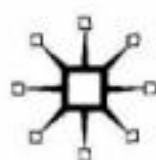


fredric
jameson
a critical reader

edited by
douglas kellner and sean homer





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Introduction

Sean Homer and Douglas Kellner

In *The Origins of Postmodernity* Anderson (1998) restates an assessment of Western Marxism that he first advanced almost three decades ago (see Anderson, 1976). Western Marxism, he argued, was born of political defeat and the crushing of proletarian insurgencies of the 1920s; separated from the classical corpus of historical materialism Western Marxism marked a sharp decline in political strategy and economic analysis, as its center of gravity shifted toward philosophy. A second generation of thinkers such as Adorno, Horkheimer, Sartre, Lefebvre, and Marcuse:

[C]onstructed a remarkable field of critical theory, not in isolation from surrounding currents of non-Marxist thought, but typically in creative tension with them. This was a tradition deeply concerned with questions of method – the epistemology of a critical understanding of society – on which classical Marxism had left few pointers. But its philosophical scope was not merely procedural: it had one central focus of substantive concern, which formed the common horizon of this line as a whole. Western Marxism was above all a set of theoretical investigations of the culture of developed capitalism. (1998, p. 69)

The broad strokes of Anderson's presentation today remain true to his earlier assessment except in one important respect. In 1976 Anderson saw the conditions that had produced Western Marxism as past and the line that ran from Lukács through to Sartre and Marcuse as essentially exhausted. At that time Fredric Jameson was a footnote in Anderson's considerations, offering the only serious overview of the tradition as a whole but, like Western Marxism itself, limited by its focus on aesthetics. In 1998 *Marxism and Form* remained for Anderson the first work to afford a complete overview of the Western Marxist repertoire but contrary to his earlier assessment it no longer marks the end of that tradition. In the intervening years Jameson's work has been elevated from a footnote in the history of Western Marxism to its "grandiose finale" and at the same time a body of work that significantly exceeds it (1998, p. 74). Our *Critical Reader* tracks that extraordinary achievement as Jameson, against the grain of much contemporary cultural theory and the "demarxification" of the academy, has acquired the status of the most important cultural critic writing today, the world's major exponent of Critical Theory and *the* theorist of postmodernity.

Jameson's published work now spans four decades and here we bring together critical interventions that engage with all of Jameson's major published works. His early work, *Marxism and Form* (1971) and *The Prison-House of Language* (1972) introduced to an English-speaking readership the traditions of Western Marxism, dialectical criticism, Russian formalism and French structuralism. With the publication of *The Political Unconscious* (1981) Jameson was recognized as one of the major Marxist cultural theorists of his era. His 1984 essay on postmodernism and the subsequent book, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) gained Jameson a global reputation and readership. Throughout his career Jameson has also produced a series of highly provocative and original single author studies: Sartre (1961), Wyndham Lewis (1979), Adorno (1990), and Brecht (1998). He has produced two volumes of film criticism: *Signatures of the Visible* (1990) and *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992), as well as a recent book *A Singular Modernity* (2002) that reengages with debates over the postmodern through a critical analysis of modernity and modernism.

Trajectory of a theorist

In his first published book, Jameson analyzed the literary theory and production of Jean-Paul Sartre. Written as a doctoral dissertation at Yale University, *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* (1961) was influenced by Jameson's teacher Erich Auerbach and by the Stylistics associated with Leo Spitzer, focusing on Sartre's style, narrative structures, values, and vision of the world. The book is devoid of the Marxian categories and political readings characteristic of Jameson's later work, but read in the context of the stifling conformism and banal business society of the 1950s, Jameson's subject matter (Sartre) and his intricate literary-theoretical writing style (already the notorious Jamesonian sentences appear full-blown) can be seen as revealing an attempt to create himself as a critical intellectual against the conformist currents of the epoch. One also sees him already turning against the literary establishment, against the dominant modes of literary criticism. All Jameson's works constitute critical interventions against the hegemonic forms of literary criticism and modes of thought regnant in the Anglo-American world, and attempt to construct more critical and oppositional social, cultural, and political discourses.

Interestingly, like Sartre, Jameson's own work would combine aesthetic, philosophical, political, and historical analysis and engage artifacts ranging from the banal objects of everyday life to the major political events of the era. After intense study of Marxian literary theory in the 1960s, Jameson published *Marxism and Form* (1971), which introduced a tradition of dialectical Marxist literary theory to the English-speaking world. Whereas in the heated debates over the postmodern, French and German positions would often be diametrically opposed, Jameson from the beginning mediated positions in

the German theories of Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Herbert Marcuse, T. W. Adorno, and others with French theorists. For Jameson, one of the dimensions of dialectics was overcoming one-sided positions and moving to a higher theoretical synthesis, a mode of thinking characteristic of his work from the early 1970s to the present.

Returning to French theory in *The Prison-House of Language* (1972), Jameson engaged French structuralist and Russian formalist approaches to language and textuality. This project illuminated key ideas and positions in the emerging poststructuralist thought, while demonstrating the use-value and provocations of a wide range of Russian formalist theorists and French thinkers including Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and A. J. Greimas. Jameson would continue to use many of the concepts of literary and cultural theory explicated in these texts, though he would move from the prison-house of language to the slaughterhouse of history, using Marxian theory to contextualize the texts engaged in his hermeneutic project.

After these influential and impressive introductions to German and French critical theories, Jameson has concentrated on developing his own literary and cultural theory in works from *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist* (1979) to *A Singular Modernity*. No early/late dichotomy in Jameson's publications presents itself as a viable hermeneutical device for interpreting his works as a whole, other than the obvious distinction between his pre-Marxian text *Sartre* and his later writings. Rather, what is striking are the remarkable continuities in Jameson's works. One can pick up his articles or books from the early 1970s through the late 1980s and discover strong similarities in their concerns, style, and politics. Indeed, one gets the feeling in reading Jameson's two-volume collection of essays *The Ideologies of Theory* that they could have all been written yesterday, or in the recent past. Yet, as Jameson notes in the introduction to these essays, there is a fundamental shift of emphasis in his works that he describes as:

a shift from the vertical to the horizontal: from an interest in the multiple dimensions and levels of a text to the multiple interweavings of an only fitfully readable (or writable) narrative; from problems of interpretation to problems of historiography; from the attempt to talk about the sentence to the (equally impossible) attempt to talk about modes of production.

(1988a, p. xxix)

In other words, Jameson's focus has shifted from a vertical emphasis on the many dimensions of a text – its ideological, psychoanalytic, formal, mythic-symbolical levels – which require a sophisticated and multivalent practice of reading, to a horizontal emphasis on the ways texts are inserted into historical sequences and on how history enters and helps constitute texts. Yet this shift in emphasis also points to continuities in Jameson's

work, for from the late 1960s to the 1990s he has privileged the historical dimension of texts and political readings, bringing his critical practice into the vicissitudes of history, moving critical discourse from the ivory tower of academia and the prison-house of language to the vicissitudes and contingencies of that field for which the term "history" serves as marker.

One therefore reads Jameson as a (still open) totality, as a relatively unified theoretical project in which the various texts provide parts of a whole. Jameson has characteristically appropriated into his theory a wide range of positions, from structuralism to poststructuralism and from psychoanalysis to post-modernism, producing a highly eclectic and original brand of Marxian literary and cultural theory. Marxism remains the master narrative of Jameson's corpus, a theoretical apparatus that utilizes a dual hermeneutic of ideology and utopia to criticize the ideological components of cultural texts, while setting forth their utopian dimension, and that helps produce criticism of existing society and visions of a better world. Influenced by Marxist theorist Ernst Bloch, Jameson thus has developed a hermeneutical and utopian version of Marxian cultural theory.

From *Marxism and Form* onwards Jameson makes clear his attraction both to Lukácsian literary theory and to his version of Hegelian Marxism, an allegiance that remains with Jameson in his later works. In particular Lukács's work on realism and on the historical novel strongly influenced Jameson's way of seeing and situating literature. While Jameson never accepted Lukács's polemics against modernism, he appropriated key Lukácsian categories, such as reification, to describe the fate of culture in contemporary capitalism. The Hegelian markers of Jameson's work include the contextualizing of cultural texts in history, the broad historical periodizing, and the use of Hegelian categories. Dialectical criticism involves the attempt to synthesize competing positions and methods into a more comprehensive theory. Dialectical criticism for Jameson also involves thinking that reflexively analyzes categories and methods, while carrying out concrete analyses and inquiries. Categories articulate historical content and thus must be read in terms of the specific environment out of which they emerge. For Jameson, dialectical criticism thus involves thinking that reflects on categories and procedures, while engaging in specific concrete studies; relational and historical thinking, which contextualizes the object of study in its concrete socio-political situation; utopian thinking, which compares the existing reality with possible alternatives and finds utopian hope in literature, philosophy, and other cultural texts; and totalizing, synthesizing thinking, which provides a systematic framework for cultural studies and a theory of history within which dialectical criticism can operate. All these aspects are operative throughout Jameson's work, the totalizing element coming more prominently (and controversially) to the fore as his work evolved.

From the 1970s to the present, Jameson has published an increasingly diverse and complex series of theoretical inquiries and cultural studies. One

begins to encounter the characteristic range of interests and depth of penetration in his studies of science fiction, film, magical narratives, painting, and both realist and modernist literature. One also encounters articles concerning Marxian cultural politics, imperialism, Palestinian liberation, Marxian teaching methods, and the revitalization of the Left. Many of the key essays have been collected in *The Ideologies of Theory*, which provide the laboratory for the theoretical project worked out in *Fables of Aggression*, *The Political Unconscious* and subsequent texts. These studies should be read together as inseparable parts of a multilevel theory of the interconnections between the history of literary form, modes of subjectivity, and stages of capitalism.

Jameson's theoretical synthesis is presented most systematically in *The Political Unconscious*. The text contains an articulation of Jameson's literary method, a systematic inventory of the history of literary forms, and a hidden history of the forms and modes of subjectivity itself, as it traverses through the field of culture and experience. Jameson boldly attempts to establish Marxian criticism as the most all-inclusive and comprehensive theoretical framework as he incorporates a disparate set of competing approaches into his model. He provides an overview of the history of the development of cultural forms and concludes with articulation of a "double hermeneutic" of ideology and utopia – which critiques ideology while preserving utopian moments – as the properly Marxian method of interpretation. Jameson employs a Lukács-inspired historical narrative to tell how cultural texts contain a "political unconscious," buried narratives and social experiences, which require sophisticated literary hermeneutics in order to be deciphered. One particular narrative of *The Political Unconscious* concerns, in Jameson's striking phrase, "the construction of the bourgeois subject in emergent capitalism and its schizophrenic disintegration in our own time" (1981a, p. 9). Key stages in the odyssey of the disintegrating bourgeois subjectivity are articulated in George Gissing, Joseph Conrad, and Wyndham Lewis, a story that will find its culmination in Jameson's account of postmodernism.

Indeed, Jameson's studies on postmodernism are a logical consequence of his theoretical project. He presented his first analysis of the defining features of postmodern culture in a 1982 lecture 'Postmodernism and Consumer Society.' Eventually, he synthesized and elaborated his emerging analysis in the article 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,' which more systematically interprets postmodernism in terms of the Marxian theory of capitalism and as a new "cultural dominant" (see 1991a, Chapter 1). Within his analysis, Jameson situates postmodern culture in the framework of a theory of stages of society – based on a Marxian model of stages of capitalist development – and argues that postmodernism is part of a new stage of capitalism. Every theory of postmodernism, he claims, contains an implicit periodization of history and "an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today" (1991a, p. 3).

Following Ernest Mandel's periodization in his book *Late Capitalism* (1975), Jameson claims that "there have been three fundamental moments in capitalism, each one marking a dialectical expansion over the previous stage. These are market capitalism, the monopoly stage or the stage of imperialism, and our own, wrongly called postindustrial, but what might better be termed multinational, capital" (1991a, p. 35). To these forms of society correspond the cultural forms realism, modernism, and postmodernism.

Jameson has subsequently refined this periodisation in 'The Existence of Italy' (1990b) and a series of studies in *The Cultural Turn* where he turns to new economic models to flesh out the cultural logic thesis, especially Arrighi's (1994) *The Long Twentieth Century*. For Jameson, Arrighi's elaboration of the nature and operation of finance capital serves to crystallize all the problems and questions that have arisen from the early 1980s around the relationship between economics and culture. In *A Singular Modernity* (2002) Jameson notes the somewhat surprising "return of the modern" in a variety of fields in recent years and attempts to delineate the construction of various concepts of modernity and the modern in rhetorical and narrative contexts.

The title "a singular modernity" is partly ironic since one of Jameson's strongest arguments is that there is no singular modernity, but a variety of narratives of modernity, modernism, and the modern that serve varied ideological purposes. Likewise, Jameson analyzes discourses of modernism in the arts as ideological discourses that legitimate certain artistic in various national and now global culture. According to Jameson, the ideology of modernism responds to an incomplete modernization and the conflicts between the country and the city, the urban and the pastoral, a premodern communal and social life and the shock of the new, essentially technology and the constant innovations of capitalist modernity, which find their registers in art. The prime rhetorical gesture and defining feature of the ideology of modernism is, for Jameson, the belief in the autonomy of art.

Jameson is critical of the ideology of modernism that provides aestheticist and antipolitical concepts of art, but believes that these ideologies can also be highly revealing. For Jameson, ideology is not just mystification and false consciousness, but is the theory of a practice which he designates "late modern" aesthetic practice, exemplified in the works of Nabokov and Beckett. In Jameson's reading, both create absolute worlds out of language, both employ language as exiles, thus creating a certain detachment and estrangement, both avoid politics and specific content (though no doubt both can be read politically and allegorically as Jameson tends to do). They signal that in late modernism the ideology of modernism has been appropriated into the work itself, that the art works and even sentences stand alone as self-sufficient aesthetic worlds and are marked by a highly self-conscious and reflexive aesthetic practice.

In short, Jameson argues that the ideology of modernism helps us grasp the structure of modernity and the modern as attempts to produce the new,

as ruptures and breaks that produce constant innovation, but without collective projects to fundamentally change the system. Rather than a theory of modernity or the modern, Jameson concludes, we need an ontology of the present that grasps the past and future in the present. More specifically “what we really need is a wholesale displacement of the thematics of modernity by the desire called utopia” (2002, p. 215). Hence, for Jameson, past, present, and future coexist in a problematic that systematically grapples with the past as it attempts to understand the present and move toward a better future.

Jameson emerges as a synthetic and eclectic Marxian cultural theorist who attempts to preserve and develop the Marxian theory, while analyzing the politics and utopian moments of a stunning diversity of cultural texts. His work expands literary analysis to include popular culture, architecture, theory, and other texts and thus can be seen as part of the movement toward cultural studies as a replacement for canonical literary studies. Yet cultural studies for Jameson is part of a broader project of developing interdisciplinary theory, an enterprise central to the studies that constitute this Reader.

A Critical Reader

The studies collected here assess Jameson’s contribution across a wide range of academic disciplines from literature and film studies to political economy, social theory, and cultural politics. The text covers the breadth of Jameson’s oeuvre from his first published work on Sartre to his recent book on modernity, and provides a rigorous, systematic, and critical engagement with the full range of Jameson’s work including: literary analysis, film studies, architecture, critical theory, third world literature, Jameson’s reception in Latin American and China, Marxism, postmodernism, globalization, spatial theory, political economy, and agency. The studies illustrate the richness and productivity of Jameson’s thought and its usefulness to critically engage and cognitively map contemporary culture and society, as well as the ways in which Jameson himself provides a range of studies that illuminate the contemporary moment. Jameson’s oeuvre is a work in progress and it continues to fascinate a large number of individuals in different disciplines and around the world, thus we imagine that our book will contribute to continued debates over Jameson’s work and to help provide theories, methods, and analyses to provide critical theories of the present model and tools and visions for its transformation.

The book opens with Sean Homer’s study of Jameson and Sartre, detailing how Jameson’s initial appropriation of Sartre helped shape his engagement with Marxism, the influence of the New Left, and his subsequent work. Homer’s chapter focuses on the historical context of the Sartre study and in particular on the politics of the New Left. Contrary to the usual critical response of simply bypassing this early text Homer insists that we can find

there not only many of the central themes of Jameson's later critical project but also, symptomatically, indications of his political development. The politics of the New Left – its rejection of orthodox Marxist analysis, the desire to create a new politics appropriate to the demands of advanced consumer capitalism, its utopianism and its “cultural turn” – can all be seen to have impacted on Jameson's understanding of Marxism. Chris Pawling's contribution extends the historical excavation of Jameson's work with a chapter on one of the most significant figures in his oeuvre, Georg Lukács. As indicated above Jameson took from Lukács both an understanding of the Marxian conception of totality as an open system and the idea of reification as the central mediator within capitalism. However, Jameson is usually seen to be unsympathetic to Lukács' “content” based literary criticism and his reliance upon a reflection theory of representation. By focusing on questions of narrative and through a meticulous reading of Lukács' essay on Thomas Mann Pawling reveals how Jameson's reading strategies from *The Political Unconscious* to the analysis of conspiracy films in *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* remain fundamentally indebted to a Lukácsian understanding of the historical novel and narration.

From the Sartre study in 1961 to the analysis of postmodern fragmentation and schizoid temporality in the 1980s and 1990s the central role of narrative in our existential sense of time as well as a broader understanding of history has been an overriding concern for Jameson. His insistence, in *The Political Unconscious*, on history as a singular narrative of class struggle to wrest the realm of freedom from the realm of necessity immediately brought forth criticism from both liberal and poststructuralist theorists focusing upon the unreconstructed nature of Marxism as it imposed identity and unity upon the difference and heterogeneity of historical process. Similarly, Jameson's reflections on the waning of history and narrative in postmodern culture tends to bring forth charges of old fashioned Marxist nostalgia and dogmatism in the face of postmodern pluralism and hybridity. Nowhere, however, has Jameson's reflections on narrative caused more critical vitriol than in a 1986 essay on narrative and “Third World” literature. In this essay Jameson proposed a reading of “Third World” literature as “national allegories” and almost overnight, as Neil Lazarus points out, Jameson's name became an anathema in literature departments and the conference circuit across the US. In particular a rejoinder to Jameson's essay by the Marxist critic Aijaz Ahmad quickly achieved the status as the final word in demolishing the imperialism of Marxist criticism by postcolonial critics. In a careful and subtle reading of the encounter between Ahmad and Jameson, Lazarus unravels the way in which Ahmad's critique was taken up by postcolonial critics to legitimate certain critical positions as well as a more wide-ranging critique of Marxism than Ahmad himself had ever intended. Through a close reading of the rhetoric of Ahmad's article Lazarus shows how Ahmad deployed his own position within the academy, as a “Third World” academic, to trump

Jameson's article and consequently, however unintentionally, this served to legitimate the subsequent postcolonial appropriations. Lazarus concludes with a defense of Jameson's reading of "Third World" literature, not on the basis of Ahmad's critique but on the basis of what Jameson himself wrote in a much more "qualified" and reflexive piece of writing than most critics acknowledge.

We then present three chapters that reconsider Jameson's extraordinarily influential analysis of postmodernism. As Christian Gregory notes, it may be late in the day to advance a critique, even a friendly one, of Jameson's conception of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism as the notion is now firmly embedded within the academy and invariably it is associated with Jameson's name. The chapters presented here, however, tackle the question of postmodernity from a perspective rather different to the standard academic critique, that is to say, that the cultural logic thesis is inherently totalizing and eradicates cultural difference. Clint Burnham and Maria Elisa Cevalco consider Jameson's contribution not in terms of its unquestionable theoretical sophistication and insight but from the perspective of a renewed political activism that now sweeps the globe. In an iconoclastic, *noir* inflected, reading of Jameson on architecture, Burnham recuperates postmodern theory for community politics in downtown Vancouver as residents resist the gentrification of their district. Through the photographs of Arni Haraldsson, Burnham presents an alternative view of the postmodern city to that of the Bonaventure Hotel and Frank Gehry's house but one still informed by Jameson's notion of postmodern spatiality. With Cevalco we move from the local to the global in an exercise that deploys Jameson's work on postmodernism and globalization to "cognitively map" the contours of the nascent anti-capitalist movement. Through the poetry of Francisco Alvim and the emergence of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, Cevalco maps the new "structure of feeling" that gives the lie to the false promises of globalization and reminds us that "another world is possible." Finally, Gregory tackles head-on the frequent criticism of Jameson's cultural logic thesis that it operates at too high a level of abstraction and lacks any firm basis in empirical economic analysis. Drawing on Davis' (1985) early critique of Jameson's utilization of Ernest Mandel's theory of late capitalism to underwrite his periodization of postmodernity, Gregory proceeds to a reconsideration of Jameson's economic analysis in relation to the turbulence of the global markets in the 1990s and the crash of the dot-com bubble. Gregory's critique undercuts much of the hyperbole that surrounds an unthinking celebration of postmodernity and globalization from the perspective of rigorously grounded Marxist political economy.

We then present two chapters on a frequently neglected area of Jameson's work, film. Although Jameson has now published two collections of essays on film, *Signatures of the Visible* and *The Geopolitical Aesthetic*, consisting of characteristically astute readings of individual films as well as major state-

ments on contemporary film theory, 'The Existence of Italy' and 'Totality as Conspiracy,' his work remains outside the mainstream of contemporary film studies. Slavoj Žižek, a figure who has himself written extensively about film but remains intransigently outside of any mainstream critical position, takes up Jameson's presentation at a conference on Krzysztof Kieślowski (also included in this book) to present, in his own inimitable style, his reflections on Jameson, Kieślowski, Lars von Trier, and revolutionary politics. In a different register Michael Chanan interviews Jameson on film. In this wide-ranging interview Jameson reflects upon Cuban and Latin-American cinema, the politics of *Screen* in the 1970s, documentary film-making, and the role of music in film. In particular, Chanan and Jameson explore the crucial role music and sound play in our sense of temporality in film and how this connects to the familiar Jamesonian concerns of narrative, realism, and form.

The final cluster of chapters engage with Jameson's most recent work on dialectical method, modernity, and revolutionary politics. In an encyclopaedic grasp of the totality of Jameson's work John O'Kane traces the fate of his dialectic from *Marxism and Form* to *Late Marxism*. Situating Jameson's work in relation to the major statements on Marxist method in the canon of Western Marxism, Sartre's *Search for a Method*, Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*, and Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, O'Kane details the subtle shifts in register from his early formulation of dialectical criticism to what O'Kane calls the postmodern negative dialectics of "late" Marxism. Xudong Zhang similarly addresses questions of method as he incisively dissects the controversy amongst Chinese intellectuals aroused by the recent publication of *A Singular Modernity*. Since the mid-1980s when Jameson taught in Beijing his name has become synonymous with the idea of "theory" in general and postmodernism in particular in China. This influence has always been something of a paradoxical affair, with Jameson's name aligned with contemporary continental European theorists and the general celebration of all things North American rather than as one of the foremost critics of both. Zhang traces the development of Jameson's influence within the Chinese academy to the present critique of his most recent work for what some postmodernist academics call his "retreat from postmodernity." Esther Leslie then provides an eloquent reading of Jameson's book on Brecht and method. Taking as her starting point Jameson's reflections on the impossibility of the critical intellectual, in a Benjaminian or Brechtian mode, today Leslie considers Jameson's return to Brecht and modernism after two decades of work on postmodernism. As with Adorno in 1991, Jameson is not concerned with retrieving Brecht for the postmodern, as for Jameson he never went away in the first place, but rather with the "usefulness" of Brecht today. We live in a historical moment that is perhaps more hospitable to Brechtian didacticism than at any point in the previous thirty years and thus he opens up the possibility for a new political aesthetic. Jameson also reads Brecht against an extraordinary book that remained unpublished in his lifetime, *Me-ti; Book of*

Transformations or *Book of Changes*; it is this Brecht, the Brecht of twists and turns, contradictions and dialectic that is useful to us today. It is surely no accident, as Leslie points out, that Jameson's work should return at this precise historical conjuncture to the revolutionary possibilities of Benjamin, Brecht, and Lenin, as class struggle once again reasserts itself and a global anti-capitalist movement is on the rise. At a time of twists and turns, imperial conflicts and breathtaking contradictions the dialectic is once again the order of the day and with the possibilities for revolutionary change it is surely an appropriate moment to pause and take stock of Jameson's trajectory, contributions, and the debates in which his work has been central.

Finally, with a chapter that provides the other side of an exchange with Žižek on Kieślowski's films, we conclude the volume with a piece by Jameson himself on Kieślowski's *Dekalog*. Cutting through the myriad of religious and ethical criticism that surrounds Kieślowski, Jameson focuses on the formal and narrative questions raised by the *Dekalog*. There are particular affinities between the episodic structure of the *Dekalog* and the form of the short story and in this respect Jameson highlights the neglected work on narrative forms by André Jolles, especially the *casus* or trial. Stressing parallels with Boccaccio's *Decameron*, he presents the *Dekalog* as an epic tour de force that interrogates life in socialist Poland to illuminate existential choices in human life and presenting, as Jameson concludes, "a critique of morality by ethics itself."

Whereas many previous studies of Jameson focused on specific themes such as his engagement with postmodernism (Kellner, 1989; Anderson, 1998) or his literary criticism (Roberts, 2000; Helmling, 2001), the texts collected here grasp the full spectrum of Jameson's work. Jameson is undoubtedly one of the most far-reaching and multisided theorists of our time and we hope that our *Reader* will encourage debate of his protean work and its multiple effects.