

## THEORIES AND METHODOLOGIES

# Paradoxes of Appropriation: The Chinese Reception of *The Political Unconscious* in the Age of Global Capitalism

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The Chinese reception of Fredric Jameson has been as extraordinary as it has been paradoxical. Beginning almost simultaneously with his semester-long lecture series on cultural theory and postmodernism at Peking University in 1985, the ongoing translation of his oeuvre into Chinese has corresponded with a steadily growing appetite for theoretical sophistication and development. Even though Jameson is well-known in many disciplines beyond literary studies, *The Political Unconscious* is easily the anchor of the Chinese reception of Jameson as a contemporary literary critic and theorist. Likewise, while his work on postmodernism was central to contemporary Chinese cultural debates, *The Political Unconscious* nonetheless constitutes a real point of departure for the “modernization” of Chinese literary and cultural analysis. And what a modernization it was! Not only does *The Political Unconscious* introduce all the necessary concepts, tools, and theoretical operations that helped usher in a new age of contemporary theory and criticism in China; the book sets all its conceptual and theoretical properties, capital, skills, and sophistication in motion in the most self-critical or auto-reflexive way. In *The Political Unconscious*, various critical traditions and theoretical discourses—the linguistic turn, Freudian psychoanalysis, hermeneutics, Walter Benjamin’s allegorical mode of reading, and so much else—are positioned next to one another and turned into an integrated operation and a singular dialectical process. As the hidden center of gravity, the book kept within its orbit all these modes of analysis and interpretation, each and every one of them coming with its own attraction, appeal, and often cult following. Indeed, the well-known

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slogan “Always historicize!” and the concept of metacommentary were understood in the Chinese context as drawing together these specific critical and political modes, and the former never served as a general imperative to engage with historicism of one kind or another, as we see in the United States context.

A Western student of theory may be surprised to learn that the Chinese discourse on Jameson appears to have been operating on a superficial, repetitive, and even absent-minded level. I use these adjectives not in a purely negative way—superficiality and absent-mindedness are expected when it comes to the post-Mao Chinese reception of Western theory or ideas in general. The institutional setup and disciplinary boundaries at major Chinese universities practically ensured shallowness in terms of knowledge transmission and production. A political and cultural agenda has determined the absent-minded or “allegorical” nature of importing and “making Chinese” any foreign ideas, theories, or discourses. A contradiction then lies in the fact that, since the late imperial movement of self-strengthening through learning from the West, anything Western that managed to stand outside the processes of this appropriation or “making Chinese”—of which Marxism is an excellent example—ended up being left alone in its “authentic” form. However, it would also be pigeon-holed into its accidental niche as something purely technical and exotic.

Meanwhile, to apply the critical-interpretive model of *The Political Unconscious* to its own reception in China, one is tempted to argue that it is precisely this “political unconscious” by which the imagined Chinese critical mind understands its own texts; that the “master code,” which foregrounds all interpretations within “sedimented layers” of preexisting ideologies and value systems, is shown to be embedded in the secrets and taboos of a party state, not in the form commonly referred to as censorship or self-censorship in authoritarian societies but rather, and more pertinently in post-Mao China, as something that structurally and historically pertains to the ambiguity of the Chinese system. And this ambiguity can be said to be within and about Marxism as much as the

Chinese state. Within this context, the invisible dynamic and unspoken conflict that surrounded and overdetermined the Chinese reception of *The Political Unconscious* become clear. In fact, Jameson’s work foresees and explains the historical, political, and cultural situations that constitute the immediate environment of its own reception. The dual factors responsible for the challenges facing contemporary Marxism in various emergent political cultures, namely “the sorry history of Zhdanovite prescription in the arts” and “the fascination with modernisms and ‘revolutions’ in form and language” (11) were still actively at work in China in the 1980s and 1990s. While the rigidity, uniformity, and oppressiveness of discursive officialdom remained a daily reality, albeit in its more rational and open versions in post-Mao China, the Era of Reforms was in full swing and thus perhaps a more predominant factor, as modernism and other “‘revolutions’ in form” (including that of literary theory) were themselves socially determined symbols, whose collective desires and unconscious had only been more properly articulated through the sweeping Chinese marketization and globalization in the decades that ensued. For these epochal and deeply ideological forces and trends, the dialectical and totalizing operations of *The Political Unconscious*, while theoretically inspiring and methodologically innovative for the critical and the self-initiated, inevitably stood as something the system (professional, educational, or political) could not refute but would not want to have to engage in any serious or systematic way.

Such was the general fate of Western Marxism in China. Yet the reception of *The Political Unconscious* was to be mediated by more specific and immediate, if tacit or even unconscious, resistance within the academic field of literary studies. This, too, is foreseen and explained in the theoretical premise of *The Political Unconscious*. Jameson, by means of a negative definition of the book as a project, tells readers not to engage in traditional “philosophical aesthetics: the nature and function of art, the specificity of poetic language and of the aesthetic experience, the theory of the beautiful, and so forth” (11). All those, to be sure, were

precisely the buzzwords and intellectual obsessions in the first decade of post-Mao China, as the construction of a modern, proto-bourgeois subject desperately needed the support and valorization of the aesthetic and poetic for its own ideological and political rationalization and fortification, not to mention for the search for a common but elevated and privileged language by which to communicate with advanced Western societies and cultures. The call in *The Political Unconscious* to radically historicize such aestheticized and fetishized experiences, a critical operation in which such aesthetics are to be exposed as mere jargons and fantasies vis-à-vis a fundamentally fragmented and reified society and thus “transformed beyond recognition in the process” (11), would have been the last thing the Chinese modernist writers, artists, critics, and intellectuals wanted to hear about, much less address.

The other, equally important professional or institutional barrier is none other than literary history as an entrenched training and research paradigm at Chinese universities. Besides disciplinary underdevelopment in the crudest sense, this fixation with literary history, usually of the most empirical kind, falls neatly into what Jameson variably calls “representational narrative” and “diachronic constructs” (11). To some extent, this Chinese academic phenomenon or idiosyncrasy can be explained by the residual desires from the revolutionary and early socialist periods to construct the proletarian Subject. As a kind of belated form of social, political, and cultural subject formation, this subject always finds itself already in so-called peaceful competition with “the construction of the bourgeois subject in emergent capitalism.” While “its schizophrenic disintegration in our own time” (12) necessitates all kinds of historical and critical reflections, its original historical substance, or its real or imagined soul, must then be kept at bay and contained within the Western capitalist world by the state-sanctioned “correct” model of interpretation. This ideological and administrative intervention of the state apparatus basically ensured the pretheoretical state of Chinese literary studies, for which the Althusserian concept of historiography promoted by Jameson in *The Political Unconscious*—namely, “not to elaborate some achieved and lifelike

simulacrum of its supposed object, but rather to ‘produce’ the latter’s ‘concept’” (12)—remains beyond reach or concrete understanding even today.

### Jameson and Method

In this light, it is not difficult to see, more synoptically, that Jameson’s reception in China sits precariously yet productively on the threshold of the “new knowledge, new theory, new methodology” that the brave new world had to offer to the students of post-Mao China: something instrumentally productive and value-free on one hand, and on the other something pertaining to a continued and intensely political analysis of historical movement and systematic change that Marxism has come to exemplify. However, the Marxist nature of Jameson’s larger oeuvre seems to have rendered its Chinese reception—while still sympathetic, even intimate—guarded and distant. At the risk of caricature, one could say that Jameson (and the Western Marxist tradition) is both too Marxist and not Marxist enough for the state-sanctioned intellectual consciousness of a purportedly actually existing socialist state. Too Marxist, because it continues to engage with the central contradictions of capitalism while using all the analytic and critical tools developed in this perennial struggle. To Chinese eyes, its advanced position and theoretical prowess thus appear to share many features and qualities with its object of critique. Yet not Marxist enough, as it is ultimately confined to interpreting the world but not changing it, at least not in the blunt sense of waging revolutions or preserving the party state. Certainly, the post-Mao Chinese state and society Jameson’s reception has experienced have been decidedly postrevolutionary. However, socio-economic development and cultural-ideological construction under the banner of opening and reform have been quite consciously conditioned by the persistence and even self-strengthening of the party apparatus inherited from the previous revolution, which, historically and theoretically, was guided by the principal of seizing power *before* and as a precondition for economic development (presumably by state capitalist means).

Chinese discourse thus seems, provisionally, to opt to stay on the surface or within the disciplinary confines of “Western knowledge”—be it contemporary literary theory or theoretical discourse on postmodernism, as if to circumvent a thorny confrontation with the Marxist problematic, its attendant totalizing tendency, its critical nature, and its political stance vis-à-vis capitalism. To that extent, the identity of Jameson as an American theorist has been embraced both unthinkingly and deliberately. It drapes an apolitical veil over this comprehensive (and, again, Marxist) theoretical discourse with its global, postmodern, and technologically robust Americanism. It also allows a more serious use of the concreteness and complexities of Jameson’s American environment as a historical and philosophical vantage point from which to reintroduce the Chinese problematic into Marxist cultural analysis.

This perceived superficiality can also be regarded as a strategy with which to read Jameson at a certain historical and political distance. Such a distance, real or imagined, sustains a symbolically theoretical space for concrete, inevitably political debates around local issues. This somewhat allegorical reading is advantageous for Chinese students of Jameson, who are faced with a discourse that politically and philosophically addresses the question of totality and historicity. The method allows students to grapple with the critical-methodological skills accumulated between, say, the linguistic turn and the flowering of various theoretical discourses in American academe. Since the mid-1980s, this self-imposed crash course has maintained its momentum with a single-minded focus on the technical, sometimes even nominalist side of all theories. This nominalist approach turned out to be the least risky way to understand Jameson and even to apply some of his notions and arguments to Chinese cultural and social realities without letting concrete, substantive polemics and analyses overwhelm disciplinary, ideological, and institutional (academic as well as state) domains and barriers. Because the legitimacy of Deng’s China relied simultaneously on declaring the end of the stormy waves of class struggle of Mao’s era *and* clinging to the

state form of a proletariat dictatorship for perpetual growth, one may argue that the state- and socially sanctioned political unconscious of reading *The Political Unconscious* must entail a desire to prevent—or at least delay—a premature entanglement with the intense, sophisticated intellectual and political battles fought openly at the forefront of global capitalism.

One may be tempted to speculate that the official “no debate” (*buzhenglun*) policy that suppressed a host of destabilizing or inconvenient questions regarding the political and economic nature of Deng’s China has been symbolically internalized among Chinese academics and intellectuals as a form of collective self-censorship. To that extent, “class struggle within theory” (Jameson, *Political Unconscious* 12) as a premise of not only Marxist cultural criticism but indeed Marxist philosophy proper must undergo an operation of depoliticization along with the post-Mao Chinese reception of Western Marxism in general and *The Political Unconscious* in particular. We can see in this light the intellectual tentativeness and a suspension of the political domain within a phenomenological space—a thought experiment that was hermeneutic in nature. On the eve of the 1980s modernism or high culture fever (see Zhang; Jing Wang), it was both logical and coincidental that hermeneutic theory (Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur) came to post-Mao China together with Western Marxism (from the Frankfurt School to the French and German critical traditions in postwar “theory”). They both offered a philosophical and textual-analytic model for China’s self-understanding and self-positioning in global symbolic space in a way not unlike the search for an ontology of the mind, and hence an integrated domain of human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) since the “crisis of European sciences” (Husserl). Reading the world as text while expecting self-enrichment on the other end—a controlled loss of the self, as Ricoeur masterfully describes it—therefore offers a way forward. It enables the “Chinese mind” to imagine itself as a reader-student who is determined to engage the world with the necessary skills for heightened moral and intellectual synthesis. The egocentric

nature of this hermeneutic imagination notwithstanding, this ideology of national selfhood did set a process of theorizing and historicizing in motion by making it possible to absorb all kinds of knowledge—and, somewhat apolitically, “methods”—by containing them within a philosophical-hermeneutic buffer zone of “understanding.”

This historical and ideological context may explain Jameson’s popularity at the superficially “value-neutral” level of high-cultural fashion. “Superficiality,” while useful for a formalistic reading of Jameson, is a symptom of a structural mechanism of control through depoliticization. Of course, what is being depoliticized here is both the critical and historical nature of Marxist analysis and the actually existing capitalist system as its object of study. As a result, Jameson’s writings were and are treated as a kind of pure knowledge (the European approach) and a set of value-neutral skills (the American). This cautiously neutral technicality was coupled with a pragmatic recognition of the American overcoming of European cultural intensity or “depth”—a global shift in paradigms of production and productivity across the board.<sup>1</sup>

### “Jameson and China”

The critical energy of Jameson’s work, *The Political Unconscious* included, was not contained by bureaucratic, administratively sanctioned reading. Chinese students of Jameson since the mid-1980s not only inevitably grasped theory as a totality but also combined it with practice in a concrete literary, cultural, and situational analysis. The intrinsically historical and political hermeneutics of contemporary Chinese cultural subjectivity played an important role in reading Jameson outside his immediate American context. However, this was in the frame of the *longue durée* of modernity, just as it also tended not to get involved in the internal machinations of its Western texts, academies, and debates but instead to stay outside this historical precedence and frame of reference. It appropriated Jameson as an extended chapter in the afterlife of classical German philosophy, a specimen of the American force that works as a great epochal equalizer,

opening an unknown age of global, at least bi-oceanic, relationality. Thanks to his appreciation of the practical reason of the peasantry (formulated most eloquently in *Brecht and Method*<sup>2</sup>), and to his profound interest in and sympathy with what used to be called the Third World, Jameson’s work could even serve as a philosophical mediator between a utopian, postcapitalist imagination and a precapitalist wisdom.

Perhaps one of the most curious and fascinating things about the Chinese reception of *The Political Unconscious* is that, while dancing around the text, often declining to push the theoretical inspirations to their logical conclusion in the context of Chinese literary and cultural analysis, the book somehow vindicated this willful or unconscious disengagement. The reading of Jameson’s *Political Unconscious*, in other words, inevitably led to discussions pertaining less to theory and more to national or cultural-political debates. Of these debates, two stood out as the most prominent. One is the controversy around the notion of national allegory as a political and aesthetic interpretation of Third World literature in the age of global capital; the other is the larger and more historically complex question of postmodernity. Together, they enjoyed a near monopoly of production constituting “Jameson and China,” a phenomenon that triumphantly displays the potency of metacommentary and dialectical criticism as concrete approaches to totality.

It may be an overstatement to describe Chinese discussions about the concept of national allegory as controversial, but the impassioned or subtle differences in interpretations of this notion since the early 1990s can be used as an indicator of Chinese intellectual engagement with Jameson more broadly. Most Chinese discontent with this notion is that it covers modern Chinese literature with the blanket of Third World literature, and as something necessarily allegorical. The Third World as a universal frame, while sometimes considered to be imposed from the outside, is internalized paradoxically by way of a cultural pride derived from China’s classical and more recent revolutionary traditions. Rethinking modern Chinese literature under the rubric of national allegory might be tantamount to

recalling the previous framework of literature and arts as representation of class struggle. As contemporary literature and intellectual discourse turned toward modernism and individual freedom in the 1980s and 1990s, any reference to collectivity or necessity sounded too political. Such resistance gradually dispersed in the years to follow, however, and more careful readings of Jameson's "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" became available as the Chinese modernist style itself recuperated the realist narrative. This was often achieved by disengaging the national as an identity politics issue and instead concentrating on the political and formalistic intensities contained by the concept of allegory (see Qin Wang). In retrospect, the national-allegory controversy seems a misguided moral indignation against an accurate description of a group's historical conditioning and literary production. The objection reflected nascent modernist pursuits and experiments under the banner of formal innovation or, more bluntly, of the modernization of Chinese literature. It also exposed a national imaginary in search of recognition for a creative soul with all the freedom and autonomy found in their Western contemporaries.

In contrast, Jameson's notion of national allegory emphasizes the political nature of the story of the collective in its struggle against the predominant and rationalized middle class culture of the First World—and we recall here the effort in *The Political Unconscious* to propose the "unity of a single great collective story" in all socially symbolic acts (19). The rich implications of the notion of allegory in this context were overlooked in the obsessive self-positioning of contemporary Chinese literature as coeval with world literature (by aspiration if not yet by achievement) by its leading critics, who then found it humiliating to be returned to an older spot, defined either temporally or stylistically, in the historical narrative of Euro-American cultural history. This is, of course, what Jameson explicitly asks his readers not to do at the outset of the essay. Nonetheless, such critics were preoccupied with *national* as designating concrete political, economic, and interpersonal situatedness and mutual dependency rather than *allegory*, which points to a

whole range of aesthetic and political possibilities for innovation and creativity. The irony that such objections unfolded almost precisely along a national-allegorical path was completely lost on the participants in this discussion. Therefore, the hasty Chinese intellectual resistance to the Jamesonian notion of "national allegory" may stand as a postcolonial moment, though the additional irony here is that postcolonialism itself had also been rejected, as a theoretical discourse, out of similar sensitivities pertaining to an insistence on being treated as equal and coeval vis-à-vis the West.

Chinese discourse about the notion of postmodernism and postmodernity had a similar trajectory, but on a larger scale. Jameson's essay from 1984, "Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," provided Chinese readers with an anchor in Marxist analysis of contemporary cultural phenomena. Here Jameson can be credited with supplying the basic conceptual tools for the surrounding debate. That debate, while at times divergent and politically ambiguous, has therefore always operated relatively within the Jamesonian parameter, but because the official post-Mao pursuit of modernization was coupled with an aesthetic and philosophical obsession with high modernism in elite cultural circles, Jameson's problematic of the postmodern provoked intense interest and vehement resistance all at once. In particular, the critical narrative offered by realism-modernism-postmodernism was highly useful in bridging the gaps in post-Cultural Revolutionary knowledge, which, in textbook manner, would leap between cultural figures with next to no context in between. For example, Jameson's cognitive mapping stood for a welter of contemporary Western knowledge and proved to be highly effective. Postmodernism, and particularly its concern with the becoming cultural of the economic, and the becoming economic of the cultural, was gradually assimilated into the Chinese horizon, forming the tacit starting point for contemporary Chinese literary criticism and cultural studies. This entire discourse about postmodernity would likely not have been achieved so quickly without Jameson's narrative.

Unique among contemporary theorists, Jameson provided a methodology that also corresponded to the changing times—their historicity, politics, and aesthetic tastes. While the early Chinese reception of Jameson was predicated on a shared Marxist and predominantly realist literary-historical lexicon, the actual flowering of the Jamesonian teachings in this area became concretely and meaningfully productive only after China had decisively transitioned into a consumer society.

This “success” did not come smoothly, but rather through perennial and passionate resistance, even downright moral suspicion or political attack. One must remember that any disruption or doubt of the linear, teleological project of modernity would be tantamount to intellectual treason in post-Mao China, a betrayal of the reform consensus that marked a departure from the Maoist doctrine of continued class struggle and the practice of “permanent revolution.” In other words, the post-revolutionary aura would find the Habermasian discourse on the “unfinished project of modernity” much more appealing than anything suggesting that the modern is or could ever be over.

Jameson’s American identity did provide some cover, if not foolproof immunity, from the assault on the gesture of historicizing the modern as a period, an ideology, and a myth. If deliberately defined narrowly as a particularly American thing, postmodernism could indeed reinforce a teleological worldview that simply sees in postmodernity a “higher” stage of modernity. Confined to the post-Mao Chinese debate, however, this “higher” stage is inevitably given a futuristic flavor, exotically advanced and thus socially irrelevant as it does not speak to the historically specific needs of Chinese development or the “modern spirit” that goes with it.

The trouble is that the category modern spirit contains opposing ideologies and politics. Both the Chinese neoliberal discourse on market rationalism *and* the Chinese New Left insistence on the persistent meaning of the state and equality are unquestionably “modern,” yet they also expand the boundaries of the modern. Similar paradoxes can be found in central and local governments acting

as catalysts of rapid economic development; or in discourses on subjectivity in cultural and artistic production, which created a decentralizing, subversive, and deconstructive force while in search of a unified self as center or origin. In this regard, positions occupying opposite ends of the spectrum could indeed share a common distaste for the post-modern as too fragmented, relaxed, frivolous, and premature, thus unfit for the task of national modernization. The steady flow of Chinese translations of Jameson’s books and essays offered a consistent debunking of such reified notions of modernity and subjectivity, reinforcing the Chinese readership’s perception that postmodern thinking threatens to disrupt and jeopardize the proper order and steps of constructing a socialist modernity as a mirror-image of its Western counterpart. The lack of constructiveness and of commitment to collective projects is one of the central reservations held by many enthusiastic students of Western Marxism in general, an attitude that might mirror Richard Rorty’s criticisms of the cultural left, and Jameson in particular, in his *Achieving Our Country*.

The Chinese discourse on postmodernism—an implicit dialogue with Jameson—entangled Chinese students in these issues (deindustrialization, finance capital, the internal diversity and multiplicity of the cultural sphere of the cosmopolitan, imperial metropolis) while the country was becoming the workshop of the world. Jameson’s summary of the language game regarding the confusing uses or abuses of the words *modern* and *postmodern*, for our purposes, pinpoints a historical dilemma at the heart of the Chinese encounter with the post-modern condition while still catching up with a real or imagined norm of modernity when he observes that

modernism is . . . understood as some old-fashioned realm of top-down planning, whether this be in statecraft, economics or aesthetics, a place of centralized power utterly at odds with the values of decentralization and the aleatory that characterize every new postmodern dispensation. So people like Lafontaine are unmodern because they are still modernists; it is modernism itself that is unmodern; “modernity” however—in the newly approved

positive sense—is good because it is postmodern. Then why not use that word instead?

(*Singular Modernity* 10)

The old-fashioned modernism that characterizes the socialist and Marxist remnants of the Chinese system has since been undergoing postmodernization. In this process, mainstream Chinese intellectual discourse tended to cling to a nostalgia for something yet to be achieved in the image of Europe and America: property rights guaranteed by rule of law and democratic institutions, all that comes with a classical constitutional state. Postmodernism tends to deny historical and philosophical satisfaction for China to finally become a mature and qualified Subject of an idealized and universalized modernity. For this deviation from proper historical temporality, and its required inner stages and qualities, postmodernism has been labeled by its Chinese detractors as too radical or too conservative. It is too individualistic or too standardizing; too Western or too Chinese; too global and deterritorialized, or too local and organic; too procapitalist in its celebration of the fusion of the economic and the cultural, or too prosocialist in its populist instinct and its drive for equality and diversity. As we can see, the discourse on Chinese postmodernism, despite its pluralistic and even nomadic yearnings, has in fact also been mediated and regulated by the state and thus an integral, albeit ambiguous, component in the political construction and expression of the mainstream social ideology of postsocialist China. Its “cultural logic” effectively staged a standard drama of becoming—narrative of ideology that is the object of analysis of Marxist hermeneutics proposed by *The Political Unconscious*.

Jameson’s writings on postmodernism have in fact addressed all these challenges. The absent-mindedness of the Chinese reading so far has inadvertently preserved the intellectual currents that postwar Europe and America have produced. The force and momentum of these can still be felt by the Chinese observers, whose opportunity lies in the fact that they are standing not at the head of the stream, but—to repurpose Benjamin’s phrasing—“in the valley” and thus can “gauge the energies of the

moment” (225).<sup>3</sup> Jameson’s theoretical discourse offers a unique solution in that its Marxist meta-commentary points to a methodological and metaphysical path into the infinitely complex and interrelated issues of the age of global capitalism at empirical, textual-analytic, and evaluative levels, while still allowing this expressive process to hold its potency as both politics and utopia. Taken as a whole, Jameson’s work is a powerful reminder and an open invitation for a place like China to partake in the question popularized by Slavoj Žižek, who attributes it to Jameson: Is it easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism? (Žižek 1). Of course, China possesses an answer to this question no more than any other nation under the grip of the capitalist world system. By taking part in a sustained critical reflection on it, however, the Chinese intellectual world will stand a chance to delve more deeply and critically into the utopia and ideology of its history as dreams and nightmares, but above all as a concrete political reality.

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## NOTES

1. The obsession with or even cult of “depth” tended to orient the Chinese mind toward various “jargons of authenticity” and led it to abhor anything analytically lucid. Thus, while Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein, along with Russian intellectuals, were deemed “deep” and demonstrative of proper moral-stylistic mannerisms, Anglo-American (and, to a lesser degree, the French of the Sartrean variety) discourses were often greeted with amiable contempt, as “shallow”—with the exceptions of logical empiricism (at the time still perceived as European rather than Anglo-American) and a particular strain of American literary modernism.

2. References to peasantry, Lao-Tze, and, for that matter, China are scattered throughout the book. However, the reader should be mindful that these references are always framed and mediated by Brecht in general and his *Me-ti, the Book of Changes* in particular. Moreover, the discussions on peasantry, precapitalist modes of production, and, by implication, experience and wisdom are never a matter of personal nostalgia or cosmic law (Tao) but rather strictly within Jameson’s Marxist problematic of productivity based on both living labor and dead labor (Jameson, *Brecht* 177–78).

3. The passage of which this is an excerpt was quoted in full in the concluding chapter of Jameson’s *Singular Modernity* under the



rubric of “geopolitical measurement of the modernity of another, neighboring culture” (213).

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