

Narrative and History

—A critical reading of F. Jameson's "On Interpretation"—

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I

This essay aims to read critically Fredric Jameson's essay "On interpretation", the first chapter of his seminal book, *The Political Unconscious*, in conjunction with a reading of de Man, focusing on the issue of the relationship between narrative (and more broadly, language) and history. Jameson's project in this essay is very ambitious to the extent that he attempts to incorporate all thinkable critical methods into his own suggestion of a new Marxian interpretation. This project is well summarized in his scandalous motto: "Always historicize!"¹⁾ As is made explicit in this short dictum, the notion of history and historicity constitutes a point of departure for Jameson's work.

Jameson contends that the projects of formalism, structuralism and post-structuralism, lacking an authentic notion of history²⁾ and

1) Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981) 9. Hereafter, page references will be identified in the text.

2) As for Jameson, history is nothing less than the absent cause of narratives, in that history is not accessible without prior narrativization. Jameson is much indebted to Althusser's notion of structural causality opposed to Hegelian

the notion of diachrony, should be inevitably imprisoned within the boundary of the "linguistic model", ultimately translating all narrative forms into the axis of synchrony. Jameson's final touchstone to evaluate any theories arises from his elaboration on the issue of diachrony and historicity.³⁾ This critique of so-called formalistic theories might be traced back to Jameson's earlier work, *The Prison-House of Language* (1972). In this book, he takes pains to examine the absence of temporality in the problematic of (post) structuralism. He writes: "Thus a new and profoundly historical awareness of time is the ultimate form taken by the Saussurean play of Identity and Difference: presence and absence in the moment itself, the generation of time out of stillness before our very eyes. With this, structuralism touches its outside limit, and it is worth pointing out that temporality here has become visible in Structuralist terms only because *it is the temporality latent within the sign itself, and not the temporality of the object, not that of lived existence on the one hand, or of history on the other.*"⁴⁾ In this passage, Jameson makes sure that "the awareness of time" becomes a kind of impassable limit of (post) structuralism based on the

expressive causality for the re-definition of history. In this sense, Jameson's notion of history lies in very similar position to Lacan's conception of the real.

- 3) It does not seem too bold to argue that Jameson's notion of the diachronic or historicity has, in a sense, something in common with de Man's notion of temporality, though with much theoretical difference due to the unmistakable breach between their concerns.
- 4) Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton UP, 1972) 187-88; my emphasis. Henceforth, this book will be abbreviated as PH with page reference in the text.

premise of diachrony, stripped of the notion of a temporality of the object. The last sentences italicized are noteworthy. The newly recognized temporality is "the temporality latent within the sign itself, and not the temporality of the object." Put differently, according to Jameson, the newly envisioned temporality in structuralism is not the same as the temporality of lived experience or history. This poses a new question: what is the connection between "the temporality latent in the sign itself" and "the temporality of object" of history? This question is of significance, now that the notion of historicity or temporality serves as a vantage post for Jameson's reflection on the new Marxian hermeneutics. This question leads to my concern for the relation between narrative (and language) and history. And this concern demands a certain exploration of the nature of language and history. In *The Prison-House of Language*, however, Jameson does not directly delve into this pivotal question in depth. Instead, he takes a detour by way of a critical analysis of Derrida and Foucault, for the purpose of posing the issue of history.

II

Jameson is, on the one hand, not averse to praising Derrida's "deconstruction" of the old-fashioned schema regarding the relationship of thought and words. Jameson, on the other hand, is also very critical of the Derridean notion of script or trace: "In the very act of repudiating any ultimate or transcendental signified, any concept which would dictate the ultimate or fundamental

content of reality, Derrida has ended up inventing a new one, namely that of script itself" (PH, 182-183). Derrida's conclusion, in Jameson's reading, looks suspiciously "like a metaphysical option, and Derrida's notion of the trace suspiciously like yet another ontological theory of the type it was initially designed to denounce" (PH, 183). It goes beyond the scope of this essay to examine in detail the validity of Jameson's critique of Derrida. What is of interest here is, with Jameson, the question of whether or not any "radical" attempt to dwell on the notion of sign/language deprived of the question of history/reality, *inescapably* results in another "metaphysical option." This question underlies my reading of "On Interpretation".

Then, how about Foucault? Jameson keeps Foucault at a distance, inasmuch as the latter's notion of history is devoid of any deep understanding of historical change (or mutation in Foucault's terminology): "But now Foucault's framework puts us in a position to see why this should be so: one cannot, in other words, reduce history to one form of understanding among others, and then expect to understand the links between those forms historically. ... *All that Language as a transcendental signified can do is to understand history as one particular mode of discourse*, and it remains gaping with amazement before a succession of forms which history itself understands simply as the life cycle of capitalism, from mercantile to post-industrial stages" (PH, 194; emphasis mine). This argument reads two-fold. First, as Jameson admits in "On Interpretation", "History- Althusser's 'absent cause,' Lacan's 'Real'-is not a text, for it is fundamentally non-narrative and nonrepresentational" (82;

Jameson's italics). Jameson is suspicious of Foucault, in that the latter is not fully attentive to the nature of history and historical change. But Jameson, to some extent siding with Foucault, also remarks: "history is inaccessible to us except in textual form, or...can be approached only by way of prior (re) textualization" (82). In other words, history as an absent cause cannot be "directly or immediately conceptualized by the text." My foregoing question reiterates itself here: What is the linking point of these two seemingly contradictory premises in Jameson's dictum? What is the exact locus of history as "fundamentally non-narrative and non-representational," since, interestingly enough, history is to be approached only in textual form?

In an attempt to re-consider the notion of history, Jameson draws on Lacan's elucidation of the relation between "the symbolic" and "the real." But a certain dilemma of Lacan's seemingly seminal examination of Freudian psychoanalysis, reproduces itself in Jameson's theory. It suffices here to mention one point. On the one hand, in Lacan's terms, the symbolic and the real are to be distinguishable in the last stance. In sum, the real cannot be unquestionably the same as the symbolic. Interestingly enough, nonetheless, the difference of the real from the symbolic is possible only if the differentiation functions in the realm of the symbolic. Consequently, it is hardly possible to draw a line of demarcation between these two fields. To my knowledge, this dilemma remains insoluble in Lacan's theory, although Jameson later takes a more favorable stance toward Lacan than in *The Prison-House of Language*.⁵⁾ To be sure, it falls into the pitfall of naive reading to

presume that history is immediately conceptualized by the text itself. At this point, Lacan's thought is undoubtedly helpful in unearthing the necessity of the symbolic, or, in Jameson's terms, narrativization. Then, what is the locus of history or historical change? What follows foretells Jameson's impasse that remains unresolved in "On interpretation":

To say, as the most consequent theoreticians of Structuralism have, that there can be no problem of the referent, inasmuch as the latter finds itself constantly reabsorbed into language in the form of new sign-systems, is merely to displace the problem, which remains intact. For one would be only too willing to admit that the infrastructure is itself a sign-system, or a complex of such systems, in its own right: *what remains to be determined, however, is the precise nature of the relationship of such systems to those more overtly verbal ones which Marxism sees as forming the superstructure.* Both synchrony and diachrony are involved: for it is not only a question of the coordination of two or more systems 'at the same time,' but also of the coordination between the changes taking place in each both separately and simultaneously. (PH, 212; emphasis mine).

This passage raises three disputable issues. First, it is far from advantageous to disregard the question of the referent in relation to "language in the form of new-sign systems." In a crucial deviation from what goes by the name of (post) structuralism, Jameson sheds light on the problem of the referent, i.e., history. Secondly,

5) See Fredric Jameson, "Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan: Marxism, Psychoanalytic Criticism, and the Problem of the Subject"(1977), in *The Ideology of Theory*, Vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1988).

surprisingly enough, Jameson is not opposed to the position of (post) structuralism (and, in a sense, Lacanian theory of psychoanalysis), adding that "infrastructure is itself a sign-system or a complex of such system, in its own right." But he does not scrutinize this somewhat scandalous dictum. In which own right can the infrastructure be itself a sign-system? Unavoidably, of course, the old-fashioned dichotomy of superstructure as a sign system or ideological system and infrastructure as a sort of material reality, requires some revisions. Althusser's rigorous reading of Marx, as Jameson points out, could be singled out as a good example to deconstruct the dogmatized dichotomy. Althusser's work is also deeply influenced by Lacan, since the division of infrastructure and superstructure is only to be possible in the domain of the sign-system, i.e., the symbolic in Lacanian terms. But this thought does not necessarily foreclose that the infrastructure should, as I have referred to Lacanian dilemma as to the connectedness of the symbolic to the real, be a sign-system. This problem illustrates itself repeatedly in Jameson's elaboration on the relation between narrative and history. Thirdly, Jameson accentuates the task of studying the precise nature of the relatedness of infrastructure (or, in Jameson's terminology, history) as a particular sign system to more overtly verbal ones which Marxism defines as forming the superstructure. With regard to the notion of narrative, Jameson is in favor of "Levi-Strauss's conception of myth or of primitive art as an imaginary resolution of some real social contradiction. ... for all practical purposes such a description seems to [Jameson] perfectly consistent with Marxism, in that it undertakes to reveal the

function of ideological objects in the conjunctures of class struggle or economic development" (PH, 212). Jameson has recourse to Levi-Strauss's thought for envisioning the notion of narrative as a socially symbolic act. But the question remains unanswered: In which way does the re-defined narrative "undertake to reveal the function of ideological objects in the conjunctures of class struggle or economic development"? This question requires a plausible answer in his project.

III

Jameson, in "On Interpretation", attempts to provide a "new hermeneutic" of narrative, situating narrative as "a socially symbolic act." He suggests that the narrative representation of history necessarily involves the process of what he calls "a strategy of containment." Relying on Freud's and Lacan's psychoanalytic reflections on dream, Jameson argues that the act of narrativization is, in a similar way to dream-work, an unconscious process rather than conscious one. In sum, literary work, like dream-work, endeavors to resolve the problems of the real through various categories of unconsciousness. A narrative, with Jameson, makes a socially symbolic act just as dream has a symbolic significance in its relationship to the real. Then, what is the function of interpretation for Jameson? The interpretation is archaeologically to recuperate the real contradictions of history repressed by the "political unconscious" of the writer in the symbolic act of narrativization.

For Jameson, the practice of interpretation is always an

essentially allegorical act, insofar as interpretation always presupposes "at least some mechanism of mystification or repression in terms of which it would make sense to seek a latent meaning behind a manifest one, or to rewrite the surface categories of a text in the stronger language of a more fundamental interpretive code" (60).⁶ Consequently, all readings become a sort of rewriting of a given text. Then, in which way does this rewriting of a given text take effect? Herein lies an interesting comparison between Jameson and de Man on the nature of reading. Jameson poses a question about the implication of "meaning": "what does it mean?" His answer runs as follows: "The question "what does it mean?" constitutes something like an allegorical operation in which a text is systematically rewritten in terms of some fundamental master code or 'ultimately determining instance' "(58; the author's italic). Thus, any sort of interpretation is supposed to "demand the forcible or imperceptible transformation of a given text into an allegory of its particular master code or 'transcendental signified' "(58). It is made somewhat clear here that a reading is "something like an allegorical operation." A given text or material should be rewritten in terms of another master code in order to be readable or interpretable. A reading is nothing but an allegorical decoding. The divergence (along with similarity to) of Jameson's conception of allegory from de Man's is not my major interest here. But it might not be without interest to note that de Man's following reflection on

6) In a sense, this remark reads a paraphrase of Freud's definition of the interpretation of dream. See, for instance, Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1965) 168.

the nature of reading is in contradistinction to Jameson's: "The paradigm for all texts consists of a figure(or a system of figures) and its deconstruction. But since this model cannot be closed off by a final reading, it engenders, in its turn, a supplementary figural superposition which narrates the unreadability of the prior narration. ... Allegories are always allegories of metaphor and, as such, they are always of the impossibility of reading..."⁷⁾

For de Man, to some extent siding with Jameson, a reading generates a "supplementary figural superposition." De Man, by contrast, also stresses the impossibility of a final reading, in that the reading already presupposes "the unreadability of the prior narration." Thus, Jameson's specific notions of "fundamental master code," "ultimately determining instance," or "untranscendable horizon" can hardly find their place in de Man's vocabulary. It is not my concern here to estimate who is right and who wrong. This issue is that into which we are neither obliged nor equipped to take up here. But the confrontation of these two seminal theoreticians on the nature of reading, leads me to some questions of significance. From the de Manian perspective, such a crucial notion of Jameson's as history as untranscendable horizon, is hardly possible, without reservations, to be incorporated into the nature of reading. De Man writes: "It now appears that writing can just as well be considered the linguistic correlative of the inability to read. We write in order to forget our foreknowledge of the total

7) Paul de Man, *The Allegories of Reading* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) 205. Hereafter, further references to this book will be identified in the text with the abbreviated title as AR.

opacity of words and things or, perhaps worse, because we do not know whether things have or do not have to be understood" (AR, 203). In particular, the last sentence is worth noting: "we do not know whether things have or do not have to be understood." Undoubtedly, this argument bases itself on the Kantian philosophical notion of "thing-in-itself (Ding-an-sich)." In de Man's problematic, the question of how to represent or understand "things" is far from his major concern. His interest leans toward a kind of relativistic view of truth, insofar as "writing can just as well be considered the linguistic correlative of the inability to read." He is very wary of any kind of absolute touchstone such as a "fundamental master code" or an "untranscendable horizon." Then, what confirms the validity of a given writing or reading? De Man does not pay much attention to this question. In this respect, de Man's position seems to come closer to post-structuralism, not fully heedful of the question of the referent or history in Jameson's terms.

The advantage of a properly Marxian interpretive act, Jameson claims, arises from its tireless concern for this question of the referent as an untranscendable horizon for any possible reading: "in the spirit of a more authentic dialectical tradition, Marxism is here conceived as that 'untranscendable horizon' that subsumes such apparently antagonistic or incommensurable critical operations, assigning them an undoubted sectoral validity within itself, and thus at once canceling and preserving them" (10). This is very ambitious and provocative declaration. In what sense could Marxism be the "untranscendable horizon"? Because, Jameson remarks, Marxism addresses chiefly itself to "a recognition of the

primacy of History itself" (14). But his answer does not fully tackle the raised question. Rather, it brings out other questions. Such Jamesonian conceptions as "recognition," "the primacy of History itself" demand of him more detailed explanations, even if one is in favor of Jameson's singular Marxian position. The first expression, "a recognition" is closely entangled with the nature of reading, insofar as recognition is only possible in the form of reading. Ironically enough, Jameson, in comparison with de Man's seeming neglect of the question of the referent, comes to presuppose, without loathing, the possibility of "the recognition of the primacy of History." One may wonder at this point whether or not Jameson's notion of language is, however apparently intricate or complex, still confined to a kind of naive correspondence theory of language.

There are some evidences for this suspicion, insofar as Jameson's whole project is rooted in a Marxian topology clearly expressed in his reflection on the relatedness of infrastructure as a particular sign-system and superstructure. Inasmuch, however, as language is, as Benjamin explicates, "an ultimate reality, perceptible only in its manifestation, inexplicable and mystical,"⁸) it is hardly possible simply to presuppose any primacy of a specific concept such as history. Jameson, of course, does not wholly belittle the question of recognition. He notes: "we never really confront a text immediately, in all its freshness as a thing-in-itself. Rather, texts come before us the always-already-read; we apprehend them through sedimented layers of previous interpretations or... through the sedimented

8) Walter Benjamin, *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1986) 322.

reading habits and categories developed by those interpretive traditions" (9). Roughly speaking, what is at stake is, following Jameson, to foreground the interpretive categories or codes through which we read or interpret a text. The first sentence addresses itself to the meaning of history as "fundamentally non-narrative and non-representational," for history comes to us only as a textual form, never revealing itself "as its freshness as a thing-in-itself." The second passage is also noteworthy, now that it concerns itself with the process of historical textualization by which a text is produced as an interpretable one. This argument has in common with de Man's: "If to read is to understand writing... then it presupposes a possible knowledge of the rhetorical status of what has been written. To understand primarily means to determine the referential mode of a text and we tend to take for granted that this can be done" (AR, 201).

In sum, an "innocent reading" is impossible as Althusser makes explicit.⁹⁾ All reading is destined to have a sort of pre-understanding or preconceptions of the process by which a given text is produced such as "the rhetorical status of what has been written." But de Man's notion of reading is contrasted with Jameson. de Man remarks: "there can be no writing without reading, but all readings are in error because they assume their own readability. Everything written has to be read and every reading is susceptible of logical verification, but the logic that establishes the need for verification is

9) Althusser writes: "But as *there is no such things as an innocent reading*, we must say what reading we are guilty of." [Louis Althusser, et al., *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 1979) 14; emphasis mine]

itself unverifiable and therefore unbounded in its claim to truth” (AR, 202). This passage could be read as a powerful refutation of Jameson’s preoccupation with history as the final horizon of verification for any kind of reading or interpretation. As Jameson insistently points out, all texts need reading and interpretation. Moreover, any kind of reading demands logical verification. There is no problem in Jameson’s reflection on interpretation so far. But, since, as de Man notes, “the logic that establishes the need for verification is itself unverifiable and therefore unfounded in its claim to truth,” it might be said, without much exaggeration, that the logic of history cannot *necessarily* privilege itself as untranscendable vantage point for any other logic such as language. Jameson is nonetheless intent on privileging the notion of history, following Althusser.¹⁰⁾

IV

For the project of a new hermeneutic, Jameson suggests three “semantic horizons” of interpretation in accordance with three

10) In a crucial deviation from the notion of history as expressive causality and mechanical causality, Jameson resorts to Althusser’s notion of structural causality as a new definition of history. Whereas the expressive or mechanical causality does not escape the pitfall of a metaphysics of presence which essentializes history or the economic infrastructure as the center of all superstructure, the Althusserian notion of structural causality decenters history as the absent cause of narratives rather than representing it as Hegelian Spirit in narratives. Jameson’s allusion to the Althusserian re-definition of history is to some extent convincing. Apart from this merit, however, a problem still remains. Chances are that the pre-given advantage of history over any instance of theoretical discourse underlies, both positively and negatively, Jameson’s ambitious attempt to establish a new hermeneutic.

different notions of history. The first horizon deals with the individual narrative as an “imaginary resolution” of the contradictions of history in the narrow sense of the latter, i.e., the diachronic or political history. The first level of interpretation intends to read in a text “a political history, in the narrow sense of punctual event and a chroniclelike sequence of happenings in time” (75). At first glance, this assertion is very similar to so-called historical or sociological camp of criticism. Then, what is the exact difference between Jameson’s first step of interpretation of the political unconscious in a text and of what he would call “ordinary explication de texte”? The difference, he argues, lies in his definition of the first level of interpretation, following Kenneth Burke’s explication, in which “the individual work is grasped essentially as a *symbolic act*” (76; emphasis Jameson’s). What is at issue at this point is how to specify the notion of “symbolic act.” Herein lies some theoretical assumptions in re-defining the nature of the literary text.

First, one is reminded, in reading this definition, of the impact of Althusser’s provocative definition of ideology: “ideology is a ‘representation’ of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.”¹¹⁾ Then, what is the relationship of

11) Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Monthly Review Press) 162. Put differently, “ideology, then, is the expression of the relation between men and their ‘world’, that is, the (overdetermined) unity of the real relation and the imaginary relation between them and their real conditions of existence. In ideology the real relation is inevitably invested in the imaginary relation, a relation that *expresses a will* (conservative, conformist, reformist or revolutionary), a hope or a nostalgia, rather than describing a reality.” [Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: NLB, 1969) 233-234; Althusser’s italics]

ideology to the literary text in the Althusserian problematic? To state a complex matter simply, the literary text is a kind of ideological form.¹²⁾ When these two definitions of ideology and the literary text as an ideological form are brought together, it highlights the meaning of the literary text as a symbolic act: “the individual narrative, or the individual formal structure, is to be grasped as the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction” (77), construing “formal patterns as a symbolic enactment of the social within the formal and the aesthetic” (77). Jameson thus adds, “the aesthetic act is itself ideological, and the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right, with the function of inventing imaginary or formal ‘solutions’ to unresolvable social contradictions” (79). The reason for it being just imaginary resolution is that it “leaves the real untouched, suitably dramatizes the ambiguous status of art and culture” (81). But this symbolic act demarcates itself from any kind of “reflection theory”, in that the first is “affirmed as a genuine act albeit on the symbolic level” (81; Jameson’s italic), whereas the latter merely limits itself to “the identification of class motifs or values in a given text, and feels its work is done when it shows how a given artifact ‘reflects’ its social background” (80-81). What matters here is the dictum of “the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction.” This expression is deeply influenced by the Althusserian notion of ideology. But a key

12) See, for example, two Althusserians’ co-written essay; Etienne Balibar and Pierre Macherey, “On Literature as an Ideological Form” in Robert Young ed. *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

issue is still not dealt with in the definition. The expression, "the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction" does not successfully demonstrate to what extent it differentiates itself from a theory of correspondence (or reflection) as to the relationship between real contradiction as an objective referent and the literary text as the site of imaginary resolution. The question concerning the nature of language is still not on the agenda of Jameson's hermeneutic. The plight of Jameson's hermeneutic prompts me to question: On which ground can Jameson confirm that the literary text is an imaginary resolution of a real contradiction? What is the relation of the literary act and the real?

As far as Jameson's theory of interpretation is concerned, the literary act "cannot simply allow 'reality' to persevere inertly in its own being, outside the text and at distance. It must rather draw the Real into its own textures, and the ultimate paradoxes and false problems of linguistics, and most notably of semantics, are traced back to this process, whereby language manages to carry the Real within itself as its own intrinsic or immanent subtext"(81). Let me take note of the final sentence. The first expression is in the balance: the literary act "must rather draw the Real into its own textures, and the ultimate paradoxes and false problems of linguistics, and most notably of semantics, are traced back to this process." This is a kind of paraphrase of the foregoing explanation of the relatedness of the real (i.e., history) as the non-representable to the textualization of the real. Then the foregoing question, "what's the relation of the literary act and the real?" might be modified as follows: In which process is it possible for the literary act to

represent the non-representable such as history? Jameson does not concern himself with this seemingly important question. He merely notes, "language manages to carry the Real within itself as its own intrinsic or immanent subtext." This remark reads in a sense as a sort of tautology, not delving into the meaning of the literary text and its relation to the real as intrinsic immanent subtext.

This issue is closely associated with the referential function of language. At this point, de Man's thought is helpful in re-examining this issue: "The heterogeneous texture of Rousseau's allegorical narrative is less surprising if one keeps in mind that his radical critique of referential meaning never implies that the referential function of language could in any way be avoided, bracketed, or reduced to being just one contingent linguistic property among others..."(AR, 207). What deserves attention is that the "radical critique of referential meaning never implies that the referential function of language could in any way be avoided, bracketed, or reduced." Jameson's re-definition of literary text as a socially symbolic act could be regarded as a trenchant critique of an old-fashioned conception of literary text as immediate, however artistic it may be, reference to a given reality. But the "radical critique of referential meaning" of the literary text in relation to reality as referent, does not necessarily, as de Man writes, rule out some detailed consideration of the referential function of language, insofar as "the loss of faith in the reliability of referential meaning does not free the language from referential and topological coercion, since the assertion of the loss is itself governed by considerations of truth and falsehood that, as such, are necessarily referential"(AR,

208). This admonition could be true of Jameson's project itself, since Jameson's new hermeneutic seems based on the distrust of "the reliability of referential meaning." The scandalous definition of literary text as a symbolic act, not as a mere representation/reflection of a social reality, i.e., history, stems from this suspicion. But, inasmuch as the effect of the symbolic act does not automatically exclude the problem of the referential meaning of language, the question of how the symbolic act of literary language incorporates (and at the same time, displaces) the referential (or representational) function of language, should not be wiped out of the agenda of his project. To reiterate, Jameson's neglect of deep explication of the referential meaning of language symptomatically reveals itself in his conscious (or unconscious) ignorance of the foregoing question: In which process is it possible to incorporate in symbolic act, without forfeiting the function of the referential or representation, the non-representable such as history?

V

The second horizon of interpretation, employing a synchronic notion of history, regrounds the individual text as a parole of the class discourse (a collective langue) which is involved in a constant dialogic struggle with other class discourses. In this second level, an individual text "has been reconstituted in the form of the great collective class discourses of which a text is little more than an individual *parole* or utterance." At this point "the object of study will prove to be the *ideologeme*, that is, the smallest intelligible unit of

the essentially antagonistic collective discourses of social classes” (76). This ideologeme is closely linked to another important notion of “class langue.” The class langue is never wholly visible and never fully present in any one of its individual utterances. This class langue is organized around minimal units, the ideologeme. Then, what is the exact advantage of this provoking invention of new notions? Jameson answers: “The advantage of this formulation lies in its capacity to mediate between conceptions of ideology as abstract opinion ... and the narrative materials with which we are working here” (87). But it still remains obscure how the mediation between the conceptions of ideology as abstract opinion and the narrative materials, takes place. Since, as Jameson points out, the individual text is a parole and the class discourse is a collective langue, it might be too bold to presume that an individual text is a part of the whole. Why? Because a parole is not simply a part of the langue, if Jameson’s Sausseurian metaphor proves to be plausible. Jameson is, of course, well aware of this problem, so that he documents that class langue is never wholly visible and never fully present in any one of its individual utterances. To sum up, the Althusserian notion of structural causality, ironically enough, keeps Jameson’s somewhat naive reflection on the relation between whole and part in check. Then, a question springs to my mind: In which space does the notion of mediation situate itself, insofar as the notion of mediation presupposes a kind of dichotomy or expressive causality? Jameson does not provide any helpful clue in this essay, for he does not wholly escape the notion of expressive causality. His on-going emphasis on class struggle reads as a

powerful impact of the expressive causality well captured in his preoccupation with the notion of the final horizon of history. This emphasis leads itself to the prioritization of history as the untranscendable horizon of any supposed (literary) theory.

Jameson focuses on the role of class discourse in this second level of interpretation. He suggests that "class discourse... is essentially *dialogical* in its structure" (84; italics Jameson's). And the dialogical is essentially an antagonistic one, so that "the dialogue of class struggle is one in which two opposing discourses fight it out within the general unity of a shared code" (84). Or, differently put, the dialogue of class struggle, i.e., class discourse becomes a kind of underlying terrain or langue on which the confrontation and struggle of specific class discourses are possible. He singles out a good example from British history. In his reading, "the shared master code of religion becomes, in the 1640s in England, the place in which the dominant formulations of a hegemonic theology are reappropriated and polemically modified." In consequence, an individual text, as the resultant of the second rewriting of a given text, is "grasped as a symbolic move in an essentially polemic and strategic ideological confrontation between the classes, and to *describe* it in these terms" (85; author's emphasis). Herein, however, lies a skillfully presupposed proposition. Let me analyze his explanation. First, there is, in reality, an essentially polemic and strategic ideological confrontation between struggling classes. This constitutes a referent that a text incorporates in itself. Secondly, a text moves in this confrontation and describes it in terms of struggling classes. I do not know exactly how these two propositions

could come together without some logical flaws. Why *should* the text move in this ideological struggle of the classes? What kind of necessity functions here to enforce this move? Isn't it merely the invisible work of history? Jameson does not seem prepared to provide any detailed answer to these questions. More importantly, the expression, "to describe it in these terms," deserves attention. What is the meaning of "to describe"? How can this notion be congruent with the symbolic move of an individual? Jameson does not carefully differentiate several functions of language. In his explanation of narrative or language, he appears, by and large, to be a bit insensitive to the unique implication of the respective notion frequently used in his essay such as representation, symbolic act, description and mediation.

VI

The final horizon pays attention to the synchronic and diachronic transformation of the mode of production itself as it is contained in the artwork as a part of the collective class discourse. The third horizon finally unearths the vast unfinished single master-narrative of history or the totality of history as the political unconscious of all individual narratives and class discourses. At the final level, the question of history is fully discussed, raising not a few issues. The notion of history is conceived "in its vastest sense of the sequence of modes of production and the succession and destiny of the various human social formations" (75). At face value, this conception of history could be regarded as an old-fashioned Marxian

doctrine of history. Jameson is wary of some possible critiques of his position. Thus, he defends himself as follows: "no historical society has ever 'embodied' a mode of production in any pure state" (94) and "what is synchronic is the 'concept' of the mode of production; the moment of the historical coexistence of several modes of production is not synchronic in this sense, but open to history in a dialectical way" (95). In sum, a specific social formation is, with Bloch, nothing other than the synchronicity of the non-synchronicities.

In the final horizon of interpretation, what modification of the concept takes place in the understanding of the relationship of individual text and history per se? Jameson hastily disclaims any connection with any kind of "homology" of text and history, for history itself is far from homogeneous totality. He goes on to write, "the temptation to classify texts according to the appropriate mode of production is thereby removed, since the texts emerge in a space in which we may expect them to be crisscrossed and intersected by a variety of impulses from contradictory modes of cultural production all at once" (95). This explanation requires a detailed analysis. First, refuting the old-fashioned notion of immediate representation of the homogeneous (expressive) totality, Jameson is suspicious of the classification of texts according to one mode of production, inasmuch as a social formation actually consists of several modes of production, even if one mode of production has the initiative as the dominant one among several modes of production. As a consequence, the contradictions of a work are far from a mere reflection of historical contradictions. Rather, they are the "produced" consequences of over-determined contradictions.

Secondly, text lies in the situation criss-crossed and intersected by a variety of impulses from contradictory mode of cultural production. This situation of intersection results in class discourse that is essentially *dialogical* in its structure. Thus, three sub-levels loom here; the contradictory mode of cultural production, class discourse and text. Thirdly, the contradictory mode of cultural production results from social formation, i.e., history itself. In the process of last interpretation, "individual text and its ideologemes know a final transformation, and must be read in terms of ... *the ideology of form*, that is, the symbolic messages transmitted to us by the coexistence of various sign systems which are themselves traces or anticipations of modes of production" (76; emphasis Jameson's). What is the ideology of form? The ideology of form is "the determinate contradiction of the specific messages emitted by the varied sign systems which coexist in a given artistic process as well as in its general social formation" (98-99). The ideology of form seeks to reveal "the active presence within the text of a number of discontinuous and heterogeneous formal processes" (99). These "formal processes are, however, sedimented content in their own right," rather than mere expression of the content. In this sense, Jameson calls it ideology of form, instead of ideology of content. These formal processes carry "ideological messages of their own, distinct from the ostensible or manifest content" of the given work. What is of interest here is that each formal process has its own ideological messages. This is a sort of transformation of the Freudian division of the manifest and the latent content of dream.

In his earlier book, Jameson shows his dissatisfaction with the

theoretical tendency which limits the function of criticism to the interpretation of content: "Thus the process of criticism is not so much an interpretation of content as it is a revealing of it, a laying bare, a restoration of the original message, the original experience, beneath the distortions of the various kinds of censorship that have been at work upon it; and this revelation takes *the form of an explanation of why the content was so distorted and is thus inseparable from a description of the mechanisms of this censorship itself.*"¹³⁾ Put another way, the process of criticism should speak of the silence of the text, or the unconscious repressed by the text, the absent other which is history itself. In the context of Jameson's explanation, the censorship by which the content is distorted, is not merely the result of institutional censorship of a given society. Moreover, Jameson is attentive to the dynamic sign system of class discourse that underlies the process of distortion of content. Thus, "any stylization or abstraction in its form must ultimately express some profound inner logic in its content, and is itself ultimately dependent for its existence on the structures of the social raw materials themselves."¹⁴⁾

The task of ultimate interpretation is "the rewriting of its materials in such a way that this perpetual cultural revolution can be apprehended and read as the deeper and more permanent constitutive structure in which the empirical textual objects know intelligibility" (97). In the final horizon of interpretation "the

13) Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and From: Twentieth Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) 404; my emphasis.

14) Fredric Jameson, *ibid.*, 403.

individual text ... is here restructured as a field of force in which the dynamics of sign systems of several distinct modes of production can be registered and apprehended" (99). He calls this dynamic the ideology of form. To reiterate, the individual text is far from an immediate representation of a referent. Some processes of mediation intervene here. The individual text is, first of all, not merely a specific author's work but also a production of the dynamic of sign systems in given modes of production, i.e., social formation. In addition, the literary text is a record of the dynamics of sign systems. This explanation is largely pointed. But, strangely enough, he does not see into how an individual writer incorporates and/or displaces such dynamics of sign systems into his/her work. Isn't the author merely confined to being an agent in the process of the apprehension of the sign-system? I still wonder in which space of the process of mediation the author's position is to be located and how the author's language situates itself in this process.

In the last horizon, history discloses finally itself as the absent cause: "With this final horizon, history itself becomes the ultimate ground as well as the untranscendable limit of our understanding in general and our textual interpretations in particular" (100). But the question of how this proposition escapes the widely held view of the Marxian interpretative operation as a logic of reification of history, remains intact. In what sense is it possible for history to take an ultimate priority over any notion, for instance, language? As I have mentioned above, the predominance of history over any other category of interpretation including language, comes to Jameson as an unquestionable one. The question of history

constitutes a hot issue, as Jameson admits, in recent academic discourse. Jameson attempts to briefly answer by foregrounding the concept of necessity in the Marxian historiography: "Necessity is not in that sense a type of content, but rather the inexorable *form* of event. it is a kind of a narrative category. And the narrative political unconscious is the formal effects of what Althusser calls an "absent cause." As a result, "History can be apprehended only through its effects, and never directly as some reified force" (102; Jameson's *italic*). Still at this point, the question concerning the possibility of apprehension of history as non-representational, remains unanswered. Even though Jameson qualifies the notion of necessity as the form of event, the presupposed priority of necessity as narrative category is from the outset suggested as the indisputable one. To encapsulate, Jameson cannot fully escape the effect of the Hegelian concept of expressive causality, although he incessantly emphasizes that history is far from homogeneous totality.¹⁵⁾ This

15) Interestingly enough, the implicit notion of history as homogeneous totality underlying Jameson's essay, conjures up a sharp contrast with Walter Benjamin's notion of history in terms of historical materialism. Benjamin writes: "The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homogeneous, empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself." [Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969) 261] It could be considered, in Benjamin's terms, as a symptom of "historicism" steeped in Hegelian philosophy of history that Jameson does allude Benjamin only one time in footnote in this long essay, in which so many contemporary, including not a few Marxian theoreticians, are quoted and commented. Jameson only points out in passing to the "religious" content in Benjamin, not discussing Benjamin's seminal notion of history at all. See footnote 48.

implicit breach of expressive causality and structural causality underlies his whole project of new hermeneutic, constituting a certain impasse.