

ON THE QUESTION OF THE GROUND OF FREDRIC JAMESON'S POSTMODERN DIALECTIC

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ABSTRACT: This paper examines Fredric Jameson's attempt to formulate a postmodern dialectic in his text, *Valences of the Dialectic*. Such a project is necessary, according to Jameson, because dialectical thought is immanent to the movement of history, and the latest epoch of history that we find ourselves caught within is that of postmodernity. Epochality and history are totalising concepts, and so we can see immediately that there is a tension between Jameson's historicist method (and presuppositions), and the prioritising of difference and non-identity that characterises postmodernism. What Jameson aims to do, therefore, is to reveal how the dialectical concepts of totality and contradiction can be thought in such a way that they are compatible with the postmodern prioritising of difference and non-identity. He aims to do this by arguing that history itself, understood in its most profound sense rather than its everyday sense, is an unrepresentable ground existing behind, and beyond, the manifold beings of our world as their condition of possibility. Jameson claims that our access to this deeper reality of history can only emerge indirectly through our awareness of the antinomies of thought and experience.

KEYWORDS: Jameson; Dialectic; Historicism; Ground; Transcendent; Transcendental; Postmodernity; Alterity

While Fredric Jameson is, perhaps, best known for his cultural and literary criticism, the attempt to explicitly formulate a dialectical method is a project that has always accompanied his practical criticism. *Marxism and Form* (1971) introduced key thinkers of the Western Marxist tradition to an English speaking readership, but it also contains a chapter in which Jameson attempts to synthesise a dialectical method of cultural analysis formulated in light of the cultural and

economic shifts of the post World War Two era.¹ The main task of the lengthy opening theoretical chapter of *The Political Unconscious* (1984) is to engage with Althusserian structural Marxism, and to incorporate its insights about the social totality into Jameson's own method of dialectical textual analysis.² The ambition of Jameson's thought here is shown by the fact that he attempts to create a unified dialectical method that incorporates the anti-Hegelian Marxism of Althusser with the Hegelian Marxism of Lukács. In the discussion that follows I will examine Jameson's latest attempt to formulate a dialectical method in his text, *Valences of the Dialectic* (2009).³ While this most recent attempt by Jameson to formulate a dialectical method shares many features with his earlier attempts, it refines and clarifies those earlier attempts. The discussion that follows will not, however, examine the development of Jameson's thought over time, but instead it sets itself the task of explicating and critiquing key aspects of Jameson's most recent account of the dialectic.

To separate the dialectic as a method from its critical application to the world or culture (its critical objects), or similarly to think of the dialectic as something that occurs in thought only, as opposed to in the world, is already to begin our discussion in an undialectical manner. The dialectic is reduced to the level of a mere method, or way of thinking *about* the world. And so, while Jameson clearly feels compelled to turn his attention to the dialectic as a topic in itself, his working assumption (which he claims avoids the temptation to reify the dialectic as a formal method) is that any true theorisation of the dialectic must reveal it to be historically embedded. According to Jameson, this means that for us, it must be a postmodern dialectic for our postmodern age.⁴ But we might then ask, as Jameson himself does, whether this means that there is just one true dialectic (*the* dialectic), or many dialectics (*a* postmodern dialectic being just one historical variant)?⁵ Or expressed differently, does this historical embeddedness of the

¹ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1971.

² Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, Methuen & Co. Ltd., London, 1981.

³ Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, Verso, London, 2010. (This text will be referred to simply as "*Valences*" from this point on.)

⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of late Capitalism*, Verso, London, 1991. This text makes the case for postmodernity as our current historical epoch.

⁵ Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, pp. 4-5. Jameson specifically asks whether the dialectic should be seen as a universal philosophy, or as a localised theory for a dialectical domain within a larger non-dialectical philosophy, but my reframing of his questions is still consistent with the spirit of his inquiry.

dialectic mean that dialectical thought, and dialectic as the animating principle of reality, requires a form of historical relativism that eschews all universal, or transhistorical, structures? Or, does the historical require a grounding in universal structures if it is to escape the historicist paradox that everything is historical except historicism itself? Jameson answers this question when he advises us in *The Political Unconscious* to “always historicise,” except when it comes to the practice of historicising itself.⁶ Developing this idea of historicism further, we can see that it requires a ground in order to escape the historicist paradox, a ground that stands somehow in relation to an ever changing reality understood as the historical transformation from one epoch (or world) to another. Through such a grounding of the dialectic, the analytic opposition of the universal and the historically relative can be overcome to reveal their mutual dependence. These are some of the key ideas that Jameson's account of the dialectic raises, and that we will examine in what follows.

Given this historical embeddedness of the dialectical method, Jameson's overarching task in *Valences* is the formulation of a postmodern dialectic. Within *Valences*, chapter 1, “The Three Names of of the Dialectic”, and Chapter 19, “The Valences of History” are the theoretical core of the text, while many of the other chapters are reproductions of selected earlier occasional writings by Jameson that are relevant to the theme of the dialectic. I will focus my analysis here on chapter 1, because this chapter succinctly outlines the fundamental claims of Jameson's postmodern dialectic. In this chapter Jameson sets out firstly to establish the status of dialectical discourse as open-ended and necessarily incomplete *theory*, which he contrast with the hubristic will to conceptual systematicity and closure that he claims characterises *philosophy*. In the discussion that follows we will set aside a discussion of the status of theory, and instead focus on the question of method, for it seems to me that method is the conceptual core of theory as Jameson defines it – method is theory's formal, logical foundation. In order to establish the dialectical method, Jameson examines the various logical forms that can be used to think the relation between any ideas, or things, held to be in a binary opposition. These logical forms are not, he insists, a conceptual system (a philosophy), but rather the fundamental, necessary conceptual elements required

⁶ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 9.

to think any unfolding historical process, for such a process emerges in the play between opposing forces (or objects, institutions, or concepts). In other words, these logical forms seem to be the transcendental conditions for historical understanding as such, and Jameson's discussion of these forms of relationality culminates in his account of what he sees as the true understanding of dialectical relationality, or contradiction – an understanding that is compatible with the postmodern prioritising of difference over identity. A postmodern dialectic is thereby revealed to be the true dialectic. While Jameson never explicitly says as much, it would seem that the lived experience of postmodernism, which can be characterised negatively as a disenchantment with unity, opens up the possibility for theoretical knowledge to more clearly grasp the true essence of dialectical relationality that has in fact always existed, although it remained largely concealed until the epoch of postmodernity.

Jameson wants to claim that the logical forms or relationality are not universals that peremptorily contain the existing, or emerging, historical situation within predetermined conceptual categories. Such reductivism is, he claims, the error of philosophical system. Instead, as noted above, he sees these forms as the minimal conceptual tools required to enable an awareness of the unfolding of historical processes. If a philosophical system is a comprehensive account of the diverse forms that constitute the necessary underlying structure of all possible being and knowing, then a method, according to Jameson, sets itself the very different goal of identifying abstractable forms, or structures, that claim a limited validity for explaining certain parts of reality (and I would add for revealing those parts of reality prior to this explaining), and moreover, the validity of these forms is to be determined in the practical act of applying the dialectical method.⁷ According to this view, method avoids any ontological commitments, such as to idealism or materialism. For Jameson, therefore, the dialectical method is an empty form, free of ideological and philosophical presuppositions. Its limits define its strengths. The aim of the dialectical thinker is to, “abstract a form of thinking sufficiently empty of content to persist throughout the multiple local dialectics ...” and, “to retain a recognizable and identifiable shape through a variety of

⁷ Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 16.

materials [i.e., the economic, the cultural, the political] ...”⁸ A method, as described here, sounds like a procedure, an efficient way to achieve an outcome, even though the outcome may have been achieved using an alternative method. Jameson's view of method here seems to reduce the dialectic to a technique one applies to a pre-existing object, and it therefore sounds like the undialectical formalism mentioned previously. Needless to say, this is not the formalism Jameson is advocating here. His dialectical formalism is, to repeat, enabling of an awareness of the actuality of the historical. Moreover, method is capable of being surprised by a reality that it reveals, but never fully corresponds with. The system/method distinction starts to become a little shaky, however, if we note that a method also seems to unavoidably suggest a fundamental principle, or insight, that orientates one's analysis and has a bearing on what the method is capable of 'discovering'.⁹ In Jameson's case this is the idea that cognisable reality is structured through oppositional structures, and that these structures reveal experiential worlds (realities) that come into existence and fade out again. And, as we will see later in the discussion, Jameson's account of method leads on to his claim that there is a deeper reality beyond the totality of a world of beings that is their ground, and that this untotalizable ground is also what enables the emergence and dissolution of worlds, which is the process of history. Such a claim about fundamental reality sounds ontological, but this deepest level of reality cannot, according to Jameson, be directly known, and so if we are to define it as being, in a manner that echoes Heidegger, then we must also follow Heidegger's own stipulation that we write it under erasure as ~~being~~.¹⁰ What this means for the question of the ground in Jameson's thought is that while the logical forms of relationality are the ground of historical awareness and knowing, there is also, as we have just indicated, an even deeper ground of history itself.¹¹

Jameson begins his discussion of the forms of relationality that constitute the

⁸ Ibid., p. 16.

⁹ Jameson himself is aware of this issue. His position would seem to be that contradiction, or antinomy, can become a theme (or content) disguised as an empty form, but that this tendency can be resisted if we understand that the contradiction points beyond itself to an alterity as its own enabling condition. See Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁰ For Heidegger's discussion of why being should be placed under erasure see his essay, "On the question of Being," (Trans: William McNeill), In, *Pathmarks*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998.

¹¹ Jameson reveals the full extent of his theoretical debt to Heidegger in Chapter 19 of *Valences of the Dialectic*.

dialectical method by looking at what he, following structuralism, considers to be the basic unit of intelligibility, or meaning, namely the binary opposition.¹² The claim here seems to be that relationality is constitutive of both the identity of the thing and the meaning of the concept.¹³ Jameson's discussion outlines the various logical forms that the relation between two opposing terms, or beings, can take. One might assume that the nature of relationality varies depending on the actual nature of the opposed objects or concepts being examined. Taking some well known philosophical binary oppositions as an example, we may think that the relation between cause and effect, subject and object, self and other, particular and universal, ontic and ontological, and ground and existence are all very different. We may even be tempted to privilege the content of one particular opposition as fundamental to reality itself. Jameson, however, wants to isolate relationality itself in an ultimate act of abstraction from all content. Nevertheless, as we will see, the various forms of relationality that he discusses do demonstrate a hierarchy insofar as they progressively reveal the truth of relationality as such.¹⁴

The first logical form Jameson examines is that of external opposition, or simple dualism, which he also refers to as “mythic” dualism, and “metaphysical” dualism.¹⁵ In this form, each of the terms of the opposition is seen as a self-contained substantial entity whose qualities simply happen to be the very opposite of the other term. Both terms are therefore defined in terms of themselves, of their own positive, qualitative nature, rather than negatively in

¹² Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 17. And in this way, Jameson claims, structuralism was dialectical without realising it, and in fact it therefore also enabled the renewal of the dialectic. Why the dialectic needed such a renewal is not clarified by Jameson at this point, but I suspect it is to do with the dialectic's association with phenomenology, and the latter's supposedly unacceptable subjectivism. Returning to structuralism though, it seems to me that relationality itself needs to be explained, rather than simply accepted as the given structure of reality. For a critique of the structuralist account of meaning that takes up my point here that its starting point is insufficiently accounted for, see Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, Verso, London, 1990, p. 28.

¹³ Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 17.

¹⁴ Thus, Jameson begins with the form of simple dualism, then shifts to the form of asymmetrical opposition, and ends with the form of the dialectic of incommensurables. (Jameson also discusses a fourth form, the double negative binary opposition, but in a sense this distinct fourth form sits somewhere between the second and third forms, and doesn't really add to the dialectic of relationality in a distinct way.) The third form is the truth of the other two, although the other two have their own irreducible reality as forms made possible by the third form.

¹⁵ Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, pp. 18-19.

relation to each other. The problem with this form of thinking is that it holds two terms in relation without grasping what a relation is – namely an internal connection. Connection here lapses into mere contiguity. The terms simply become two equal, but opposed, entities, whose rivalry with the other is external and contingent. The play of identity and difference between the terms that is essential to relationality is reduced to a mere contingent proximity. For example, a mythic reading of good and evil might see them as two equal and opposed forces vying for control of the world, and aiming by means of such control to make the world all good, or all evil, without understanding that such a triumph by either force would transform the very nature of the victorious force. This interpretation of relationality therefore fails to grasp that each term only exists as itself in contrast with its other.

The second form of relation Jameson examines is asymmetrical opposition.¹⁶ Here one term is dominant, or central, while the other term is defined negatively as the refusal of the dominant, and is therefore perpetually marginal. The problem with this form of thinking is that relationality eventually collapses under the force of the dominant term. The marginal term is seen as (and sees itself as) being in opposition to the dominant term, but ultimately the marginal term reveals itself to be merely the occasion for the more emphatic assertion of the dominant term. The independence of the marginal term is therefore essentially illusory. The difference between the terms therefore ultimately collapses into full identity, and relationality itself therefore collapses. As an example, we might think of the various counter-cultural movements of the sixties. Understood through the lens of the asymmetrical opposition (dominant-marginal relation), we can interpret these movements either as ‘pressure-valves’ that enabled the dominant force (here Western consumerist capitalism) enough frisson to energise itself, or as an actualisation of a possibility of the dominant itself – hence the eventual co-opting of those movements within consumerist culture.¹⁷ If we think through the asymmetrical opposition using Jameson’s own example of the master-slave opposition, then as he points out, the resolution of the opposition can only come from a total replacement of the system – you cannot have a justly treated slave.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁷ This is my example. Jameson himself gives the examples of the master-slave relation, and the capitalist-proletarian relation, as we will see. See Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 20.

While Jameson doesn't say so explicitly, it seems to me that the problem with this form is that it doesn't leave a space open for the impetus of such a totalizing change – there is a degree of negativity here in the marginal term's attempt to subvert the dominant, but this negativity is ultimately recontained in the total system. As Jameson says, from this perspective, “the Slave is not the opposite of the Master, but along with him, an equally integral component of the larger system called slavery ...”¹⁸ Thus, this asymmetrical form of relationality reduces, in the end, to total identity, and therefore it can never really comprehend relationality or change.¹⁹

The next form of relationality that Jameson looks at, and the form that will turn out to be the truth of relationality, is that between what he terms “incommensurables.”²⁰ These incommensurables are things, or concepts, that are in relation with each other, but that seem so radically different from each other that no internal connection, or mediating term, can be found for them. And yet, neither term can really be itself without negating the other. These entities are external to each other, as with simple dualism, and yet their mutual interdependence is also evident. And so while there might not be some internal connection between these two entities, as there is between the two terms of the asymmetrical opposition as members of the one system, Jameson insists that an “internal negation” persists here, by which he means a relationality that constitutes the entities as being what they are.²¹ Jameson's first example of such a relation is that between plot and style in a narrative literary text. The narrative text needs both of these elements, and yet they are fundamentally different. These elements cannot be the simultaneous focus of our attention, and hence they are incommensurable, but Jameson's claim is that this incommensurability goes beyond a simple limitation of the human mind, as we will see below. The text itself can be seen as an attempt to unify these elements, but this can only ever be

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁹ The point of these examples is not to reveal the erroneousness of the concepts of good and evil, or to show that the 1960s counterculture wasn't really subversive or radical, but rather to show that whatever the truth of these examples may be, it cannot be grasped at its deepest level using the limited models of relationality that have been discussed so far.

²⁰ Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 22.

²¹ Ibid., p. 25. Jameson insists that without this internal negation, relationality dissolves into sheer multiplicity, and real difference is lost altogether.

a failed synthesis given the fundamental incommensurability of the terms. Jameson's second example is Lacan's three orders – the imaginary, the symbolic and the real.²² These three orders can be seen as describing essential elements of a unity, or a being, called “the psyche”, but such a view fails to grasp that these orders remain incommensurable, while at the same time remaining inextricably related to each other. These orders can never really form a unified whole, but are instead held in perpetual “dialectical” tension with each other. Relationality here is preserved, unlike in the previous two forms of relationality, and yet there is no shared substantial ground of the elements, and no ultimate unity. In summary, from our examples we clearly have identifiable unities called “the novel” and “the psyche”, but these are merely convenient labels that ultimately mask a lack of unity, or that at best name unity as a problem. The difference between incommensurable terms, of itself, seems to be what holds the elements together. Ultimately, the nature of this relation cannot be explained as arising out of the elements themselves. These elements are therefore necessarily related, and yet necessarily incommensurable, and here we have the dialectic of identity and difference as Jameson grasps it, and as he has extrapolated it from poststructuralist theory. According to Jameson, such incommensurable relations are not merely historical, but rather they indicate “a fissure in being” or even “metaphysical gaps”.²³ What these phrases name, it is being claimed, is something outside being and ontology (understood as presence), some otherness that is the source of beings (presence), or in other words, an otherness beyond thought and beings that makes possible (and ultimately impossible as a self-contained totality) the world(s) of meaning.

Revealing this transcendent reality, this alterity, or noumenal otherness, seems to be the ultimate goal of Jameson's discussion of dialectical logic.²⁴ This

²² Peter Dews, however, claims that Lacan does maintain a version of the concept of the unified singular subject through his theory of the lost object *petit a*. See Peter Dews, *The Logics of Disintegration*, pp. 87-91. For Jameson's own further discussion of the identity-difference relation in Lacan see his “Imaginary and Symbolic in Lacan.” In, *The Ideologies of Theory, Essays 1971-1986, Volume 1, Situations of Theory*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989, p. 82.

²³ Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 22.

²⁴ I am using the term “transcendent” as opposed to “transcendental” for this grounding reality, but as we will see later in the discussion, one of the key points at issue is precisely the status of this alterity that is so integral to Jameson's thought.

level of reality, this otherness, is the grounding condition of possibility for the existence of determinate beings, and for historical development itself. This claim is never explicitly stated by Jameson in chapter 1 of *Valences* in so many words, and yet it is the premise that gives coherence to his discussion of dialectical logic. We can draw this claim about the necessity of a grounding transcendent otherness together with the question of the relation between incommensurables as follows. We might begin by asking what the relation is between this discussion of the dialectical logic of incommensurables and change, or by inference, history? The Jamesonian answer is that an awareness of the dialectical logic of incommensurables leads thought to an awareness of its own limits. Dialectical thought becomes aware of these limits via its grasping of its own inability to reconcile the incommensurable, or the aporetic, either through some higher conceptual unity, or through the positing of some shared ontological (present) ground, or through practical reason (or praxis). The positing of a transcendent otherness as ground, a ground that is revealed through “metaphysical fissures” and “ontological gaps,” is the only way, according to Jameson, to escape the pitfalls of a limited, ultimately ahistorical, metaphysics of presence or identity. This transcendent otherness is that from out of which beings, and history, emerge, and to which thought is therefore perpetually playing catch-up. The question that hangs over this grounding of the dialectic in transcendent otherness, or alterity, is how we can get to the richness and diversity of the phenomenological world from out of such otherness? How do we go from the indefinite to the definite? From void to world? As we will see later, Jameson’s thought does not provide an adequate answer to these questions. If the logical forms of relationality provide a ground for thinking and experience, then the relationship between this ground, and the deeper ground of history itself as transcendent otherness needs to be clarified, and we will return to this question below. What can be pointed out for now, however, is that if we understand the logical forms of relationality as a transcendental ground – in the sense that they are knowable structures that make experience possible by providing a form for experience – then we really need to ask if this is adequate as compared to an ontological grounding of experience in the structure of Dasein. An ontological account of Dasein, or being-in-the-world, enables us to account for the richness of a lived world as the creation of human

beings that takes place within the space opened up by the withdrawal of being.²⁵

The role played by this principle of transcendent otherness in relation to contradiction and history can be further demonstrated by a discussion of Jameson's next example of a form of relationality often diagnosed by dialectical thought – the double negative binary opposition.²⁶ In this form, the two binary terms, which appear to be opposites, are revealed to be two symptomatic sides of the same totalising coin. This form of opposition is therefore similar to the asymmetrical opposition, only here there is no dominant term identifiable with the system as such, but instead we have two equally privative terms. I will briefly outline two of Jameson's examples – one from politics, and one from aesthetics. Firstly, in politics, we have Lenin's lumping together of reformism and infantile leftism, two seemingly opposed political strategies, as both sharing the same presupposition that history and politics can only be shaped by a spontaneous, ad hoc response to given conditions. Secondly, in aesthetics, we have Lukács's claim that modernism and naturalism, two seemingly opposed aesthetic styles, share the same basic premise, which is that reality is an objective process which thought, and art, can merely passively reflect. The naive objectivist epistemological assumptions of naturalism, and the subjectivising, perspectival epistemology of modernism are therefore ultimately 'the same' insofar as both are premised on an absolute separation of subject and object. Thus, in both examples, dialectical thought unmasking apparent difference as identity. In both Lenin and Lukács's critiques, a higher unity is found for a seeming opposition, but this unity is not really a synthesis of the terms of the opposition itself, but rather simply points out the wider context in which both equally flawed options exist. So far so good from Jameson's perspective. But, the error that Lenin and Lukács both make, according to Jameson, is that their next move is, in fact, to posit a solution beyond the two equally bad options they outline.²⁷ Thus, Lenin posits the party as solution to the reformism versus activism opposition, claiming

²⁵ I am here drawing on Heidegger. While the term Dasein loses prominence in Heidegger's later work, his continued focus on the mutual relation between the human and being is demonstrated in such later texts as his essay, "On the question of Being," (Trans: William McNeill), In, *Pathmarks*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998. See in particular pages 308-9.

²⁶ Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, pp. 27-31.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

that only a party structure can channel the spontaneity of the masses into an effective revolutionary political program. While for Lukács, a true realism (as opposed to a false official social realism) can be posited as a third way beyond the dead end of the opposition between naturalism and modernism.

From Jameson's perspective, such solutions are an error because they voluntaristically, and thus prematurely, claim to resolve an issue that is grounded in the deeper reality of the historical situation (or in other words, the transcendent alterity), and that cannot, therefore, be merely willed away. We can even go so far as to say that for Jameson, there are no solutions as such, but rather there is only ever a shifting to a new problematic, and this shifting cannot be the result of a conscious positing, but only of a shift in "being" (or ~~being~~) that emerges out of the "metaphysical fissures". And, what must finally be understood is that whatever may be sent to us out of this void cannot be predicted, although it can, at least, be sensed indirectly through a mood of empty anticipation.²⁸

We turn next to the question of the relation between Jameson's account of the relationality of incommensurables, and the insights of poststructuralism, where the latter is understood as the theoretical form corresponding to the epoch of postmodernity. The purpose of the present analysis is not to give a full comparison of Jameson's thought with poststructuralism, which would be a task that would take us far beyond the constraints of the current discussion, but rather to clarify Jameson's own thought. Nevertheless, a very brief outline of poststructuralist thought is needed in order to establish its family likeness to Jameson's thought. We will take Derrida and Deleuze as our examples, because Jameson himself refers to them specifically in relation to dialectical thought. Three further questions then follow from this initial question of the relation

²⁸ The previous examples of plot and style in narrative, and of Lacan's three orders, are clearly different types of examples from those taken from Lenin and Lukacs. The first set of examples are transhistorical, while the latter are historical. It's hard to see how the antinomy between plot and style in narrative could ever be replaced by a different antinomy so long as narrative exists, whereas the naturalism versus modernism debate is clearly culturally specific. It could perhaps be argued that the transhistorical antinomy of plot versus style in fact enables the various historical forms of narrative to emerge in response to it, whereas the second type of historical antinomy is replaced and therefore 'overcome' by shifts in being emerging out of the "metaphysical gaps". The point, from Jameson's perspective, is that his acknowledgement of the "metaphysical gaps" enables a perspective beyond antinomy, and that is therefore productive and dialectical.

between Jameson's theoretical claims and poststructuralist thought. Firstly, has Jameson adequately captured the poststructuralist insight? Secondly, is the poststructuralist insight consistent in itself? And, thirdly, is that insight compatible with dialectics?

Turning first to Derrida, his thought can be described as an attempt to think the conditions for the possibility of both thought itself, and for the existence of the phenomenological world. He attempts this task, however, without recourse to what he sees as the tautological incoherence of the philosophical view that thought is both self-grounding, and the ground of the world. His claim is that the emergence of new thoughts (and the new as such), as well as the historicity of thought (and change as such) can only be understood if we posit that the self-presence required of the concept is dependent on an ineradicable alterity. This alterity cannot be hypostatized as a being, or Being, or as negativity, or Nothing.²⁹ It cannot become a transcendental signified, or signifier for that matter. Différance, one of the provisional names for this alterity, has the appearance of being the ground of meaning, but it can only be understood correctly if we radically transform our understanding of ground itself, no longer seeing it as a presence that projects itself beyond itself. To understand différance correctly is to see it as a 'transcendence-in-immanence', an alterity tied to the meanings and finite objects it makes possible. To grasp différance is therefore to go beyond the binary oppositions of logical (or analytical) understanding, and to embrace the paradoxical reality of a 'transcendence-in-immanence' as an essential generative condition for both thought and the phenomenological world.³⁰

Like Derrida, Deleuze can be seen as a thinker who is centrally concerned with the problem of accounting for the new without falling into the same trap that most previous philosophy falls into when attempting this task. This is the trap of undermining the new by always already inscribing it within the identity of

²⁹ See Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, p. 24. See also Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, (Trans: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak), The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976, p. 65.

³⁰ On the relation between différance and presence, Derrida notes that, "What defers presence [différance], ..., is the very basis on which presence is announced or desired in what represents it, its sign, its trace ..." (Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, [Trans: Alan Bass], The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1982, p. 8.) Derrida goes on to note that, "the movement of *différance*, as that which produces different things, that which differentiates, is the common root of all the oppositional concepts that mark our language, ..." (Ibid., 9.)

knowledge, representation and the concept. Like Derrida again, Deleuze attempts to 'ground' this process of the emergence of the new, giving his own thought the paradoxical label of "transcendental empiricism".³¹ As is well known, Deleuze sets out to achieve this by modifying the Kantian move of positing the transcendental subject as the necessary condition for all possible experience. For Deleuze, such a move gestures towards breaking the impasse between metaphysics and empiricism, but only succeeds in entrenching the peremptory identity of the concept through its positing of the transcendental *subject* as the ground of all meaning. In contrast, Deleuze argues for the reality of a transcendental field of the virtual, which is itself an untotalizable multiplicity, and which is the 'transcendental' condition required, he claims, for actual (as opposed to possible, which remains within the identity of the idea) experiences, concepts, and objects.³² The virtual is not the origin of experience in a direct causal sense, but rather experiences, concepts and objects are the continual collapsing of the infinite virtual field into a state of finitude.

What Derrida, Deleuze and Jameson all share is an adherence to the claim that thought needs to reveal the 'ground', or the generative conditions logically required for meaning; and, in their attempt to achieve this project, which they each do in their own different ways, they all claim to go beyond what they say are the limits of the ontological and phenomenological attempts to provide such a 'ground'. The ontological and the phenomenological are, for them, unavoidably contaminated by subjectivism, presence, and self-identity. For Jameson and Derrida, however, to dismiss the phenomenologico-ontological altogether would be to lapse into a mere reversal of the logic of presence, and thereby to unwittingly reproduce it. Far better, therefore, to displace the phenomenologico-ontological mode of philosophising, to see it as an effect, and to accord it a limited, localised validity. Deleuze's project seems somewhat different from this. His thought is

³¹ Deleuze writes of a "superior empiricism," by which he means a transcendental empiricism, in *Difference and Repetition*, (Trans: Paul Patton), Columbia University Press, New York, 1994, pp. 56-7.

³² For a discussion of Deleuze's 'transcendentalism,' with reference to its relation to Kant, see Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979, pp. 152-156. See also the following article for a comprehensive summary of Deleuze's 'transcendentalism': Daniel Smith, John Protevi, and Daniela Voss, "Gilles Deleuze", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2022 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2022/entries/deleuze/>> Accessed 16/01/2023

more actively creative in its own right, restlessly throwing up new concepts and motifs that supersede the old ones. Nevertheless, the connection between all three thinkers is clear enough from the brief sketches given above, even though, of course, a more detailed comparison would also draw out the differences between them. All three thinkers claim to ground meaning and the richness of the phenomenological world in a generative foundation that is 'outside' meaning, but that somehow remains immanent to the process of the unfolding of meaning itself rather than becoming an absolutely transcendent source of meaning. And because this ground is immanent to the unfolding of meaning, it can be termed transcendental, although unlike the Kantian transcendental, it is not itself graspable through concepts.

But does Jameson, however, end up hypostatizing the alterity of the ground as absolute alterity, thereby merely inverting, and inadvertently reproducing, the logic of the metaphysics of presence and identity? His ground may be an unknowable absence, a void, but it still functions as the source of meaning. If Being is placed under erasure, it still functions as the guarantor of meaning. Jameson often uses the familiar metaphysical names for this alterity – thus it is “Necessity,” it is “History,” it is “outside” thought and meaning. Jameson’s account of the ground therefore seems all too transcendent, rather than transcendental. Nevertheless, he also insists that this alterity, whatever it is called, can only be known via the antinomies that are constitutive of texts and our experiences, and the implication of this is that he sees it, therefore, as a legitimately immanent transcendental ground. Is this tension between transcendence and immanence, this undecidable wavering between the legitimately transcendental and the illegitimately transcendent, a flaw in Jameson's theory, a flaw that arises because he clings to supposedly outmoded, irredeemably metaphysical modes of thought, namely Marxist and Hegelian dialectics?³³ I claim, rather, that this ambiguity is an inevitable effect of the attempt to constitute a ground for the phenomenological world that is *beyond* consciousness, or human existence understood as being-in-the-world. And it is, therefore, a flaw common to Derrida

³³ This is the view of Arkady Plotnitsky in his text, *Reconfigurations. Critical Theory and General Economy*, University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 1993. See chapter 6, which is a discussion of both Jameson and Althusser. The claim Plotnitsky is making is that Jameson’s thought falls short of the radicality of Derrida’s insight into the detotalising force of the poststructuralist idea of general economy.

and Deleuze as well. Putting aside this wider critique of poststructuralism for the moment, Jameson's defence against the charge that his thought fails to live up to the insight of poststructuralism would be that the reader needs to respect the different layers of his analysis. It is true, therefore, that on one level, Jameson's thought maintains ideas that may well be dismissed as continuing the tradition of the metaphysics of presence, while on another level he displaces these ideas through his account of the ground of history as radical alterity. Thus, although he maintains that there is only ever one dominant epochal synchronic totality, and that history is a diachronic, linear narrative (no matter how much complex layering of different temporalities we acknowledge), he has fundamentally altered these essential Marxist concepts (that maintain the form of metaphysics) by 'grounding' them in an alterity that can itself never be encompassed by conceptuality. We could go further and say that the synchronic totality (society), and the diachronic totality (history), require this alterity if they are to be truly dynamic and open ended, and going one step further, that even this alterity itself can only correctly be grasped in contrast with (or is it in dialectical contradiction with?) these more traditional (and metaphysical) concepts of totality. If we respect these different levels of Jameson's thought, then his work is compatible with poststructuralism.

The question of whether Deleuze and Derrida achieve what they set out to achieve (and whether their thought is consistent with itself) is, of course, a complex one that cannot be thoroughly addressed here. All we can do here is to suggest that a critique which measures their claims against their achievements is possible, and to provide some hints to support the claim outlined above that the ambiguous wavering between the transcendental and the transcendent in Jameson's work is shared by poststructuralism, and that its source is their insistence on going beyond the phenomenological that inevitably, and against its own intentions, threatens to lapse back into the logic of precritical metaphysics in which the world is subordinated to a grounding transcendent otherness. The assumption behind such a critique of poststructuralism is that what a philosopher claims to be saying, or what his or her texts claim to be saying, cannot simply be taken at face value. Whatever content, or ideas, a philosophical text may explicitly espouse, there is also an implicit logic at play, an implicit meaning of the form of those same ideas, a meaning that may work against the text's explicit

ideas. No doubt Jameson himself would approve such a claim, as would Derrida and Deleuze.

Peter Dews has addressed Derrida's work from just such a critical position, arguing that his thought is marked by an inescapable inconsistency in its account of *différance* as 'transcendental ground.'³⁴ Dews notes that on the one hand, *différance* is *beyond* the dialectic of identity and difference because it is its condition of possibility. On the other hand, *différance* is that which "connects" identity and difference, and is therefore *immanent* to their relation. How *différance* can be said to connect phenomena, and by extension how the Derridean transcendental can be said to be connected to the phenomenal, is, however, precisely the point of contention.³⁵ If *différance* itself cannot be encapsulated by the language, or thinking, of ontology, and if this is because *différance* 'is' the spacing between things (and significations), then this surely implies that there is no *différance* without the play of phenomenal differences.³⁶ The transcendental needs the phenomenal, just as the phenomenal needs the transcendental. *Différance* may be logically prior to the dialectic of identity and difference, as Derrida must claim,³⁷ but the phenomenal realm, which is the realm of meaning, and of the subject, cannot therefore be a mere effect of *différance*, as Derrida also claims,³⁸ given that *différance* only functions through the unifying movement of meaning.³⁹ Dews claims that we cannot, therefore, go beyond a dialectic of

³⁴ Peter Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, Verso, London, 1990. The crux of Dews's critique of Derrida can be found on pages 26-7.

³⁵ In his book on Derrida, Kevin Hart simply asserts without further explanation that these two aspects of *différance* are connected. See *The Trespass of the Sign*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 187.

³⁶ In Derrida's essay "Différance," he claims that *différance* is "'Older' than Being itself" (Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, [Trans: Alan Bass], The Harvester Press, Brighton, Sussex, 1982, p. 26), and that *différance*, "has no meaning and is not." (Ibid., p. 22.) Towards the end of the essay Derrida reasserts that *différance* is other than Being: "This unnameable [meaning *différance*] is not an ineffable Being which no name could approach: God, for example. This unnameable is the play which makes possible nominal effects [meaning names, but also differences] ..." (Ibid., pp. 26-7.) We must not forget, however, that despite the use of the term "effects," "[t]his does not mean that the *différance* that produces differences is somehow before them ..." (Ibid., p. 11.) And so here we have Derrida's attempt to convey the paradoxical 'transcendence in immanence' of *différance*.

³⁷ See Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, p. 95.

³⁸ Derrida often describes differences as effects of *différance*. See, for example, note 49 above.

³⁹ Is not this mutual dependence of meaning and *différance* affirmed by Derrida's assertion that, "[t]he same, precisely, is *différance* ... as the displaced and equivocal passage of one thing to another, from one term of an

meaning and non-meaning to see *différance* itself as the source of meaning, and that the being that constitutes this dialectic in the structure of its very being is the pre-reflexive subject, as first theorised by German Idealism, and then further developed by existential phenomenology.⁴⁰ Of course, Derrida rejects any such 'bastardised' notion of consciousness, or of a subject that "is what it is not, and is not what it is".⁴¹ For him, consciousness and the subject must mean presence, but in a sense this is really only a quibble over words, given that his thinking of *différance* seems to require precisely the type of structure that has, within the history of philosophy, been attributed to the pre-reflexive subject.

Peter Hallward's provocative critique of Deleuze claims that for all Deleuze's insistence that his philosophy is immanent to the world, and that the virtual is properly understood as a 'transcendental ground' (in Deleuze's modified sense of such a phrase), he cannot avoid having the virtual function as a transcendent realm beyond the world of finite experience.⁴² The transcendent realm of the virtual becomes the true source of creativity, and the sphere of the actual is a falling away from this vital source. For Hallward, Deleuze's metaphysics becomes a repetition of Spinoza's metaphysics in its fundamental structure, and he claims that Deleuze, like Spinoza, faces the unresolvable problem of explaining how the finite world can have a relation to its source in an infinite order of reality (which is God for Spinoza), given that the infinite cannot, from a Spinozist view, be in any way beholden to the finite, or in other words, given that it is not in a

opposition to the other." (Derrida, "Différance," p. 17.) Derrida's claim here is essentially the same as Jameson's oft repeated claim that "difference relates."

⁴⁰ Dews, *Logics of Disintegration*, p. 29.

⁴¹ This phrase is Sartre's definition of consciousness, which is repeated throughout *Being and Nothingness*. (See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, [Trans: Hazel E. Barnes], Methuen and Co. Ltd., London, 1976, p. xli.) For Derrida's critique of the subject and consciousness, see "Différance," pp. 15-16.

⁴² Peter Hallward, *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, Verso, London & New York, 2006. For Hallward's comments on the status of the transcendental in Deleuze see pp. 74-5. Hallward does try to distinguish Deleuze's virtual from the transcendent by claiming that going 'out' of the actual is not a going 'beyond', but this distinction seems problematic given that the effect is still to be other than in the world. (See Hallward, p. 57.) Hallward's reading of Deleuze follows on from Alain Badiou's text, *Deleuze: The Clamour of Being*, which claims that Deleuze's thought remains beholden to the "One", or in other words identity, despite its ostensible championing of multiplicity. See Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamour of Being*, (Trans: Louise Burchill), The University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, 1999.

dialectical relation with it.⁴³ Deleuzeans have rejected Hallward's reading, of course, claiming that the actual is just as necessary to the process of creativity as the virtual, but if this is the case, then it is hard to see why the phenomenological subject is so objectionable to Deleuze.⁴⁴ As is well known, Deleuze objects to the view that the subject can be defined at the fundamental ontological level by lack, or what it is not, or by its limit, but if it cannot be defined in this way, is it really finite at all?⁴⁵ Surely the only consistent conclusion to draw is that the finite subject, for Deleuze, is the manifestation of a transcendent creative force.⁴⁶

Both Derrida and Deleuze explicitly claim that their thought is opposed to the Hegelian dialectic, although their modes of opposition to it are very different. While Derrida seeks to displace the dialectic from within by revealing *différance* at play within the Hegelian concept, Deleuze seeks to displace it by constructing an alternative metaphysics that draws on a philosophical lineage of figures he believes to have been marginalised by the dialectical tradition.⁴⁷ Both thinkers,

⁴³ For Hallward's outlining of the Spinozist idea that the world itself has no true reality, an idea which he claims is shared by Deleuze, see *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, p. 10. In his review of Hallward's book on Deleuze, John Protevi objects to Hallward's identification of Deleuze with the theophantic tradition, pointing out that Deleuze is an atheist, and that Spinoza's God must be naturalised and understood as Nature if we are to understand Deleuze (and possibly Spinoza as well) correctly. (John Protevi, [2007], Review of Peter Hallward, *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 2007 [8], paragraph 9.) What this critique of Hallward's approach misses is that Nature can function as God insofar as it is understood to be, like God, the infinite creative source that gifts finite beings their existence and their thoughts.

⁴⁴ The argument that the actual is just as important to creation as the virtual in Deleuze's thought is made by Protevi. (John Protevi, [2007], Review of Peter Hallward, *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*. *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*, 2007 [8], paragraphs 11-15.) On the status of phenomenology, Deleuze himself says that, "[t]he whole of Phenomenology is an epiphenomenology." (Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 52.) In his comments on Heidegger's account of the ontological difference, Deleuze seems to suggest that the later Heidegger himself saw that placing Dasein as the mediator between Being and beings, and therefore maintaining a phenomenological orientation, was still a subordination of difference to identity. (Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 65.)

⁴⁵ On Deleuze's hostility to the concept of lack see Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, p. 178.

⁴⁶ See Hallward's discussion of Deleuze's concept of counter-actualisation, or of how the self can be overcome as a set identity. (Peter Hallward, *Out of This World: Deleuze and the Philosophy of Creation*, p. 4, and pp. 43-45.)

⁴⁷ Deleuze's most vehement critique of Hegel, and dialectical thought in general, is arguably to be found in his text on Nietzsche. (See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, [Trans: Hugh Tomlinson], Continuum, London, 2006) Chapter 5 of Deleuze's text is in fact titled, "The Overman: Against the Dialectic". (Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, pp. 139-183.) Although Deleuze is here providing an interpretation of Nietzsche's philosophy rather than an account of his own philosophy, the closeness of these positions seems obvious. Derrida's engagement with Hegel occurs throughout his oeuvre, but his stance in relation to Hegel is perhaps best summarised by his comment that the phenomenology of mind (by which he seems to mean

however, acknowledge a certain debt to Marx. Derrida directly addresses Marx in *Spectres of Marx*, and in that text he acknowledges the value of Marx's critique of capitalism, while also questioning the underlying metaphysical premises of that very critique.⁴⁸ As Jameson notes, late in his career Deleuze was planning a text on Marx, but he never completed it.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, in his essay on Deleuze in *Valences of the Dialectic*, Jameson outlines an interpretation of Deleuze and Guattari's collaborative work that situates it as a novel intervention within the Marxist problematic of base and superstructure.⁵⁰ These brief contextual comments show that Jameson's project of constructing a poststructuralist Marxism is not without a basis in poststructuralist theory itself, although the status of the dialectic is precisely what is at issue in such a project.

Finally, we need to turn to the question of whether Jameson's poststructuralist reworking of the dialectic is ultimately compatible with a truly dialectical notion of contradiction. Jameson certainly makes a strong claim that contradiction is central to his own thought, and he even distinguishes his own logic from that of structuralism and deconstruction precisely because of his insistence on the necessity of the concept of contradiction:

For the structuralist perspective always grasps contradiction in the form of the antinomy: that is to say, a logical impasse in which thought is paralyzed and can move neither forward nor back, in which an absolute structural limit is reached, in either thought or reality. This deconcealment of the antinomies at the root of practical or theoretical dilemmas can serve as a powerful instrument of ideological analysis (as in deconstruction), but it should not be confused with that more

a whole philosophical approach rather than just Hegel's text of that name) is not to be overcome by simply being overturned. As Derrida states: "Instead of simply being overturned it is comprehended: not comprehended by knowledge-gathering comprehension, but inscribed within the opening of the general economy along with its horizons of knowledge and its figures of meaning." (Jacques Derrida, "From Restricted to General Economy," In *Writing and Difference*, [Trans: Alan Bass], Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, Melbourne and Henley, 1985, p. 271.)

⁴⁸ See Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*. Routledge, New York & London, 1994. For Jameson's response to Derrida's text see *Valences of the Dialectic*, Chapter 4, "Marx's Purloined Letter."

⁴⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 183.

⁵⁰ See Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, Chapter 5, "Deleuze and Dualism", and Chapter 3, "Hegel's Contemporary Critics." Vincent Descombes also discusses Deleuze and Guattari's method of combining Marx and Freud, although Descombes points out that Deleuze's method remains resolutely Nietzschean rather than Marxist – thus, Deleuze/Guattari identify desire itself as productive. He also points out key differences between Deleuze/Guattari and Marxism. See Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, (Trans: L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding) Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979, pp. 173-180.

dynamic and productive act of setting the antinomy itself in motion, that is to say, revealing it to have in reality been a contradiction: for it is the unmasking of antinomy as contradiction which constitutes truly dialectical thinking as such.

But what is contradiction in this case? It is not that which blocks and suspends movement but [that] within which movement itself takes place, ...⁵¹

As has been shown earlier, however, the logic of incommensurables is, for Jameson, the culmination and ultimate expression of dialectical logic. But, while the incommensurable terms themselves are in relation with each other, this relation remains antinomic, and the terms of the antinomy do not themselves contain their own dynamic principle, or capacity for self-overcoming. Instead, Jameson sees transcendent otherness as the source of the new. For Jameson, it is this premise of the ground as transcendent otherness that distinguishes his thought from structuralism, and perhaps from the more limited critical uses of deconstruction (derived from poststructuralism), and it is what he claims ultimately makes his invocation of antinomies dynamic and productive.⁵² A contradiction therefore, to complete Jameson's definition, is an antinomy as seen in relation to the transcendent otherness that is its ultimate ground.

But, Jameson's dialectic never really gets beyond the antinomies that structure our experience and concepts. He himself seems to think that the positing of a transcendent otherness as ground is a form of going beyond, but given that this otherness is unknowable (although clearly not unthinkable), this means that knowledge itself is, in effect, limited to the realm of antinomies. A key step in the process of coming to dialectical awareness for Jameson, therefore, is for the thinker to become aware of incommensurables as incommensurables, and for the thinker to intuit the otherness beyond these antinomies of knowledge and empirical experience. Once this level of awareness has been achieved, the thinker grasps that the received conceptual unities of everyday understanding (for

⁵¹ Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 43.

⁵² Thus, Jameson aligns his view of the ground with that of Žižek, who "proposes the possibility of ontological convictions without any accompanying linguistic or philosophical expression: locating the 'truth' would then be something like a symptomal operation on the order of the Freudian primal desire which precedes all representation, all translation into the figural codes as such. The formula of a parallax would then compare the process to the determination of a planetary body beyond the capacity of our registering apparatus to record, even though we can approximate its existence hypothetically: and this affirmation of a content beyond all form is clearly very foreign indeed to the spirit of deconstruction and of postmodern relativism in general." (Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, p. 62.)

example, the text or the psyche) rest upon a difference that continually threatens the very existence of these received concepts/unities. To achieve this level of awareness is to be plunged into a skepticism in which the stability of any unity whatsoever is threatened, and this is for Jameson the very nature of the experience of dialectical thought. The solid ground of common sense reality is dissolved beneath our feet.⁵³ Unities are broken down into incommensurable 'parts' as we have seen, but even these incommensurables can be broken down further, and so on. This vertigo of analytical fragmentation is only countered by the emergence of the new out of the transcendent otherness that is between, but also beyond, the antinomic concepts. We see here that transcendent otherness plays the role in Jameson's thought that subject plays in Hegelian dialectic, which is that of overcoming oppositions, only this transcendent otherness is not really like a subject because it is beyond the terms of the opposition themselves, and thereby beyond the process of change as well. For Jameson, overcoming an opposition means leaving it behind and embracing a new opposition because ~~being~~ has moved on. This is very different from Hegelian sublation – an overcoming that preserves and raises to a higher level. For Jameson, the transcendent otherness becomes the source of change, the dark void out of which the new appears, rather than its transcendental ground. Antinomy is the realm of experience and concepts; the source of experiences and concepts lies beyond the antinomic. We can think this source in an abstract speculative way, but by definition we cannot know it, nor experience it. It is not immanent to our experience and knowledge. The dialectic of incommensurables – which according to Jameson is the true dialectical understanding of contradiction – is therefore simply the antinomic when it is fully understood as being antinomic, and therefore as incapable of being unified as presence.

While I claimed earlier that Jameson's account of the ground ambiguously wavers between the transcendental and the transcendent, his account of the relation between the phenomenological and its ultimate ground of radical alterity clearly makes the ground a transcendent source of the phenomenological. Jameson's displacement of the phenomenological, or of an ontology of Dasein,

⁵³ Jameson outlines a phenomenology of dialectical thought, or in other words what such thought feels like, in *Marxism and Form*, pp. 306-308. For a similar phenomenology of dialectical thought, see Jameson's *Valences of the Dialectic*, pp. 50-51.

means that he fails to acknowledge Dasein's struggle for meaning as being in active dialectical relation with its opening to radical alterity. As noted earlier, Jameson preserves a place for the phenomenological rather than simply rejecting it, but he preserves it only as a necessary passage to its own dissolution in an awareness of the transcendent otherness of the ground. For Jameson, this awareness dissolves the phenomenological subject's illusory view of itself as capable of free action, thereby also ridding it of the illusion that it can contribute to the making of history through its own intentional action. The relation between the phenomenological and the ground in Jameson's account is therefore undialectical, meaning that they are not mutually dependent. Jameson's postmodern dialectic is therefore undialectical at its core.

One further consequence of Jameson's absolute separation of experience from its ground in alterity is that we can never see the new emerge. We never witness the process of the unfolding of history before our eyes. We can, however, construct a retrospective understanding of the causality of this process, but this is merely the illusion of hindsight. All we can say is that in the past the world (and our experience and understanding of it) was divided by certain identifiable antinomies, and now it is divided by these new ones, and logically this process will repeat itself. We cannot say that these shifts follow a destiny, for the ground is unknowable. And, we cannot attribute these shifts to human intentionality, for historical change from Jameson's perspective comes from beyond the human. The emergence of a new historical epoch out of the void leads us to the question of the place of the utopian in Jameson's thought, for to grasp history as the upsurge of the unprecedented as a totalising, epochal event is to grasp it as utopian in its form. Of course, the new epoch soon disappoints, goes stale, settles into being another accumulated chapter in the ongoing horror story of history, but in Jameson's postmodern dialectic the utopian moment is still necessary for grasping the essential nature of history itself as the upsurge of the unprecedented.

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