what is relatively transparent... in the cultural realm, namely that change is essentially a function of content seeking its adequate expression in form, is precisely what is unclear in the reified world of political, social, and economic realities, where the notion that the under-lying social or economic "raw material" develops according to a logic of its own comes with an explosive and liberating effect. [328]

Totality, or, 'Thought to the Second Power'

To understand the specifics of the form of Jameson's dialectical method, then, it is necessary to look at the particular content or object of each "application" which determines *in part* the form of its analysis. However, there are more general characteristics of dialectical criticism which can be observed, here, and which have

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implications for its form. One of the most distinguishing of these characteristics, and one from which many other characteristics derive, is its totalizing movement. The concept of totality entails that the analyst move past the detailed scrutiny of a particular object and enlarge her/his field of view in order tó figure the relationships between that object and all other objects and phenomena; relationships which have heretofore been obscure. In Jameson's words, the movement towards totality is the attempt to shift one's emphasis from "the individual fact or item [to] the network of relationships in which that item may be embedded" [x]. In these terms, no individual object, fact or phenomenon exists as accidental or external to a larger social whole; the dialectic tendency is towards the "abolition of chance", the total assimilation of contingency, and the overdetermination of all social elements [30]. Just as Marx argues that the concept of "individuality" was an invention that developed along side the material relations of capital with the effect of obscuring the *social* reality of subjects, Jameson argues it is equally as ideological for analysts to represent art or cultural activities as isolated, ahistorical events (i.e., to neglect a totalizing perspective), obscuring their historical and social situatedness [331].

As one illustration of the dialectical reconciliation of seemingly isolated events, Jameson uses the example of language. Specifically, Jameson argues that the dense and difficult language of many contemporary theorists which has been criticized as repellent and elitist cannot be entirely understood *in itself*, but only in relation to our current historical context wherein the values of clarity and concision for language have served economically and politically conservative ends; from interpretations of 'our reality' by the mass media to advertising slogans. Jameson writes:

in the realm of philosophy the bristling jargon of seemingly private languages is to be evaluated against the advertising copybook recommendations of "clarity" as the essence of "good writing": whereas the latter seeks to hurry the reader past his own received ideas, difficulty is inscribed in the former as the sign of the effort which must be made to think real thoughts.   [24]

As another illustration of the power and capacity of a totalizing perspective, Jameson compares Marx's rendering of the functioning of capital with the rendering of those middle-class economists who preceded him; Smith, Ricardo and Say [183]. In dialectical terms, the nature of a certain phenomenon is revealed not so much in the phenomenon, itself, as it is through an understanding of how it is situated in relation to all other phenomena. The difference between Marx and his predecessors was not that they focused on different objects--Marx incorporated the already existing categories of market circulation, ground rent, accumulation of capital, etc., into his own work--but that Marx is able to integrate these categories into a "unified field theory"; to understand them as parts of a larger whole [183]. Totalizing analyses that bring about the understanding of alienated labour, the fetishism of commodities and the multiple functions of value threatened the middle-class economists' depiction of the potential for economic and political freedom and equality within capital, obliging them "to pursue their research on a fragmentary and empirical level only" [138].

The potential of a totalizing perspective is that it allows one to theorize the nature of the relationship between, for example, cultural artefacts (works of art, literature, film, genres of artistic production, such as, surrealism), social and political movements,

institutions, etc., and their greater social, economic and historical environment. To be able to articulate this relationship at all "requires a gradual enlargement of critical focus" [331] which we have discussed above in terms of the concept of totality. It is not enough, Jameson argues, to simply 'juxtapose an object to " some vaster social reality... or ontological ground" where the former is seen as a symptom or reflection of the latter' [4-5]. The dialectical relationship between figure and ground is more complex than this analysis in several ways which I will discuss below. Part of the complexity of dialectical criticism, however, is that even after a particular object is figured into a larger historical totality, that object does not lose its "particular" quality; the "object's integrity as independent entity" is respected *at the same time* as one attempts to transcend its specificity [4]. Instead of subsuming the particular in the universal or the individual in the collectivity, the dialectic moves between or *mediates* the particular and the universal, the intrinsic and the extrinsic, the public and the private, the individual and the collectivity. And it is this characteristic movement which, Jameson argues, results in the particular form of dialectical criticism: "as practice and as a conceptual operation [dialectical criticism] always involves the jumping of a spark between two poles, the coming into contact of two unequal terms" [4].

Not only, however, does dialectical analysis seek to transcend the apparent discontinuity of individual facts or events in order to reveal their mutual implication [8], it also reveals the interconnectedness of the categories through which facts and events are segregated within theoretical, academic and popular discourses; categories such as, the political, the cultural, the ideological, the economic, etc. [xiv]. The 'enemy' of dialectical

thought, therefore, is the specialized dicipline--the result of a non-dialectical division and

fragmentation of critical/intellectual labour and the isolation of those fragments. Jameson

argues, for example, that Marx's call to replace philosophy with political economy as an

object of study is implicitly a critique of the above process [294]. Marx does not criticize

the philosophical discussions of his day as being *inherently* idealistic and in need of

replacement by a materialistic approach (i.e., Marx is not calling for the replacement of

one specialized discipline (philosophy) with another (economics)) [294]. Instead, it is the

concept of, and the mobilizing of critical work around, the specialized discipline to which

Marx objects [294]. In place of the specialized discipline of philosophy, Marx proposes

that theorists enlarge their reflective field; adopt a more totalizing and dialectical

understanding of social formation. This approach Marx calls a political economic one.[5]

Dialectical Mediation

If in the theorist's enlarged reflective field the cultural begins to blend into the

political, and the political into the economic, and if what at first appears extrinsic to a

situation is revealed as intrinsic, or if effect is revealed to be cause and *vice versa*, then this

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[5]   Today, as Jameson points out, the discipline of economics is as specialized, narrow
and abstract as was the philosophy that Marx was critiquing. With this in mind, a
contemporary dialectical understanding of social formation will "involve a partial
dissolution of the economic as well as other abstract disciplines" [294] and, therefore,
possibly a name other than that designated by Marx. Jameson, for example, offers several
names including, "totality", "mode of production", and "history", and points out that a
similar concept is designated by Althusser as "structure" and by Lacan as "the Real". I
would argue that some post-structuralist theorists have also come to this same, if not a
similar, understanding which they have called "textuality".

totalizing activity, for which Jameson uses various terms--figuration, mapping, the assimilation of contingency--entails a very subtle understanding of the *mediation* of phenomena, or the "how" of such interconnectedness: the concept of mediation has traditionally been the way in which dialectical philosophy and Marxism itself have formulated their vocation to break out of the specialized compartments of the (bourgeois) disciplines and to make connections among the seemingly disparate phenomena of social life generally."[6] In light of the above quotation it may be tempting to view the concept of mediation as merely a tool of the theorist--as simply a method of using the "same terminology" to articulate "two quite distinct types of objects" [*PU*, 40], such as, individual experience and the social collectivity, a technological innovation and a political movement, or an artistic turn in popular music and a larger economic climate. The temptation to see mediation as an "artificially induced" articulation, however, dissolves in the face of the (dialectical) understanding that "social life is in its fundamental reality one and indivisible, a seamless web, a single inconceivable and transindividual process, in which there is no need to invent ways of linking language events and social upheavals or economic contradictions because on that level they were never separate from one another" [*PU*, 40]. More simply put, dialectical analysis gives us a way of talking about what already exists.

Jameson emphasizes that a dialectical conception of mediation is not simply a case of drawing analogies between different levels of reality. For example, it does not entail finding "homologies" between, say, a particular artistic sensibility like that of the machine

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[6]   Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981, p.40. From here on abbreviated as *PU*.

inspired Italian Futurists and another level of experience, such as, the industrial

mechanization of the early 20th Century [325]. Nor is dialectical mediation a

unidirectional and mechanistic "billiard-ball model" [*PU*, 25] of cause and effect where a

particular context or situation directly produces a certain event or phenomenon which is

then held to be entirely an effect of the former. Jameson does not intend to argue that

these forms of mediation cannot exist. In fact, he points out that the billiard-ball model of

cause and effect, wherein an extrinsic and objective force acts upon an object like a

"material and contingent 'accident'", is appropriate for analyzing certain historical

situations [*PU*, 26]. Furthermore, its historical appropriateness is not *just* the result of an

ideological misinterpretation of the interconnectedness of all social phenomena, but a real

"symptom of objective contradictions [the fragmentation of social life] that are still with

us" [*PU*, 26]. Therefore,

> [m]echanical causality is... less a concept which might be evaluated on
> its own terms, than one of the various laws and subsystems of our
> peculiarly reified social and cultural life. Nor is its occasional experience
> without benefit for the cultural critic, for whom the scandal of the extrinsic
> comes as a salutary reminder of the ultimately material base of cultural
> production, and of the "determination of consciousness by social being."
> [*PU*, 26]

The difference between the cause and effect model and a dialectical model of

mediation is that in terms of the latter, once a totalized frame of reference can be

established, the concepts work and background, figure and ground, etc., interact to the

extent that each can be seen as both the cause *and* effect of the other [5-6]. What is more,

Jameson reminds us that this dialectical interaction between objects, which he likens to a

chemical reaction, "is *prior to* any of the conceptual categories, such as causality,

reflection, or analogy, subsequently evolved to explain it" [6, emphasis mine]. Illustrative of this 'almost chemical' and definitely dialectical interaction is T.S. Eliot's portrayal of the relationship between the two entities he calls "tradition" and "the individual talent" [314]. In an essay called "Tradition and the Individual Talent", Eliot explains that when each individual work of art is created it immediately becomes part of and, therefore, alters, if even slightly, the whole morphology of the artistic tradition which informed it [314]. Here, one observes that with both the work of art and the whole history of artistic and cultural production, each one alters, and is altered by, the other, or, in Jameson's words, the "cultural object... brings into being that very situation to which it is also, at one and the same time, a reaction" [PU, 82]. One is not to lose sight of the fact, however, that the cultural object remains a complete and autonomous entity developing its own internal (dialectical) structure, parallel to the greater historical and social reality, and duplicating the dialectical structure of the latter on a smaller scale [16]. The result is one dialectical structure within another, bringing to mind once again the image of a *mise en abyme*.

The Dialectical Reversal, or, Dialectical Thought as Tautology

Jameson has given the term dialectical reversal to "that paradoxical turning around of a phenomenon into its opposite" [309], i.e., the work which, under dialectical scrutiny, fades into the background, or the fact that is revealed to be an effect of that which it is supposed to have caused, or the 'problem which turns into its own solution' [307]. Dialectical reversal is one name for the mental strategy that is the key to the seemingly

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cryptic riddle I proposed earlier in the introduction: the dialectical articulation of a

problem can 'convert the problem into its own solution' [307], or, the dialectical

articulation of the dichotomized philosophical positions of universalism and particularism

can reveal how they are, in fact, the same position--two sides of the same coin.

> For to the degree to which [dialectical thinking] places the older mental
> operation or problem-solving in a new and larger context, it converts the
> problem itself into a solution, no longer attempting to solve the dilemma
> head on, according to its own terms, but rather coming to understand the
> dilemma itself as the mark of the profound contradictions latent in the very
> mode of posing the problem.   [341]

Jameson uses the often opposed Marxist and Weberian analyses of social

determination to illustrate this type of dialectical reading [6]. Marx's rendering of

Puritanism as a reflection or ensuing ideology of the capitalist mode of production and

Weber's rendering of Puritanism as "one of the *causes*... in the development of capitalism

in the West", Jameson argues are not opposing understandings, but "are essentially

variations on the same model"--two different ways of articulating the same position [6].

> Such [dialectical] thinking is therefore marked by the will to link together
> in a single figure two incommensurable realities, two independent codes
> or systems of signs, two heterogeneous and asymmetrical terms: spirit
> and matter, the data of individual experience and the vaster forms of
> institutional society, the language of existence and that of history.   [6-7]

And because a dialectical reading is never "finished" in the sense that levels of analysis

expand in a centrifugal way (and, therefore, can also contract centripetally), the categories

through which we qualify the facts in question -- cause/effect, progressive/regressive,

subject/object, obstacle/catalyst, internal/external -- can flip around like live fish out of

water. In fact, Jameson argues that *the point* of such terminological categories for dialectical thought is in the process of their reidentification in the course of the analysis: "the function, in dialectical analyses, of such terms as *progressive* and *regressive*, by means of which elements of a given complex are distinguished only in order to reidentify them the more surely in their inseparability and to make possible a different perception of the place of a given moment in the historical continuum" [17].

For the grand finale[7] of the conceptual operations Jameson performs on the reified oppositions of contemporary social thought, Jameson pushes the notion of dialectical reversal to what would appear to be its ultimate stage. For when 'cause' is revealed as 'effect' and *vice versa*, it is only a short logical step to the conclusion that cause and effect were one and the same in the first place. This manoeuvre brings us to Jameson's characterization of dialectical thought as *tautology* [341]. Tautology is related to (if not just another name for) the concept of dialectical reversal articulated above wherein two seemingly opposing interpretations or categories are, within a dialectical framework, revealed to be parts of one and the same position. And while the notion of a tautological relation between oppositional categories or phenomena takes Jameson's discussion in several directions, particularly interesting and potent implications follow the conflation of subject and object. The dialectical subject/object tautology is realized when the thinking subject understands that she or he, along with the thinking process itself, is part of the larger totality which is also the object of her/his thoughts [341]. Put differently, social

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[7]   I am using the term "grand finale" metaphorically to connote a marvellous flourish and do not mean to imply the 'finishing off' of Jameson's analysis. Technically speaking, in terms of dialectical thinking such a finishing off would be perpetually postponed.

antagonisms, conflicts, prejudices, traditions, conventions, alliances, institutions, relations,

are the *products* of human history *at the same time* as they form the invisible "structure"

(which, Jameson argues through Althusser, is unrepresentable in its entirety and

experienced only in its effects) into which humans are born and which becomes for them

the "*objective* situation to which they are not free *not* to react" [285]. Therefore, the

empirical and objective distance the independent observer imagines to be between

her/himself and the social phenomenon in question is revealed as non-existent in dialectical

thought and replaced by an intimacy, so acute, that the distance between subject and

object disappears altogether. At this point, Jameson argues, "the very act of thinking

dissolves away" [341]:

> Nondialectical thought establishes an initial separation, an initial dualism,
> naively imagining itself to be a subjectivity at work upon an objectivity
> wholly different and distinct from itself. Dialectical thinking comes as an
> enlargement upon and an abolition of this initial dualism, for it realizes that
> it is itself the source of that external objectivity it had imagined to be
> something separate...   [342]

This situation where the subject is both the creator and the creation of the "external

world" is important for Marxist interpretations which strive to demonstrate that human

labour power, and not reified economic categories (property, capital), is the source of

social value. A Marxist rendering of the subject/object tautology entails that "the external

world is the product of human labour and human history so completely that the human

producer is himself [*sic*] the product of that history" [342].

The conflation of subject and object has other implications (or rather the same implications by other names). For instance, the transition in the perception of the subject as omniscient observer to the subject as one part of a larger social totality implies what Jameson calls the "concrete decentring" of the subject [*PU*, 74]. This social totality or, as identified above, the invisible structure made up of the sum of social traditions, conflicts, alliances, etc., that preexist the subject, confronts individual consciousness -- traditionally the seat of free will and autonomy -- "with a determination... that must necessarily be felt as extrinsic or external to conscious experience" [*PU*, 283-284]. Only in the sense of this concrete decentring, where the subject is no longer the nucleus of the outside world but its "decentred effect", can the notion of 'the individual' or 'the ethical' be transcended "in the direction of the political and the collective" [*PU*, 60].[8] However, the idea that one is "determined" by the configuration of the social totality of one's particular historical moment needs to be looked at more closely, especially what is entailed in the notion of 'determination'. At this point the discussion fades into another "theme" of dialectical thought, one which we will call the historicizing of the investigating subject.

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[8]   The idea that only the 'self-realized decentred subject' (you can hear the dialectic in this phrase) is able to conceive of political and collective unity is particularly relevant to the discussion in chapter 4. The notion of the decentred subject is associated with poststructuralism, and it is argued by some leftist social theorists that it is in the terms of this same notion that poststructuralism's political impotency and regressive conservatism are rendered. Alternatively, Jameson's rendition of the decentred subject as the very precondition of political action may indicate the place where dialectical analysis could undermine the opposition between leftist political theory and poststructuralism by revealing how they are, in fact, intimately interconnected.

The historicized subject has to do with locating the subject in history, or, understanding how the subject is limited and enabled by the potentialities of her/his historical moment. Precipitated by the web of social phenomena which comprises the social totality, and which is never a static structure but constantly evolving (sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly and dramatically), are the conventionalized categories and orientations through and from which historical subjects understand, produce and reproduce the world. *How*, exactly, certain philosophical categories (freedom, equality, universality, individualism) become part of the social formation that corresponds to a certain moment in history (the early capitalism of the 17th Century, the later capitalism of the end of the 20th century) is a complex process whose details are specific to each past and future example, an adequate analysis of which is beyond the scope of this chapter. The following brief example from Marx can provide a cursory illustration of how the critical capabilities of the investigating subject are "determined" by the social formation of her/his historical moment.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx demonstrates how the concept of individual freedom became a component of capitalism's evolution as the 'ideological' fodder for the legitimation of the material transformations that were occurring in the dominant mode of production at the time, feudalism. As workers were needed to fill the early factories, the 'ideology' of individual freedom functioned to expedite the movement of peasants from rural to industrial settings by contradicting the popular belief that one was necessarily tied to the land on which one was born, and that to attempt to change one's lot in life was necessarily to question the will of God or the Great Chain of Being. As capitalism

evolved, 'freedom' became a more securely established and conventionalized concept, providing the philosophical foundation and justification for the further evolution of this emergent mode of production. As a subject within a mid-19th Century and dominantly capitalist historical moment, and representing 'freedom' as a category which informs his own perceptions, Marx proceeds to critique capital on its (and his) own terms,[9] exposing capital as an inherently contradictory set of social relations, buttressed not by the freedom of individual workers but by the *denial* of the individual freedom of the worker population. Capital, therefore, provides Marx with the categories for its own critique (freedom, equality, universality), as well as, for the formulation of its Utopian alternative. For it is through these same categories--those which developed in dialectical interrelation to capital--that Marx envisages an alternative mode of production to capitalism--different, in that it will be characterized by a non-contradictory relationship between the material relations of production and the ideological framework into which the categories freedom, equality and universalism translate.

The relationship between a certain philosophical category and its corresponding social totality (or 'mode of production', as Jameson also calls the latter, not letting us forget his own Marxist orientation) is, itself, dialectical in that each can be seen as both cause and effect of the other. And for the subject located within a particular mode of production, s/he is both limited by the categories particular to that mode of production at the same time as s/he is enabled by them. Therefore, as Jameson argues, philosophical "work depends not so much on the cast of mind of the philosopher as on the possibilities

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[9]   This type of critical operation is referred to within Marxist theory as an immanent critique.

for development inherent in the organizational principle available to him [sic]" [49]. For this reason, when Jameson sets out to characterize "his" dialectical method in *Marxism and Form*, he does so *through* an examination of the work of those (Hegel, Marx, Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse, Bloch, Lukács, Sartre) who have shaped in some way the "organizing principles" available to him. Those theorists are not the silent background to Jameson's work but actively participate in Jameson's intellectual production: "what look[s] like a dead past reveals itself to us as a host of looks remembered, staring at us in irreparable judgement; until the abstract future becomes visible... as the burning judgement of some unimaginable and alien posterity" [305].

The concept of the social totality to which one is oriented setting the guidelines for one's perceptive capabilities brings us back to the idea of thought to the second power--the self-consciousness of the subject to her/his own historical context and presuppositions. Jameson illustrates the interdependency of the two ideas by using his own activity in the construction of the discussion in *Marxism and Form* as an example. Near the end of the book Jameson explains that the discussion so far has been undialectical in that it has taken dialectical thought as an object only; that it has merely presented dialectical thought as a method and not been self-conscious, itself, in regards to its own construction [338]. However, as Jameson realizes with irony, his self-consciousness towards his own work as undialectical raises it at the same instant to a "higher dialectical plane" [339]. Jameson's 'commentary on his own commentary' [340] undermines his account of his own work as undialectical.

Self-consciousness of the historical situatedness of both the theorist and the concepts through which s/he works is an important dialectical lesson. In turn, the limits and potentialities of the concept of dialectical totality, itself, are also foreordained by the specifics of the historical moment which is the context of its application. Therefore, Jameson argues, the concept of totality which was relatively accessible to Hegel for whose time an overall sense of organization and unity was commonplace is equally as inaccessible for contemporary Western thinkers whose time is characterized by previously unattained degrees of disciplinary specialization, division of labour, fragmentation at all levels and moments of social, political and cultural life, and a fervent ideology of individualism [48]. However, the incomprehensibility of the concept of totality today, Jameson continues, is not a comment on the value of the concept or some internal limitations that may characterize it, but a comment on the experience of the modern world [47]. The impossibility of totality "is not a proof of its intellectual limitations" nor of its being "less concrete that anything we are able to imagine today": "it is a judgement on us and on the moment of history in which we live, and in which such a vision of the totality of things is no longer possible" [47].

Conclusion: Totality, Once Again

The impossibility of a complete conceptual totality brings us to the threshold of a contentious debate in contemporary critical theory. Totality as a concept has been criticized (predominantly by critics of an anti-Hegelian or poststructuralist persuasion) as

an adjunct of theoretical universalism; as a tool and symptom of the culturally chauvinistic

omnipotent philosopher who assumes that the universe and its entire contents are

ultimately knowable from at least one (or only one) point of view. While the critique has

been apt in various circumstances, Jameson is clearly not proposing in *Marxism and Form*

a concept of dialectical totality that entails any type of universal validity or transparency

[358]. According to Jameson, the return to some omniscient observer is not a solution to

the fragmentation of modern society; rather, this position has been and will continue to be

a "scarcely veiled defence of middle-class ethical norms and values" [357]. Jameson

understands that totality is 'untotalizable': "subject and outside world can never find such

ultimate identity or atonement under present historical circumstances" [56]. Furthermore,

the point of dialectical thought is not to discover whether truth ultimately resides with the

subject or the world, the individual or the collectivity, but to mediate between these two

entities, to demonstrate both their autonomy and their interdependence. Totality as a

contemporary theoretical tool will always be limited but remains an inspirational moment

within dialectical criticism. The idea is not to achieve some omnipotent vantage point but

to come as close as possible by attempting to understand *that which thwarts* the

achievement of any such vantage points in one's particular historical moment.

Overcoming that which prevents one from conceiving and experiencing totality

socially, culturally, politically, is part of dialectical thinking's utopian element. For even

though the achievement of a totalized understanding of society is almost an impossibility

today, Jameson does represent it as a future possibility; one to develop dialectically along

side social and historical change and involving "the transcendence of individualistic point

of view by more genuinely collective forms" [358]. And these forms are not so far off that

we cannot recognize a great many allusions to them in contemporary cultural production

[358].[10] Furthermore, the transcending of unproductive categorical divisions that both

inform and are produced by political and cultural practice, including the work that goes on

in universities, is not merely a Pollyanna call to all sides of the debate. Dialectical criticism

is a way of reading diagnostically a situation and charting the historical specifics that

realized that situation. It is also a proposal for changing the way we do theoretical/critical

work and, perhaps, even how that work informs our other practices. And if there is a

practical point to dialectical thought—to overcoming isolation and opposition—it is to

move towards some kind of collective logic [268]; some sense of the interconnectedness

of social life and, therefore, the sense of responsibility of each individual for the whole.

Or, in Jameson's more poetic words, the point of dialectical thought is to see "the privacy

and elbowroom of Western middle-class society in the present... yield before a swarming,

suffocating, intolerable feeling of human relationships" [305].

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[10]   For example, Jameson argues that new modes of narration can be found
everywhere in modern literature. He argues that these new forms transcend an
individualistic point of view and represent a type of 'collective form of narration' which
would "correspond formally to the realities of a postindividual world" [358].

Chapter Three

Necessarily Contingent, Equally Different, and Relatively Universal: the Antinomies of Ernesto Laclau's Social Logic of Hegemony

We now come to our second 'model for undoing' the reified dichotomies which, in

Seyla Benhabib's terms, characterize the debate between the philosophical positions of

universalism and particularism. Ernesto Laclau is the author of this second model which I

will designate as the social logic of hegemony.[1] As will become clear, the relationship and

the dynamic between dichotomies such as necessity/contingency, self/other,

abstract/concrete, intrinsic/extrinsic, equivalence/difference and, particularly,

universal/particular, are as pivotal to Laclau's theory of hegemony as they are for

Jameson's dialectical criticism. In fact, there is a striking similarity between the central

themes of both Jameson's and Laclau's social and political theories[2]--Jameson's Marxism

and Laclau's post-Marxism: the logic of contingency vs. the logic of necessity,

overdetermination, ideology, the negative (relational) vs. positive (essential) character of

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[1]   Chantal Mouffe, Laclau's co-author of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, must also be accredited with the formulation of the concept of hegemony in that book. Because most of the material/ideas on which I focus in this thesis come from Laclau's independent work, I refer to Laclau, solely. While Mouffe's work after *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is closely related to that of Laclau, their paths and concerns do not perfectly overlap. I will reference both Laclau and Mouffe when I discuss ideas that I have taken directly from *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

[2]   I understand that the similarity between Jameson and Laclau in this regard may not be *so* striking in that the interests which they share are some of the most well attended-to debates in Western Marxism, poststructuralist theory and, probably, Western leftist social and political theory, in general.

identity, totality and/or horizon, the centred vs. the decentred subject, a theory of historical transformation, the relationship between structure and agency, between the individual and the collectivity, and between the political, economic, social, ideological and cultural "spheres" of experience. And, as was the case with Jameson's dialectical criticism, Laclau's social logic of hegemony no more readily lends itself to a step by step characterization in that Laclau's central themes and categories overlap to such a degree that, paradoxically, to reach a clear understanding of one seems to require a prior knowledge of all the others. Again, similar to Jameson, Laclau's categories are so intimately interconnected that the movement of this discussion from one to the next will appear to be more a transition in terminology than content.

Despite their similarities, there is at least one significant difference, of course, between the analytical approach of Jameson and Laclau which would appear to position them at opposing and irreconcilable points on the spectrum of ways of understanding the social.[3] While Jameson insists on preserving traditional Marxist categories in his analysis of social and political formations, Laclau's analysis proceeds from a critique and abandoning of these same categories which, for Laclau, are no longer adequate.

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[3]   For readings of Laclau and Mouffe which perceive the Marxist/post-Marxist divide as irreconcilable and as an either/or situation, Cf. Norman Geras, "Post-Marxism?", *New Left Review*, 163, 1987, and "Ex-Marxism without Substance", *New Left Review*, 169, 1988; A. Belden Fields, "In Defense of Political Economy", *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Retreat From Class: A New 'True' Socialism*, London and New York: Verso, 1986. For readings which perceive potentially a more subtle and negotiated relation between Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxism and more traditional leftist political—Marxist and Feminist—theory, Cf. Michele Barrett, "Ideology, Politics, Hegemony: From Gramsci to Laclau and Mouffe", *The Politics of Truth*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991; Rosemary Hennessy, *Materialist Feminism and the Politics of Discourse*, New York and London: Routledge, 1993.

However, my discussion is moving ahead of itself. An analysis of Laclau's work and a comparison of the latter to the work of Jameson will be the focus of the next chapter. In preparation, in the present chapter I will limit my focus to a detailed characterization of Laclau's social logic of hegemony.

The Ins and Outs of Identity

I will begin the discussion of Laclau's concept of hegemony by examining a theme which could arguably be considered a fundamental moment of any social or political theory; namely, the conditions for existence of any identity and/or objectivity. Following the insights of Saussure,[4] as do many whose work can be associated with structuralist or post-structuralist thought, the *relational* character of all identity/objectivity is of foundational importance to Laclau's theory of hegemony. The relational character of identity entails that an identity is an identity, as such, not because of some essential and, thus, internal quality, but because of what it is not; because of its difference from other identities. One identifies a cat not in terms of some essential cat quality, but because it is different from a dog, a fish or an elephant. An objectivity exists only in terms of its differential relation to other objectivities and, therefore, exists only in terms of that which is external to, or outside, that objectivity. Appropriating a concept from Derrida, Laclau designates that externality which is the condition of existence of all objectivity, its *constitutive outside*.[5] Because of the constitutive role of that which lies external to (as

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[4]   Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1986.

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opposed to internal to) objectivity, the latter can never achieve the status of positive, full, or self-transparent entity. Instead, all objectivity/identity is negatively constituted, incomplete and ultimately unstable as a result of its lack of self-sufficiency and its radical opening to a constitutive outside. Another way of making the same point would be to assert the *contextual* nature of objectivity and identity, including the context-specific meanings and consequences which follow from them; a claim which is, for the most part, no longer controversial.[6] Meaning and identity cannot be fixed (and cannot be the expression of *a priori* essences) if they are defined in terms of a context which can, and sometimes does, continuously change. "Unfixity has become the condition of every social identity", Laclau and Mouffe explain in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, entailing that "the sense of every social identity appears constantly deferred. The moment of 'final' suture[7] never arrives."[8]

If we accept that identities/objectivities are not the expressions of one stable ground or essence but can shift and transform in relation to their context--in other words,

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[5]   Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, London and New York: Verso, 1990. p.84. Hereafter abbreviated as *NR*.

[6]   Ernesto Laclau, "Subject of Politics, Politics of the Subject", *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 7.1, 1995, p.151. Hereafter abbreviated as "Subject".

[7]   · The concept of 'suture', which Laclau utilizes frequently throughout his work, is associated with (predominantly Lacanian) psychoanalytic theory. While Laclau and Mouffe provide a detailed explanation of 'suture' in an endnote in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (p.88), here, I will briefly define it as the (precarious) closure ('stitching up') of objectivity and the (temporary) fixing of meaning in the context of a structure in which the closure of objectivity and the fixing of meaning are, in the last instance, impossibilities. Suture represents an attempt to 'fill in for' the absence of closure and fixity which characterizes social systems of meaning.

[8]   Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London and New York: Verso, 1985, p.85-86. Hereafter abbreviated as *HSS*.

accepting the polysemic character of identity/objectivity--then the (precarious) affirmation

of any objectivity entails the repressing of all other objectivities that could potentially take

its place. Another name for the act of repression which is entailed each time an identity,

objectivity or meaning is established at the expense of all others is power:[9] "the

constitution of a social identity is an act of power... identity as such *is* power" [*NR*, 31].

Furthermore, because the relationship between an identity and its outside is founded on

exclusion and an attempt by one to negate the other, Laclau characterizes the relationship

as *antagonistic*.

Antagonism and the Impossibility of Objectivity

The concept of antagonism is a central tenet of Laclau's theory of hegemony. It

will be helpful to broach the topic of antagonism by returning to the notion of 'context'. If

a particular context is constitutive of a certain identity or system of differentially related

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[9]   I believe that Laclau's sense of 'power' in this formulation can be likened to
Foucault's concept of power/knowledge (Cf. especially Michel Foucault,
Power/Knowledge, New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.). Foucault's concept
('*pouvoir-savoir*' in the original French) conveys something more than the English word
'power'. While *pouvoir-savoir* connotes 'the knowledge that allows one to do and be
something', the English word 'power' generally does not. Gayatri Spivak explains:
"*Pouvoir* is of course 'power'. But there is also a sense of 'can-do'-ness in '*pouvoir*', if only
because, in its various conjugations, it is the commonest way of saying 'can' in the French
language.... *Pouvoir-savoir*—being able to do something—only as you are able to make
sense of it. This everyday sense of that doublet seems to me indispensable to a crucial
aspect of Foucault's work" (Gayatri Spivak, "More on Power/Knowledge", *Outside in the
Teaching Machine*, London and New York: Routledge, 1993. p.34.). More conventional
understandings of 'power', such as, a thing which some possess and others do not, or, that
"which characterizes relations between social forces" [*NR*, 31], would be a subset of the
wider sense of power to which I am referring.

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identities,[10] then the limits of that context will be synonymous with the limits of that

identity or system (i.e., we have already established that a shift in context entails a shift in

a corresponding set of objectivities). In other words, establishing what a particular system

of identities *is*, just as surely entails establishing that which it *is not*. Consequently, in

order to postulate a system of differential identities, one must be able to locate the limits

of that system ["Subject", 151]. Locating the limits of a system, is to identify that which

lies beyond those limits [*ibid.*]. While this task sounds simple enough, 'logically speaking,

nothing could be more difficult' [*ibid.*]. Because the differences between identities are,

themselves, constitutive and not the symptoms of a fixed and a priori ground, that which

lies beyond the limits of a context or system of identities will only constitute yet one more

difference [*ibid.*]. With no ground to which to appeal, there will be no way of

establishing, in the last instance, whether this 'final' difference is inside or outside the

system of differences in question,[11] and the very viability of the context is, thus,

undermined [*ibid.*]. Laclau proposes that the concept of antagonism is the way out of this

apparent double bind. An antagonistic force refers to the radical otherness of a system--to

that which is beyond the limits of a system yet "which is not [just] one more difference but

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10   It is more accurate, at this point, to speak of a 'system of differentially related
identities' than of individual identities because, as we know, according to Laclau, identities
can never exist in isolation but only as one link in a chain of differences. For example, the
individual identity 'mother' does exist, however, only in terms of a system of differential
identities we call 'the family'. A more detailed examination of systems of identities and the
relationships between systems I undertake further on in my discussion of the concept of
articulation.
11   The deconstructionist formulation of this problematic is a cousin of Laclau's: any
boundary that separates an inside from an outside will necessarily be both inside and
outside at the same time, thus existing as a site of undecidability.

something which poses a threat to (i.e. negates) all the differences within that context" [*ibid.*] and, therefore, must be excluded.

The identity/objectivity's 'constitutive outside' is another name for the radical antagonistic otherness which confronts every identity/objectivity. "[A]ntagonism is the *limit of all objectivity*"; it characterizes the relationship between an objectivity and its radical outside such that the completion and fullness of the former will be forever denied [*NR*, 17]. "With antagonism, denial does not originate from the 'inside' of identity itself but, in its most radical sense, *from outside*; it is thus pure facticity which cannot be referred back to any underlying rationality" [*ibid.*]. It is in light of the existence of antagonism that Laclau makes the claim that society is an impossible object.[12] Like any objectivity, society, despite the degree of regularity with which it is often reproduced, is, ultimately, an unstable and open entity as it, too, is constituted by an antagonistic/constitutive outside. Furthermore, the term 'antagonistic/constitutive outside' brings us to the first of several paradoxes characterizing Laclau's theory of hegemony. The antagonistic/constitutive outside of every identity/objectivity is responsible for the latter's constitution *and* its negation--it exists as both a condition for, and a subversive threat to, all objectivity:

> ...the antagonizing force fulfils two crucial and contradictory roles at the
> same time. On the one hand, it 'blocks' the full constitution of the identity
> to which it is opposed and thus shows its contingency. But on the other
> hand, given that this latter identity, like all identities, is merely relational
> and would therefore not be what it is outside the relationship with the force
> antagonizing it, the latter is also part of the conditions of existence of that
> identity.... This link between the blocking and simultaneous affirmation

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[12]   Cf. Ernesto Laclau, "The Impossibility of Society", *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*.

of an identity is what we call 'contingency', which introduces an element
of radical undecidability into the structure of objectivity.   [*NR*, 21]

Necessary Contingency: Antinomy #1

For Laclau, an "objectivist and positive conception of the social" [*NR*, 20] is

rejected in favour of a social logic which is predicated on the radical contingency of all

meaning and identity. In terms of the social logic of radical contingency, the existence of

any objectivity is strictly the result of factors external to that objectivity as opposed to

some essential and, thus, internal factor [*NR*, 19]. The logic of contingency refutes the

existence of some necessary ground in light of which one might make sense of social

practices, identities and relationships and, instead, exists as the impossibility of ever fixing

the meaning of any element of the social [*NR*, 20].[13] However, Laclau is well aware that a

logic of contingency *cannot take the place of* a logic of necessity as the foundational

moment of the social. Just as all objectivity exists as an entity 'partially constituted *and*

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[13]   Laclau perceives his recognition of a social logic of contingency as sort of a
revolutionary break with a 'line of modern thought--from Spinoza to Marx'--which is
characterized by the essentialist manoeuvre of "referring finite beings back to conditions of
existence which are necessary... [and provide] the ground for a self-generating and
self-regulating totality" [*NR*, 20]. For example, the variety of critiques which Laclau
directs at Marxist thought can all be reduced to what Laclau perceives as Marxism's
essentialist inclinations. I will touch on Laclau's perception of the distinction between his
own work and the Marxist tradition later on. Here, I will mention that Laclau has been
criticized for his apparent simple replacement of 'necessity' with 'contingency', thus, merely
inverting the dichotomy instead of displacing it. Whether or not the logic of contingency
which, in Laclau's work, achieves foundational status is an example, itself, of an
essentialist lapse in Laclau's argument will be explored in the next chapter. For an
interesting treatment of this possibility, Cf. Vincent Pecora, "Ethics, Politics, and the
Middle Voice", *Yale French Studies*, 79, 1991.

partially threatened', it will represent a "moment of undecidability between the contingent and the necessary" [*NR*, 27]. The understanding behind that which Laclau refers to as the *dialectic* of contingency and necessity[14] entails that even though the relationship between an identity and its constitutive/antagonistic outside is a contingent and, hence, open one, the identity is, nonetheless, *necessarily* dependent upon that outside for its existence [*NR*, 21]. Were necessity to be utterly negated, objectivity/identity could not even be partially constituted and we would be left with "nothing but indeterminacy and the impossibility of coherent discourse", a situation conducive only, Laclau argues, to 'an inhabitant of Mars' [*NR*, 26]. And because an antagonistic force cannot exist without some (at least partially) constituted identity to threaten, it seems as though contingency cannot be as foundational a moment of the social as is the moment of undecidability:[15] "this interplay of mutual subversion between the contingent and the necessary is a more primary ground, ontologically, than that of a pure objectivity or total contingency" [*ibid*.].

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[14]   Interestingly, Laclau continues to call this relationship a dialectical one even though he absolutely dismisses all Hegelian and Marxist versions of the dialectic wherein he perceives the ultimate internality of the negative moment (contingency) as it is 'reabsorbed into a higher unity, or *Aufhebung*' [*NR*, 26]. However, because Laclau's formulation above is that contingency is, itself, absolutely necessary for the constitution of identity, it is ambiguous just how different Laclau's version of the dialectic is from a Marxist version. The implications of this ambiguity will be pursued further in the following chapter.

[15]   I say it *seems* to be the case because Laclau does refer elsewhere throughout his work (for example, on pp. 42, 44, 96 of the title essay of *NR*, from whence I site the above formulations) to the contingent (and to the contingent by other names, such as, the temporal, the political, dislocation, freedom) as the more primary ontological ground of the social.

While the prevailing logic of contingency foretells that all social meaning and

identity will be ultimately unstable, Laclau understands that all social practice, as well as,

every form of social organization--from the fundamental to the complex--must presuppose

a system of (relatively) stable identities/meanings/objectivities. The practice of creating

unities between identities (i.e., of establishing social relations), Laclau calls *articulation*.

Articulation entails the transgressing of contingency and the (temporary) fixing of meaning

around nodal points [*HSS*, 113] to form organized systems of identities referred to as

articulated totalities [*HSS*, 93]. Furthermore, because articulation is the bringing into

relation of objectivities that have no essential connectedness--because it is a practice which

"proceeds from the openness of the social" [*HSS*, 113]--articulation is an act of power.

Any unity that may be established between social agents, for example, is an articulated

unity because it is "not the expression of a common underlying essence but the result of

political construction and struggle" [*HSS*, 65].

The process of articulation transforms the identities being articulated [*NR*, 30].

The full relevancy of this point will become clear further on during the course of an

examination of Laclau's concept of the relationship between structure and agency. In the

mean time, we have established that identities are constituted contextually. Because

articulation entails a recontextualization (i.e., identities which were once isolated enter

into relationships with each other), the transformation of those identities is a response to

the transformation of context [*NR*, 30]. For example, Laclau states, "Given that any

contingent identity is essentially relational in terms of its conditions of existence [i.e., its outside],... any change in the latter cannot fail to effect the former" [*ibid*.].[16] For this reason, Laclau distinguishes between 'moments' (articulated identities) and 'elements' (identities which have not been articulated) [*HSS*, 195].[17] The concept that identities are transformed through the process of their articulation with other identities is the logic behind Laclau's argument that there can be "no major historical change in which the identity of *all* intervening forces is not transformed" ["Subject", 149]. The identity of a social force or group which establishes itself as antagonistic to a currently authoritative social formation or system of power (or a *hegemonic* system of power, as we will come to call it) has, nonetheless, been constructed in relation to, and is bound up with, that social system. Therefore, if the antagonistic force is able to subvert and dislocate that system, the identity of the antagonistic force is also dislocated in the process.[18] Such an understanding, Laclau argues, can help to explain the current centrality of the concept of

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[16]   In light of this point, those who criticize Laclau for over-emphasizing a voluntaristic element to the complete neglect of structural determination, seem to have overlooked this element of Laclau's argument. For examples of such a critique, see Michael Rustin, "Absolute Voluntarism", *New German Critique*, 43, 1988; Nicos Mouzelis, "Marxism or Post-Marxism", *New Left Review*, 167, 1988.

[17]   I believe that there are loose ends surrounding the distinction between moment and element which Laclau leaves uncharacteristically untied. A non-discursively articulated objectivity is impossible to represent, linguistically or otherwise and, thus, does not have 'being' for subjects. Therefore, any time we designate something as an element, it has always already been transformed into a moment. Or, the element is outside the discursive structure (articulated structure) from which we conceive and is part of an antagonistic structure in which case, again, it is already a moment. The fact that I can designate something as an 'element' implies that it is already a moment. I have found no textual evidence that Laclau has considered this situation.

[18]   Ernesto Laclau, "Universalism, Particularism, and the Question of Identity", *October*, No. 61, Summer, 1992, p.88. Hereafter abbreviated as "Universalism".

cultural 'hybridity' in debates concerning identity ["Subject", 149]; especially those influenced by postmodern or postcolonial theory.[19]

Articulation, therefore, is at the heart of Laclau's theory of hegemony. It is the formal logic of all social unities or groups; from a group of friends to a soccer club, to activist groups and social movements, to political parties and nation states, to large social "orders" like capitalism, patriarchy and socialism. 'Discourse' is the name Laclau and Mouffe give to the structure, system, group, etc., that is the result of articulation [*HSS*, 105]. Before I go on to discuss 'discourse' and 'discursivity' in Laclau's work, concepts which have proven to be points of contention for Laclau's critics,[20] it will be helpful to take a detour through Laclau's notion of the dialectic of equivalence and difference.

Equal in Difference: Antinomy #2

So far I have emphasized the importance of the concept of difference (differential identity) for Laclau, specifically, in terms of the logic of contingency. To emphasize difference, however, to the neglect of a concept of equivalence is to tell only one side of the story. Laclau is aware that, when speaking of social formations, a concept of pure difference, on its own, is, analytically, unproductive ["Subject", 150]. He argues that 'essentialism of the structure' (wherein social formations, i.e., the configurations that are

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[19] Cf. Homi Bhabha, "The Third Space. Interview with Homi Bhabha", *Identity. Community, Culture, Difference*, Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990.

[20] Cf. Norman Geras, "Post-Marxism?", *New Left Review*, 163, 1987; A. Belden Fields, "In Defence of Political Economy", *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

the result of relationships between identities, are conceived as ahistorical and necessary) is no less problematic than an 'essentialism of the elements' (pure and necessary atomism) because both positions presuppose the ground of a *closed system*.[21] However, as we have already established, no system can be entirely closed as it remains open to an outside which both constitutes it and blocks its fulfilment.

Therefore, rejecting an *either* difference *or* equivalence formulation, Laclau argues that all identity will be "constitutively split; it will be the crossing point between the logic of difference and the logic of equivalence" ["Subject", 152]. His explanation goes as follows: It is true that identities are defined through difference. However, in every system of articulated, differential identities, each identity has something in common with all other identities that make up that system: their relationship to the constitutive outside of that system: "differences are equivalent to each other as far as all of them belong to this side of the frontier of exclusion".[22] The presence of an antagonistic force confronting an articulated system (i.e., a social group, formation, "order", etc.) is the basis of equivalence between identities. Laclau's concept of equivalence, then, is not a 'positive quality that identities share' but negatively constituted instead: "a variety of concrete or partial struggles and mobilizations—all of them are seen as related to each other, not because their *concrete* objectives are intrinsically related, but because they are all seen as equivalent in confrontation with the repressive regime" ["Why", 172]. Articulation, therefore, entails

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[21]   Ernesto Laclau, "Metaphor and Social Antagonisms", *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, p.253. Hereafter abbreviated as "Metaphor".
[22]   Ernesto Laclau, "Why do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?", *The Lesser Evil and the Greater Good*, Jeffrey Weeks (ed.), London: Rivers Oram Press, 1994, p.169. Hereafter abbreviated as "Why".

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the establishing of *chains of equivalence* between identities and between articulated

systems of identities, or, in other words, the establishing of precarious totalities founded

on the equivalence between differentially related identities in regards to their relationship

to a constitutive outside.

Discourse and Discursivity

As I mentioned briefly above, another name for an articulated totality is 'discourse':

"a structure in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed, is what I call

'discourse'" ["Metaphor", 254]. The concept of discourse should not be mistakenly

reduced to the categories, speech, writing or language [*ibid.*], while these latter do form a

part of discourse. When a non-articulated element (a potential identity/objectivity) is

discursively articulated into a network of differentially related moments (a discourse), it

acquires 'being'. In order to characterize the latter, I will explain its distinction from that

which Laclau designates as 'existence'. An entity's existence refers to its existential

materiality that continues to exist outside of any human thought or community. On the

other hand, only when an entity is articulated into a discourse can it acquire being and,

hence, meaning for human subjects and communities [*NR*, 100-105]. For example, an

undiscovered planet has existence outside of any discursive structure. However, it only

attains being or meaning for human communities at the moment of its discovery and

subsequent articulation into contemporary astronomical discourse. "[I]n our interchange

with the world, objects are never given to us as mere existential entities; they are always

given to us within discursive articulations" [*NR*, 103]. In accordance with discourses, an entity's being is not ahistorical but changes over time [*ibid.*]. This is clearly the case if we return to our example of astronomical discourse. Obviously, the way that human communities perceive the meaning and the 'nature' of the cosmos has changed dramatically over time. Furthermore, there is a distinction to be made between the notion of a discourse and that of 'the discursive' or the field of discursivity. As no objectivity can be established outside discourse, the field of discursivity constitutes the conditions of possibility of all objectivity [*ibid.*]. The discursive, therefore, is not "an object among other objects (although, of course, concrete discourses are) but rather a theoretical *horizon*"--an horizon of possibility [*ibid.*].

Dislocating the Social and Instituting the Political: Antinomies #3, 4 and 5

For Laclau, discourse is a fundamental category of the social. As "structure[s] in which meaning is constantly negotiated and constructed" ["Metaphor", 254], all social formations are discourses. We need, now, to pursue Laclau's characterization of society and the social in greater detail. So far, the only specific description I have given regarding society is that as a full and totalized objectivity it is an impossibility. Nonetheless, Laclau argues, society exists as the attempt to 'constitute that impossible object' ["Metaphor", 254; *NR*, 91; *HSS*, 112]. Therefore, society exists as the attempt to fix meaning (and, hence, social relations) and to transgress the contingency which will always stand in the way of total fixation in the last instance. "Dislocation" (connoting the shifting of

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something out of place) is another name for the logic of contingency and stands over against the terms 'constitution' or 'fixation' forming an antinomy. This is yet another way of giving name to the primordial paradox (known to us so far as necessity/contingency, or equivalence/difference) which Laclau perceives as the founding moment of all experience and identity. Still another name for this paradox is 'the social' *vs.* 'the political'.

It is helpful to approach a characterization of the distinction and the relationship between the social and the political by way of another set of concepts, namely, sedimentation and reactivation, which Laclau takes from Husserl and develops for his own purposes. We have discussed how in the process of articulation (or the construction of discourses) decisions entailing acts of power, and which result in the establishment of identities and relationships between them, are made even in a terrain characterized, ultimately, by a radical undecidability. The resulting identities and relationships or, on a larger scale, resulting social formations, which are established through the exclusion of alternative identities, relationships and formations, can achieve relative stability if reproduced repeatedly over time and, as such, assume an "objective presence" [*NR*, 34]. An entity's persistent objective presence tends to conceal the originary terrain of power and undecidability on "which that instituting act took place", or, put differently, it tends to conceal that entity's contingency and historicity [*ibid*.]. This 'forgetting of the historical/contingent origins' of the instituted objectivity Laclau calls 'sedimentation'.[23] Reactivation, on the other hand, refers to the act of recovering the previously concealed historical/contingent origins of the instituted objectivity—"to reinsert [the latter] in the

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[23]   It does not seem to me that Laclau's use of the concept of sedimentation is much different, if at all, from the Marxist use of the concepts 'reification' or 'fetishization'.

system of real historic options that were [necessarily] discarded" upon its establishment

[*ibid.*]. Laclau warns not to mistakenly understand reactivation as a *returning* to an

original moment of an identity's institution and to the same options that were repressed at

that time [*ibid.*]. An objectivity's reactivation entails a different context to that of its

institution and, accordingly, "the system of those alternatives will be different" [*ibid.*].

The processes of sedimentation and reactivation correspond in Laclau's work to

those of the social and the political. 'The field of the social is constituted by sedimented

forms of objectivity' [*NR*, 35]; it represents the movement towards relatively stable and

fixed meaning as a precondition of any social order. Political practice, on the other hand,

entails laying bear the contingent character of all objectivity and reactivating "the moment

of decision [and power] that underlies any *sedimented* set of social relations[, hence,]...

enlarging the area of structural undecidability [and] also the area of responsibility".[24] For

example, if social relations are conceived as contingent and radically historical as opposed

to the manifestations of an essential, ahistorical and, thus, immutable social order, then the

responsibility for the reproduction *or* transformation of existing social formations falls on

the shoulders of struggling social/political agents. The goals of political struggle,

however, cannot be merely to dislocate sedimented social orders. The social logic of

instituting a new set of relations to replace the old is always a part of dislocatory practice.

For example, the goal of the Women's movement is not just to disrupt a sedimented

patriarchal order but to replace it with a set of social relations informed by feminist

principles. In light of this knowledge, Laclau reasons that "political victory is equivalent

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to the elimination of the specifically political nature of the victorious practices" [*NR*, 68].

In other words, the anticipated culmination of political practice occurs when the political

dislocatory moment matures into a moment of social institution:

> Once again we find the paradox dominating the whole of social action:
> freedom exists because society does not achieve constitution as a
> structural objective order; but any social action tends towards the con-
> stitution of that impossible object, and thus towards the elimination of the
> conditions of liberty itself. This paradox has no solution... [*NR*, 44]

For this reason, Laclau explains that the "boundary of what is social and what is political

in society is constantly displaced" [*NR*, 35]. Furthermore, there can be no such thing as a

purely social or purely political moment; neither can exist apart from the other if the

moment of undecidability is constitutive. Therefore, social relations will always be located

at the cross roads of the social and the political:

> If, on the one hand, a society from which the political has been completely
> eliminated is inconceivable--it would mean a closed universe merely repro-
> ducing itself through repetitive practices--on the other, an act of unmediated
> political institution is also impossible: any political construction takes place
> against the background of a range of sedimented practices.... The distinction
> between the social and the political is thus ontologically constitutive of
> social relations. [*NR*, 35]

If, as we established above, a pure moment of dislocation is unthinkable in that the

latter is always implicated in a moment of institution, then the political (as another term for

dislocation) and agents of the political fill the *contradictory* role of subverting current

social identities *and* facilitating the formation of new identities [*NR*, 39]. Laclau uses the

example of the experience of workers during the emergence of capitalism to illustrate this

contradiction of political dislocation. On the one hand, Laclau observes, capitalism

subverted the current social orders, traditions, and stabilities of the day through "the

destruction of traditional communities, the brutal and exhausting discipline of the factory,

low wages and insecurity of work" [ibid.]. On the other hand, workers responded actively

to these dislocations by 'breaking machines, organizing trade unions and going on strike',

forming new identities, skills and alliances which might not have been formed otherwise

[ibid.]. Political dislocation, therefore, Laclau argues, is the very form of possibility: the

possibility of subverting an established formation in order to make way for something else.

As such, political dislocation is the very form of freedom itself [NR, 42-43].

Still another way of representing the social/political, institution/dislocation

antinomy, Laclau proposes, is as the distinction between the spatial and the temporal:

"temporality must be conceived as the exact opposite of space" [NR, 41].[25] Laclau

perceives space as analogous to the social in that both entail the fixing of moments in a

structural totality. Spatialization equals the 'synchronization of successive moments', or

"[a]ny repetition that is governed by a structural law of successions" [ibid.]. Therefore,

the representation of time as a cycle, wherein all moments of the cycle are present at once,

is an example of the spatialization of time [NR, 42]. All representations, in fact, regardless

of the entity being represented, are spatializations. Pure dislocation, on the other hand, as

"the very form of temporality", is unrepresentable [NR, 41-42] in that it constitutes only

the subversion of representation—the subversion of the structural totality—and, hence, the

unfixing of the social space. The temporal, then, is associated with what Laclau calls 'the

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[25]   Doreen Massey provides a compelling critique of Laclau's configuration of
space/time from the point of view of a cultural geographer in her article, "Politics and
Space/Time", New Left Review, 196, 1992. Interestingly, Massey compares Laclau's
configuration of space/time with that of Fredric Jameson.   /

event', or the radical interruption of identity by its contingent outside. The spatial, on the other hand, is associated with the concept of the telos.

To compare the concept of the event with that of the telos is to approach the heart of Laclau's distinction between *his* understanding of historical transformation and that which he perceives as a Marxist one. A Marxist-Hegelian rendering of historical transformation, Laclau argues, entails the working out of an internal rationality or order where "everything acquires an absolute intelligibility within the grandiose scheme of a pure spatiality" [*NR*, 75]. By these terms, the transition from capitalism to an alternative social order must be understood as the "development of the contradictions belonging to capitalist forms themselves" [*NR*, 56]. Laclau, on the other hand, perceives historical transformation as the dislocation of social formations as a result of their interruption by pure event--their confrontation with a radical outside/temporality [*NR*, 75]. Laclau's characterization of a Marxist theory of history as a kind of teleology is a footnote to his more general critique of the essentialism of Marx and subsequent Marxisms. However, Laclau does not perceive the *entire* body of Marxist thought to be founded on an essentialist or objectivist logic. Theories of antagonism and political struggle such as Rosa Luxemburg's spontaneism, Sorel's concept of myth, and Gramsci's historical bloc are, according to Laclau, incipient anti-essentialist formulations [*HSS*, chaps. 1, 2]. Therefore, Laclau concludes, the "political and intellectual history of Marxism" is, in fact, the working through of an "internal tension" between essentialist and anti-essentialist logics [*NR*, 17].[26]

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[26]   Because the majority of the next chapter will be devoted to a comparison of Laclau's post-Marxism with Jameson's Marxism, specifically, I have avoided a detailed

It may seem, at this point, that a more direct treatment of the concept of hegemony is overdue. It would be a mistake, however, to think that I have been merely circling the target without making any direct hits. In many ways, I have been discussing *nothing else but* Laclau's concept of hegemony. To illustrate my point, following Laclau, we can separate the logic of hegemony into two moments [*NR*, 91, 219] (it will be an artificial separation because these moments are, in fact, ontologically inseparable). The first moment (in no particular order) witnesses the ultimate unfixity of all meaning, identity, objectivity, structure, social formation, order, etc., as a result of its negative, or contextual, constitution. It is "the moment of instability resulting from the presence of a constitutive outside" [*NR*, 219]. This formulation is the precondition of any hegemonic activity and I have discussed it at length by several names: contingency, antagonism, difference, reactivation, the political, the temporal, dislocation.

The second moment of Laclau's social logic of hegemony entails the attempt to transgress the first moment. It is the "attempt to effect [the] ultimately impossible fixation" of meaning and objectivity; to arrest the play of differences; "to domesticate infinitude [and] to embrace it with the finitude of an order"; to construct stable systems of identities—the hegemonization of collective identities—which *can* function as collective

exploration of Laclau's critique of Marxism and the relationship between Laclau's work and Marxism, generally, in the present discussion.

[27]   Ernesto Laclau and Lilian Zac, "Minding the Gap: The Subject of Politics", *The Making of Political Identities*, Ernesto Laclau (ed.), London and New York: Verso, 1994.

wills but have no essential or *a priori* design to do so [*NR*, 91]. Once again, the reader

will recognize this formulation, as well as, other names ascribed to it: necessity,

articulation, equivalence, the formation of discourse, sedimentation, the social, the spatial,

institution. The systems of meanings and relations, the social structures and orders that

are the result of the preceding processes we can call *hegemonic formations*. As I just

mentioned above, hegemonic formations have no transcendent, *a priori* dimensions, which

means that the how, what and by whom of their institution are all matters of power,

facticity, history. It is for this reason that Laclau argues that the place of power, in terms

of social organization and political struggle, is an empty place [*NR*, 192]. In other words,

there is no way of ultimately securing, ahistorically or acontextually, that place for one

particular hegemonic force—Left or Right, progressive or reactionary. For example,

Laclau and Mouffe argue in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* that a necessary objective

of political struggle for the Left, today, is the design of strategies for appropriating that

empty place of power through the "construction of a chain of democratic equivalences

[among various differentiated social identities] in the face of the neo-conservative

offensive" [*HSS*, 186]. And if there is no essential connection between the place of power

and the agent who fills it, then hegemonic practice works as a type of "hinge" 'suturing

the relationship between task and agent' [*NR*, 95-96].

The concept of various political identities competing to fill the empty place of

power in order to secure the chance of authoring the dimensions of the resulting social

formation brings us to another way of understanding the hegemonic process. As we

know, every social system, order, etc., is ultimately open, unstable and incomplete. Social

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formations are, therefore, characterized by an absence or *lack* of fullness (Laclau does

intend to reference Lacanian psychoanalytic discourse when he posits the concept of lack

as a central category of hegemony [*NR*, 96]). However, recalling both Derrida and Lacan,

Laclau argues that the fullness which continues to thwart the social is, in fact, present as

an absence which needs to be represented. The practice of finite and historical political

agents representing in their own terms the absent fullness of the social order--of "filling the

gap which has opened up in the 'objectivity' of the structure" [*NR*, 212]--is another way of

describing the hegemonic process. For example, Laclau writes:

> Let us suppose a situation of generalized social disorder: in such a situa-
> tion "order" becomes the name of an absent fullness, and if that fullness is
> constitutively unachievable it cannot have any content of its own, any form
> of self-representation.... That fullness is present, however, as that which is
> absent and needs as a result to be represented in some way. Now, its
> means of representation will be constitutively inadequate, for they can only
> be particular contents that assume, in certain circumstances, a function of
> representation of the impossible universality of the community. This rela-
> tion, by which a particular content overflows its own particularity and
> becomes the incarnation of the absent fullness of society is exactly what I
> call a hegemonic relation.   ["Time", 89-90]

Different groups or collective identities struggle to hegemonize their

representations of the social totality or absent fullness of the social order. Feminism,

environmental conservation, racial equality, as well as, free enterprise, individualism or

Christianity are all priorities around which different groups organize their social

representations. Not every identity, however, will experience an equal capability of

hegemonizing their representation of the social. The latter's popular acceptance depends

on its credibility [*NR*, 66] and its ability to articulate the priorities of other groups and

identities with it. If a particular representation of the absent fullness of the social manages to achieve popular acceptance to the degree that it dominates all other alternative representations, it assumes the role of an 'unlimited horizon of intelligibility' in terms of which are figured the forms of both social institution and political dislocation [*NR*, 64]. At this point, Laclau argues, that particular representation becomes a social *imaginary*: "The imaginary is a horizon:... as modes of representation... they are located beyond the precariousness and dislocations typical of the world of objects.... [I]t is because there are 'failed objects'... that the very form of objectivity must free itself from any concrete entity and assume the character of a horizon" [*ibid.*].

The representation that 'frees itself from any concrete entity' and comes to stand as the banner under which differentiated political struggles unite in order to confront a common enemy (which is the ground of their equivalence) is exactly what Laclau calls an *empty signifier* ["Why"]. These signifiers (representations) are 'emptied' of their particular concrete signifieds so as to stand, in name, for the ultimately unrepresentable absent totality ["Why", 174]. For example, the specific priorities and objectives of a particular worker's struggle could come to represent for other struggling groups the potential subversion of the status quo, in general, and, therefore, become the horizon of a unified struggling force consisting of various precariously articulated collective identities ["Why", 176]. Because no one struggling force is predisposed *a priori* to carry out this unifying function, the 'particular worker's struggle' in the example above, like any other struggle, has the potential to function in this capacity. "[E]mpty signifiers," Laclau argues, "[are] the very condition of hegemony" ["Why", 175]. "Politics is possible because the

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constitutive impossibility of society can only represent itself through the production of empty signifiers" ["Why", 176].

Particular Universality: Antinomy #6

Empty signifiers, representations of the absent fullness of the social, social imaginaries: these concepts can all be described in another way, according to Laclau; they are all examples of *universalisms*. The objectivity, or *universality*, of the social order may be an impossibility, but its function as a horizon within which equivalences can be established between particular identities is an imperative moment of all social formation. Because a fully universal identity cannot exist, a concrete and particular identity assumes the role of symbolizing the absent universality of the social. This situation entails that the relationship between the universal and the particular is a hegemonic one ["Subject", 153]. The concept of the universal, therefore, outside of its hegemonic relation to a particular identity is contentless; it cannot "operate beyond the context of its emergence" [Subject", 156]. And the 'context of the universal's emergence' is always an entirely historical context: "which particular demand... [plays] this function of universal representation is something which cannot be determined by a priori reasons" ["Subject", 157], therefore, introducing the possibility of democratic struggle between competing particular identities [*NR*, 81]. Further, the universal *emerges from* the particular because it signifies the transition of a particular content to a symbol of a fullness that transcends its original particularity.[23] Therefore, while the universal may be empty,

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it is absolutely essential for any kind of *political* interaction, for if the latter took place without universal reference, there would be no political interaction at all: we would only have either a complementarity of differences which would be totally non-antagonistic, or a totally antagonistic one, one where differences entirely lack any commensurability, and whose only possible resolution is the mutual destruction of the adversaries.

["Subject", 160]

While the universal can never be fully present, concrete and particular identities continue constantly to experience the effects of its absence, similar to Lacan's concept of *the Real* ["Beyond", 134]. Like Lacan's Real, whose presence is only experienced through symbolic mediation, the presence of the universal is, nonetheless, absolutely necessary. Several of Laclau's critics target what they perceive as a celebration of "a purely particular world [void of any conception of normative ground] in which social actors pursue only limited objectives", and where the universal is rejected as a totalitarian inspiration ["Beyond", 132]. While there is legitimacy to the argument that Laclau emphasizes a logic of contingency over a logic of necessity in order to compensate for what he sees as a political and intellectual history which has valorized only the universal side of the equation, Laclau does argue, repeatedly, that the particular is only one half of a theory of social formation. To recognize only this half at the expense of the universal is politically and theoretically unproductive: "The assertion of pure particularism, independent of any content and of any appeal to a universality, is a self-defeating enterprise" ["Universalism", 87].

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²⁵   Ernesto Laclau, "Beyond Emancipation", *Development and Change* (SAGE, London, Newbury Park and New Delhi), Vol.23, No.3, 1992, p.134. Hereafter abbreviated as "Beyond".

The first reason Laclau gives for the necessity of a concept of the universal is a logical one and consistent with his theory of hegemony as I have outlined it so far. 'Particularism is a relational concept' ["Beyond", 132]: to recognize an identity as particular is to recognize it as such *in relation to* other identities. If we were to conceive of a purely differential, nonantagonistic identity, we must presuppose, first, the presence of all other identities to which our first identity exists in relation and, second, some "total ground [i.e., a universal] that constitutes the differences *as* differences" ["Universalism", 88]--a context within which they are constituted in the absence of a constitutive antagonistic outside. If we try to imagine an open system of differential identities, than all identities will share a common relationship to an antagonistic outside. For example, to claim that the only thing that a number of identities have in common is that each is particular in relation to the others is still to reveal a commonality which transcends each individual particularity. Extending the argument, Laclau explains that "[t]o assert... the right of all ethnic groups to cultural autonomy is to make an argumentative claim which can only be justified on universal grounds" ["Subject", 147]. Therefore, to valorize particularism over and against universalism is a logical inconsistency. Furthermore, what is also entailed in the above formulation--anticipating a comparison between Laclau and Jameson--is that this precarious, unstable and *relative* universal ["Subject", 164], the constitutive horizon of every particular, is another term for the *social totality* ["Beyond", 132].

Two more reasons why, Laclau argues, the appeal to pure particularism is self-defeating are as follows. First, political struggle is involved in the creation of

identities because the objectivity of one identity is achieved through the exclusion and

subordination of other identities. In other words, differential identities are based on

relations of power ["Universalism", 88]. If the subjects of a social order recognize only

their differential character without reference to a universal horizon (it is the latter which

allows them to recognize power relations at all) this would amount to a "sanctioning of

the status quo" in terms of the power relations between identities [*ibid*.]. This latter

formulation, Laclau argues, "is exactly the notion of 'separate developments' as formulated

in *apartheid*: only the differential aspect is stressed, while the relations of power on which

the latter is based are systematically ignored" [*ibid*.].[29] Second, if particularism were the

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[29]   Strictly speaking, this 'appeal to particularism' cannot be a logical inconsistency if it
is a historical possibility as Laclau demonstrates with his example of South African
apartheid. What Laclau implies but doesn't explain, explicitly, is that this formulation (the
recognition by subjects within a society of only their differential quality without reference
to a universal horizon) works, analytically, in favour of those whose objective it is to hide
operative power relations, and it works to the detriment of those whose objective it is to
expose them. In other words, this formulation obscures the fact that different social
identities are unequal in terms of the power and manoeuvrability that, historically, their
subject positions afford. Therefore, Laclau's critique of this appeal to particularism does
not demonstrate that it is self-defeating but that it is inconsistent if, and only if, one
presupposes a ground which holds *equality among agents* as a normative principle (as
opposed to the principle of 'natural' inequality among agents, such as, that embraced by
neo-conservative discourses). This situation can be explained in two ways. Immediately,
one could argue that this is a lapse in Laclau's argument because the normative principle of
equality does appear to come out of thin air and contradict a logic of anti-essentialism.
However, it can also be explained, if rather creatively, by referring to earlier moments in
Laclau's argument.
         The principle of equality, Laclau argues, is a product of the Democratic
Revolution. Laclau states that every revolution, as an act not just of dislocation but also
institution, must conceal its contingent origins and represent its informing norms as
transcendent of their actual historicity 'in order to establish itself as a source of positivity'
[*NR*, 68-69]. This 'forgetting of the contingent origins' of all objectivity, meaning or social
configuration is a necessary moment in the hegemonization of that objectivity, etc.,
wherein the normative criteria of the latter come to exercise a positive and essential
function. Early in *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*, Laclau describes his
argumentative work, here, as hegemonic practice in that he is trying to 'win over' his

sole valid principle in terms of which identities could claim (relative)

objectivity/legitimacy, societies would be forced to legitimate "reactionary" collective and

individual identities "involved in antisocial practices" ["Universalism", 87]. As opposed to

this situation, a society must have recourse to more "general principles" in order to

regulate the clash between "progressive" and "reactionary" forces [*ibid.*][30] Finally and, by

now, not surprisingly, we are left with a paradox. Universality and particularity are

incommensurable *and* mutually constitutive; the 'universal is an empty but ineradicable

place' ["Subject", 157] And, as I have already quoted Laclau as saying, "[t]his paradox

cannot be solved, but its insolubility is the very precondition of democracy"

["Universalism", 90].

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readers and institute his formulation of the social in the context of contemporary social
and political theory. We have discussed earlier on in this chapter how a principle of
equality (equivalence) is, in part, foundational to Laclau's social logic of hegemony, as it is
for Laclau and Mouffe's formulation of a radical and plural democracy: "in the case of the
democratic imaginary... what is affirmed is not *positive* and *differential* identities but, on
the contrary, the *equivalence* between them" [*NR*, 187]. Therefore, one moment of
Laclau's attempt to hegemonize his formulation of the social, is to presuppose an
underlying concept of equality, the contingent origins of which he must necessarily
conceal. For more on this strategy or inconsistency of Laclau's, Cf. Vincent Pecora,
"Ethics, Politics, and the Middle Voice".
[30]   Once again, this argument of Laclau's presupposes already that the author and
reader share at least some 'general principles' such that the distinction between
'progressive' and 'reactionary' is not completely meaningless. For example, I refer the
reader to the preceding footnote for an explanation as to why at least one of the general
principles that Laclau can assume he shares with the reader is the concept of equality.

The relation between the particular and the universal can also be phrased in terms of the relation between the individual and the social totality or the agent and a hegemonic structure. The question of the nature of the relationship between agency and social formation is likely one of the most contested and well attended to debates in leftist social and political analysis: are agents self-determining or are they passive effects of the social structures into which they are born? I want, now, to turn to a discussion of Laclau's understanding of the relationship between agency and structure, the logistics of which I have been working through all along.

For Laclau, a social formation is the sedimentation of a, nonetheless, contingent order; contingent, in that it is characterized by its lack of full objectivity. *The structure's lack of fullness—the moment of dislocation—is the locus of the subject* [*NR*, 210]. In other words, the subject, also contingent and constituted by a lack of objectivity, is the site of tension between the inside and the outside of the structure. Because the social structure/institution is always ultimately unstable, it has only a 'weak capacity for integration' [*NR*, 223]. The subject relates to the structure through the active practice of identification, wherein the subject makes a decision to identify with the structure [*NR*, 210]. Specifically, the subject identifies with one or more of the various *subject positions* which are internal to the structure/institution [*NR*, 223]. Subject positions, Laclau explains, are simply another way of understanding the gaps and openings of a structure which are the traces of its radical outside. As subjects only have 'being' (recall Laclau's

distinction between an entity's 'being' and its 'existence') and, therefore, agency *as subject positions*, "the subject exists because of dislocations in the structure" [*NR*, 60]. And because there will be, practically, a multiplicity of ways in which the objectivity of a structure can be subverted, there will be, likewise, a plurality of subject positions internal to that structure [*NR*, 223]. The social, as relatively instituted objectivity, constitutes a field of subject positions. Subjects, as the very form of the dislocation of the social, threaten to subvert those positions even as they identify with them. Subjects are, by definition, political [*NR*, 61]: they are the "result of the impossibility of constituting the structure [the social]... as a self-sufficient object" [*NR*, 41]. Once again, we are faced with a familiar paradox. Subjects may tend to move towards the institution of the social (identification), while existing, at the same time, as the very possibility of freedom (dislocation) [*NR*, 44].

The absence of an underlying rationality between structure and subject implies that the subject's making of the decision to identify with the structure 'presupposes an act of power' [*NR*, 60] and, therefore, hegemony. The articulation of structure and agent does not entail the coming into relation of two already fully established identities as we know. During the course of articulation, all identities involved are (re)created, or, transformed into something different. Therefore, it is impossible to posit structure before agent or agent before structure; through hegemonization, agent and structure are both the creators and the (re)created.[31]

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[31]   . Anticipating my discussion in the next chapter, Laclau's characterization of the relation between structure and agent on this point is strikingly similar to that of Jameson where subject is both the product and the producer of the social totality.

> ...the question of *who* or *what* transforms social relations is not pertinent.
> It's not a question of 'someone' or 'something' producing an effect of
> transformation or articulation, as if its identity was somehow previous to
> this effect. Rather, the production of the effect is part of the construction
> of the identity of the agent producing it... For example, one cannot ask *who*
> the agent of hegemony is, but *how* someone becomes the subject through
> hegemonic articulation instead.   [*NR*, 210-11]

Therefore, we cannot speak of 'recognizing or discovering the true identity' of social

agents.[32] If the hegemonization of a social order transforms the identities involved in its

institution and, similarly, the destructuration of the social initiates a transformation of the

identities involved in its dislocation, then social agents are *constructed*

entities--constructed *in relation to* the sedimentation and reactivation of social

structures/institutions [*NR*, 30]. The construction of social identities is the result of

subjects' identification with social structures and the subject positions they afford: "agents

themselves transform their own identity in so far as they actualize certain structural

potentialities and reject others" [*ibid.*]. The absence of 'true' or 'essential' social identities

make possible the process of identification: "one needs to identify with something because

there is an originary and insurmountable lack of identity" ["Introduction", 3].

On the one hand, agents actively reconstruct social structures. If a structure or

institution has achieved a relatively high degree of stability over time, it is not the result of

some essential or ahistorical quality of that institution but that agents have, with regularity,

recreated that institution again and again over a period of time [*NR*, 223]. On the other

hand, agents do not come to work on structures from the outside. Subjects only have

agency by identifying with the subject positions which are internal to structures. Structure

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[32]   Ernesto Laclau, "Introduction", *The Making of Political Identities*, Ernesto Laclau
(ed.), London and New York: Verso, 1994, p.2. Hereafter abbreviated as "Introduction".

and agent, therefore, are not two separate entities. While structure is always only partial and in constant need of the intervention of the recreating/articulating agent, agents only 'have being' in terms of their articulation with social structures, systems of meaning, discourses, etc. Such a formulation, Laclau argues, avoids both the Scylla of structural determinism and the Charybdis of absolute voluntarism. Furthermore, it facilitates the politically significant recognition of subjects as the *creators of* their social reality: "Inasmuch as argument and discourse constitute the social, their open-ended character becomes the source of a greater activism".[33] No longer is it necessary to perceive, with a kind of Frankfurt School-style pessimism, a structure like the capitalist system as a "self-regulating totality", wherein 'transformation can only be an internal moment of the system itself', rendering the system impervious to any potentially subversive agent [*NR*, 52]. Instead, Laclau argues, "[h]umankind... [can] consider itself for the first time the creator and constructor of its own history" ["Politics", 79-80].[34]

The 'Last Instance' Never Arrives

We can extend Laclau's argument that neither structure nor agent can exist completely autonomously in terms of the other to the consideration of the relationship between "levels" of experience—political, economic, ideological, etc. According to

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[33]   Ernesto Laclau, "Politics and the Limits of Modernity", *Universal Abandon, The Politics of Postmodernism*, Andrew Ross (ed.), Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1988, p.79. Hereafter abbreviated as "Politics".
[34]   The reader may recall from the preceding chapter that this consideration is equally an important moment of Jameson's dialectical thought.

Laclau, for one level, such as the economic, to determine other levels--political, social, ideological--it would necessarily entail the primacy and autonomy of that first level. However, because all structures, including those designated as economic, are contingent, i.e., both constituted and subverted by that which is radically external to them, no one level of experience can achieve such a primordial and essential status. As such is the case, to designate one set of relations, such as, a perceived set of economic relations, as determining, *in the last instance*, the subsequent social fabric, Laclau observes as a lapse into idealism. Materialist analysis, on the other hand, is that which vigilantly affirms the contingent character of all relational systems of meaning. Therefore, in terms of an understanding of the relation between levels of experience, one discerns "not an interaction or determination between fully constituted areas of the social, but a field of relational semi-identities in which 'political', 'economic' and 'ideological' elements will enter into unstable relations of imbrication without ever managing to constitute themselves as separate objects" [*NR*, 24]. It *is* possible for a social structure or institution to achieve a high degree of stability if it is reproduced with regularity. Over time, the contingent origins of the structure/institution can be conventionally forgotten while the latter comes to be perceived as an autonomous entity. In light of this situation, which we described earlier as sedimentation, one can conclude that autonomy, itself, is a "hegemonic construction" [*H*SS, 140].

Conclusion

Social and political theories, such as Laclau's social logic of hegemony, which proceed from a critique of foundationalism, a critique of the self-adequate, "centred" subject, the affirmation of contingency and negativity, and the jettisoning of the belief in an underlying rationality of the social and social relations, are accused by some critics of apoliticism, at best, and neo-conservatism, at worst.[35] The accusation entails that the abandoning of the category of the subject as origin of free will and self-determination (i.e., 'the death of the subject') equals undermining the possibility of social/political agency, resulting in political paralysis and the sanctioning of the status quo. Laclau, of course, argues the contrary; formulations which other theorists have perceived pessimistically, Laclau perceives with optimism [*NR*, 35-36]. "If social relations are contingent", Laclau explains, "it means they can be radically transformed through struggle... and if power is ineradicable, it is because there is radical liberty that is not fettered by any essence" [*NR*, 36]. Further, he argues, "the field of possibilities for historical action is... widened, as counter-hegemonic struggles become possible in many areas traditionally associated with sedimented forms of the status quo" [*NR*, 82]. The difference between an anti-essentialist and an essentialist social logic is the difference between understanding our humanity as something constructed or as something we already have, the true essence of which must,

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[35] For example, see the work of Jurgen Habermas, especially, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, and "Modernity—An Incomplete Project", *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Hal Foster (ed.); Terry Eagleton, "Discourse and Ideology", *Ideology, an Introduction*, and "Marxism Without Marxism" *Radical Philosophy*, 73, 1995; E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*.

therefore, be recognized [*NR*, 83]. Simply put, because social formations have no *a priori*

design, they are what we make them; an understanding which Laclau believes can instil in

social agents a sense of responsibility for the dimensions of the greater social landscape.[36]

And far from reaching a conclusion of political paralysis, Laclau claims, "this final

incompletion of the social is the main source of our political hope in the contemporary

world: only it can assure the conditions for a radical democracy" [*NR*, 82].

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[36]   It is interesting that Laclau's conclusion that human subjects create the social order
(as well as being created by it) is a Marxist formulation as well, and one forwarded by
Jameson, as I demonstrate in chapter 2. I make this point, in more detail, in chapter 4.

Chapter Four

Strangers in the Night: the Unlikely Conjunction of Fredric Jameson and Ernesto Laclau

The purpose of this final chapter is to compare the critical positions of Fredric Jameson and Ernesto Laclau with the goal of revealing the possibility of a somewhat unconventional (and hopefully more measured) understanding of the relationship between them. I am aware that a comparison of the work of Jameson and Laclau is already unconventional in the sense that these two theorists are rarely looked at together formally, or even occasionally.[1] However, debates concerning the relative strengths and weaknesses of Marxist *vs.* post-Marxist (or Marxist *vs.* poststructuralist, Marxist *vs.* psychoanalytic) analytical categories *are* well rehearsed, and it is my sense that the present analysis has significance for such work, if only to demonstrate that the practice of situating more generalized debates can problematize, productively, suppositions which may have more to do with 'establishment' and 'convention' than with creative insight or detailed scrutiny. For example, instead of concluding that the critical positions of Laclau and Jameson are necessarily oppositional in light of their theoretical orientations, I will attempt to move in a different direction and demonstrate where Laclau's and Jameson's arguments converge in

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[1] Doreen Massey's article, "Politics and Space/Time", *New Left Review*, 196, 1992, is a rare example of a formal comparison of Jameson and Laclau in terms of their configurations of the space/time relation.

certain interesting ways; a discovery which can serve to undermine an "either/or" representation of their work.

I do not mean to imply that there are not fundamental distinctions between Jameson's dialectics and Laclau's theory of hegemony. Nor will I refrain from analyzing what I perceive these fundamental distinctions to be. However, those entrenched points of contention on which debates between Marxists and post-Marxists tend to focus most often--contentious points such as, a totalizing vs. non-totalizing perspective, foundationalism vs. antifoundationalism, the relationship between the universal and the particular, Identity vs. Difference; a Utopian vs. an anti-Utopian approach, and the relative autonomy or interdependence of the cultural, political, economic, ideological, etc., "levels" of experience--are not, I would argue, necessarily points of divergence between Laclau and Jameson. On the contrary, these categories, which have traditionally represented moments of impasse between Marxists and post-Marxists, seem to resonate in surprisingly similar ways in both Jameson's and Laclau's work. In this chapter, I will attempt to set aside any presuppositions which might accompany a comparison of Jameson's and Laclau's work in order to discern whether it is possible to posit a relationship between them that is something other than reified opposition or mutual exclusivity. In Jameson's words, what follows is an attempt to temporarily put aside "the discontinuities of separate opinions and positions and [search] out crucial points at which even opposing positions seem to share a common conceptual dilemma..."[2] for the purpose of "[making] a detour around the reifications of current theoretical discourse".[3]

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[2]   Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994, p.xiii. Hereafter abbreviated as *ST*.

In the first part of this comparison of Jameson's dialectical criticism and Laclau's social logic of hegemony, I want to begin with more general, "wide angle" observations and move towards a narrower and more detailed examination of these respective positions. First, it is necessary to highlight the rather glaring discontinuities which one immediately perceives to exist between Laclau and Jameson such that it is not surprising if a mediation and/or articulation of their work should seem a fruitless project. As I mention in the introduction to the previous chapter, there are some obvious dissimilarities between Laclau and Jameson that would indicate a great distance separating their perspectives.

First, while Jameson has worked consistently from the time of his earliest publications to demonstrate the subtlety and scope of Marxist analysis and to underscore the importance of continuing to exploit its categories of thought, Laclau's writing, on the other hand, depicts a steady movement away from Marxism and, finally, the outright repudiation of certain Marxist categories. In fact, the notion of dialectical thinking and its elements of totality, contradiction and mediation—concepts which enjoy a privileged status in Jameson's work, as I attempt to argue in chapter 2—constitute the targets of Laclau's more vigorous attacks. For example, Laclau argues that as one of the more overtly 'idealist and determinist tendencies within Marxism' [*NR*, 108], dialectics consists of a purely conceptual model of the movement of history [*Ibid.*]; a set of inexorable laws which allows philosophers to predict history's inevitable forward roll towards the promised

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³   Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991, p.182. Hereafter abbreviated as *PM*.

land [NR, 205] without regard for facticity or empirical observation.[4] According to

Laclau, dialectical thought reduces the real to 'form' [NR, 108][5] and, hence, to a concept.

The contradiction is the motor of dialectical transformation and, as such, represents an

"internal movement of the concept" [NR, 8]. For Laclau, the dialectical category of

contradiction and, hence, transformation are considered within Marxist formulations as

built-in features of the social order, implying that social change is an *internal* mechanism

as opposed to being the unpredictable consequence of an interruption of the social order

by the contingent historical event. Similarly, the theme of 'reality following concept'

informs Laclau's repudiation of the dialectical categories, totality and mediation. The

concept of social totality, Laclau argues, entails that the social order is a system of

relations which is discernible in its entirety. "The status of... totality [is] that of an essence

of the social order which [has] to be *recognized* behind the empirical variations expressed

at the surface of social life" [NR, 90]. Mediation describes the internal relatedness of all

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[4]   Laclau's plea for empiricism (and it is not an isolated occurrence) represents one
side of a tension (unacknowledged by Laclau and, surprisingly, by many of his critics)
which runs throughout his work between a positivistic (deferring to notions of the "real",
"factual" and "empirical") and a negativistic (all objectivity is contextual, constituted
through an antagonistic outside) orientation. Interestingly, Jameson argues that
postmodern theoretical discourse, with its commitment to "particular" and "actual"
subjectivities and histories (and in the context of Jameson's argument, one can include
Laclau in this category) is, in part, the legacy of a tradition of positivism associated with
empiricism and the social sciences [Fredric Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno, or, the
Persistence of the Dialectic*, London and New York: Verso, 1990, p.89, 90. Hereafter
abbreviated as *LM*]. I will spend more time working through what the historical
opposition between dialectics and empiricism means for a comparison of Jameson and
Laclau in the final section of the chapter.
[5]   Somewhat ironically, both Laclau and Jameson describe their own approaches as
nonformalist, while describing, disapprovingly, the approach of the other as formalist and
something for which their own work might serve as a corrective (Laclau targets dialectics,
generally, while Jameson targets Laclau's work directly [NR, 108 and ST, 43]). Once
again, I will refrain from addressing this situation until the final section of the chapter.

elements constituting the social totality [*HSS*, 94] and is, therefore, according to Laclau, a concept equally scarred by an essentialist logic. These characterizations of central Marxist and dialectical categories are clearly very different from those we find in Jameson's analysis. More interesting for my purposes, however, than Laclau's rather caricatured version of Marxism will be the concepts Laclau adopts to replace those he finds lacking, and how the former compare to a Jamesonian version of their Marxian counterparts.

Second, in light of the overtly different ways in which Laclau and Jameson interpret central Marxist categories, it is no surprise that a discontinuity exists in terms of how each theorist situates Marxism with regard to the greater context and history of social and political thought. Because, Jameson argues, dialectical historiography entails the discerning of connections between different analytical traditions, including the latter and dialectical historiography itself, as an "attempt to unify a field and to posit the hidden identities that course through it,"[6] this type of analysis functions as a horizon that transcends all differentiated theoretical positions. For Jameson, Marxism subsumes all other approaches within its totalizing perspective.[7] Laclau, of course, tells a different story. According to Laclau's narrative, Marxism and the concept of socialism represent one evolutionary stage in what Laclau describes as a two hundred year old "democratic

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[6]   Fredric Jameson, "Marxism and Postmodernism", *New Left Review*, 176, July/August, 1989, p.34.

[7]   I am not implying that Jameson's is a synchronic approach whose dimensions can be sketched independently of some concrete content. As I have already argued, the form of Jameson's dialectical criticism is historically determined. Furthermore, the readiness with which a totalizing analysis can be adopted is also dependent upon historical circumstance. For example, the ideology of individualism and compartmentalization which is an element of the contemporary mode of production (Jameson calls the latter postmodernism) has contributed to the hostile reception of a totalizing approach which attempts to demonstrate the interconnectedness of all things.

revolution": the introduction and maturing of a political imaginary founded on the concepts of liberty and equality, originating in the French Revolution and symbolized by the Declaration of the Rights of Man [*HSS*, 155]. However, Laclau explains, because Marxism and the socialist discourses are marred by positivist and essentialist overtones, they have proved unable to carry the democratic revolution to its ultimate stage and must, therefore, be supplanted. The transition from Marxism to post-Marxism represents the purging of essentialism and positivism from radical Leftist discourse and the establishing of the necessary discursive climate for the hegemonization of a radical and plural democracy. Post-Marxism, or Laclau's social logic of hegemony, is the final evolutionary stage of a democratic revolution which subsumes Marxism as one of its internal and less developed moments.

Third, it takes only a superficial glance at Jameson's and Laclau's work to realize that their characterizations of the social world—of the nature of human relationships including the one between human beings and that which they confront as their "external" reality—are almost exactly the reverse of each other. (And however much Laclau and Jameson insist that their characterizations of the social are firmly rooted in history, as opposed to some less transitory orientation, such characterizations entail essentializing. For the attempt to describe 'how something is', is necessarily also the attempt to transcend that very history which has allowed one to make such characterizations in the first place; even if, as is the case with Laclau, the essence to be posited is one of contingency and nonessence.)

According to Laclau's formulation, because objectivity is determined by what is external to it, there can be no necessary, essential or internal relationships *between* objectivities. Social relationships are hegemonic articulations; i.e., they are purely functions of a social logic of radical contingency. And for Laclau, contingency is a characteristic of the social which transcends any particular historical moment and, therefore, is the "essence" of the social world. Jameson's formulation, on the other hand, appears to be the reverse of Laclau's. For Jameson, the totalizing movement of dialectical thought entails the *assimilation* of contingency; the recognition, only in retrospect, of how, within a given historical context, certain patterns of organization or sequences of events were unavoidable: "dialectical interpretation is always retrospective, always tells the necessity of an event, why it *had* to happen the way it did...."[8] Much differently from Laclau, Jameson argues that the "essence" of the social world is history, or, the stories of *necessary* relations and interdependencies. And similar to the status of the concept of contingency for Laclau, these necessary dependencies between objectivities exist in any case, regardless of whether the exigencies of a particular mode of production cultivate the ability to perceive them or not.[9] For Laclau, social reality is open and contingent, yet, can only be represented through totalities or universalisms (hegemony, or the institution of the social, depends upon fragmented and dislocated entities and political agents overflowing their particular content and representing themselves as—becoming the incarnation of—*the*

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[8]   Fredric Jameson, *The Ideology of Theory, Volume 2: The Syntax of History*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988, p.41. Hereafter abbreviated as *IT*.
[9]   What is more, Jameson argues that the ideological demands of the current mode of production; postmodernism, definitely *do not* accommodate the "mapping" of totalities, or, the networks of relations between phenomena.

social totality). For Jameson, on the other hand, social reality is a kind of totality which can only be represented, ultimately, (and especially within the contemporary mode of production, postmodernism) in a fragmented and compartmentalized way (the object of "a Marxist hermeneutic... is precisely not given as a representation but rather as an *absent cause*, as that which can never know full representation [*IT*, 149-150]).

I want to interrupt, temporarily, this cataloguing of the more overt dissimilarities between Jameson and Laclau and shift our point of view from "wide angle" to "telephoto" with the goal of demonstrating that the nature of the relationship between Laclau and Jameson becomes somewhat more difficult to discern when the finer details of their positions are put into play.

Convergences

For the second part of this comparison, I will narrow the focus of the analysis while continuing to look at the themes introduced in the preceding section and adding others as we go along. For those configurations which, until now, I have described as a point of divergence for Jameson and Laclau--eg., whether it is a logic of totality/necessity or a logic of hegemony/contingency which underwrites social formation--may betray some commonalities when compared from a different angle.

Immanence and Utopia

Beginning with an example of one such divergence-cum-commonality, to imply, as I do above, that contingency and history are *oppositional* in terms of Jameson's and

Laclau's configurations of the essence of the social is, in at least one sense, misleading.

For example, it can be argued, I believe, that *both* Jameson's and Laclau's analyses must

constantly reverberate between contradictory historical and transcendent[10] moments.[11] On

Laclau's part, the perception that there are no historical conditions of contingency can only

be considered a transcendent moment: contingency, as social logic, transcends all

particular situations. Meanwhile, if all identity/social formation is fundamentally

contingent, then the dimensions of that identity/social formation--from individual psychic

landscapes to the global restructurings of multinational capital--are entirely historical.

Similar to Laclau, on Jameson's part, the content and dimensions of all social formation

have historical conditions of existence, without exception. History, however, as

totality,--as the absent cause which we experience only in its effects--alludes empirical

observation and immediate experience. The social totality is a concrete historical reality

which we can only approach, as historical subjects, by way of abstraction: we

conceptually map (i.e., we totalize) the concrete through the abstract, through reflection,

through analysis which represents an attempt to transcend our historically situated

condition which, nonetheless, always ends up constraining our perceptions.[12] Therefore,

to position Laclau and Jameson in terms of a historical *vs.* nonhistorical approach

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[10]   I'm using the term transcendence, here, to refer simply to the concept of thinking
outside one's time, place, mode of production, etc.
[11]   My observation, here, is not meant as the exposure of a fault or inconsistency in
either Jameson or Laclau. Jameson, for example, (unlike Laclau) recognizes both the
historical and the transcendental tendencies of his dialectics. Cf., for example, chapter 7
of *PM* titled, "Theory: Immanence and Nominalism in Postmodern Theoretical
Discourse".
[12]   One's historical situatedness can potentially also favour the perception of the social
totality; for example, the historical situation and associated totalizing vantage point which
Lukács claims for the proletariat.

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(whichever theorist is associated with whichever approach), from one angle, may not be as accurate as comparing Laclau and Jameson in terms of two different versions of the equation of history and the social.

However, there is more to say on the relationship between that which so far I have called the historical and the transcendent tendencies which seem to mutually haunt one another in both Laclau's and Jameson's analyses. To open up the relationship further will require the introduction of a new set of terms as well as a more precise sense of the old. For example, we would do better to designate by the term *immanence* the concept that we are ultimately confined within our time and place and that engagement with anything beyond our immediate experience will always be shaped by the ideological structures of the latter. Even though a concept of immanence has been recognized as being a central component in the intellectual tenor called "New Historicism" [*PM*, 181], to designate this understanding as a historical tendency instead, as I do above, is misleading. This is especially the case in Jameson's work where history means a great deal more than that which we are calling immanence, including the almost antithetical understanding that history is the invisible structure which *connects* us to the outside of our immediate experience and not that which keeps us from it. I will resignify, then, for the moment, the tension identified above as one between immanence and transcendence.

Elaborating upon the immanence/transcendence tension in Jameson's work, we can recognize it, as does Jameson, as a dialectical one. In what sense the concept of immanence in Jameson, which entails the understanding that we exist within structures or systems that are particular to our time and place (consumer capitalism) and which shape

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and determine even our imaginations [*Ibid.*, 207] (and, hence, our ability to conceive of alternatives to that system), is haunted by a concept of transcendence, can be demonstrated by Jameson's own example of how Marx perceived the transition from capitalism to socialism. Marx's critique of Capital and his painting of a desirable socialist alternative *is accompanied by* an explanation of how the logic of capitalism was already creating within itself the structures of socialism that would supplant it [*Ibid.*, 205-6]. If our present social formation is "pregnant" with the seeds of future formations than our present experience is both immanent to, and transcendent of, that formation at the same time. Marx's conception of the transformation of capitalism to socialism, Jameson argues, was neither completely immanent nor transcendent: "even if they have no 'ideal,' the communards have a program, and their consciousness of it reflects the limits imposed on them by the very situation the program is designed to change: 'mankind always raises only those problems which it is already in a position to solve.'" [*Ibid.*, 206].

At this point, it becomes clear that another term for transcendent thought is Utopia, visions of which persist in Marx's thought in dialectical suspension with immanent forms of critiques, and whose complicated presence there refutes arguments, such as Laclau's, that Marx's conception of social change is a function of the internal laws of history and, therefore, entirely idealist. Jameson describes, in no uncertain terms, the integral part that Utopian thought plays in his analysis as well. "critiques of consumption and commodification can only be truly radical when they specifically include reflection... above all, on the nature of socialism as an alternative system" [*Ibid.*, 207]. The "obligation" of the dialectic, for Jameson, is to make connections between that which we

call today local or micropolitics--one's "immediate situation"--and a totalizing, global or

Utopian vision [IT, 73] a "local issue is meaningful and desirable in and of itself, but is

also *at one and the same time* taken as the *figure* for Utopia in general, and for the

systematic revolutionary transformation of society as a whole" [*Ibid.*] Yet, even with

regards to such an unquestionable affirmation of the importance of Utopian critique, there

is no place in Jameson's dialectical thought where one can rest comfortably for too long.

It is a mistake, Jameson argues, to understand Utopian thought as-a type of "hall pass"

which allows one to step outside their culture, social formation, etc., even temporarily.

Envisaging Utopia is not a possibility in this sense, but its *impossibility* is crucial. The

attempt to think Utopia is relevant specifically in terms of where that attempt falls short

because it is this failure which allows one to perceive where the limitations of her or his

present time and place exist:

> It is thus the limits, the systematic restrictions and repressions, or empty
> places, in the Utopian blueprint that are the most interesting, for these
> alone testify to the ways a culture or a system marks the most visionary
> mind and contains its movement toward transcendence. But such limits,
> which can also be discussed in terms of ideological restriction, are concrete
> and articulated in the great Utopian visions: they do not become visible
> except in the desperate attempt to imagine something else; so that a relaxed
> consent to immanence--a consciousness in advance of the necessary failure
> of the project that leads us to renounce it--can yield no experimental infor-
> mation as to the shape of the system and its boundaries, the specific social
> and historical fashion in which an outside is unattainable and we are turned
> back in on ourselves.   [*PM*, 208-9]

Structure and Agency

Here, we can make a timely turn towards Laclau. For the preceding quotation

which arguably epitomizes the dialectical cadence of Jameson's analysis, somewhat

ironically, also resonates strongly with Laclau's own formulation. Before I explain what might seem like a surprising claim, however, I want first to look in more detail at the tension between immanence and transcendence which I have already argued exists in Laclau's work but upon which, unlike Jameson, Laclau does not seem to reflect explicitly.

Rejecting what he understands as a Marxist-Hegelian rendering of social transformation, where the latter is the result of the internal rationality of the social order, Laclau argues, instead, that social transformation is the result of the interruption of the social order by a radical outside--by that which lies beyond sedimented discursive boundaries, i.e., social change is an external/transcendent,[13] as opposed to internal/immanent, phenomenon. Here, Laclau's formulation is on line explicitly with at least half of Jameson's dialectic in terms of affirming what Jameson calls the "revelation of the *extrinsic*" [*IT*, 43]. However, I would argue that there exists, simultaneously, an underlying immanence to Laclau's formulation, as follows: the absence of any internal rationality in social structures places the burden of responsibility for social change solely on the shoulders of human agents. Human agents, however, do not, and cannot, act entirely outside of, or independently from, social structures. Rather, subjects can only become agents through their articulation with subject positions which are internal to structures [*NR*, 223]. The subject, Laclau argues, exists as the site of tension between the

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13   I'm sure that Laclau would not agree, in any way, with my characterization of his formulation as demonstrating a transcendent tendency. Transcendental critique, in Laclau's lexicon, is synonymous with the equally unacceptable notion of essentialism. Laclau would more likely describe his work as post-transcendental, given the latter term's semantic relationship to other terms such as anti-essentialist, non-objectivist, etc.

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inside and the outside of the structure and, therefore, as the site of the articulation between agency and structural efficacy [*Ibid.*].

At this point, not only does the transcendent/immanent tension in Laclau's formulation become clear, we are, consequently, confronted with an analysis which seems to have posited very little distance between itself and the dialectics it sought to leave behind (at least in name). Subjects create and act upon social structures / Subjects are only able to act through their articulation with social structures: outside becomes inside, cause becomes effect and *vice versa*. Both Jameson's and Laclau's analyses of the relationship between structure and agency and the dynamics of social change conclude by emphasizing the responsibility that human actors bear for the creating, maintaining and transforming of social structures without positing, to use Laclau's language, 'a priori agents of change' [*HSS*, 178]. For both Laclau and Jameson identities are formed and transformed through practice and through relationships with other identities. Laclau, for example, in a description of what he calls the "fetishism of identities" [*NR*, 234] approaches Jameson's notion of the "decentred subject", or, the recognition of one's interconnectedness to all other subjects which is the requisite of responsible action: "Merely relational identities, whose constitution thus depends on the whole of the discursive-strategic field in which they are inserted, are presented as if they belong to the agents' very individuality and had established relations of mere exteriority with that field" [*Ibid.*]. For Jameson, as well, the critique of the decentred subject is a response to the reified individualism and fragmenting imperatives which Jameson attributes to late Capitalism.

Hauntology, or, Spectral Logic

I want to use as one final context for the comparison of Laclau's and Jameson's

theories of historical transformation, Jacques Derrida's book, *Specters of Marx*.[14]

Specifically, it is Derrida's own theorizing of historical transformation which becomes an

interesting point of articulation between Jameson and Laclau. More generally speaking,

this identified point of articulation has to do with what Derrida calls the logic of the

specter, or, *spectrality*. The specter, in Derrida's formulation, is all that is the 'other' of

ontology: "a world cleansed of spectrality is precisely ontology itself, a world of pure

presence, of immediate density, of things without a past...".[15] Spectrality is Derrida's name

for the self-inadequacy of the present ontological moment, the hold of the past on the

present, the whole network of human relations and conventions which ventriloquate the

present. The idea that our immediate perceptions are haunted by that which we cannot

immediately perceive (i.e., history, or, the genealogy of conventions, alliances, traditions,

common sense, etc.) is not new for Derrida. For example, he has referred to the concept

by several other names in the past: the trace, textuality, *différance*, alterity, undecidability,

etc. In fact, Jameson has argued that Derrida's life's work has always involved the chasing

of such ghosts ["Purloined", 102]. What is interesting for the present discussion,

however, is that Derrida's ghost story in *Specters of Marx* is perceived by both Laclau and

Jameson to be an allegory for their own formulations.

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[14] Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994.

[15] Fredric Jameson, "Marx's Purloined Letter", *New Left Review*, No. 209, Jan.- Feb., 1995, p.102. Hereafter abbreviated as "Purloined".

For Laclau, Derrida's spectrality is a way of depicting the presence of a contingent and radical outside which haunts every objectivity. It represents the interminable moment of dislocation--the "dislocation corrupting the identity with itself of any present" ["Time", 88]--which forever undermines self-adequacy while providing the very possibility itself that some form or content can transform into some *other* form or content. This latter possibility is what Derrida calls the "formal structure of promise" [*Specters of Marx*, 59], and entails that the possibility of transformation is an inherent structural property of all experience or objectivity. The structure of promise, however, which Derrida also describes as a type of messianism, is not prescriptive. It incorporates in advance the unpredictability of new knowledge, new techniques and new political givens without any sense of what their content might be. For Laclau, Derrida's messianic refers to the *primordial* opening of every objectivity, identity, experience, etc., to its 'other'--its constitutive outside--"whose lack of content... is the very possibility of justice..." ["Time", 90-91]. Laclau explains:

> ...the general movement of Derrida's theoretico-political intervention... is
> to direct the historico-political forms back to the primary terrain of their
> opening to the radically heterogenous. This is a terrain of a constitutive
> undecidability, of an experience of the impossible that, paradoxically, makes
> possible responsibility... I find myself in full agreement with this movement.[16]

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[16]   I do not agree with Laclau, entirely, when he describes Derrida as attempting to direct "historico-political forms back to the primary terrain of their opening to the radically heterogenous". While I believe this is also how Laclau would describe his own work, Derrida's intervention is different from Laclau's on at least one fairly fundamental point, which is that for Derrida, acting in the world entails that the awareness of the 'radically heterogenous' be transgressed. Haunting Derrida's formulations is the acknowledged understanding that every time one acts, speaks, writes or theorizes (even theorizing about radical heterogeneity) one is simultaneously making an effort to transgress radical heterogeneity. Therefore, Derrida's project is not to 'decentre the subject', but to expose the mechanisms by which the subject always centres itself. This formulation is closer to

Derrida's structure of promise is, for Laclau, the structure of dislocation and the precondition of historical transformation without any predisposition as to the content of that transformation.

The specters which haunt objectivity in Derrida's analysis, and whose presence result in the messianic structure of all experience, are also, for Jameson, allegorical of the dialectical concept that the seeds of future forms/contents exist already in those of the present. For while spectrality entails the determining traces of *the past* in the present, it also entails "traces of the future" ["Purloined", 104]: "[Derrida's] messianic is spectral, it is the spectrality of the future, the other dimension, that answers to the haunting spectrality of the past which is historicity itself" [*Ibid.*, 108]. Derrida's spectral logic, therefore, incorporates both those things which, in Jamesonian terms, we can call historicity and Utopia. More specifically, it is Jameson's argument that that which Derrida calls the messianic is the same phenomenon which Jameson calls Utopia: the impossibility which, nonetheless, necessarily *must be* [*Ibid.*, 104]. And like Jameson's Utopia, Derrida's messianic is "energetically future-oriented and active" [*Ibid.*], but in a way which we cannot, with any certainty, imagine or predict: "This is the notion of the non-announced, the turning of a corner in which an altogether different present happens, which was not foreseen" [*Ibid.*, 107].

Laclau's argument that every act of political interruption is attended by the attempt to institute an alternative social order--that is, by the attempt to re-hegemonize the dislocatory moment.

The Universal and the Particular

The idea that Utopia, in some form or another, is an element of social analysis

which should not be forsaken, may be one of the rare *explicit* moments of convergence

between Jameson and Laclau. I think I have already made it clear that the concept

reserves a central place in Jameson's work. For an explicit reference to the concept in

Laclau, we can look at an earlier essay called "The Impossibility of Society" wherein

Laclau writes, "...as the vain attempt to institute that impossible object [, society,]...

Utopia is the essence of any communication and social practice" [*NR*, 92]. That is, Laclau

understands his hegemonic logic--the post-political instituting of some kind of social

order--as a form of Utopian thought. Some may take issue with my reading of Laclau and

argue that Laclau swiftly abandons the concept in his later work, dismissing Utopian

analysis as essentialist. It is true that, later on, the trajectory of Laclau's critique of

Utopian thought, as well as, his formulation of the theory of hegemony and radical

democracy almost obliges him to pronounce his own work as anti-Utopian [see, for

example, *NR*, 232-233]. However, it is not exactly the concept of Utopia itself which

Laclau rejects, but the form that Utopian thought has taken for past and contemporary

Leftist social and political theorists. In fact, not only does the concept of Utopia survive

in Laclau's later work, it reserves centre stage, if by another name: the universal.

To demonstrate that a concept of Utopia persists in Laclau's later work and that

his version of it bears interesting similarities to that of Jameson, I want, finally, to turn

back to my earlier discussion of Utopia in Jameson. I would argue that, as opposed to

more explicit statements, the implicit convergences between Laclau and Jameson which I

am about to sketch are the most interesting and the most revealing. At the beginning of the section titled 'Structure and Agency', and before a somewhat lengthy digression, I began to argue that Jameson's dialectical formulation of the concept of Utopia signals a point of convergence between Jameson and Laclau. Recall that, for Jameson, Utopia is both a necessary and an impossible moment. Utopian thought is most important not in terms of the future visions it allows us to see, but in terms of those ideologically camouflaged social, political, cultural and economic limitations which the failure of Utopian imaginations exposes to the light of day. Remember also that, for Jameson, micro or local politics exists in a relationship to Utopia which we can liken to two sides of a piece of paper. The local and the global--the particular and the universal, in other words--are dialectically mediated in Jameson's formulation. The local/particular exists in and for itself while existing simultaneously as an allegory or figure for the global/universal.

Turning to Laclau, we find, first of all, that that which Laclau, himself, calls a "possibility-impossibility dialectic" [NR, 36] exists at the heart of his theory of hegemony. For example, the very condition of possibility of any and all identity, objectivity, social formation, etc., is the latter's constitutive outside which exists, simultaneously, as the condition of *im*possibility for the full and total constitution of that identity, objectivity, social formation. It is an objectivity's constitutive outside which both makes possible and impossible that objectivity. Second, and more significantly, let us recall Laclau's configuration of the relationship between the universal and the particular as I attempted to sketch it in chapter 3. According to Laclau, in order to hegemonize some sort of social order, particular and historical agents must overflow their finite identities and become the

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incarnation of the, otherwise, absent social totality. In other words, particular identities attempt to represent the absent universal social order. In turn, the represented universal functions as a type of ground or horizon only against, or in terms of, which can equivalences, unities or alliances be established between otherwise particular and differentiated identities. Furthermore, that which Laclau calls the universal in his later writing functions precisely in the same way as that which in his earlier writing he calls Utopia. (to repeat) it is the representation of a social totality in terms of which agents attempt to hegemonize a particular social order.

Like Jameson's Utopia, Laclau's Utopia/universal is at once impossible (universalisms in Laclau cannot be empirically or factually realized[17]) and absolutely necessary: necessary, yet, doomed to failure. Both Laclau's and Jameson's Utopia/universal represent the politically imperative transcendent impulse of immanently situated historical actors. Furthermore, both Laclau and Jameson have taken the possible-impossible relationship between the universal and the particular as a defining allegory for their logic of hegemony and dialectical thought, respectively, one explicit goal of which has been, in both cases, to displace such reified dichotomies which have characterized much social analysis [HSS, 14]. In fact, Jameson argues in *Late Marxism* that the production of such reified dichotomies, whose oppositionality precipitates a "generalized crisis (existential, social, aesthetic, philosophical, all at once)" [LM, 89], is one of the predominant tendencies of postmodern theoretical discourse given the latter's investment in what Jameson refers to, by way of Adorno, as positivism [*Ibid*.]

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[17]   This particular character of Laclau's sense of the universal signals an important *divergence* between Laclau and Jameson which I will explore in the next section.

(Positivism, here, for Jameson and Adorno, refers to "a commitment to empirical facts and worldly phenomena in which the abstract—interpretation fully as much as general ideas... —is increasingly constricted" [Ibid].) In Laclau's language, it is the universal ground which allows equivalences to be forged between, say, differentiated political struggles, where the success of the latter depends on the extent to which these struggles can locate such common ground. For example, Laclau, with Chantal Mouffe, argues that,

> The strengthening of specific democratic struggles requires, therefore, the expansion of chains of equivalence which extend to other struggles. The equivalential articulation between anti-racism, anti-sexism and anti-capitalism, for example, requires a hegemonic construction which, in certain circumstances, may be the condition for the consolidation of each one of these struggles. [HSS, 182]

The logic of equivalence in this formulation entails that differentiated political struggles can never remain completely autonomous from all others; "equivalent symbols of a unique and indivisible struggle" [Ibid]. However, this does not mean for Laclau that these struggles are hence subsumed within one overriding identity. Differentiated political struggles maintain their own integrity and specificity while existing on a terrain of equality which prevents the hierarchization of interests [Ibid, 184]. Laclau's conception of the equivalential articulation of different struggling groups bears a resemblance to Jameson's plea for "alliance politics" to such an extent that Jameson, himself, has remarked on the similarity. While in Laclau's formulation, 'the individual' is only conceivable within the context of a larger matrix of transindividual relations, Jameson, too, argues that the radicality of different political struggles rests in their ability to form "strategic interrelationships" [ST, 65] or alliances with other struggling groups, while warning

against the perception of such totalizing impulses as suspicious on principle. In other words, Jameson argues that it is too hasty to assume that any alliance forged between struggling groups necessarily translates into the subsumption and, hence, suppression of many diverse voices and interests by one dominating interest:

> Only caricatural memories of specific moments of Stalinism encourage the belief that the concept of totalization means repressing all these group differences and reorganizing their former adherents into some ironclad military or party formation for which the time-honored stereotypical adjective always turns out to be "monolithic"; on the contrary, on any meaningful usage... the project necessarily means the complex negotiation of all these individual differences and has perhaps best been described, for our generation, by Laclau and Mouffe in their book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, which its authors, however, believe to be directed against "totalization" as such. [*Ibid.*]

Both Jameson's and Laclau's formulation preserve the individual within the collectivity. For neither theorist is this tension (which we can call antinomy for Laclau, and contradiction for Jameson[18]) between the particular and the universal resolved. For Laclau, its resolution would entail one or the other of two equally unacceptable errors, i.e., an essentialism of the totality or an essentialism of the elements. For Jameson, the practice of thinking a contradiction, like individual/collectivity or particular/universal, without resolving it--a practice to which Jameson refers as "determinate negation" [*Ibid.*, 131]--is a distinguishing characteristic of dialectical thought. For one thing, in Jameson's formulation it is a mistake to understand universality and particularity as commensurable in the first place; as though they existed on the same level and could be thought "together in a 'synthetic judgement', with whatever inversion of the philosophical and logical

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[18]   Cf. chapter one of *Seeds of Time* for Jameson's theorizing of the difference between the contradiction and the antinomy.

hierarchy of subject and predicate seems desirable" [*Ibid*, 29]. The positioning of the universal and the particular as a thinkable contradiction is, itself, a function of a *universalizing* tendency, of "philosophical language, which, in trying desperately to designate what is other than the universal, continues to use an abstract terminology and the very form of logical opposition or dualism to convey its protest against the operations of that language and that logical form" [*Ibid*]. This incommensurability of the universal and the particular also precludes the possibility of their synthesis or the taking of some *third position* somewhere in between the two moments [*Ibid*, 39]. On the contrary, the dialectic flips from one moment to the other, never resting long enough to feel completely at home in any one place.[19] In fact, the relentless tension between the universal and the particular in Jameson's work—the permanent sense of discomfort that accompanies dialectical thought—is cultivated and foregrounded as a type of "suffering for the mind" (to use Adorno's words) [*Ibid*, 90] and as a way of emphasizing the difference between such discomfort and the alternative, that is, the repression of that tension, the domination of one side over the other, or their "logical reconciliation" [*Ibid*]. Recently, Jameson argues, this repression of the dialectical tension between the universal and the particular has taken the form of "the positivistic dismissal of universals as sheer metaphysical survivals" and/or

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[19]   The structure of Jameson's book, *Late Marxism*, provides an allegory for this restless movement of the dialectic. In the table of contents, which we can consider a representation of the totality of the book, each individual chapter is given a title. However, in the body of the book, the subsequent chapters are designated only by a number, making it necessary for the reader, if she or he wants to know the title of that chapter, to flip back to the table of contents. Thus, the process of reading *Late Marxism* mimics that of dialectical thought in that it requires a flipping back and forth between the individual chapters and the totality of the book represented by the table of contents.

the equation of particularism with the "placid form of the unproblematical appearance of everyday reality" [*Ibid.*], as is the case with some postmodern theoretical formulations.

Totality or Contingency?

Another way of understanding the relationship between the universal and the particular in Jameson's dialectical criticism and in Laclau's social logic of hegemony is as a relationship between the social totality and individual subjects [*Ibid.*, 245]. As has been the case throughout these chapters, once again we approach the question of totality only to find that we have been tracing its outline all along. The final question I want to ask in this section on convergences is just how different is Jameson's 'totality' from Laclau's 'founding antinomy between contingency and necessity'—an antinomy to which Laclau often refers, simply, as 'contingency'?

The concept of totality (which we can also call 'history', 'mode of production' or 'the universal'; to name a few of its aliases) stands in Jameson's formulation for the mass of social relations and structures, institutions, traditions and conventions which both transcends and is the creation of individual subjects (i.e., objectivity and its other in one thought) and which we can only conceive of as a type of Althusserian 'absent cause' [*IT*, 150]. In Jameson's words, it is "the invisible shaping power of history, which everywhere exceeds the existent or the isolated fact, just as it betrays its omnipresence in all the contents of my consciousness, from the social to my very language, none of which belongs to me. The birth of history is just that acknowledgement of... totality" [*LM*, 90-91]. Contrary to the vision of the hermetically sealed social system which Laclau attributes to the concept in the context of Marxist discourse, Jameson does not claim for himself, or

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anyone, an omnipotent perspective of society's boundaries. As I argue in chapter 2, Jameson's totality is not "total" in this way: "a mode of production is not a 'total system' in that forbidding sense; it includes a variety of counterforces and new tendencies within itself, of 'residual' as well as 'emergent' forces, which it must attempt to manage and control" [*PM*, 406]. It is because the social totality is *not* immediately perceivable--because we cannot know its perimeters first hand--that totalizing practices must involve questions of representation; that is, in Althusser's sense, totalizing involves the formulating of 'imaginary resolutions to our real contradictions' [*Ibid.*, 401]. The social totality can only ever be approached by way of such representations or historical abstractions (capitalism, postmodernism and patriarchy are the names of some contemporary enabling representations) the figuring of which Jameson has also called "cognitive mapping".[30] The point of cognitive mapping or other totalizing exercises is to enable the individual to represent to him/herself, even if in a partial way, his or her relationship to the "vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole" [*Ibid.*, 51].

I believe that a similarity between the notion of cognitive mapping and Laclau's concept of the social functions of hegemony is discernible. Both entail the production of totalizing social visions, at least one function of which, is to allow one to think an alternative to the status quo. Secondly, recalling Laclau's formulation of contingency, the conditions of existence of all objectivity is the antagonistic presence of its constitutive

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[30]   Cf., for example, Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping", *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

outside; an 'other' which both constitutes identity and blocks its full presence. Jameson, on the one hand, argues that despite a relative autonomy of each identity, there exists, nonetheless, a connectedness between all identity and its other which Jameson calls totality. Laclau, on the other hand, argues that there is *no* connection between identity and its other--its constitutive outside--*except* that they are mutually constitutive. My question is: does not mutual constitutivity--a relationship which Laclau describes as utterly necessary--exist in Laclau's configuration as a connectedness between identity and its other which is understood to be at least as primordial (I would argue more so, in fact) as any in Jameson's work? Laclau states, "there is a... subtle dialectic between necessity and contingency: as identity depends entirely on conditions of existence which are contingent, its relationship to them is absolutely necessary... [I]dentities and their conditions of existence form an inseparable whole" [*NR*, 21]. I am arguing that there exists a similarity between this "inseparable whole" and Jameson's concept of totality. Both formulations point to a tension between an inside and its outside which cannot be repressed either by the reconciliation of its two sides or their complete and final severance. Interestingly, both Laclau and Jameson liken contingency and totality, respectively, to Lacan's notion of the Real, i.e., as that which we cannot represent and, yet, must attempt to in any case; as something which underwrites all experience, but that we experience only in its effects.

Furthermore, what I have identified as a certain similarity between the concepts totality and contingency leads Laclau and Jameson towards other similar conclusions on at least two other subjects. The first subject is ideology. While the post-Althusserian

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debates over the concept of ideology have taken exceedingly nuanced and complicated forms--forms upon which are reflected throughout Jameson's work--Jameson continues to emphasize the usefulness of that which has come to be considered (often by 'theoretically sophisticated' poststructuralists) as old-fashioned ideology critique, or the exposing and historicizing of hidden presuppositions [PM, 334]. Ironically, while Laclau has expressed his intentions of distancing his own form of ideology critique (Laclau preserves the terminology [NR, 92]) from this Marxian one, it is my argument that the actual distance between the two versions is quite small. Laclau's reconceived sense of ideology is as the concealment of the moment of alterity (negativity, undecidability, etc.) which underwrites all objectivity and the will to fix meaning as a positive essence (Laclau admits that because one moment of the logic of hegemony is the institution of some meaning or order that the movement of hegemony is partly ideological [Ibid.]). The function, therefore, of ideology critique, in Laclau's reformulation, is to expose the "precarious character" of any positivity and direct if back to the terrain of difference [Ibid.]: in other words, "to *reactivate* the moment of decision that underlies any *sedimented* set of social relations" ["Time", 93]. Furthermore, that a will to *historicize* political, economic, social and cultural 'givens' is the central movement of *both* old-fashioned ideology critique, as well as, some post-Althusserian reformulations of it, has not escaped the notice of several critics, including Jameson: "My sense is that everyday garden-variety theoretical discourse pursues a task finally not very different from that of common-language philosophy (although it certainly does not look like that!), namely, the exclusion of error by way of the vigilant tracking of ideological illusions" [PM, 392].

The second subject concerns the relationship between the various identifiable "levels" of experience (political, economic, cultural, etc.). Specifically, both Jameson's understanding of totality and Laclau's of contingency induce them to posit a sort of relative autonomy[21] between these levels which allows their separate identification while observing an interconnectedness which finds them, at the same time, "inextricably fused", to use Laclau's words [NR, 26]. In terms of Jamesonian dialectical analysis, the ever-expanding sphere of critical reference results, for example, in a concept of politics which cannot be separated out from economic and social considerations; in other words, political practice cannot be theorized outside of a context of social and economic organization. For Laclau, because any identity such as 'the political' is, at once, blocked and constituted by that which it is not, i.e., the economic, the cultural, etc., a *necessary* interrelation exists between these 'levels'. The result, in Laclau's terms, is "a field of relational semi-identities in which 'political', 'economic' and 'ideological' elements will enter into unstable relations of imbrication without ever managing to constitute themselves as separate objects" [*Ibid.*, 24].

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[21]   Laclau makes a point of distinguishing between the type of relative autonomy he is proposing and that proposed by Althusser. Laclau rejects Althusser's formulation because Laclau believes the necessity-contingency dialectic in Althusser to be undermined by his concept of "economic in the last instance", which, Laclau argues, contaminates the analysis with an essentialist logic. Alternatively, according to my own understanding of Althusser, thus far, I am unable to locate any practical distinctions between the two formulations. In my view, the debate revolves predominantly around terminology.

Nearing the end of this chapter, I find that the current train of thought must shift register once again. For some of those moments in Jameson and Laclau which, until now, I have described as converges, when pushed further, appear to take an about-turn. Similarities, significant in their own, become also the means of introducing differences and vice versa.[22] Furthermore, instead of leading to some kind of resolution between the ideas of Jameson and Laclau, the present comparison has displayed, from early on, the dynamic of a type of "hypertext", in that, the act of working through the present material has not resulted in a concluding analysis, but to the opening up of new areas of interest and inquiry. And similar to Jameson's description of the potentially ever-expanding and/or contracting degrees of analysis--a situation I allegorized as a *mise en abyme*--it is unlikely that the present discussion will find its own tidy resolution.

To begin sketching the following divergences (i.e., convergences which have taken an about-face) we can use as a starting point the relationship between the universal and the particular--a problematic which has maintained a central place throughout most of these chapters. For the universal and the particular are semantically linked to another couplet, namely, the abstract and the concrete; and, here, Laclau and Jameson part ways dramatically. In Laclau's lexicon, the universal and the particular translate directly into the abstract and the concrete, respectively. Particularity is concrete, immediate, specific; the individual, the factual, the empirical. Furthermore, it is the *opposite* of universality [*Ibid.*,

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[22]   So as not to give up the game, the reader may recall my marginalizing the traces of such initial reversals in the preceding section by relegating them to footnotes.

xiv]; of that which is abstract, empty, absolute, ideological. Universality represents, for

Laclau, those dominating and contentless ideals of history (Humanity, Rationality, Truth,

Masculinity, Femininity, etc.) which have tyrannized real and concrete human beings. He

writes:

> I think that the main task of a new culture... [is] to pass from cultural
> forms constructed as a search for the universal in the contingent, to
> others that go in a diametrically opposite direction: that is,... that con-
> struct the beauty of the specific, of the unrepeatable, of what trans-
> gresses the norm. We must reduce the world to its 'human scale'.
>
> [*Ibid.*, 190]

There is, however, one theoretical formulation which Laclau neglects to factor into

the preceding narrative which, I believe, throws a wrench into the works, so to speak. In

fact, I would argue that Laclau's neglecting of this tenet is especially strange since it is one

of the central tenets of both psychoanalytic thought, as well as, Derridean deconstruction,

two intellectual currents which have influenced Laclau's thinking. The tenet to which I am

referring is the concept that individual subjects are spoken by a history, a set of norms,

conventions, traditions, prejudices, etc., which lie beyond our conscious grasp. In this

formulation, the boundaries of every individual far exceed that which is immediate,

concrete, empirical or knowable. Derrida's critique of presence, for example, is the

attempt to problematize the privileging of so-called empirical and immediate knowledge by

exposing the absences and aporias that constitute its foundation. It is ironic that Laclau

turns to Freud in the very next sentence following the above quotation as one author of

the "human scale" which he calls for above; Freud,--of all examples!--the theorist of the

*sub*conscious (i.e., we are not even immediately knowable to ourselves), of desires which

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speak through the individual but find their origins in other places: social, including family, relations, history, myth.

Instead, and not without irony once again, it is Jameson's Marxist genealogy which allows him to theorize the abstract/concrete couplet in such a way as to anticipate these, nonetheless, astute and important "poststructuralist" formulations of 'decentred subjectivity' or the *non*-immediacy of our own individual experiences. Unlike Laclau, it would seem that Jameson concurs with many poststructuralists *and* Marxists that the concrete individual is shot through with society, history, the "abstract" collectivity at every turn. "History already thinks the thinking subject and is inscribed in the forms through which it must necessarily think" [*LM*, 24]. Even the very language with which I fashion my most personal and intimate thoughts is a social and collective phenomenon which far transcends my immediate time and place: "'Society precedes the subject',[23] thought's categories are collective and social; identity is not an option but a doom; reason and its categories are at one with the rise of civilization" [*Ibid.*].

It is odd, too, in one sense, that for a theorist so expressive of the dangers of objectivist and/or positivistic discourses that Laclau should also put such implicit faith in a concept of 'facticity'. For Laclau, history is not that which lies beyond our immediate knowledge--that which we experience only in its effects--but is, instead, empiricism itself. According to Laclau's anti-essentialist formulation, because identities, relations, etc., are not the reflections of some primordial *essence*, their perimeters are entirely the result of 'real', factual and empirical circumstances, i.e., history: "A final characteristic of social

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[23]   Adorno quoted in Jameson.

relations is their radical historicity.... To understand something historically is to refer it back to its contingent conditions of emergence.... it is a question of deconstructing all meaning and tracing it back to its original facticity" [NR, 36]. For Jameson, however, this connection between a type of positivism—a faith in the real, actual and particular—and postmodern theoretical discourses[24] does not seem all that odd

First of all, Jameson argues that in terms of much postmodern theoretical discourse there is a connection between the "commitment to empirical facts" [LM, 89] discussed above and the rejection of everything abstract—representation, interpretation, historical narratives—as signalling an old-fashioned metaphysical thought, long since out of fashion. That such a connection exists in Laclau's formulation, Laclau himself would not disagree. As to the *reasons* for taking such a position, Jameson and Laclau cannot remain reconciled. While we have already discussed that, for Laclau, the turn to the particular/concrete is a response to a long history of domination by a set of universal and absolute ideals, Jameson argues that it is a logical extension of the mode of production he calls both late capitalism and postmodernism:

> ...our historical metabolism has undergone a serious mutation; the organs
> with which we register time can handle only smaller and smaller, and more
> and more immediate, empirical segments; the schematism of our trans-
> cendental historical imagination encompasses less and less material, and
> can process only stories short enough to be verifiable via television. The
> larger, more abstract thoughts... fall outside the apparatus; they may be
> true but are no longer representable—it is worse than old-fashioned to
> evoke them, rather a kind of social blunder is involved.   [LM, 95]

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[24]   Jameson includes discourse theory and poststructuralism in the category of "postmodern theoretical discourses" and, according to his description of it in PM, I believe that for the present discussion we can situate Laclau there as well without doing violence to his formulations.

Therefore, for Jameson, 'the desire to eliminate philosophical activity', *even one which situates itself within a spirit of anti-capitalism*, is at one with a late capitalist logic which tends to fragment its subjects' sense of the whole into smaller and smaller unrelated bits, precluding the possibility of imagining large-scale resistance, never mind an alternative social and economic organization all together [*ST*, 40-41].

At this point, some may conclude that such a division of thought renders Laclau and Jameson irreconcilable. However, I want to argue that we can more productively position them as two sides of the same coin, or, that these two formulations share a common 'itch', namely, identity. For the concept of identity against which Laclau rallies in the name of a repressed concept of difference is the same identity which Jameson points out is at the heart of the exchange relationship (i.e., the labour theory of value demonstrates how differentiated kinds of labour must be standardized for the purpose of exchanging the products of that labour). And if we are faced with two versions of the postmodern tending to the particular/concrete--one reactionary and the other progressive--it is not because one theorist is wrong and the other right, it is because this tendency of the postmodern is both of these things at once: it is a critique of a logic of capitalist identity which proceeds through the extension of that same logic. I will admit, however, that Jameson does seem closer than Laclau to a self-reflexive recognition of the relationship between their two positions, and that, possibly, he and Laclau have been talking about the same object all along:

> It is true that Laclau and Mouffe are less attentive to the tendency to
> differentiation and separatism, infinite fission and "nominalism," in small
> group politics... for they see the passion for "equality" from which the

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small groups spring as the mechanism which will also forge them--by way of the "chain of equivalents," the expansive power of the equations of identity--into alliances and reunified Gramscian hegemonic blocs. What they retain of Marx is thus his diagnosis of the historical originality of his *own* time, as the moment in which the doctrine of social equality had become an irreversible social fact; but with the omission of Marx's causal qualification (that this social and ideological development is the consequence of the universalization of wage labor...   [*PM*, 319]

It is interesting, however, that the divide between Jameson and Laclau in terms of the abstract and the concrete, in another context, appears to reverse itself. In a different discussion of very similar themes, Jameson accuses Laclau and Mouffe, as proponents of antifoundationalist formulations, of putting forward a most abstract type of formalism where, having 'rigged the game in advance', a logic of radical contingency and antiessentialism becomes a model to which all of "concrete" history is forced to adhere [*ST*, 43-44]. Suddenly the terms of the debate seem to be turned upside-down: Jameson uses a concept of the "concrete" to reproach Laclau and Mouffe with excessive abstraction. Not surprisingly, Laclau's repudiation of dialectical criticism is also founded on Laclau's belief in the latter's formalistic quality--proceeding by 'reducing the real to form' and, hence, to an ideal [*NR*, 108]. At this stage, it is not my point to argue which theorist is truly guilty of formalism, just that their concerns with very similar problematics (even the similarity of their terms) seem to imply that a kind of more intimate relationship lies behind these conflictual thoughts.

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Conclusion

Just what to call this relationship between the critical positions of Laclau and

Jameson, however, I'm not certain. Something like the name (if there is one) for the

relationship between the electrons which orbit a common nucleus may be appropriate. In

any case, I have attempted to demonstrate at least two things regarding this relationship in

this chapter: first, that it is not fixed and, second, that it is more complicated than one of

mere oppositionality. First, I demonstrated that the dimensions of the relationship

between Jameson and Laclau will shift and reconfigure according to the problematic in

question, and in terms of the analytical lens in place (i.e., in terms of a point of view which

can range from the panoramic to the molecular). Second, there is something of a

conventional presumption of oppositionality where the intellectual and political traditions

of Marxism and post-Marxism are concerned. I meant, here, simply to offer an

unconventional reading of the relationship between these two traditions and to

problematize that presumption of oppositionality. I demonstrated, I believe, significant

convergences of the two lines of thought, particularly interesting because they tended to

align themselves with those debates which have been most contentious between Marxists

and post-Marxists: questions of totality, Utopia, necessity *vs.* contingency, particularism

vs. universalism, and the relationship between structure and agency. As well, I identified

points of division which, even so, represented something more complex than opposition in

a strict sense. It is not my point with this chapter to argue that all comparison of

intellectual and political projects must be made bearing all angles of scrutiny and every

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intricacy of argument in mind. This is not, in every case, possible or desirable. A generalized landscape of the relative positions of ideas and traditions within social and political theory is necessary and useful. My point has been to demonstrate that these landscapes will always be as deceptive as they are necessary; that no figuration of the relative critical dimensions of the positions of Jameson and Laclau (and, I would argue, allegorically, the positions of Marxists and post-Marxists) can proceed without the uneasy awareness that it may be an inadequate representation in terms of some unforeseen context waiting around the next corner.

Conclusion

The Politics of Intellectual Production

My goal in writing this thesis, perhaps overambitiously, existed on two levels. On the first, more immediate level, my goal was to provide clear explanations of certain theoretical formulations of Fredric Jameson and Ernesto Laclau; formulations which, in the context of Left-oriented social and political thought, in general, I believe are important, but which have, nonetheless, been contentious in their own ways, as well as, reputedly "difficult" or obfuscatory. Furthermore, and still on this first level, my goal was to compare the formulations of Laclau and Jameson, exposing commonalities between them which would undermine representations of the relationship between their ideas as being strictly oppositional. Towards this goal, my reading of Jameson and Laclau collapsed more conventionally supported distinctions between, for example, their concepts of totality and contingency, between their critiques of Utopia, their understandings of the relationship between the universal and the particular, as well as, the relationship between structure and agency.

On a second level, this thesis sought to function allegorically. On this level, Fredric Jameson stands as an allegory for the more flexible and agile possibilities of Marxian analysis, while Ernesto Laclau stands allegorically for the rewriting of poststructuralist categories in specifically social and political terms. Accordingly, through the comparison of Laclau and Jameson (which remains significant in itself, I believe), I

sought also to represent the potential articulation and/or mediation of Marxist and poststructuralist thought.

There is, however, one more slightly different sense in which this exercise may be considered allegorical, namely, in terms of the method through which we can come to perceive such "discordant affiliations"[1] between "competing" discourses such as Marxism and poststructuralism. In other words, the point which I tried to make by way of the structure of this thesis—and it is a point which finds a home in both Marxism and poststructuralism (for Marxism in terms of the various versions of the dialectical concept of permanent revolution, and for poststructuralism in terms of the deconstructivist concept of the incessant 'othering' or haunting of ontological imperatives)—is that conclusions drawn with regards to the nature of the relationships between various critical positions will shift, reverse, transform according to the angle from which one observes those relationships. Every panoramic observation, necessary in itself, is, at the same time, haunted by the intricate details of those objects of its gaze which threaten to prove its conclusions false or, at least, uncertain. Similarly, analyses completely immersed in the molecular structures of their objects may be oblivious to the shifting dimensions of those objects when they are historically situated. The point, here, is not to resolve the tension between the panoramic and the molecular. Nor was the goal of this thesis to resolve the tension between Marxism and poststructuralism—between Jameson and Laclau. I did not mean to advocate some type of third, synthesized position. Instead, I attempted to advance the kind of permanent uncertainty which I describe above—this never allowing

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[1] Fredric Jameson, "Marx's Purloined Letter", p. 84.

oneself to feel too comfortable in one's conclusions which is characteristic of both dialectic

and poststructuralist thought, and which, I would argue, is the requisite of responsible,

productive and "politically correct" social/political/cultural analysis.

I will, of course, qualify this, perhaps, unusual concept of "politically correct"

social/political/cultural theory. In the general context of critical scholarship, in any field,

the institution of certain ideas or theoretical formulations over others, as well as, *how*

certain divisions or alliances between formulations or critical positions become naturalized

or legitimated over other possible divisions or alliances, is often only partly the result of

the content of those positions, ideas or formulations, and partly the result of that which I

am calling the politics of intellectual production. I believe it is not an exaggeration to say

that some philosophical debates have as much to do with the establishing and overturning

of intellectual authority or canons of thought as with the content of the ideas involved. Of

course, these two things overlap to a great extent, but it is also a mistake to understand

them synonymously. Theorists such as Gayatri Spivak and Seyla Benhabib demonstrate a

particular consciousness with regards to situating their own practices of doing and

presenting research within an academic context which is far from benign or disinterested.

For example, it is in the spirit of such incessant intellectual self-consciousness which

Spivak advocates "persistent critique rather than academic competition disguised as the

politics of difference [as] a more productive course".[2] While the point for those engaged

in social criticism is not to avoid the unavoidable, that is, the immediate "political" context

of their intellectual work, what I *am* calling 'politically correct' social theory is that which

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[2]   Gayatri Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, New York and London:
Routledge, 1993, p.53.

proceeds with a consciousness of this context--how it can shape what research is done, what questions are asked and what conclusions are reached.

While it is unavoidable that the legitimating of one's theoretical position proceed not only through "positive" self-reflection but through the critique or debunking of alternative or "contradictory" positions, Spivak points out that both these unifying and dividing tendencies in intellectual production have been pushed to unproductive extremes.[3] Reducing the usefulness of a "competing" concept by giving it a minimal explanation is an observable practice which can be the result of several factors, including the pressure on academics to "publish or perish" in a competitive environment where academic jobs are becoming fewer and less stable. Discussing similar themes, Jacques Derrida has argued that the various possibilities for public intervention by intellectuals have been restricted by the rhythm of the mass media. The media's rapid pace and demand for concision and resolution make the possibilities for sustained analysis obsolete. For example, Derrida explains that,

> "[t]his different time, the time of the media, gives rise to a different distri-
> bution--different spaces, rhythms, intervals, forms of speech-making and
> public intervention.... Some intellectuals are reduced to silence by it--those
> who need a bit more time, and are not prepared to adapt the complexity of
> their analyses to the conditions under which they would be permitted to
> speak. It can shut them up, or drown their voices in the noise of others--at
> least in places which are dominated by certain rhythms and forms of
> speech.[4]

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[3]   Gayatri Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, Sarah Harasym (ed.), New York and London: Routledge, 1990, p.15.
[4]   Jacques Derrida, "The Deconstruction of Actuality: An Interview with Jacques Derrida", *Radical Philosophy*, 68, Autumn, 1994, p.30.

While Derrida's reference, here, is to public speaking, I want to argue that something like "media time" influences the intellectual practices of research and publishing as well: for example, when academic careers are increasingly measured by the weight of their published volumes, more measured analyses, demanding greater preparation time, may be sacrificed and replaced by those which have taken time only to reproduce well established wisdoms.

In response to these unproductive tendencies and pressures within intellectual production, Seyla Benhabib argues that, instead of inspiring division, measuring competing claims against one another can soften the boundaries which have been built around them,[5] challenging the canonization of an intellectual or disciplinary division of labour.[6] Similarly, Gayatri Spivak argues that bringing competing theoretical discourses into dialogue can have strategically salutary consequences. Appropriating a concept from Marx, Spivak argues that such a dialogue could force the debate towards a "productive crisis",[7] wherein each position exposes the limits of the other, allowing the theorist to be more self-reflexive and better equipped to manage the contradictions of her/his practice.

My reason for introducing this discussion of what I have called the politics of intellectual production in the conclusion of this thesis is that I think it would be difficult to deny that in at least one sense, however marginal a one, the almost canonized division between Marxism and poststructuralism has been the result of those politics of which I

[5]   Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*, New York and London: Routledge, 1992, p.26.
[6]   Gayatri Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, Sarah Harasym (ed.), New York and London: Routledge, 1990, p.111.
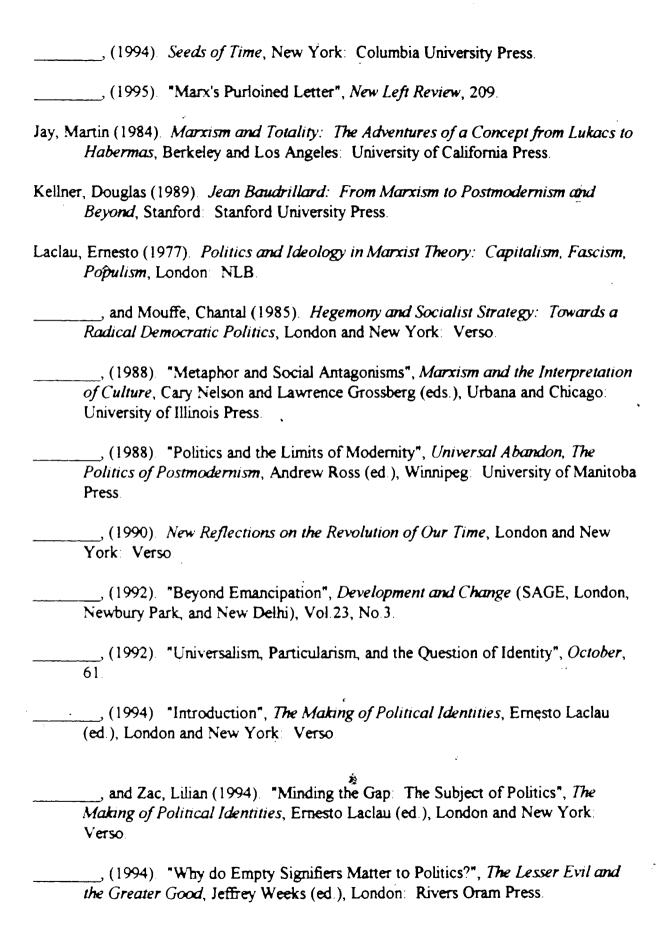[7]   Gayatri Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, New York and London: Routledge, 1993, p.53.

speak above. My intention with this thesis was, in a small way, to force some of the lesser foregrounded content of these positions back into the debate in order to undermine these more conventional and "rigidly certain" interpretations of them.

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