***The Antinomies of Realism*. Fredric Jameson. London: Verso, 2013. Pp. 326 (cloth).**

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The Antinomies of Realism develops Fredric Jameson's work on two topics that his work has been concerned with for some time. The first of these is literary realism itself, which has recurred as a theme throughout Jameson's work since *Marxism and Form* (1971), and which here finds its most extensive elaboration. Equally though, as its appearance as part of the continuing series of volumes grouped under the title *The Poetics of Social Forms* attests, the book contributes to a vast theoretical project Jameson has been engaged in for decades, which seeks to map formal developments in aesthetics onto the trajectory of economic and social history across the modern era. The first volume to be published under this series, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), sought to do this for the contemporary or postmodern period. Postmodern art and culture, as well as its theoretical expression in postmodern and poststructuralist theory, were there considered not simply as innovations, as a new set of ideas and aesthetic practices which have of their own accord broken with older ones, but more deeply as symptoms of and responses to a new historical situation designated "late capitalism," which for Jameson has its most characteristic feature in the waning of a collective sense of history and temporality, resulting from global capital's rampant material and ideological success in the post-war era and the decline of systematic critiques and alternative political visions. The turn to nineteenth-century realist literature in this book serves, in some significant ways, as a kind of pre-history of that text's account of contemporary experience and subjectivity as refracted through aesthetic practices. A tension runs through this new book between realism as such as an object of study—with all of the aesthetic, epistemological, and political questions which that term opens up—and the largely implicit historical narrative around the trajectory of modernity towards the postmodern and the "end of temporality," of which this engagement with nineteenth-century texts forms a part. The result is that *The Antinomies of Realism* maintains a considerable distance from discussions of realism as a contemporary concern or aesthetic possibility, and also that the success of Jameson's readings of particular canonical realists, individually brilliant as they are, depends to some extent on one's acceptance, not just of his

theoretical account of realism, but of the longer historical narrative that runs along behind it.

This is not to say that nothing has changed in Jameson's thinking since the publication of *Postmodernism*. Indeed, I think that part of his motivation in writing the present book has been to revise certain of the ideas around the postmodern that he has been working with since the appearance of the initial essay on that topic in the early eighties, and which will be central to his next book, *The Ancients and the Postmoderns: On the Historicity of Forms* (due to be published in February 2015). As such, my suspicion is that *The Antinomies of Realism* will form something of a companion volume to this seemingly unrelated upcoming book; and that some of the questions about the broader historical narrative opened up by *Antinomies* may well be answered, or developed and further complicated, in the forthcoming work.

The most notable of these revisions concerns the concept of affect, which played a prominent role in the postmodernism book, and which is put to quite different use here. It is worth recalling that earlier usage so as to have in mind some of the baggage that the term carries when it is introduced as a crucial component of realism in the present volume, and what theoretical problems Jameson is trying to work his way through in this book, which extend far beyond—and at times exist in an uneasy tension with—his study of canonical European realism itself. Famously, Jameson wrote that postmodernism entails a "waning of affect." There, affect was defined as a feeling or emotion belonging to the individual subject or monad, as the form by which this individual expresses itself: Jameson's paradigmatic aesthetic example is the expressionism of Munch's *Scream*, where the emotion felt acts to define, mark, or constitute the individual subject while isolating this subject from all others in its privacy and incommunicability. In postmodernity, affect of this kind is replaced by "intensities," which Jameson defines as "free-floating and impersonal, tend[ing] to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria."[1] In a postmodern era wherein reification and commodity fetishism have established their domain over all aspects of social life, where "the prodigious new expansion of multinational

[1] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 16.

capital ends up penetrating and colonising those very pre-capitalist enclaves (Nature and the Unconscious) which offered extraterritorial and Archimedean footholds for critical effectivity," there is no longer any subject in that older sense, and hence no emotion or affect of the kind which marks or defines such a subject, and which would seem to depend upon a certain free capacity of mental life Jameson associates with the uncolonised unconscious.[2]

Somewhat confusingly, Jameson now defines affect as essentially the opposite of this. Partly influenced by the rise of affect theory in the years since his *Postmodernism*, which has often explicitly attacked his notion of the "waning of affect," Jameson now uses the term to designate something similar to those intensities he had defined as proper to postmodernity. Here he identifies emotion, or specifically what he calls "named emotion," as the binary opposite of affect. The named emotion is then another way of defining that feeling belonging to an individual subject said to be in decline in the contemporary period. But with this new dichotomy, Jameson also raises consciousness and language as central to the picture he is trying to provide of the history of feeling and sensation. He states, first of all, following other theorists in this tradition, that "affects are bodily feelings, whereas emotions (or passions, to use their other name) are conscious states."[3] And as conscious states, they can be named, expressed in language. Jameson cites a line from Stendhal's *Charterhouse of Parma* as a prime example of emotion's relationship to naming and to consciousness: "If the word love comes up between them I am lost!"[4] Love is one such "conscious state" that comes to be only through its naming, a naming which allows the lovers to understand themselves as lovers.

Affects, then, are defined in contrast as unnamed and in some sense unnameable. They belong to the immediacy of the body and the impersonality of phenomenological consciousness, which Jameson wishes to distinguish from the self-conscious, hermeneutic character of subjective consciousness as such. Affects are qualities of immediate, asubjective experience or sensation, of the body's perpetual present, conflicting with the temporality of past-present-future

[2] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 49.

[3] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), 32.

[4] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, 30.

proper to conscious reflection and the emotions. So in the above example, the love between Fabrice and Gina has a determinate starting point in time, which is simply that anticipated moment when the word love will be uttered between them, and which will constitute a dramatically new state of being. Affects, by contrast, are situated on a chromatic scale of varying intensities (that word again), and as such they have no beginning or end points, but modulations and shifts in volume. Jameson cites the "endless melodies" of Wagner which defy the temporal structure of sonata form, and the registration of light at distinct moments of the day in Monet's paintings, which offer the sheer singularity of the temporal instant, in contrast to the durational structure embedded in narrative painting of whatever kind, as other definitive aesthetic encodings of affect in the late nineteenth century, alongside the realist novel. Realism, then, in a dialectical twist, takes shape at the point at which these affects irreducible to language are picked up by literary language, in the process transforming all pre-existent literary practices of representation through this insertion of the affective register of the "eternal present."

The principal antinomy of realism, then, is that of affect—which pertains to the immediacy and impersonality of "the body's present" and to the materiality of the immediately given objective "scene"—and the narrative form of the récit or tale, which defines all narrative incidents within a pre-determined temporality of "linear time" or past-present-future. These two elements exist in productive tension within canonical realism. While the incorporation of affect develops a radically new capacity of artistic presentation in the mid-nineteenth century, linking realism with the great formal leaps of a modernism to come, the récit pertains to an older form of storytelling which can only co-exist uneasily with the affective mode's determination to reduce duration to the immediacy of the body and the objective scene. Hence we find that it is the breaking apart of these ultimately irreconcilable extremes which will constitute the "dissolution" of classical realism, with the advent of the various modernisms abandoning the shackles of the récit and offering up new literary modes of registering the "scenic present" and organising affective investment. This model of literary history then has the advantage of shifting our sense of the relevance of nineteenth-century realism, by presenting it not as a classicism with which modernism broke absolutely, but as a mode which instituted the initial step of a modern literature of experimentation and the heightening of form, through the registration of affect

and sensuous immediacy, which would be extended rather than negated by modernism.

Just how this rise and dissolution of realism takes place is detailed through a series of readings which make up the central chapters of Part One of *Antinomies*. This gradual unfolding of the narrative of realism's rise and fall is arguably the book's greatest achievement: far from being a series of stand-alone essays each exemplifying the theory of realism established from the outset, Jameson's sequential readings of Zola, Tolstoy, Galdos and George Eliot document the story he is telling, of the coming together of the opposing poles of affect and story, and the imbalance which gradually arises as the affective pole seeks ever-more appropriate formal means for its own expression and thus comes into conflict with the opposing impulse of the narrative function. David Harpham has noted Jameson's extraordinary capacity to "engulf his subject," to produce books which—even as they pursue questions he has been addressing for decades, and in a prose style that is always recognisably singular—assume the form of the very object of his inquiry, "like a mighty python, taking on its shape in the way that a python, having swallowed a piglet, looks like a piglet."[5] Just as *Postmodernism* was structured as an "affectless," euphoric flick through the various areas of culture which the "logic of late capitalism" had infiltrated (with chapter headings like "Video," "Sentences," and "Economics" flatly signalling their subject matter, like the names of TV channels that one scrolls through absently), organised in no obvious order and without any one being privileged or subordinate to another; and just as *Late Marxism* assumed a fragmentary form and a density to its sentences which seemed not to mimic but to inhabit the form of Adorno's prose; so we find that *The Antinomies of Realism* is structured more than anything like a sprawling realist novel, with a grand narrative charting the gradual coming together and breaking apart of two characters (whose names are affect and storytelling) as they venture through a series of situations which test and finally destroy their bond (the works of the particular realist authors), and closing with a dénouement which shows us where each of these old, now estranged friends has ended up today. Thus Jameson's book can be read and evaluated on three levels: as a work of theory, as a work of criticism, but also as a work of fiction. While this is not a suggestion that the author would be likely to

[5] David Harpham, "Late Jameson," *Salmagundi* 111 (Summer 1996), 226 [213-32].

endorse (he did after all conclude *Marxism and Form* by sternly advising that "it does not seem to me very becoming in critics to exalt their activity to the level of literary creation, as is loosely done in France today"),[6] the narrational and the expressive qualities of the book are to my mind—for better or worse—an unavoidable aspect of its ambition and its achievement.[7]

Following the readings of these four canonical realists, Jameson considers the fate of genre in the wake of realism's rise, in a central chapter which is a minor masterpiece in its own right. What realism interrupts is the univocity of particular traditional genres, through a mixed style that introduces to literary representation what Auerbach calls the everyday and what Jameson is attempting to approach somewhat differently via the notion of affect: something like "the real" (although Jameson never avowedly names it as such), which cannot be approached directly, cannot be named, and must instead be defined only in opposition to the generic. The everyday or the real is what fails to be tragic, comic, sentimental, melodramatic, or whatever—and can only be defined negatively in relation to these generic types which precede its representation. Yet realism's flourishing entails the production of its own genres, of which Jameson elaborates four: the novel of adultery, the *Bildungsroman*, naturalism, and the historical novel. As Jameson observes, this seemingly perpetual rise and fall of genre "is a curious and dialectical process which may be identified as the increasing tension between universalism and particularity (or even singularity) in modern times, where the genre eventually comes to be identified as the universal and thereby the target of critical isolation and eventual demolition, particularly insofar as such genres work virtually by definition with social and ideological stereotypes."[8] The next dialectical step is then to the dissolution of *these* genres, which Jameson suggests is one of the achievements of high modernism. In a few

[6] Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 415.

[7] One suspects even that the very sternness of that friendly advice in *Marxism and Form* indicates that it may be inwardly addressed, especially if one recalls Terry Eagleton's remark that "part of Jameson's perverse fascination with Wyndham Lewis […] may be that he detects in Lewis's flailing, agitated prose a kind of savage caricature or nightmarish version of what his own literary style might look like if it were to throw off all decorum." Terry Eagleton, "Jameson and Form," *New Left Review* 59 (September 2009), 124 [123-37].

[8] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, 144.

brilliant pages he reads Joyce's *Ulysses* as a deconstruction of each of these genres in turn, preserving genre only as a "reified […] essence" in the form of the *Odyssey* parallel, which informs not its narrative detail but its formal structure: "It is as though the idea of genre had taken the place of its practice in this ultimate moment; and that a series of powerful affective moments of an all-immersing present could only be unified […] by way of an idea of unification symbolically concentrated in an ancient, classical, pre-novelistic form."[9]

Jameson further pursues the question of realism's afterlife in a chapter on what he calls "Realism After Realism," considering how an equally dialectical process plays out at the level of style and syntax in the process of the gradual dissolution of the realist antinomy. Jameson observes that, in much twentieth-century fiction (his principal examples are from Faulkner), one of the means by which the waning of the traditional narrative impulse is enacted is via what he calls the swollen or blank third person, a reconstitution of third-person narration which divests it of the objectivity with which it had once been associated. Here the "identity" of the individual to whom the third-person pronoun refers is indefinitely withheld, referring to an individual whom the reader comes to know only in the sequential blows of a concussive immediacy, via the "perpetual present" of a narration borne by affect. Yet the narrative impulse smuggles itself back in at this very moment when it seemed to have been precluded, precisely in the form of the artificial withholding of the identity of this blank third person, whose function is "to construct a secret and a mystery which is the result only of the author's withholding of information, rather than latent in the plot itself."[10] Such works "testify to the weakening of the pole of the récit, of the past-present-future system itself, by the dominance of an eternal present which seeks then to disguise itself as récit and narrative to be told and story or destiny to be revealed."[11] This precipitates the dramatic flashforward of the chapter's closing pages, where the unbinding of the realist antinomy of affect and récit is shown to produce the splitting off of aesthetic modernism (which privileges affect

[9] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, 152-3.

[10] Here Jameson seems to be extending Hugh Kenner's discussion of this aspect of Faulkner's work, in his essay "Faulkner and the Avant-Garde," in *Faulkner, Modernism, and Film: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha*, ed. Evans Harrington and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1979), 182-96.

[11] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, 176.

absolutely, at the expense of narrative) and popular or mass literature, which extends the Faulknerian mode of narration in a particular direction, reproducing—in a kind of bad faith—the objective mode of the récit while divorcing it from destiny, replacing the duration and narrative coherence that entailed with the now inescapable perpetual present, which infests or colonises individual sentences as much as the function of character and genre or the particular ideologies of authors themselves.

Part Two of the book essentially leaves this narrative behind, and consists of three long essays—two of which were previously published in other contexts—concerned with realism in a rather looser fashion, which come down to earth from the structural model erected in Part One, returning more directly to questions of what he calls "the relationships of narrative possibility to its specific raw material."[12] This rather offhand remark—the only theorisation Jameson gives of the relationship of this second section to the main part of the book—serves as a reminder of all that has been conspicuously absent from the story Jameson has been telling of realism's great rise and fall: namely material reality. To be sure, the emergence of affect in literature is said to be consistent with the constitution of the "bourgeois body" as one of the achievements of bourgeois hegemony in Europe, with literary analysis acting as a privileged vehicle for mapping this transformation at the level of individual life, for the reason that "literary representation furnish[es] the most comprehensive evidence as to a momentous yet impossibly hypothetical historical transformation of this kind," and further that it is the peculiar capacity and even demand of "the most alert arts" to "scan the era for the new."[13] But these remarks remain frustratingly vague (in what exact ways are certain arts more "alert" than others, and how is the relationship between literary works and "the new" as a quality of existence mediated by such things as social institutions and social classes?), and Jameson never develops this model of historical development and its effect on cultural forms beyond these tepid articulations in the book's opening pages. At the end of it all, one is faced with the fact that this study of literary realism has nowhere posed the question of how these authors (and their readers) may have thought about the question of the relationship of their works to social reality, or what

[12] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, 11.

[13] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, 32, 31.

significance the term "realism" may have then had or may have now, as anything other than an arbitrary designator given to a series of famous texts, which can be studied purely at the immanent level of their place in the history of literary form. Indeed, there is no evident reason why Jameson uses the term at all, other than that it is how other people have referred to these books before him. The deep engagement with realism as a privileged form of "cognitive mapping," as enabling modes of collectivity, and as a hovering capacity for contemporary forms of art, which were central to such major essays as the 1977 "Reflections on the Brecht-Lukács Debate" and "The Existence of Italy" from 1990, and which have been greatly elaborated upon in a significant recent book by Dougal McNeill, is essentially absent from what was to have been Jameson's major statement on realism.[14]

This absence, however, can hardly fail to leave its own negative traces. These are most notable in the sudden, spectacular flashforward conclusion to Part One, which offers an all-encompassing account of contemporary popular fiction as a mere after-effect of that "realism after realism" elaborated above, finishing it off with a censorious reproach directed at such fiction for "the facile free association and the ease and speed with which a character can be shown to think when the truly ontological obstacles of objects and otherness have been evaded: a stream of perceptions, thoughts, desires, which are neither telling nor showing, but a performance that purports to offer both, at the same time that the novelist's narrative gets itself continued and then finished off."[15] While the literary-historical argument here offers perhaps the book's most questionable example of a grandiose claim written into the wider narrative via a highly selective, formalistic reading of certain texts which then dramatically shifts to a vast, epochal perspective, this sentence also smuggles a positive conception of realism back in, by pointing to its absence from contemporary fiction. For it seems clear that Jameson's adoration of the nineteenth-century realists is tied to their engagement with such "truly ontological obstacles," which he believes (most) contemporary fiction evades; these works engage the question of the relation of subject and object, representation and reality, as contemporary or postmodern

[14] Dougal McNeill, *Forecasts of the Past: Globalisation, History, Realism, Utopia* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2012).

[15] Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism*, 185.

literature is unable to do. A properly dialectical exploration of nineteenth-century realism and its afterlives would surely need to consider how the transmutations of literary form reflect and react upon the movement of modern social history, and thus offer ways of thinking about just how literature approaches and has approached those "ontological obstacles," how it has done so in the past and what aspects of contemporary social reality and inherited artistic forms may problematize its capacity to do so in the present. Jameson finds himself so tied to the overarching narrative of postmodernisation upon which he has staked so much, of the waning of collectivity and historicity, of the swollen predominance of the cultural in contemporary times, that in this new, "pre-historical" addition to the narrative, he is unwilling to test the ideas that undergird it, instead working them in indirectly with a brief nod, a majestic flourish or a scattered footnote.

But this is precisely what an engagement with realism as a question surely demands: a consideration of art's representational capacity, and of how this capacity may be actualised in different historical situations. If one wishes to denounce the category of representation and venerate all that is other to it, like Deleuze, or dispense with it and ground a theory of the relationship of art and politics in something else entirely, like Rancière, then so be it—in this case one will have no truck with the concept of realism. Jameson doesn't and never will take such a leap. Instead he finds himself caught, as ever, between a sophisticated poststructuralism of whose political dead-ends he is suspicious, and a Lukácsian Marxism he sees as historically exhausted. This book's hovering between a lofty dismissal of any engagement with the questions around representation and the relationship between art and society that the category of realism would seem bound to provoke, and a recurrent, indirect return to such questions as if behind the back of his own "official story," can on one level be read as a symptomatic playing-through of this perpetual tension in Jameson's work. This need not prevent readers from making use of and extending the ingenious theoretical model of the opposing modes of temporality whose tension drives so much great nineteenth-century literature, or from taking a great many suggestive and original insights into these particular authors and into the history (if not the historicity)[16] of literary genres, from a book that is as breathtakingly

[16] For this, one need refer back to Chapter Two of Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*, "Magical Narratives: On the Dialectical Use of Genre Criticism."

thought-provoking as anything in Jameson.[17] It does, however, raise the stakes further for Jameson's next act: *The Ancients and the Postmoderns*, a return to the contemporary and the postmodern, which will, one hopes, address more directly the broader social-historical and methodological questions which *The Antinomies of Realism* too often both pretends to ignore and presumes to have already answered. What does the reign of singularities over identities, of bodily immediacy and the perpetual present over temporality and historicity—which *Antinomies* approached by way of the category of affect—mean for the capacities of social and political modes of resistance, as well as of artistic production? If realism was not to be the banner under which Jameson chose to answer or even articulate such questions, one awaits his doing so in the different context of a renewed theory of postmodernity.

[17] Jameson seems to flag possible criticisms of his own work when remarking in a footnote that "the purpose of theory [is] not to invent solutions but to produce problems in the first place" (191, n. 7).