Nutshells and Infinite Space: Totality and Global Culture

Dissertation

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Abstract

In my dissertation, “Nutshells and Infinite Space: Totality and Global Culture,” I reformulate the Marxist concept of totality in response to the economic and cultural transformations brought about by globalization. The dissertation is divided into three parts. In the first part, I trace the lineage of Marxist thinking about totality through the writing of Marx, Lukács, Adorno, and Jameson. Through addressing critiques of totality, I develop a conception of immanent totality that reconciles Hegelian Marxist thinking on totality with the critiques of the concept elaborated by Spinozist Marxism, Lyotard, and others. In the second part of the dissertation, I argue that attempts to theorize globalization from the late 1980s until the early 2000s (in the work of Ronald Robertson, Arjun Appadurai, Leslie Sklair, Kenichi Ohmae, Ulrich Beck and others) constitute an unconscious search for a subject of history, or for a universal agent that can exert control over globalization. This unconscious search is conducted in globalization theory’s attempt to relate systematic changes brought about by globalization to the subjective experience conditioned by such changes. I argue that in a first moment, globalization theories attempt to construct new discursive contradictions in order to describe their new phenomena. In a second moment, these contradictions tend to collapse, marking the failure of the search for a subject of history. I conclude by arguing that the nation-
state remains a suppressed object of desire for globalization theory, one that marks the possibility of future collective projects. In the final part of my dissertation, I present a typology of World Literature theories. I argue that early World Literature theories include an unintended rejection of totalizing aesthetics. In contrast, I argue, more contemporary discussions of World Literature look for ways in which totalizing aesthetics are reinvented to take into account cultural transformations that result from processes of globalization. I then introduce a case study of Israeli literature. I present a short history of totalization in Israeli literature, showing how contemporary attempts to reinvent totalizing aesthetic strategies modify older totalizing imaginaries in order to address the specific effects of globalization in the Israeli context. I argue that these attempts to reinvent totalizing representational strategies point to possible directions for reconstituting radically transformative collective political imaginaries in the Israeli-Palestinian context.
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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this dissertation is to argue for the necessity of retaining a totalizing horizon in any critique of the present. Two questions therefore deserve some preliminary attention, the first having to do with the insistence on what the Marxist tradition has called totality or totalization, and the second having to do with its pertinence in the present conjuncture or situation. To be sure, the urgency of political critique today, obvious as it may be, does not seem to demand a return to what is still surely viewed as part of an outdated Marxist vocabulary, one that we often associate with revolutionary failure, totalitarianism, or - in a more historical vein - with Stalinism. Associating totality with totalitarianism is of course not some natural tendency but rather a historical result – one having to do less with the “facts” of Stalinism than with the coming into dominance of what we call “French theory” in the American academy in the 1980s and 90s, and the latter’s emergence out of intellectual disappointment with the French Communist party in the 60s. We will therefore return to four moments of Marxist staging of totality: Georg Lukács and the totalizing standpoint of the subject of history; Jean Paul Sartre’s distinction between totalities as the product of past praxis and the opposing living process of totalization; Adorno’s system of exchange value and its antagonist in the form of the non-identical of use value; and Fredric Jameson’s unconscious totality, or
totalization’s persistence under postmodernism. If the writing of the first three authors has been many times “adapted” to postmodern concerns, Jameson’s writing has “French theory’s” attacks on totality as its immediate context. Thus, in the case of the first three authors, we will have to contend with their historical distance from us and their contemporary readings. The opposite will prove to be the case for Jameson’s writing: we will try to generate some historical distance from his work, where it seems not to exist. Even if the age of high theory in the American humanities has to a certain extent ended, it has left behind an anti-Marxist residue, one whose origin can be traced to the French political context of the 1960s and 70s. In the first chapter, therefore, we will address not only Marxist writing on totality but also some of totality’s most well known antagonists: from Lyotard’s “let us wage war on totality” and Foucault’s critique of continuous history, to Spinozist post-marxism’s suspicion of transcendence and Latour’s rejection of any totalizing social perspective. In each case, we will show that the critique leveled at totality is actually a moment in the process of totalization itself. Thus, it is through showing how totalizing critique includes Lyotardian, Foucauldian or Spinozist moments that we will be able to begin answering the double question of totality’s pertinence today.

As we will argue in the beginning of the first chapter, totality does not designate a concept, insofar as the latter connotes some positive, stable content or form. Rather, it has more to do with an attempt to dialectically relate different kinds of knowledge, or to trace the emergence of isolated phenomena within a larger framework of contradictory determinations. The localized, temporary successes of
the totalizing process nevertheless have a collective project as their prerequisite: the attempt to interrelate phenomenon of different orders or types cannot begin without some collective goal or some image of a desired transformation. It is of course here that the urgency of totalizing today becomes more directly visible. For if our own moment can be characterized as seething with political energy that is yet lacking in political language and in forms of organization, totalization is precisely the process by which these can become conceivable again. Indeed, for a more academic set of concerns, the decentered subjectivity that we have inherited from postmodernism, its anti-systematic impulses, and its grand narrative of grand narratives’ failure seem to have left us with a wholly aporetic political imagination. It is precisely this blockage that totalization attempts to overcome. In the first chapter, we will try to capture the inseparability of totalization from a collective project by including in our discussions of Lukács, Sartre, Adorno, and Jameson an aesthetic object that will always constitute an attempt to imagine the process by which a specific goal is attained. It is through these contemporary, aesthetic examples that totality’s persistence in contemporary attempts to think social relations will emerge in a rather more concrete, historical vein. Our discussion of different films in the first chapter will thus have a double purpose – to demonstrate the persistence of a totalizing impulse in our supposedly post-totality age, and to recast the totalizing process in theoretical languages or figurative codes that are very much our contemporaries.
Yet, as we have already suggested, to totalize is also to expose the contradictions of the particular in its system, which can be thematized as the relation between subjective experience and its systemic determinants. Our second chapter will turn to what is probably the most elaborate recent attempt to imagine the system that governs subjective experience today, namely theories of globalization. Our discussion will demonstrate that to the degree that globalization theory, at its 90s heyday, attempted to map the contradictory space between individual and system, it constituted an unconscious search for a subject of history, or for a universal agent. Of course, the unifying system here is none other than global capitalism, and the phenomena with which globalization theory is preoccupied – from labor migration and the embattled nation-state to the formation of a global elite and the travel of cultural forms – all constitute the sites in which the system’s contradictions become visible. It is in this articulation of a new, contradictory landscape that an unconscious search is asserted for a universal agent who can transform the system. That this search always ultimately fails in globalization theory will enable us to expose globalization’s own pastness, which is also to show that globalization is somehow behind us.

If globalization theory always stages the thwarting of a totalizing impulse, so does the study of world literature, which is globalization’s equivalent in the literary realm. In our third chapter, we will combine the concerns of the first two chapters: we will begin with a survey of theoretical writing on world literature, suggesting, for the most part, that it implicitly rejects a totalizing aesthetic. We will then suggest
defining world literature as contemporary literature that attempts to stage a process of totalization, a definition that will allow us to think through the problem of figuring the unrepresentable global system. If in the first chapter the selection of aesthetic objects will not follow any explicit logic, we will here engage in a more sustained historical study of the totalizing imaginaries in modern Hebrew literature, from the early 1900s until today. Several genres will define our literary historical trajectory: from the initial utopian program of Theodor Herzl's *Altneuland* to the genre of “soldier's experience” (for lack of a better term) in the writing of S. Yizhar and Ron Leshem, and the special national role given to detective fiction in Israeli letters, of which we will examine the totalizing fiction of Batia Gur. In each case, we will see how an inherited totalizing imaginary is modified to include figurations of new social and economic transformations. This inclusion is by no means necessarily “realistic”; rather, as we will see, the totalizing impulse requires these transformations’ estrangement, or their representation as repositories of both new possibilities of collectivity and of the constraining momentum of history. Here, then, totality’s necessity today emerges in full force: in the later novels that we will discuss, it is precisely the contradictions of the global system that exert their pressure on the totalizing imaginaries, posing a challenge to any attempt to figure aesthetically the relation between subjects and system. The attempt to think collectivity in the later novels thus emerges from the productive tension between older aesthetic forms of totalization and the political challenges of globalization.
A short political comment is needed here, for one cannot attempt a political reading of Israeli literature without reference to the ways in which the Israeli imagination has attempted to represent Palestinians or exclude them from representation. We do not seek here to challenge the long history of Palestinian oppression at the hands of Israeli authorities, or the historical modes of exploitative integration of Palestinian labor in the Israeli economy. That Palestinians appear in Yizhar’s stories, for example, only as the absent producers of what Marx called “dead labor,” or that they appear in Gur’s *Murder in Jerusalem* as victims of the detective’s investigation despite their innocence is, to be sure, very telling of the ideological background of these aesthetic imaginaries. Yet, literature does more than one thing, and we will contend here that the post-Zionism that has washed over the Israeli left since the late 1980s has had a double effect. On the one hand, it has made Palestinian plight and struggle more visible. On the other, and at the same time, it has made invisible the moment of truth of failed national ideology: that a totalizing impulse is necessary for any collective project. It is through the modification of familiar collective imaginaries (and forms of social organization) that a leftist political project can be revived, rather than by their wholesale rejection in the name of some post-national ethics (whose limitations should by now be obvious).

The need to reclaim collectivity for the left is what will guide us in our exploration of totalizing imaginaries in Israeli literature. That we will insist on reading novels that belong to the heart of the Israeli canon, works whose ideological underpinnings are divorced from ours, will not entail a subscription to these
ideologies, but it will also not mean their mindless and facile rejection as propaganda. To reclaim a totalizing collective imaginary would instead entail focusing on their creative moment, or on the ways in which they try to figure the unrepresentable system and the possibilities that totalization opens up in them, even if only momentarily. To totalize is to keep revolution possible in the face of what confronts us as a rigid system with no imaginable alternatives. That the birth of some radical political otherness seems today to be once again on the table is what makes it necessary for us to explore contemporary totalizing imaginaries.
CHAPTER 1: TOTALITY TODAY

For many, the Marxist concept of totality seems today to contain nothing but an ominous oppressive potential: either an original theoretical sin that makes Marxists into dictators despite their good intentions, or, more cynically, a concept designed to mask totalitarian manipulation as a theory of liberation. Partially responsible for this suspicion is of course the turn to theory in the 1960s and 70s in the American humanities and social sciences. Lyotard’s “let us wage war on totality” or Foucault’s assault on universal histories, read outside their French context (in which particularly relevant are the crisis of the French communist party and of French centralized national planning), have thus come to serve as an epistemological basis for many politically-oriented academic writers.¹ The turn to theory was of course compounded by an emerging postmodern consciousness, whose suspicion of ideological commitment and coherent subjectivity did nothing but exacerbate the suspicion towards totality and its proponents. Even if the “age of theory” has largely passed, the somewhat anti-theoretical attitude that replaced it has not provided a more receptive environment towards any notion of totality.

Thus, any positive use of the category of totality seems to mark the non-contemporaneity of the writer – her childish naïveté or her failure to mask malicious intentions, since “today we know better.” It is precisely this temporal disjuncture, one that marks totality as necessarily obsolete, which is the point of departure for what follows. This chapter, which will discuss some of the Marxist writing on totality, will demonstrate that rather than attesting to our better understanding today, this imagined temporal break speaks to the degradation of our political imagination. In other words, we will show that there is much to be regained by reinventing totality.

To dispel some of the initial prejudice, it is important to emphasize that in Historical-Materialist writing, the category of totality is not a concept. It does not designate a predetermined content, structure or methodology, as any empirical attempt to extract its meaning from the way it was and is used would show. Readers who expect this chapter to defend a definition of totality – a list of necessarily abstract qualities and prepositions – will therefore be disappointed. Rather, it is better to approach totality initially as a process immanent to its subject matter, or that cannot be abstracted from it without losing precisely what had made it a process – or a historical transformation – in the first place. This does not mean that we are condemned to reproduce older discussions of totality in fear of losing

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3 As we will see, this inseparability of totality from its subject matter is asserted, albeit in very different ways, by both Lukács and Adorno.
their concreteness; rather, it entails a certain approach to the dynamic between theory and its object. Instead of developing an abstract definition of totality and “applying” the concept in analyzing examples, we will have our objects of study prove to be much more than mere illustrations, or reproductions of sameness: the tension between theory and object will provide for us new ways of thinking totality. This newness will of course then be subject to the same process of conceptualization with which it had sought to break, but it nonetheless will have provided a way out of the older conceptual ground, one that does not forgo concreteness.4 Despite the frustrating intractability of totality from its object, we can still ground temporally the transformation implied by totality. For that purpose, we will use the Sartrean distinction between totality and totalization, in which the latter term is a living process delimited in its beginning and end points by the “dead” products of the former.5

The present moment also demands of our discussion a confrontation with some of the critiques of totality that are largely responsible for its mindless and predictable dismissal. Thus, in what follows we will address some of these critiques – particularly those elaborated by Lyotard, post-marxists of a Spinozist persuasion, Bruno Latour, and others. In each case, we will show that these critiques are not completely wrong; they always contain a moment of truth, one that makes it possible to see them as elaborating a moment in the staging of totalization, rather

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4 See Fabio Duraó’s discussion of the dialectic of conceptuality and objects, or theory and experience, in his Modernism and Coherence: Four Chapters of a Negative Aesthetics (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008) 15-16.

than being its negation. To be sure, if the horizon of all critique is political, then the
task at hand is not to salvage the lost intellectual enterprise of totality for our museum catalogues. Rather, it is to demonstrate how the “point of view of totality,” to use Lukács’ words, is still necessary in order to translate new cultural coordinates – in our case, what postmodernism has left behind – to political projects.

Our discussion of totality will have two very conspicuous absences, namely those of Hegel and, to a large degree, Marx. Both of course provide indispensable points of reference for all theorists of totality that we will discuss: if Hegel provides the basic schema for dialectical thinking in general and for the dialectical staging of totality in particular, Marx is no less dispensable for the historical grounding of totality in capitalism and the ways in which the latter implies the emergence of certain social relations. Their absence thus cannot be excused away, and will be remedied only in future writings. Another problem that we should address here is that of historicization. Focusing as we will on the nexus between different theoretical accounts of totality and contemporary aesthetic objects, or on the ways totalization is imagined today, will mean that explicit historicization of both aesthetic objects and theory will be relatively marginal. This problem as well will be addressed in future work.

Throughout our discussion, it will be important for us to keep totality from collapsing into identity with the dialectic itself. To a certain degree, keeping the two separate is an arbitrary choice. That the dialectic and totality are closely linked and
in fact can be seen as interchangeable has been suggested by Bertell Ollman and others. However, for our purposes it will be helpful to maintain a difference of scale between the two: the dialectic will designate for us a more localized transformation (whether in thought or in reality), while totalization will designate a dialectical transformation of multiple elements. It is precisely this difference in scale that grants totality, as we will see, a valence of systematicity, or designates totalization as an attempt to capture a system of relations. This systematic valence of totality will prove to be essential in what follows, for only through it totalization reveals itself as an opening up of a space of intervention, rather than a “totalitarian” closure; as a whole constituted by the development and displacement of contradictions in the system, rather than a mechanism by which all dissent is silenced, and all difference is repressed. And it is to that constitutive contradictoriness of totality that we will turn our attention first.

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Lukács and Immanence

As an example for the contradictions constitutive of the whole, we can take Marx’s polemic against the Proudhonists, in which totality appears through an invocation of “the system”:

the proper reply to [the Proudhonists] is: that exchange value or, more precisely, the money system is in fact the system of equality and freedom, and that the disturbances which they encounter in the further development of the system are disturbances inherent in it, are merely the realization of equality and freedom, which prove to be inequality and unfreedom. It is just as pious as it is stupid to wish that exchange value would not develop into capital, nor labour which produces exchange value into wage labour. What divides these gentlemen from the bourgeois apologists is, on one side, their sensitivity to the contradictions included in the system; on the other, the utopian inability to grasp the necessary difference between the real and the ideal form of bourgeois society, which is the cause of their desire to undertake the superfluous business of realizing the ideal expression again, which is in fact only the inverted projection [Lichtbild] of this reality.9

It is here, rather than in Marx’s more explicit comments about totality, that we catch a glimpse of the process of totalization that will only be elaborated later by Lukács.10 The contradictory elements here – the real and ideal form of bourgeois society – stand in a puzzling relation to one another: inequality and unfreedom are both the realization of equality and freedom and at the same time they constitute the reality that projects equality and freedom as their ideal form in the first place. Equality and freedom here are both the motor of realization, of translating ideals into institutions, and what these institutions – “the money system” – project as their

ideology. Equality and freedom are thus timeless in this system – they both precede the process of realization and appear to be a result of it. Thus, the surprising result is not that the bourgeois system falls short of fulfilling its promises of equality and freedom, but that this failure is necessary and immanent to the system as a whole, and that the only clue of this necessity is the appearance of equality and freedom as timeless or eternal. The Proudhonist (and to a certain extent, the social-democrats and “social justice” reformists of today) attempt to prefigure a society in which these timeless values are as if immediately realized - without a prolonged radical transformation of the system of exchange which necessarily accompanies it - ignore the constitutive role of the contradiction itself to the existing system.

For our purposes, it is important to see that the totalizing impulse here resides in bringing into a contradictory unity what initially seem to be independent elements: the ideal form and the real one. This reconstitution of “the system” to include its projected elements, or its ideology – an elementary step in the writing of almost all Western Marxist thinkers - is far from being a simple addition in which certain elements are now seen to interact with other ones; rather, it demands a wholesale reconstitution of the elements themselves, as Lukács argues. Bourgeois society is no longer seen as failing to achieve freedom and equality but is now reread in light of a positive, historical emergence of a contradiction between equality and freedom and their opposites. It thus comes to designate a certain, determinate mode of splitting equality from inequality and freedom from unfreedom, a splitting which is traced in other texts by Marx to the principle of
exchange and its perfection as commodity exchange under capitalism.\textsuperscript{11}

Totalization, then, designates this wholesale refashioning of the elements themselves in a new and inventive manner, in which both a temporal dialectic movement – the interplay of befores and afters – and a perspectival one – the perspective of the realizers of values and of their victims – play a role.

In the quote above, Marx’s main objective is a critique of Proudhon. But this critique does not rob its object of its truth: the Proudhonists are still “sensitive to the contradictions included in the system,” even if their response to this intuition is misguided. It is therefore the way in which contradictions are perceived and acted upon that is central to Marx’s critique here; Totality or the system is here closely linked with the relation between knowledge and revolutionary practice, and it is this precisely this relation that is picked up in Georg Lukács arguments in \textit{History and Class Consciousness}. It is in Lukacs’ writing that totality becomes a central theme – with the famous demand that we attain the point of view of totality in its opening pages, coupling this point of view with a particular class position, claiming that “the unity of theory and practice is only the reverse side of the social and historical position of the proletariat.”\textsuperscript{12}

Now, the possibility of totalization for Lukács is not born out of a metaphysical whim. Rather, it is the historical spread of capitalism itself, submitting more and more relatively autonomous areas of human existence to a similar logic –


that of formal rules rendering all calculable – that makes the totalizing project conceivable in the first place.\textsuperscript{13} That Lukács’ examples often focus on factory workers is precisely because for them, in Lukács’ time, the subsumption of social relations under capitalism is most advanced. It is only for this reason that Lukács “privileges” the industrial working class, rather than any other group, as the locus for what he calls totality, claiming that “the fate of the worker becomes the fate of society as a whole.”\textsuperscript{14} As social relations become subsumed under capitalism, according to Lukács, the Taylorized calculus of the process of production invades subjectivity itself, separating the subject’s quantifiable and exploitable capacities – their labor power - from their subjectivity as a whole, which then appears only as a source of error or caprice, leading to the emergence of “contemplative consciousness.”\textsuperscript{15} The emerging contradictoriness of subjectivity is only one of the contradictions Lukács explores. Many pages of \textit{History and Class Consciousness} are devoted to the dialectical development of contradictions between different dimensions of social existence (such as the one between the law and capitalist transformations); between subject and system (such as the flexible-seeming nature of relatively stable productive processes, versus the experiential rigidity of constantly-revolutionizing capitalism – both considered from the point of view of the worker); and contradictions internal to specific fields of knowledge (such as the notorious antinomies of bourgeois philosophy, in which the contradiction manifests itself in the form of a barrier to knowledge, the Kantian thing-in-itself, appearing in a

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 90-1.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 89.
variety of instances). In each case, Lukács shows how the emergence of the contradiction can be traced back to the seemingly simple initial formalizing, quantifying, thingifying operations of capitalism over the production process, or the coming into dominance of exchange-value over use-value. As for the entire system, “the capitalist process of rationalization based on private economic calculation requires that every manifestation of life shall exhibit... an interaction between details which are subject to laws and totality ruled by chance.” The process of fragmentation and specialization (itself dialectically related to the formalizing logic’s unification of every sphere of existence under the single logic of fragmentation and calculation), thus leads “to the destruction of every image of the whole,” which is nonetheless sought after.

The most important contradiction for Lukács is thus the one on which the reconstruction of an image of the whole depends, for it is this reconstruction that can rescue the transformation of this whole from its irrationality. This contradiction is, of course, the antagonism between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The important difference between the two classes is thus not that they share different social existences – for the social system that grows out of the capitalist mode of production determines both classes' reified existence equally, or as Lukács puts it, “the objective reality of social existence is in its immediacy ‘the same’ for both.” Rather, the significant difference is to be found in the way each class becomes conscious of the system and of its own subjectivity or agency in it: “this [objective

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16 Ibid., 93-102, 110-149.  
17 Ibid., 102.
sameness] does not prevent the specific categories of mediation by means of which the merely immediate reality becomes for both the authentically objective reality, from being fundamentally different.” Here, of course, the difference between mediated and immediate reality makes a decisive appearance, the most puzzling result of which is that it is the mediated, rather than the immediate, reality that is the “authentically objective” or true one. We will return to this point soon. What is important for us in this juncture is that the proletariat’s standpoint, rather than that of the bourgeoisie, is the one from which the totalizing operation becomes possible. For while the bourgeois consciousness has its subjectivity – its agency in the world – reflected back to it in this immediacy (no matter how reified of a subjectivity this is), the proletariat enjoys no such fate; in order to retrieve its subjectivity, which has been reduced to reified labor-power and wrested away from its experience, it has to become conscious of the system of mediations that controls that labor-power. And it is this only through this process, which Lukács’ terms the proletariats’ attainment of its “self-knowledge as a commodity,” that a staging of totality is made possible and a revolutionary class can appear – both of which designate the same process. As we will see below, it is precisely the totalizing attainment of self-knowledge that grounds political action for Lukács, or that is inextricably bound with the advancement of political struggle – each “step” of it connoting a transformation of that self-knowledge.

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38 Ibid., 150.
39 Ibid., 168-172.
At first sight, it seems that very little of Lukács’ schema can be maintained today. Factories are no longer at the forefront of capitalist innovation; the centrality of the experience of alienation in the life of salaried workers has been lost with the advent of a postmodern decentered subjectivity; the different social location of cultural production makes any appeal to the reduction of workers to the commodity of labor power seem itself reductive (does not the coming into dominance of so-called “affective labor,” for instance, render obsolete the Lukácsian claim that workers’ subjectivities are made superfluous to the production of commodities?); the advent of “alternative histories” seems to fill any historiographical vacuum that might have existed at Lukács’ time; the teleological tying up of practical revolutionary political practice with the production of knowledge seems at the outset very unconvincing, if not outright oppressive in our anti-teleological age, and so on. All of these, to be sure, require us to produce new readings of Lukács if his staging of totality is to offer us something more than a historical curiosity.

One critique that we need not spend much time debunking is the empiricist criticism of Lukács’ notion of totality in *History and Class Consciousness*. Martin Jay’s contention that Lukács’ “solutions to the antinomies of bourgeois culture were enormously powerful taken on their own terms. But it soon became apparent that their elegant simplicity could not bear close scrutiny” - can be taken as a good example here. Jay turns to reality or the “facts” of actual workers’ consciousness to
justify this assertion.20 Yet, as Lukács repeatedly reminds us (and as Jay himself recognizes) it is precisely the imagined independence of “the facts” from their theoretical comprehension that totalizing critique dispels. And this point is perhaps made most acutely in relation to the discipline of history, in which, according to Lukács, “the question of universal history is a problem of methodology that necessarily emerges in every account of even the smallest segment of history.”21 Any elaboration of “the facts” thus always implicitly asserts some operative “whole,” and it is totalizing critique that exposes this implicit philosophy and its relation to existing social relations. Therefore, invoking some pure empirical reality to critique Lukács is never sufficient – for it is precisely this purity of the empirical which is denied by Lukács.

Yet, it is this tension between the needs of empirical struggle and the speculative or strongly teleological, already suggested by Jay’s critique, which fuels much of the recent writing on Lukács. The preoccupation with this tension can be said to be the result of what seems to be today a bridging of two extremes in Lukács’ writing, captured in Žižek’s assertion that “the paradox is thus that... History and Class Consciousness is at the same time politically engaged and... speculative-Hegelian.”22 As others have argued, Lukács’ direct involvement in political projects – his ties with the Leninist revolutionary project and his political involvement in Hungary – accounts for the centrality of political practice (and of human activity in

21 Lukács, 151-2.
general) in his writing.\textsuperscript{23} Undoubtedly, Lukács’ arguments against “economism” (by which he does not designate economic reductionism, but those who see only economic struggle – trade unionism – as important for class politics), reflect precisely those political immediacies with which he had to contend.\textsuperscript{24} It is this historical content then that becomes unthinkable, at first sight, when one considers the “speculative” dimension of Lukács writing, or what seems to be the universal teleological role granted to the proletariat. Thus, the problem of the quote from Marx with which we started our discussion, of the relation between the “ideal” or projected form of society and its material practical form, is thus given center-stage again in contemporary writing on Lukács. The contradiction is recast as the opposition between pragmatic political action and the utopian goal, a problem which of course opens up to discussions of the role of teleology in Lukács, and to a reevaluation of the proletariat, or the point of view for which totality becomes a historical necessity.

Most contemporary readings of Lukács “solve” the problem by bracketing the more teleological, speculative, tones associated with the proletariat and its determinate class position, focusing instead on the opposite pole – that of pragmatic political practice. Thus, for example, claiming that “modern technology is more than a tool. It is an environment and structures a way of life,” Andrew Feenberg goes on to examine the possibilities for “radical de-reification” inherent in struggles

\textsuperscript{23} Jay, 102; Slavoj Zizek, “Postface,” 151.
\textsuperscript{24} Lukács, 71.
centered around technology. Timothy Hall, to give another example, brackets the problem posed by the standpoint of the proletariat by stating that “it is not necessary to subscribe to Lukács’ class theory of political agency in order to accept his account of the crisis of political subjectivity,” instead focusing on “the manner in which his account of social domination outstrips his prescription for overcoming it.” Neil Larsen’s recently published “Lukács sans Proletariat” takes this line of inquiry one step further, explicitly arguing that Lukács was wrong to see the proletariat’s standpoint as the key to revolution. Thus, much of the current writing on Lukács tends to bracket if not completely do away with Lukács insistence that only from the proletariat’s standpoint, does self-knowledge coincides with the transformation of the whole of society. In terms of bracketing the problem of the subject of history, these readings are not entirely new in Marxist theorizing. Althusser’s notion of history being a “process without a subject,” for example, can be seen as a forerunner (even if of a very different type) of any attempt to rid Lukács of the proletariat; another forerunner can be seen in Istvan Mészáros’s pronouncements on the “contradictions between the limited immediacy of political

27 Neil Larsen, “Lukács sans Proletariat, or Can History and Class Consciousness be Rehistoricized?” in Georg Lukács: The Fundamental Dissonance of Existence, ed. Timothy Bewes and Timothy Hall, 81-100. Larsen draws on the work of Moishe Postone and Robert Kurz to argue for a growing gap between actual labor and global surplus value production, which in turn makes the reduction of laborers to labor power marginal for the reproduction of capitalism.
perspectives and the universality of a socialist programme in Lukács’ conception.”

On the other hand, that contemporary discussions of totality or the utopian in Lukács are then mostly limited to the realm of aesthetics – as for example in Gail Day’s writing on Lukács or in David Cunningham’s - only goes to strengthen the impression of a division between a more utopian, “teleological” Lukács and a more practical one.

However, there is one way in which totality survives in contemporary readings of Lukács, in which the utopian or teleological is surprisingly folded into the pragmatic. Michael Thompson’s reconstruction of the Lukácsian dictum to retrieve a “telos” to human activity is one such reading. According to Thompson:

Specifically, human praxis is understood [by Lukács] as a series of conflicting decisions (Alternativentscheidung) where ‘every social act... arises from choices directed toward future teleological positings.’ This means that human praxis is grounded in the dialectical relation between thought and the object created. The value of any object, for any human being’s self understanding (Fürunssein) as opposed to its economic exchange value, is determined by the extent to which it ‘can fulfill its social functions.’ Human beings are thus ontologically defined simultaneously by their sociality and their labor as seeking to realize goals (Zielen) in the concrete world. This Lukács refers to as the category of the ‘socio-human’ (esellschaftlich-menschlich).... Lukács claims that the root of social being is contained

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28 Louis Althusser, Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays (New York; London: Monthly Review Press, 1971) 121-125; Istvan Meszaros, Lukács’s Concept of Dialectic (London: Merlin Press, 1972) 81. The historical determinants of these earlier interventions should however alert us to the specificity of their interventions. If for Althusser, it is the struggle over the de-Stalinization of the French Communist Party that makes urgent a rebellion against some reified idea of the proletariat (on which we will touch in the last section of this chapter), Meszaros’s is no less determined by the Cold War. A better understanding of the relation of these interventions to their historical context is therefore needed before any recuperation of their positions as some de-historicized truth claims.

in labor which he defines as ‘the positing of a goal (Setzen des Zieles) and its means’ wherein ‘consciousness rises with a self-governed act, the teleological positing (Setzung), above mere adaptation to the environment.’

Here, Thompson rescues teleology in Lukács through viewing the act of “teleological positing” as a necessary part of any reappropriation of the object-world for accomplishing human goals. The positing of goals that necessarily, however feebly, contains a negation of the present in favor of an imagined state of affairs is thus seen to play a part in what remains an essentially pragmatic drama: teleology is meaningful to the extent that it is immanent to processes of reconstitution or reconfiguration of the socio-objective world. If a redemptive potential is to exist here at all, it is in the invention of new concrete goals and in appropriating the use of existing objects to realize these goals: an imaginary replete with the utopian potential of the bricoleur or the tinkerer. Surprisingly, it is here that we discover echoes of the quote from Marx with which we started, namely the discovery that ideology is immanent to the institutional structure of the present. There is plenty in History and Class Consciousness to strengthen Thompson’s reading. Lukács’ insistence that the categories of theory belong to the same order as those of reality itself, rather than seen as descriptive tools with no origin, betrays precisely this folding of ideology into practice: that “all the categories in which human existence is constructed must appear as the determinants of that existence itself (and not merely of the description of that existence),” or that “[t]he task is to discover the principles

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by which it becomes possible in the first place for an ‘ought’ to modify existence,”
display precisely the immanence of knowledge and of the utopian ‘ought’ to pragmatic reality itself, or to use-value.\(^{31}\)

And yet, in this quote from Thompson we can also detect a certain secularization of teleology, or an adaptation of its meaning to denote mundane, everyday goals, rather than some grand vision of emancipation. It is at this point that Thompson’s Lukács can start reminding us of the writing of one of totality’s most unlikely allies – the Lyotard of The Postmodern Condition.\(^{32}\) For Lyotard, it is precisely this folding of imagined goals into the practical which is the result (and the historical motor of) of the well-known “death of meta-narratives.” What is traced by Lyotard’s account is the rise of what he calls the “performativity” of utterances, in which “every utterance should be thought of as a ‘move’ in a game.”\(^{33}\) If Lyotard sees performativity as originating in the form and protocols of narrative, this performativity now comes to govern scientific utterances as well. Thus, the truth or the descriptive value of utterances - which in any case depended previously on their legitimation by (and of) a “grand-narrative” – is now legitimated through their pragmatic value or performativity:

The production of proof, which is in principle only part of an argumentation process designed to win agreement from the addressees of scientific messages, thus falls under the control of another language game, in which the goal is no longer truth, but performativity—that is, the best possible input/output equation. The

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\(^{31}\) Lukács, 159, 161.

\(^{32}\) “Let us wage war on totality” (Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) 82).

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 10.
State and/or company must abandon the idealist and humanist narratives of legitimation in order to justify the new goal: in the discourse of today’s financial backers of research, the only credible goal is power. Scientists, technicians, and instruments are purchased not to find truth, but to augment power.34

The subsumption of truth under imperatives of the augmentation of power here should not be read as a criticism in Lyotard. Indeed, as Fredric Jameson remarks in his preface to The Postmodern Condition, the death of the transcendental totality signals for Lyotard the emancipation of minor narratives and an increased capacity to create newness, or of narrative in the service of a utopian impulse.35 Thus, truth or the possibility of representation do not disappear with the coming-into-hegemony of performativity. Rather, they become epiphenomenal to the “real” laws of performance: the truth “works” for our purposes; this is why we have truth at all. Ideology becomes part and parcel of the performative logic – not some external imposition on the social and material world, but something operative in reality itself, helping us achieve this or that pragmatic goal or to “augment power.”

What is opened up for the imagination in this foreclosing of history is therefore precisely the compositional logic of connectability, mutability, and reutilization that now encompasses both ideological constructs and material objects. It is this compositional logic that for Thompson defines the Lukácsian staging of totality: a consideration of the interconnections between different objects and phenomena, and the possibilities of reconnecting them to achieve a different

34 Ibid., 46.
Thus, a totalizing impulse surprisingly resurfaces here, after having been thought by Lyotard to be completely eschewed by the demise of overarching “grand narratives”: an imaginary in which all disparate objects in our field of vision are refashioned and reconnected to achieve a certain purpose. This form of totalization, which we will call “immanent totalization,” is thus a starting point to answering any facile attempt to associate totality with oppressiveness and a closed system: any object that comes into its purview poses a challenge to the totalizing process, a problem whose solution will modify both the object and the staging of totality. Gail Day’s argument for the radical openness of the totalizing process in Lukács, as well as Thompson’s reading of Lukács that we have been discussing, are based precisely on this utopian moment of recombination. Thus, the Lyotardian attack on totality, based as it is on the becoming-performative of all ideological statements, comes in this reading of Lukács to inform the basis of the staging of the transformation of totality itself.

With folding ideology so neatly into practical goals, we are nevertheless in danger of losing the possibility of transcendence altogether, or even making it impossible to understand transformation and change. For if any assertion of an image of the “ought” or any theoretical reconstruction of the present are merely part of that present, then real transformation becomes unintelligible – since that “ought” no longer has actual bearing on the future. In order to see how the other side of

36 Thompson, 237-240; Day, 209.
37 This “immanentist” reading of totality emphasizes the point of radical openness in Lukács own writing. See for example Gail Day, 210-1.
38 Thompson, 240; Day, 209.
totality – namely, the meaningfulness of history - survives in immanent totalization, we will turn to our first aesthetic object, which we will call the postmodern revenge fantasy genre. As we will argue, this genre stages a process of immanent totalization, or the combinatorial logic in which ideology is revealed to provide some of the subject matter to be utilized and reassembled. Our discussion of an object will also make it possible for us to return history into the discussion, and to show how Lukács' insistence on labor and its performers as the key to totality is still maintained. Our argument will therefore follow a long trajectory: beginning with a more formalist notion of immanent totality, the discussion of the postmodern revenge fantasy (that will itself pause for theoretical elaborations and additions), will surprisingly make it possible for us to return to a more substantive and historically charged staging of totality.

Broadly speaking, the postmodern revenge fantasy includes movies from the 1970s until today, starting with Blaxploitation movies of the 70s – such as Foxy Brown, Coffy, and The Spook Who Sat by the Door – but also including to a certain extent other 1970s movies, such as Sam Pekinpah’s Convoy. Later examples of the genre include the Kill Bill series, and the recent Django Unchained. We are not implicitly claiming here that revenge has become an object of aesthetic exploration only in the 1970s. The roots of the genre can be undoubtedly traced all the way back to ancient Greek tragedy, reworked much later in Elizabethan “revenge plays” and reappearing, for instance, in von Kleist’s Michael Kohlhaas, and, much more recently, in Tayeb Salih’s Season of Migration to the North (to name just several examples).
We will not be able to examine here the historical transformations implied by this long history, which would merit a separate book-length project. We will, however, explore the transformations of the genre in the last forty years – from the emergence of postmodern sensibilities to our present moment.

Most postmodern revenge fantasies follow roughly the same structure: an initial personal loss leads the protagonist into a state of mania, or to become a prisoner of what from a realist perspective would seem like an *idée fixe* – the uncompromising wish to exact revenge on those responsible for the initial loss, which usually entails their killing. The story, then, will narrate the way in which the protagonist overcomes the different obstacles that stand in her way to attaining the goal (the wish-fulfilment’s satisfaction is one of the iron rules of the genre). Some of the power of many Blaxploitation revenge fantasies undoubtedly resides precisely in the inversion of individual madness that they enact: instead of a realist neutralization of the mania-driven protagonist, or instead of showing how reality easily trumps their impractical goal, the subjective mania is, as we will see, suddenly charged with its entire objective social universe. For now, it is important to note that even at this early stage we can detect the workings of our immanent totality, residing in the drive towards making everything the protagonist encounters. Those that oppose the heroine, social structures, material obstacles all present challenges to be overcome through their creative incorporation into the effort to fulfill the wish. This process of “immanent totalization,” at least in the more interesting cases, requires the protagonist to adjust to working with a whole machinery of new allies,
enemies, objects, etc. Ideological statements and even mere descriptions of the situation assume from the start the performative status to which the Lyotardian death of grand narratives relegates them - they become in this context just part of the arsenal to be re-utilized for exacting revenge, amply demonstrated in the ideological arguments in *The Spook* and in *Coffy’s* corrupt politician’s speeches.

It is important for our purposes to distinguish this totalizing impulse from one found in the postmodern conspiracy film, on which Fredric Jameson has written. As Jameson argues, the central figurative device operating in the conspiracy film is that of the network (communication technologies, road systems, mysterious organizations and others). The drama in which the invisible network is slowly revealed (or rather fails to be revealed) contains a totalizing impulse in tracing the contours of a preexisting system – an ominous force which the protagonists find themselves battling. In contrast to the encroaching totality of the conspiracy film, postmodern revenge fantasies are animated by a diametrically oppositional totalizing impulse: in order to achieve a certain goal, the protagonist, who usually starts out by owning nothing except her labor power – a point to which we will return later - finds herself alternating between the positions of the tinkerer or bricoleur, of the conspirator, the killer, and even of the leader of a collective in weaving the “conspiracy” itself. If the conspiracy film offers its viewers a point of

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40 The entire first chapter of Jameson’s book (9-85) revolves around detecting an unconscious totalizing impulse in conspiracy films, arguing that they are both symptoms of the failure to “cognitively map” the present, and so figure this failure in their own form.
view external to a preexisting totality, the revenge fantasies offer us a point of view internal to the totalizing project.

Now, while the totalizing impulse of the revenge fantasy can be diametrically opposed, in terms of point of view, to that of postmodern conspiracy film discussed by Jameson, they share an important common feature - namely, their dramatization of the failure to totalize. The repeated frustration of the viewer's assumptions (and most times the protagonist's) about the contours of the conspiracy (in some of the films Jameson discusses), while betraying a totalizing impulse (the desire to map the system), ends up highlighting the failure to grasp the system, according to Jameson. The twists and turns of the double and triple agents, every ally turning out to be an enemy, and then an ally again – all dramatize the failure to see the contours of the totality, and bring about the protagonist’s downfall. In the revenge fantasy, on the other hand, the success of the totalizing project – the satisfaction of the trivial fantasy – paradoxically hinges on precisely this failure: in the more interesting cases, such as The Spook, any attempt to narrate the totalizing project, or to narrate the steps necessary to exact revenge, turns out to be just another device in the process of manipulating the environment for the practical advancement of the project (sometimes even behind the protagonist's back). All we see is the progression of events themselves, which are almost never accompanied by explanations or plans. The protagonist’s silence is strongly felt, as the viewer does not know beforehand whether and to what degree the events are planned. Thus, for

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41 Ibid., 22-23, 31-3, 79.
example, towards the end of *Coffy*, when the protagonist arranges to meet the corrupt politician with whom she has been having an affair, the viewer does not know to what degree she is aware of his untrustworthiness, and what she hopes to achieve in the meeting. Progress is thus always blocked from view. This, of course, brings us back to what we already briefly mentioned - the post-ideological environment in which the action takes place: any explanations or predictions are strictly folded back into achieving a concrete goal. The scenes in the *The Spook* in which the protagonist confronts both well-off African-Americans or the policemen provide a good illustration for this “folding”: the protagonist takes different ethical and political positions in each of these verbal exchanges, thereby making any seemingly definitive judgment of the action be just another local practical intervention, designed to generate certain effects rather than a stable “teleological” narrative that captures the entirety of the project. That the film otherwise avoids any stable articulation of a utopian telos only highlights the conjunctural immanence of any such articulation even further. This effect is even stronger in more contemporary filmic examples, such as *Kill Bill*: the opening scene in which our protagonist confronts her first victim exemplifies precisely this use of conversation, declarations of intentions, and ideological statements as means to finding a tactical advantage. Thus, the success of the process of totalization in the case of the revenge fantasy – the successful incorporation of other actors and objects into the dynamic project – depends on the failure to narrate the different steps of the project and their interconnections.
Before we continue to the social content of the revenge fantasy, we will now add another layer to the “Lyotardian” Lukács that allowed us to develop the figure of immanent totalization. We can now expand our purview to include other positions, ones that we can label, for a lack of a better term, Spinozist Marxism. For we can also identify a “Spinozist” moment in Lukács, one which brings Lukács surprisingly close to the supposedly anti-Lukácsian Althusser. It is here that the dialectic of mediation and the immediate in Lukács, mentioned earlier, becomes important for us. Lukács is sometimes caricaturized as having a deep disdain for the immediately perceivable or knowable, always looking for the mediations that lead to the so-called expressive core, or the basic, hidden, laws governing contradictions. Yet, as Lukács repeatedly points out,

Immediacy and mediation are... not only related and mutually complementary ways of dealing with the objects of reality. But corresponding to the dialectical nature of reality and the dialectical character of our efforts to come to terms with it. They are related dialectically. That is to say that every mediation must necessarily yield a standpoint from which the objectivity it creates assumes the form of immediacy.\(^42\)

Thus, any immediacy is the product of past mediation, just as any mediation must be produced, or have as its starting point, what appears in the first place as immediately given. For Lukács, this succession of immediacies and mediations is not simply a matter of intellectual inquiry, but rather governs historical transformation itself.\(^43\) Thus, immediacy cannot be dismissed as mere illusion; rather, it is a necessary starting point, the only starting point available to both the narration of

\(^{42}\) Lukács, 155-6.  
\(^{43}\) Ibid., 159.
history and the synchronic analysis of a given moment. Even if, as many interpreters of Lukács insist, "social totality' without 'mediation'... is an empty – and abstract – postulate... [it] exists in and through those manifold mediations through which the specific complexes... are linked to each other," the totalizing process depends no less for its success on its grounding in immediacy.44

It is precisely this grounding of the starting point of totality in the immediately given which is expressed in Althusser’s Spinoza-inspired argument in Reading Capital that “the structure is immanent in its effects,” or that the system of relatively-autonomous “levels” of social existence cannot in any way be said to exist prior to or outside the effects – or immediacies - of that system.45 Rather than constituting a damming critique of Lukács (or of Hegelian Marxism), Althusser’s insistence on the immanence of the system to the immediate can be read as echoing a particular moment in Lukács’ staging of totality, that in which immediacy and its contradictions are formulated on their own terms.46 Yet, in Lukács’ temporal dialectic of immediacy and mediation, the emergence of a new immediacy through mediation connotes precisely what we have called the folding of ideology into the

44 Meszaros, Lukács’ Concept of the Dialectic, 63.
45 Althusser, Reading Capital (New York: Pantheon, 1970) 189. This is not to say, of course, that the system forever remains inaccessible for Althusser. For, the scientific model that he elaborates – in which the different levels’ points of interaction and relative autonomy are studied - aims precisely at reconstructing totality. Jameson’s discussion of Althusser’s Reading Capital comes close to suggest exactly this identification of mediation in Hegelian Marxism with Althusser’s conception of structural determination (Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) 17-102.
46 For readings of Althusser which reaffirm his anti-Hegelianism, see Etienne Balibar, “The Non-Contemporaneity of Althusser” in The Althusserian Legacy (London; New York: Verso, 1993), ed. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker; See also Warren Montag’s essay in the same book. Jameson’s discussion of Althusser in his Political Unconscious remains the most elaborate attempt to show that the Althusserian notion of structural determination in the mode of production is in fact not contradictory to the Hegelian-Marxist notion of totality.
pragmatic. What was previously taken to be only a description of reality, one that only by happy coincidence has matched reality, comes to be perceived through its mediation as an immanent part of that reality, or as an ideology that performs a certain objective role in that reality. Examples abound. A familiar illustration is perhaps Lukács’ demonstration of the way in which the abstraction of labor power under capitalism brings about the emergence into dominance of a scientific formalism. It is precisely this scientific formalism that is then used to further rationalize the production process (even as it invades other realms, such as the law or bureaucracy). What Lukácsian mediation (in this case, the tracing of formalism to capitalist abstraction) therefore shows is precisely the “Spinozist” Althusserian point that the system is immanent to its effects or immediacies, and that therefore the latter cannot simply be brushed off as mere illusion.

Indeed, even the ultimate revolutionary “ought” is made immanent by Lukács to the reality from which it springs:

[The ultimate goal is not] a 'duty', an 'idea' designed to regulate the 'real' process. The ultimate goal is rather that relation to the totality (to the whole of society seen as a process), through which every aspect of the struggle acquires its revolutionary significance. This relation informs every aspect in its simple and sober ordinariness, but only consciousness makes it real and so confers reality on the day-to-day struggle by manifesting its relation to the whole.49

47 It is important to note that this immanence of ideology to reality, or its objective necessity for the functioning of reality, does not slip into either a claim of its cynical use – someone knowingly manipulating it as ideology for certain purposes – nor does it make this ideology a mere subjective belief.

48 Lukács, 90-93.

49 Ibid., 22.
The utopian “ought” is thus, again, folded back into the reality with which it seems to have completely broken - it is a “relation to the whole” which “informs every aspect in its simple and sober ordinariness.” We will return to the significance of the rest of the quote later. This is of course another example of the way in which the Lukácsian mediation names precisely the process by which certain forms of thinking (and also material phenomena) are shown to be immanent to reality, or to be necessary immediacies.

Let us retrace the argument until this point before we continue. The “Lyotardian” Lukács of Michael Thompson has helped us think what we have called “immanent totalization,” or the relentless creative incorporation of ever more objects, relationships, and things – including ideas - in the service of some project. The postmodern revenge fantasy, to which we will return again below, has proved to be a useful metaphor for this ceaseless process of composition and recomposition. The strict incorporation of all ideas – descriptions, expectations, and overtly political or ideological statements –into the practical effort in the revenge fantasies have allowed us to conceive of a “Spinozist” Lukács. For this Lukács, as we have now seen, the objects and ideas encountered in the totalizing process are not arbitrary; they are rather immediacies that necessarily appear within that reality, immediacies that the totalizing process recombines (keeping in mind, of course, that “necessity” does not mean here “unchangeable”), or to which the system itself is immanent.

Now, the “Spinozist” Lukács does not mean the disappearance of the “Lyotardian” one. Rather, the Lyotardian compositionalism is preserved in the
Spinozist moment. This is made clear in the rather different approach to Spinoza of Negri and Deleuze. As Susan Ruddick has argued, even if both writers diverge in their use of Spinoza’s writing, the utopian moment of the potential of social recombination or recomposition of human cooperation animates both writers’ work. For both Negri and Deleuze, according to Ruddick, the formation of Spinozist adequate ideas has nothing to do with a true reflection of the facts. Rather, “awareness is the product of a multiplicity of encounters whose meanings themselves are deeply invested in the materiality of the social field.” Adequate ideas, therefore, are the ones that increase human capacity (or maximize joy) by helping bring about a specific composition of bodies, or a specific structure of cooperation (echoes of the Lyotardian “augmentation of power” are of course undeniable here).\(^{50}\) Ideas are thus folded back into practical material composition. Not only is the source of ideas the interaction between bodies, but also “better” ideas correspond to better interactions, ones that increase a capacity to act, in this Spinozist scheme. A description is therefore not to be judged on its veracity or accuracy vis-à-vis “the facts,” but on what it does – what kinds of compositions of bodies it helps solidify, and what increase in capacity to act it helps bring about. And this pertains not only Negri and Deleuze: for instance, this compositionalist moment is also strongly asserted in the work of Maurizio Lazzaratto, who takes his cue from Deleuze’s Spinoza. Lazzarato’s attack on totality is based precisely on the utopian moment of compositionalist, or on the possibility of recombinining objects

and ideas in ever new ways to achieve certain pragmatic goals (or on what he calls “the externality of relations”). As should be clear by now, not only is this compositionalism not antagonistic to totality, as Lazzarato’s critique would have it; rather, it constitutes a necessary moment in the staging of totality.

It is surely possible to keep deepening the commonalities between Lukács and Spinozist Marxism – claiming, for instance, that the “becoming conscious” of the relation to the whole in the quote from Lukács above corresponds to the attainment of a specific Spinozist adequate idea and its correlate cooperative structure. But what is more important for our purposes is to emphasize again that the suspicion towards representation which runs through both Lyotard and Spinozist Marxism informs a particular moment in Lukács: that in which ideas, explanation, descriptions, and models suddenly turn out to be ideology, or in which abstractions are suddenly seen as emerging from certain social relations and helping reproduce them. To be sure, it is precisely this moment that our revenge fantasies incessantly reproduce in the protagonists’ refusal to explain or give a rationale to the protagonists’ actions, and in which the mere giving of any rationale turns out to be an intervention designed to advance the project.

It is history that takes Lukács beyond the pure formalism of the compositionalist moment. And it is here that we must return to our revenge fantasies, and show them to be more than mere exemplars of immanent totalization, which will necessarily take us into their specific content and form and their relation to their historical context. In the early blaxploitation revenge fantasies of the 1970s, Maurizio Lazzarato, “Multiplicity, Totality and Politics,” 
as we have briefly mentioned above, the protagonist moves in and out of different social spaces: workplace, spaces of leisure, the home, the strongholds of black and white bourgeoisie, and those of organized crime. In all of these spaces, the protagonist’s actions – her attempts to further her cause - silently expose the social, material and ideological structures and hierarchies that stand in the way of wish-fulfillment or the exacting of revenge. It is here that sexism, racism, and exploitation are exposed, to be sure. Yet, these structures remain hidden until the protagonist seeks to actively advance her irrational cause. In other words, the totalizing movement of Foxy Browns’ actions (and those of her allies) creatively polarize that social field – or make the greyscaled variety of social positions into two antagonistically-defined groups: those who oppose the project and those who assist or join it. It is only through her actions that the drug addict, for example, is revealed to be untrustworthy, just as it is only through the actions of the protagonist of The Spook that the black bourgeoisie comes to side with the white bourgeoisie against the black revolt.\textsuperscript{52} Coffy’s treatment of black politicians follows a similar path – the corrupt black politician’s siding with the forces that oppose Coffy materializes and becomes apparent to the viewer only through her actions. It is important to emphasize in this regard the permeability of the borders of the totalizing project:

\textsuperscript{52} Coffy depicts with much more detail the problems created for black solidarity by drug abuse, showing how druglords are in fact on the side of white oppression rather than that of black liberation, even when they help fund black politicians that declare war on drug-abuse. It thus exposes the contradictions of what will later be called the “war on drugs”: it is both a war on black communities, yet its kernel must be coopted to a certain extent by any revolutionary movement that springs in a social context of rampant drug abuse.
except for very few figures, no one is excluded in advance from joining it, even as certain allies prove easier to acquire than others.

In short, therefore, what the blaxploitation revenge fantasies engage in is a realist social mapping, paradoxically enabled by the irrational and unreal mania of the protagonist. Of course, it is easy to see how the historical background of the blaxploitation revenge fantasies is mediated into them: these are the days of the Black Panthers, of African American riots in the inner city, of white flight to the suburbs, and of the partial successes of the Civil Rights movement. It is this historical content that undoubtedly supplies the blaxploitation films - whose plot almost always takes place in an urban, poor, black social setting - with their subject matter. It is here that we can finally weld together the totalizing form of the films with history. The multiplicity of social settings and their population with multiple subject positions, each with its different attitude towards the protagonist, suggests that what blaxploitation social mapping confronts is the Lukácsian realist “social type.” And it is the polarization of the multiplicity of African American social types (and some white ones) into two opposing camps which stands at the heart of the totalizing, socially-recomposing, journey of the protagonist through her social world. The creative “reduction” of a multiplicity of realist social positions into two opposing camps can now suggest to us a surprising result – that blaxploitation revenge fantasy films are complex allegories of class formation, or of the formation of the dreaded and much-maligned proletariat.

53 See Lukács, Studies in European Realism (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964) 5-6, 88, 154.
To strengthen this reading - which is by no means a purely logical result of the Spinozist-Lukácsian recompositional form itself – we can now briefly address the development of the revenge fantasy genre in its later instances, such as *Kill Bill* or *Django Unchained* (indeed, Quentin Tarantino's name is almost synonymous with the later iterations of the genre, almost to the degree that Pam Grier's is synonymous with the blaxploitation originals).\(^5\) We have already briefly mentioned how initially the protagonist’s isolation, her need to improvise and develop new skills, can be read as a metaphor for her owning nothing but her labor power.\(^5\) This metaphorization of the proletariat already strengthens our reading – for the protagonist can then be said to appropriate the products of its labor power in the course of the film. And it is precisely this point which allows us to decode the transformation of the genre in its later iterations. In the later revenge fantasies, such as *Kill Bill*, while the social mapping recedes and sometimes disappears altogether, a curious formal transformation occurs: all violence becomes spectacular violence; the perfect revenge depends not only on the mere act of defeating those responsible for the initial loss, but also on the satisfying affective charge released by exacting the revenge. The particular aesthetization of the fight scenes in *Kill Bill* or the spectacular burning of the slave owner's mansion in *Django* are good examples of

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\(^5\) These are by no means the only later representatives of genre. Outside Tarantino’s work, *Memento* is a particularly interesting instance, in which the revenge fantasy meets science fiction. In the literary landscape, Caren Irr’s *Toward the Geopolitical Novel: U.S. Fiction in the 21st Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014) 159-161) contains a discussion of the relation between revolutionary fiction and revenge, which can be related to our discussion here – particularly in its claim that ideology is always a ploy for the avenger.

\(^5\) This is of course true of many cinematic action hero's, most notably in Kung Fu movies in which the hero can rely on nothing but his bodily skills, or to a certain degree in *Rocky*, with its by-now familiar montage of the protagonist’s severe bodily disciplining to achieve his goal.
this explosion of affect. Labor is the key to this transformation – for it is precisely the coming into dominance of affective labor, immaterial labor, or in short, the growing centrality of cultural labor in production under postmodernism, which is captured by this transformation in the later revenge fantasies. This formal transformation, which depends on transformation of labor under late capitalism, thus strengthens our reading of the postmodern revenge fantasy as a complex allegory of the coming into view of the proletariat. Recalling the beginning of our discussion of Lukács, it is the proletariat whose self awareness depends on a totalizing process that begins with the proletariat's insertion as an object – labor power – into the capitalist system. It is thus labor power and its retrieval from the alienating system which is the true kernel of the revenge fantasy's allegory. The moments of affective violence thus come to constitute in the later revenge fantasies their most auto-referential moment – in them the products of aesthetic labor are expropriated by the laborer for her own use. Ends become their own means, as a modernist functionalist ideology - in which aesthetic and function are reconciled - is for a moment revived.

It is in the polarizing effect of the totalizing movement, then, that the coming into view of a revolutionary subject is allegorized in the revenge fantasy. And here we approach one of the more contentious of Lukács’ claims, one which once again

raises the ghosts of the so-called “Stalinist” oppression or that ideological slippage from totality to totalitarianism. This is, of course, the “privileging” of the proletariat, seeing it as the only subject whose consciousness of its “relation to the whole” (to recall Lukács’ own words) is a precondition for revolution. And even worse: we seem to have arrived at a paradox. For the revenge fantasy, as we have argued above, has a very silent protagonist; it does not allow any stable description of the totalizing process, since it keeps folding ideology into practice. It therefore does not seem possible for it to allegorize the coming into consciousness.

Slavoj Žižek’s commentary on Lukac’s proletariat provides us with a way out of this paradox. Žižek’s starting point is what he sees as a paradox not dissimilar to ours, which he sees existing at the heart of Lukac’s project: it is at the most practically-informed theoretical text of western Marxism, and at the same time one the most speculative.Žižek starts out by highlighting the historical transformation of Marxism from revolutionary theory to ritualistic Stalinist state ideology, a transformation that provides the background for the writing of History and Class Consciousness (and for its later denouncement). He then argues that a reading of Lukács, in which the Proletariat contains a hidden “potential” or some dormant consciousness that the intellectual elite (the Party) has to awaken and develop, always contains in advance the seeds of Stalinist oppression towards actual workers.

58 Žizek, “Postface,” 152-3.
The Leninist-Lukácsian position is rather the opposite, according to Žižek: “Ultimately, there is no objective logic of the ‘necessary stages of development,’ since ‘complications’ arising from the concrete texture of concrete situations or from the unanticipated results of ‘subjective’ interventions always derail the straight course of things.”59 The potential, then, is transferred from the Proletariat to the contingent conditions of a political struggle - the environment in which concrete actions take place, bringing back into the picture creative interventions that depend on these contingencies, tactical thought about mediating between existing imaginaries and revolutionary actions, and the timing of action. This is, in short, what Žižek (following Alain Badiou) calls “the Act.” It is precisely conjunctural intervention which is eliminated when we identify a hidden potential in the Proletariat that the party has to actualize (a Hegelian identity of the Party and the Proletariat in Žižek’s “syllogism”), a formal assumption that what will be actualized was already there, eliminating in advance any intervention and a creation of newness.60 In contrast to the “Stalinist” reading of Lukács, according to Žižek, we need to take seriously Lukac’s point about the “subjective mediation” of the proletariat, or the way in which actual subjects become the self-aware proletariat – which is precisely the problem of our revenge fantasy. According to Žižek, we need

...to read the gap between the factual and the ‘imputed’ class consciousness not as the standard opposition between the ideal type and its factual blurred actualization, but as the inner self-fissure (or ‘out-of-jointedness’) of the historical subject. To be more precise, when one speaks of the proletariat as the universal class, one should

59 Ibid., 163.
60 Ibid., 167.
bear in mind the strictly dialectical notion of universality which becomes actual, ‘for itself,’ only in the guise of its opposite, in an agent who is out of place in any particular position within the existing global order and thus entertains towards it a negative relationship...  

Žižek’s commentary on Lukács has several interesting results for our purposes: not only does it show that the revolutionary subject of history in Lukács is not to be scientifically discovered but rather produced by conjunctural interventions, but also that even the most speculative theorization is a conjunctural intervention, and conversely, that even the most practical approach contains ideological assumptions. Therefore, self-consciousness implies, first and foremost, a way of social being, immanent to the social system of which it is a part, or as Žižek puts it: “it is not sufficient to oppose the way things ‘objectively are’ to the way ‘they merely appear to us’: they way they appear (to the observer) affect their very ‘objective being.’”  

Or in Lukács’ words: “integration in the totality ... does not merely affect our judgment of individual phenomena decisively. But also, as a result, the objective structure, the actual content of the individual phenomenon - as individual phenomenon - is changed fundamentally.”  

It is here that Žižek’s Lukács becomes useful for our purposes. As we have already mentioned, the revenge fantasy protagonist moves from one social setting to another, generating confrontation and polarizing the social field as it goes along. It is precisely in this sense in which our protagonist is a figure of “an agent who is out of place in any particular position within the existing global order and thus

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61 Ibid., 168-9.  
62 Ibid., 173.  
63 Lukács, 152.
entertains towards it a negative relationship.” Second, it is of course a series of conjunctural interventions that unfold in the films – a series of creative negations that cannot be articulated prior to the material, institutional, and discursive conditions imposed by their contexts. And thirdly, while the revenge fantasy excludes any possibility of elaborating a stable speculative ideal, it is the trivial aim - to Kill Bill – which provides a placeholder for the necessary speculative element or the properly social final aim. For it is precisely this idée fixe that fuels the change in the “objective structure” of particular phenomena, which is in our case the enactment of totalizing social polarization. That the satisfaction of the fantasy makes way for disappointment in the revenge fantasy film is telling in this respect: it is the restoration of the previous order of things, the re-normalization of the vengeful subject as the revenge impulse disappears, which is finally disappointing and signals the failure, at the last instance, of the process of totalization. Thus, both the revenge fantasy and Žižek seem to tell us the same thing: the success of the totalization process depends not on ridding our theory from its speculative moment, but rather on the opposite – in being successful in positing something akin to Lukács’ Subject-Object of History, or in the successful elaboration of a redemptive ideology.64

It is in this sense that Jameson defines Lukács’ totality as “not... a form of knowledge, but rather a framework in which various kinds of knowledge are positioned, pursued and evaluated.”65 Jameson’s “History and Class Consciousness as an Unfinished Project” and his “Cognitive Mapping” should be read as attempts to

64 Lukács, 276-80, 101-5.
imagine ways to relate to what are initially disparate kinds of knowledge. His example of feminist standpoint theory as one such attempt should not be read, as some have, as confusing the perspective of actual women with the revolutionary “imputed consciousness.” Rather, it is the attempt itself to relate women's experience to global capitalism that has the potential to produce (inescapably, through collective praxis) – rather than discover – a revolutionary class through the inventive solutions with which totalization comes to relate plurality. Contemporary Marxist writing that tries to deduce logically that there cannot be a subject of history under late capitalism (undoubtedly a symptom of the virtual non-relation of contemporary academic Western Marxism to actual political movements) therefore substitutes scientific discovery for political production. That allegories of the staging of the Lukácsian totality still exist – and flourish - under the cultural legacy of postmodernism is merely one of the ways in which totality's relevance persists as a political problem in the contemporary juncture.

Sartre and Transcendence

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66 See Neil Larsen, “Lukács sans Proletariat, or Can History and Class Consciousness be Rehistoricized?,” 83.
A good point of departure for any discussion of Sartre’s conception of totality could be the surprising lack of interest in his Marxist writing today, judging by the relative lack of contemporary Marxist considerations on his work. Several possible factors might constitute reasons for this relative lack of interest. First, that the dialectical style of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is somewhat cumbersome, uncompromisingly demanding of its reader the adoption of its own mode of thought. Secondly, Sartre’s preoccupation with personal freedom and the dialectic of self and other – a result, to be sure, of his existentialism – might seem to be an outdated form of nascent neoliberal individualism. Thirdly, Sartre’s main theoretical “points” sometimes seem too self-evident or too intuitively understandable to be productive. Yet, at least the latter point must be understood as an effect of our own vantage point, from which some of Sartre’s arguments seem to elaborate an emergent postmodern sensibility. The Sartrean claim that history is a “totality without a totalizer” (a clear precursor to Althusser’s “history is a process without a subject”) can serve as a good example here. Severing the Lukácsian link between a particular subject position and the staging of totality seems to amount to excluding the possibility of exerting control over some universal historical process, or of a subject whose emergence in the system necessarily signals its demise at that subject’s conscious hands. The postmodernism of incredulity towards grand narratives and of decentered subjectivity thus seem to creep into Sartre’s work, but not in a developed enough way as to make his writing immediately suggestive or

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69 Jay, 352-353.
productive for Marxist concerns. Sartre’s reticence concerning Lukácsian teleology is of course the result not only of his experience during the Second World War and his existentialism, as Martin Jay claims, but also of the emerging crisis of one of his chief political interlocutors until 1956, namely the French Communist party. It therefore seems only natural after the failures of the ferment of the 60s (with which as Jameson argues, Sartre’s Critique is inextricably tied) to produce a revolution to arrive at Jay’s conclusion that it “might be possible to read the Critique as the theoretical correlate of a new type of political praxis closer to that of the New Left than to Lukács’ totalistic Leninism.” In what follows, we will attempt to restore a certain productive opacity to Sartre’s concepts, and a contemporary relevance to a few of the dialectical exercises of the first volume of the Critique.

It is this historical conjecture that also gives birth to Sartre’s most important contribution to theorizing totality, which is his distinction between totality and totalization. Totality will now come to designate a rigid product of praxis, while totalization designates the process of something “continually being formed by a present activity,” as Joseph Catalano puts it, or praxis itself – whose end point is the reified or “thingified” totality. Some vision of ultimate liberation - or that

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70 Ibid., 348. Here and throughout, we will keep suggesting (as we indeed already have) that the possibility of recognizing a revolutionary subject or of some concrete revolutionary goal has to do with the relation of the intellectual or the writer to a living political project. The more indirect or mediated this relation becomes (or the more the project itself is in crisis), the less clear will be the goals to be achieved and subjects that are supposed to achieve them. We will not be able to discuss this claim in any length here, but it is a direct result of our discussion of Lukacs.


Lukácsian identification of the ultimate goal with a relation to totality that the totalizing process brings to view - thus seems at first sight to have dropped from the horizon of praxis itself. Sartre’s totalization is an avatar of immanent dynamism: each constitutive part of the totality-in-formation is simultaneously an embodiment of the whole, but also something that enables the totality-in-formation to relate to itself and to its other constitutive parts. Or in other words, the whole is immanent in its parts as a developing praxis (and, as in Lukács and Žižek, the self-consciousness of the totalizing project is, ontologically, a moment in its development). No objects, no “multiplicity,” to borrow Sartre’s term, remain constantly outside the totalizing project, as some transcendent goal. Rather, each part alternates both as something to be totalized and as something that in its own transformation embodies the totalizing process itself:

Thus the dialectic is a totalising activity. Its only laws are the rules produced by the developing totalisation, and these are obviously concerned with the relation between unification and the unified, that is to say, the modes of effective presence of the totalising process in the totalised parts. And knowledge, itself totalising, is the totalisation itself in so far as it is present in particular partial structures of a definite kind. In other words, totalisation cannot be consciously present to itself if it remains a formal, faceless activity of synthetic unification, but can be so only through the mediation of differentiated realities which it unifies and which effectively embody it to the extent that they totalise themselves by the very movement of the activity of totalising.

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74 Sartre, Critique, 45-6.
75 In a long footnote (47-8) Sartre stresses the immanence of the whole in its parts, and describes a dual movement: as the whole dialectically interiorize parts, incorporate it into the whole, in a dialectical process of totalization, so does the part interiorize the whole, making the whole immanent to it.
76 Ibid., 46 (my emphasis).
We should therefore distinguish at the outset between two types of totalization: one designating a “formal, faceless synthetic unification” and the other a self knowing transformative process (this distinction is of course equivalent to two kinds of “praxis” for Sartre, one that tries to challenge a certain state of affairs, and one that reproduces it, as Jay stresses). Indeed, as Mark Poster also emphasizes, the self-knowledge of the totalizing process is “both internal to the totalisation and a determinant of it.” It is the second kind that will of course be more interesting for us, for its self-knowledge implies its possible control or direction towards a goal. Totalization, or the process of transformation that unifies disparate objects, becomes knowable or controllable when it can recognize its own “effective presence” in the transformations of the parts to be totalized. The effective presence of the process in its parts is therefore not a degraded presence or expression of some purer entity; rather, the ideal itself, insofar as it is divorced from the current state of things, is a degradation: it prevents the process of totalization from relating to itself. A self-knowing process of totalization is therefore always radically present or radically immanent to what is being totalized.

As opposed to the process of totalization, totality for Sartre is an inert product of past praxis or totalization – from paintings and symphonies to machines and institutions. And “our present action makes them seem like totalities by resuscitating, in some way, the praxis which attempted to totalise their inertia.”

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77 Jay, 351.
79 Sartre, 45.
Sartre’s example of the domicile as totality is a helpful illustration: it is not the house itself that alone constitutes a totality, but the ensemble of practices and subject-positions that constantly give meaning to it as a domicile that fashion it as a totality. This will turn out to be a crucial point for us: the Sartrean inertia is not mere stasis, but the more accurately defined inertia of Newton’s laws: it designates the tendency of objects to continue in their own course until force is applied to them. They thus “lie heavy on our destiny because of the contradiction which opposes praxis (the labour which made them and the labour which utilises them) and inertia, within them.”

Totalities are therefore imbued with past “intention,” one which we must materially struggle with whenever we make use of them. It is by this feature that totalities are the basis for a larger social field dominated by past intention, which Sartre designates by the term “practico-inert” – one that as we will see comes to dominate everyday life.

The main theoretical question then, on a purely abstract level, thus becomes for us the transition from an existence dominated by totalities to the process of self-knowing totalization. And it is here that Sartre’s concepts of seriality versus the group-in-fusion, of counter-finality and the practico-inert, emerge as important conceptual mediators between totality and totalization. With these terms, we are already entering Sartre’s discussion of different types of sociality and interaction. To begin with, it is important to emphasize that for Sartre no interaction between people is isolable and intelligible on its terms alone. Rather, as Andrew Dobson and

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80 Ibid., 46.
others argue, every interaction assumes some collective structure at work.\textsuperscript{81} It is this background in which totalities reside, their inertia propelling us towards certain praxis (and any attempt to redirect this inertia will, in an almost bodily fashion, make those resistances felt, or reveal that “what hurts is history”).\textsuperscript{82} The different types of groups that Sartre describes in the \textit{Critique} will therefore differ from each other according to this governing background and the way in which it is handled in the group itself.

We will here focus on two kinds of groups - the serialized mass and the group in fusion. Seriality, for Sartre, governs what we would call everyday life, dominated as it is by existing social institutions that give form to everydayness. Now, seriality for Sartre is captured best not in the spaces of workplace, leisure spaces, or home, but rather in moments of transition between these spaces, those in which isolation is dominant. Thus, Sartre elaborates on the effects of seriality through his famous example of the bus queue, in which the unrelatedness of the people waiting for the bus demonstrates an isolation which is the “negative side of individual integration into separate groups”:

[the group of people waiting for the bus consists in a] plurality of isolations: these people do not care about or speak to each other and, in general, they do not look at one another; they exist side by side alongside a bus stop. At this level, it is worth noting that their isolation is not an inert statute (or the simple reciprocal exteriority of organisms); rather, it is actually lived in everyone’s project as its negative structure. In other words, the isolation of the organism, as the impossibility of uniting with Others in an organic totality, is

\textsuperscript{82} Jameson, \textit{The Political Unconscious}, 102.
revealed through the isolation which everyone lives as the provisional negation of their reciprocal relations with Others.\textsuperscript{83}

In the serialized condition, then, we can hear echoes of the Lukácsian alienated objectification of individuality through abstraction, and formalizing reduction of the individual’s specificity. It is only through non-specificity that individuals are related to each other in the serialized state. For, it is completely dictated by the practico-inert field based on abstract calculation, leading to an “interchangability on men.” Yet, what will be important for us here is rather the way in which Sartre comes to invert the Lukácsian focus – rather than stressing the reduction of individual specificity, it is this pre-determined isolation and abstraction whose results are explored. According to Sartre,

\text{...since all the lived characteristics which might allow some interior differentiation lie outside [the determination of identity by the practico-inert], everyone’s identity with every Other is their unity elsewhere, as other-being; here and now, it is their common alterity. Everyone is the same as the Others in so far as he is Other than himself. And identity as alterity is }\textit{exterior separation};\text{ in other words, it is the impossibility of realising, through the body, the transcendent unity to come, in so far as this unity is experienced as an irrational necessity.}\textsuperscript{84}

It is this structural absenting of unity with others, “everyone’s identity with every Other is their unity elsewhere,” to which Sartre then returns several times in the section on the Serialized group, demonstrating the ways in which the causes for the serialized praxis – those totalities or “transcendent unities to come” - are always structurally absented from the specificity of the situation. And this negation of self –

\textsuperscript{83} Sartre, 258.  
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 260.
or the affirmation of self in alterity alone – takes on a temporal dimension, in which “whatever ordering procedure is used, seriality derives from practico-inert matter, that is to say, from the future as an ensemble of inert, equivalent possibilities.”\textsuperscript{85} It is precisely this absenting of the self and its determinations from the unity that governs the praxis of the people on the queue that makes that unity “transcendent” and “irrational.”\textsuperscript{86} In short, the relation between self and future expectation is broken down from the perspective of individual experience; futurity thus makes its appearance, but only irrationally and in a transcendent manner (which means for Sartre that this totality is only present in the serialized individual’s praxis through this individual being not-himself, or other). The surprising result here is not again the tired point about reduction of individuality, but the thwarting of the possibility of otherness itself. As Joseph Catalano nicely puts it: “At This level, true alterity does not exist: each person is oneself just as every other person is oneself.”\textsuperscript{87} Thus, the pre-prescribed futurity that we have associated with totality’s inertia comes to be the hallmark of seriality and the practico-inert institutional field that governs it. We will return to this point later.

Meanwhile, the group-in-fusion comes to designate in Sartre the precise opposite of seriality. It is the living, self-knowing, process of totalization. The form of sameness through being-other is here precisely the first obstacle to be overcome. Before we discuss the Sartrean group in fusion, however, we will briefly turn to

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 263.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 264, 269.
\textsuperscript{87} Catalano, A Commentary on Jean Paul Sartre’s Critique of Dialectical Reason (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986) 145.
what will seem at first sight to be completely unrelated to Sartre’s concerns: Walter Benjamin’s discussion of the “optical unconscious” in his “Little History of Photography.” For Benjamin, it is the negation of perspective itself in photography, and that of the intention of the photographer, which makes a utopian spark immanent to the photograph:

the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now, with which reality has (so to speak) seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it. For it is another nature which speaks to the camera rather than to the eye: "other" above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious.88

It is of course a utopian impulse – an escape from the present of the image revealed in the image itself - immanent to that “long-forgotten moment” that Benjamin so brilliantly detects in photography, or in that “other nature” revealed to the camera but hidden from the eye. What Benjamin comes to call the “optical unconscious,” in which this utopian impulse is revealed, by definition “cannot be circumscribed by artistic intention,” as Timothy Bewes puts it.89 Photography thus provides an elimination of perspective or point of view, one that reveals the presence of a utopian impulse – a formal feature that according to Bewes it shares with film.

The important point for our discussion is the striking similarity between the irrationality and transcendence through which futurity presents itself to the

serialized individual, and the structural impossibility to intend futurity from the photographer’s perspective in Benjamin’s account. The structural dissociation of futurity from the self and its intention is precisely what makes it utopian, for it provides the schism, the radical break from the here and now, which is necessary for the utopian to appear.\(^9^0\) We have therefore arrived at a surprising result: the precontained futurity of serialized praxis, or the fact that this praxis leads to totality only insofar as self is already-other, makes a utopian impulse a necessary structural byproduct of serialization. Sartre’s “elsewhere” of unity in the serialized state, or, in short, that reconciliation is always associated with the self-as-other - is precisely the radical break that the utopian impulse presupposes. The irrationality that Sartre attributes to it dissociates its existence from any practical intention, relegating the utopian impulse to something like the realm of irrationality or the subconscious, much like in Benjamin.

We can now take this productive similarity one step further. For another result can be drawn from Sartre’s discussion of seriality - the infamous blockage of the utopian imagination associated with postmodernism and globalization.\(^9^1\) That Benjamin’s artist cannot intend utopia is expressed in seriality’s form of reconciling self and other: it is only by not-being a differentiated individual that I can see myself as belonging to the same group as others (or, to employ Sartre’s language, the serialized self is present in the other only insofar as it is not itself, and the other is


present in this self also only insofar as it is not-itself, that is, insofar as it is the same as this self). This form of reconciliation, in which identity is premised solely on being-other, is the result of the practico-inert field, as Sartre constantly reminds us, or of the existing totalities that governs serialized praxis.\textsuperscript{92} It is this resistance of the material world, this formal thwarting of the possibility of reconciliation from the perspective of the serialized individual, which is captured in Sartre’s notion of counter-finality. Or, as Joseph Catalano puts it, “the practico-inert introduces a distinctive inertia, or counterfinality, into the world, one which acts against our best efforts to change the world.”\textsuperscript{93} This inertia introduced by the practico-inert, then, should be thought of not only in terms of material obstacles that have to be overcome in struggle, strategically or tactically. Rather, it is manifested in the blocking of reconciliation that seriality enacts, that which intimates to us that “isolation is a project.” Thus, serialized sociality accounts for both the emergence of the utopian impulse – that irrational, subconscious, utopian supplement to every praxis, be it practical or aesthetic - and the blockage of the intentional, explicit utopian imagination.

The totalizing project of the group-in-fusion can now be seen as what neutralizes both results of seriality, through completely inverting the latter's interplay of interiority and exteriority, or self and other (or, in the Benjaminian schema, enacting a neutralization of perspective). If the subjects of the serialized mass were relatable only through being not-themselves, the group in fusion negates

\textsuperscript{92} Sartre, 266.
\textsuperscript{93} Joseph Catalano, \textit{Reading Sartre}, 114.
this negation by making each member a "third party" in its relation to any other member:

The individual, as a third party, is connected, in the unity of a single praxis (and therefore of a single perceptual vista) with the unity of individuals as inseparable moments of a nontotalised totalisation, and with each of them as a third party, that is to say, through the mediation of the group. In terms of perception, I perceive the group as my common reality, and, simultaneously, as a mediation between me and every other third party. I say every third party deliberately: whatever relations of simple reciprocity (helping, training a new neighbour or comrade, etc.) there are within the common action, these relations, though transfigured by their being-in-a-group, are not constitutive. And I also say: the members of the group are third parties, which means that each of them totalises the reciprocities of others.94

Thus, on one hand, every relation between members of the group in fusion is mediated by the group itself, or is not understandable without the collective project. On the other hand, every member “totalizes the reciprocities of others,” or through praxis embodies the relations between other members. Indeed, what we have referred to as Spinozist compositionality – or the enhancement of individuals power by his specific “joyful” relation with others – is precisely what the inclusion in the group-in-fusion brings about, for “the third party comes to the group... receives the power he gives, and he sees the other third party approaching him as his power.”95

It is important to decipher here what Sartre means by “nontotalised totalisation.” The totalizing process can never grasp itself as an object, or in exteriority to itself; thus, it is prevented from seeing itself as a totality, in its inert

94 Sartre, 374.
95 Ibid., 375.
meaning discussed above. Only through the totalizing activity can totalization recognize itself, as Sartre emphasizes countless times. Thus, where in the serialized group the origin of one’s actions, or their “center,” was always elsewhere, in the group in fusion it is everywhere, or in each member of the group. This everywhereness of the center means for Sartre a contradictory combination of immanence and transcendence – every presence is a presence insofar as it refers back to an absence. And it is here that perspective is neutralized too, since “through the mediation of the group, he is neither the Other nor identical with me.”96 And utopia (in the guise of a transcendent object or totality) is revealed as a structural impossibility from the point of view of the totalizing group:

Thus I am neither totally integrated into the group, which has been revealed and actualised through praxis, nor totally transcendent. I am not a part of a totality object and, for me, there is no transcendent totality object: the group is not in fact my object; it is the common structure of my action. In material terms, this is often expressed by the fact that I cannot really effect a total (for example, perceptual) synthesis of the group in so far as it is my environment: I can see my neighbours, or, turning my head, the people behind me, but I can never see them all at once, whereas I synthesise the marching of everyone, both behind and ahead of me, through my own marching.97

Thus, the state of “nontotalised totalisation” negates both pure immanence (or absolute integration into the group) and pure transcendence of the group, from the perspective of its members. As opposed to the practico-inert’s reign over the serialized state as an externally-imposed totality, in the fused group it is not possible to objectify that which governs praxis. It is rather “the common structure of my actions,” expressed through these actions (even representational ones!) and

96 Ibid., 377.
97 Ibid., 374.
never transcendent or wholly external to them. This double negation of immanence and transcendence or of the rift separating self from other, constitutes the group-in-fusion as the utopian state itself, as Fredric Jameson remarks. It is therefore not very surprising that from the point of view of a group's member, utopia becomes superfluous ("for me, there is no transcendent totality object"), or no longer serves any structural purpose. Thus, while serialization gives rise to a utopian impulse and a blockage of the utopian imagination, the totalizing process of the group-in-fusion makes both disappear.

As we will now see, it is precisely this tension between seriality and the group-in-fusion, or totality and totalization, which stands at the center of current post-apocalyptic film and TV. Very briefly, post-apocalyptic narratives belong to the dystopian genre of science fiction. As others have noted, dystopia should in no way be categorized as anti-utopian, but rather as negative utopia. In early dystopias, the future fall occasions an exploration of the roots of the fall in the present, which is thereby estranged and reconstituted as a space of historical practice. Orwell’s 1984 can be used as an example of this dynamic: the origin of the future repressive state of things is traced to an estranged present – British reconstruction after WW2 - through the historical narrative given in the Brotherhood’s “Book” (and, of course, when the suspicion is raised that The Book was actually produced by the oppressive

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99 That is, if utopian texts try to imagine what seeds of positive change in the present can help develop a radically-other alterity, dystopian texts latch on to what seems new ominous developments in developing their vision of the bleak future. See for example Erich Fromm, “Afterward,” in George Orwell, 1982 (New York: Penguin, 1982) 281-283. In contrast, Anti-utopias operate on the conviction that any utopian ideal must end up reproducing radical unfreedom.

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Party, it is the waning of historical consciousness itself on which the blame for the fall rests, and the thing to be remedied).

Yet, it is precisely this dynamic which is almost completely absent from current post-apocalyptic TV shows and films. Even though movies such *12 Monkeys* or *The Book of Eli* still seem to enact something like a historical mapping of the post-apocalyptic state, the nuclear holocaust (in *The Book of Eli*) is not really a felt imminent danger in the present, but rather a pastiched old generic trope. Instead, the disease that within days turns people into zombies in the TV series *The Walking Dead* or in the movie *28 Days Later* is not a historical consequence to be explored (at least at first sight). The few flashbacks into pre-catastrophic times – as for example those that present the marital dynamic between the police officer and his wife in *The Walking Dead* – are not presented as causes of the apocalypse, but rather provide narrative background for their interaction after the catastrophic event. We might therefore accept Baudrillard’s claim that the age of the end has itself ended, or that “the end of the world is now only a spectacle in reruns,” as Teresa Heffernan puts it, in relation to what the older dystopias were trying to do.¹⁰⁰ As we will see, however, instead of generating a historical narrative, current post-apocalypses should be read as symptoms of what Evan Calder Williams calls the apocalyptic present, or the ongoing crisis of capitalism, the here and now of an end “without revelation,” intimating a fantasy of a terminal end to capitalism.¹⁰¹ This diagnosis

will be the end-point of our analysis rather than what provides us with some “first principles” of analysis, for most viewers will not immediately read the events in this manner.

We will begin, instead, with what is undoubtedly the source of imaginative attraction in many contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives. Namely, the survivors’ group attempt to adapt to its new surroundings, the social and ideological transformations it requires, and the different relationships to the material world which it necessitates. Mere survival is not very important to us here. As the first episodes of The Walking Dead, Survivors, or Battlestar Galactica demonstrate, the initial struggle for survival offers little in the way of propelling the narrative. The group of survivors quickly develops the foraging skills and the division of labor that secures basic survival. What is of more importance for us is the way in which, with the choosing of a goal that transcends mere survival (traveling to a promised land of plenty, settling in an abandoned prison, or joining communities of survivors that are prosperous enough to sustain farming, leisure activities, scientific research, etc.), these transformations in the group become a battle between totality and totalization, or between seriality and an emergent group-in-fusion.

What is immediately imposed on the group in the aftermath of the catastrophe is a humanly-comprehensible re-scaling of social relations. The group is easily perceived as a whole by any of its members – and containable within a single shot - rendering all relations to others immediate and direct. Rather than lament the apocalyptic vision of his objects when he declares that the current crisis of capitalism is terminal – or that capital will not find yet another way to displace its current contradictions. Yet, Williams’s reading of post-apocalyptic narrative as symptoms of an ongoing crisis will be affirmed in our reading as well.
zombie-movies’ preoccupation with the family structure (as Williams does), we can see this tendency as a result of the family structure being probably the only acceptable analog in our minds today for the new, easily containable social universe.⁹² This rendering-visible of the social will now enable the viewer to see pre-catastrophic habits, behaviors, ideological attitudes, professional skills, and so on, come into contradiction with the new social and material environment, and make way for the development of new ones. That looting can no longer be ethically frowned upon, that it is worthless to carry money around, and that women can engage in physical labor (and are many times revealed to be better at some physical tasks than some of the men) are common examples of the way in which old habits are estranged.⁹³ These old habits can be seen, to be sure, as the negative image of seriality itself. For suddenly the old ways of thinking and acting are exposed as those with which the old practico-inert field, which no longer exists, seared its subjects. That these habits are easily recognizable as those of certain social types (the policemen in The Walking Dead, for example, still trying to enforce the law) strongly mark them as making sense only within an older totality - as belonging to nobody’s personality, but rather being the result of the previous social order. The logic of the older totalities, then, gradually falls apart as the narrative progresses.¹⁰⁴

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¹⁰² Williams, 144.
¹⁰³ Examples abound, of course: from monogamy and the biological family relations to hair styles and patterns of speech – all old habits are put under scrutiny with the sudden rescaling of social relations. Of course, some of the old habits will then be reutilized rather than disappear altogether.
¹⁰⁴ The critical impulses of many postapocalyptic narratives lies precisely in this estrangement of older habits. The shopping-mall setting with that exposes an ideology of consumerism is a popular critical moment, as well as the zombies themselves standing in for the unknowing masses. As Williams remarks, these critical moments are usually celebrated by critics, even though they rehearse hackneyed criticisms (Williams, 86).
And in the process of exposing old behaviors as the signature of the now dead practico-inert, they become charged with a utopian impulse – an irrational wish to return to the old social order. Not letting go of money, prison guards that try to keep their prisoners under lock and key despite society's sudden disappearance – all are charged with an irrational wish to return to the pre-apocalyptic order. The farmhouse and its inhabitants that *The Walking Dead*'s group of survivors meet on their journey is the perfect example here: the stubborn attempt of the farm's inhabitants to maintain their pre-apocalyptic way of life – clearly unsustainable now - becomes charged with a clear nostalgic utopian impulse. There could be no clearer illustration of the utopian impulse that accompanies seriality, of course. And, conversely, that change becomes unthinkable for those fighting desperately to maintain a dead social order designates the blockage of the utopian imagination that, as we discussed above, accompanies seriality as well.

Meanwhile, the new goal of the group comes to be embedded in the new “common structure of action.”\(^{105}\) Every new goal is immediately expressed in changes in the social organization of the group – something made very apparent in *Battlestar Galactica*, for example, where the command hierarchy has to constantly adapt to the immediate goal to be achieved. This is not only expressed in a new division of labor, one that is directly, transparently, mappable onto the goal. It is even more powerfully suggested in a particular malleability of subjectivities, in which new reconciliations of individual personality traits and needed skills take

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\(^{105}\) Sartre, 374.
place. Thus, for example, *Galactica’s* Kara Thrace’s insubordinate nature sometimes becomes an asset for the fleet in desperate times. Or, the women who used to fish as little girls, as a hobby, find themselves using their skill for the benefit of the group in *The Walking Dead*. These are, of course, the marks of the Sartrean group in fusion – the disappearance of the utopian into the structure of praxis, and the group members’ status as not wholly immanent to the group, nor wholly transcendent to it. Thus, the group’s adventures in the postapocalypse can be seen as a simple illustration of the transition from totality to totalization, or from seriality to the group-in-fusion.

And it is here that our illustration can finally merge once again with history to produce a new result. What becomes clear especially in the post-apocalyptic TV series (*Battlestar Galactica, The Walking Dead, Survivors, Lost*, and others) is that the contradiction between totality and totalization is never resolved; rather, it is staged time and time again, each transition providing the occasion for a new totalization to emerge out of the previous totality, new “old habits” to be neutralized and new individual malleabilities to be explored. This constant oscillation produces an exploration of different modes of organization (and correspondingly different goals) one after the other. *The Walking Dead’s* transition from the farmhouse to the abandoned prison in which the group tries to settle, to joining what at first sight seems like a utopian community. Every time, the solution turns out to be a false one: the farm house turns out to be undefendable; the prison provides shelter, only to once again prove to be somewhat of a prison or a liability to those that occupy it; the utopian community turns out to be based on totalitarian rule, or oppressive
violence.\textsuperscript{106} The same trajectory can be detected in *Galactica* - when different modes of organization suggest themselves as solutions appropriate for some purpose, only to make room later for other ones. *Galactica* explores multiple social imaginaries through these transitions: the different ways of combining democratic power with military hierarchy, religious hegemony and its benefits, ending of course with a certain understanding and cooperation with the post-human, or the Cylons, etc. A final resolution is never suggested: *Battlestar Galactica* ends with the fleets arrival at a safe planet, cutting off the process of establishing a more stable social order. Every possible solution is thus rejected, making all cows grey in the postmodern night.

The constant oscillation between totality and totalization, or the refusal to finally commit to a solution, is of course a postmodern form of closure, or a setting of the problem of closure and its failure as the narrative’s main problem. But, more importantly for our purposes, it launches the narrative into what Eric Cazdyn (engaging in mostly implicit conversation with Bauldrillard and Derrida’s discussions of apocalypse) calls “chronic time.” The temporality of chronic time, according to Cazdyn, is clearest in the medical field:

The new chronic mode in medicine, in which the utopian desire to cure is displaced by the practical need to manage and stabilize, if not preempt the disease altogether (practiced in fields as varied as

\textsuperscript{106} These transitions, of course, can be read as simple allegories of the contradictions each solution seems to embody for the viewer. The exposure of the utopian community to be a totalitarian regime is probably the most hackneyed of these.
oncology, HIV, and psychiatry), is also at work in politics and culture.\textsuperscript{107}

Chronic time thus comes to designate a permanent state of crisis in which the terminal, or the end, is excluded in advance, constituting a “looping of time in which the future is spelled out in advance, granting to the meantime an impossible location that is heading somewhere and nowhere at once.”\textsuperscript{108} It is the last sentence which should by now resonate in our context – for the constant pendulum of totality and totalization in contemporary apocalypse invokes precisely the sense of heading somewhere and nowhere at once (strongly suggested in Lost’s affective register: each part of the journey somehow makes us grow, but in no particular direction). What time and time again presents itself as a group-in-fusion emerging from reified totality turns out to be an exercise in flexible management techniques, one that preempts the possibility of a cure, or the cure’s correlative in the social field, a revolution.

The chronic temporality that governs the form of contemporary post-apocalypse thus finally makes it possible for us to read it as symptomatic of the terminal-yet-ongoing crisis of global capitalism today. It is precisely what Cazdyn names as a wish to reclaim our right to terminality, to an end to capitalism, that makes contemporary post-apocalyptic narratives an elaboration of a fantasy of the end. As Cazdyn argues, the temporality of the chronic is precisely the result of the


\textsuperscript{108} Cazdyn, 4.
logic of the “management” of the contradictions of capitalism – it excludes in advance the death of the system or the terminality of its crisis.\textsuperscript{109} And it is the tension between Sartrean totality and totalization, staged incessantly in the postapocalypse, which has allowed us finally to read its form as symptomatic of current crises.

\textbf{Adorno and The System}

The decisive difference between Adorno and our previous champions of totality – Lukács and Sartre – is that Adorno does not have a systematic theory of totality, even if the term appears everywhere in his writing, sometimes under the names of “the system” or “the whole.” This is particularly true if we bracket Adorno’s discussion of the autonomy of the artwork, in which the dialectical conception of autonomy-through-negation of reality can be seen as a discussion of totality (a subject worth pursuing, to be sure, but that would require a lengthy attempt to come to terms with what this autonomy might mean after the death of modernism).\textsuperscript{110} Furthermore, for both Lukács and Sartre, as we have seen, totality

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 6, 68.
was inseparable from the question of praxis. 111 Adorno’s use of the term, as Gillian Rose notes, is dissociated from the question of political practice – a topic on which Adorno had notoriously little to say. 112 To make matters even worse (which in a sense we have to do, to set the stage for Adorno’s sober tone), Adorno has many times been presented as one of totality’s strongest opponents – and not only by proponents of poststructuralism. Thus, according to Susan Buck-Morss, Adorno maintained that “the very concept of totality was irrevocably lost in the passing of history,” and that the strong Lukácsian identity of historical unfolding with the truth of the system (which we have discussed above) can no longer be maintained.113 Martin Jay follows almost the same line of argumentation, adding to Adorno’s supposed disdain for totality one reservation - that Adorno still held on to a negative concept of totality, remaining always suspicious of any totalizing effort that produced a stable, positive position. This, for Jay, mostly means a critique of any “false totality” or wholism through fragmentarity and an emphasis on “non-identity.”114 According to Jay, “Adorno’s negative dialectics itself must be understood as an untotalized ‘forcefield’ of apparently contradictory statements that both reflect and resist the reality it tries critically to analyze.”115

If Jay points at a certain ambivalence in Adorno’s writing on totality, his reservation nevertheless seems to mystify rather than shed light on the matter (for

115 Ibid., 266.
what could it mean to “both reflect and resist reality”?). And this should come as no surprise, for the specific form of Adorno’s dialectical style – which we will discuss below in terms of intentionality – almost prevents one from being able to summarize his writing into a set of “points” or stances. It is in Fredric Jameson’s *Late Marxism* that we get a diametrically opposed stance, namely that “Adorno is not merely not an enemy or a critic of this copiously stigmatized idea [of totality], but that it comes precisely as a solution to the problem of thinking with and against the concept.”¹¹⁶ We will touch on the adventures of conceptuality in Adorno below. For now, it is important to note that Jameson’s reading of Adorno takes as its starting point a literary-critical mode of reading, one which only later develops into a substantive reading, or into one that looks for truths. Thus, Jameson start by looking at the way totality or the system functions in Adorno’s writing (rather than what Adorno seems to say about it), claiming that the appearance of totality or the system in Adorno’s writing makes contradiction itself visible. In Adorno’s words, “what is differentiated will appear divergent, dissonant, negative… just as long as it measure what is not identical with itself against its own claim for totality.”¹¹⁷ Thus, according to Jameson:

That is the sense in which it can – and must – be affirmed that [Adorno] perpetuates the primacy of system as such: his more powerful philosophical and aesthetic interventions are all implacable

¹¹⁷ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 5-6. The translation for the passage used here is the one provided by Jameson who quotes the passage (Late Marxism, 26). In what follows, when quoting from *Negative Dialectics*, I will use either the Dennis Redmond translation (available online at http://members.efn.org/~dredmond/ndtrans.html), passages translated by Christian Thorne, or Jameson’s translations (the specific choice will be indicated in a footnote). We will avoid quoting from E.B. Ashton’s translation. However, the page numbers cited refer to the equivalent passage Ashton’s translation, since it is still the only translation of *Negative Dialectics* available in print.
monitory reminders – sometimes in well-nigh Weberian or Foucauldian tones - of our imprisonment within system, the forgetfulness or repression of it binds us all the more strongly to it...\footnote{Ibid., 27.}

In short, according to Jameson, the centrality of the system to Adorno’s writing resides in the fact that only through its invocation (in myriad forms), contradiction and difference can become visible, dispelling to a degree the invisibility of the closure of totality. And in this context we should add that what seems to be a slippage between “resisting” totality and making its effects visible is a result of a materialist conviction – namely that thought by itself can never exit the system by simply willing it (and in which the moment of truth of this desire to escape totality is precisely where the utopian impulse resides). And just as the effects of the existing totality cannot be ignored or bracketed simply by an act of will, so are conceptual thinking (and reification in general) ultimately unavoidable under capitalism. As David Sherman puts it; “For Adorno, the bad social totality and an identity driven conceptuality are homologous... just as conceptuality is a necessary aspect of cognition... the social moment is a necessary aspect of cognition and cannot be discarded to get around the bad social totality in the name of particularity.”\footnote{David Sherman, \textit{Sartre and Adorno: The Dialectics of Subjectivity} (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007) 145.}

One more point needs to be made before we discuss Adorno’s approach to identity, which is inextricably bound for him to the function of the system or of totality. The reason we have stressed Jameson’s different initial approach to Adorno
(which Jameson undoubtedly employs in other contexts) is that the initial literary-critical mode of reading enacts precisely the operation that Jameson is describing; for Jameson starts out by looking at the way in which totality operates - what narrative function, as it were, it fulfills - within the overall structure of Adorno's writing, rather than trying to establish its meaning. The whole - in this case, the structure of Adorno's arguments - is brought into view by Jameson in order to understand what the particular term - totality - does in his writing. This is of course completely analogous to the way in which totality itself functions in Adorno's writing, according to Jameson: initially, it makes visible tensions or contradictions between the universal system and the particular.

To the degree that a search for totality's meaning constitutes developing a concept - totality itself - we can see the difference between the previous readings of Adorno and Jameson's as an example for the way in which Adorno thinks identity, or the operation of concepts. From the perspective of a search for a term's meaning in a text, its function in the text's structure becomes unthinkable or transparent. This parallaxical difference between meaning and function is one way of thematizing the blindness of identity, on which Adorno writes that:

[the dialectics] name says to begin with nothing more than that objects do not vanish into their concept, that these end up in contradiction with the received norm of the adaequatio. The contradiction is not what Hegel's absolute idealism unavoidably transfigured it into: no Heraclitean essence. It is the index of the untruth of identity, of the vanishing of the conceptual into the concept.120

120 Adorno, Negative Dialectics, 5 (Redmond translation).
The “vanishing of the conceptual into the concept” is precisely the impossibility of the concept to think its own form, or of content to think its application. Two points need to be emphasized in this context. First, that this unthinkability (or the disappearance of form) has its source for Adorno in the dominance of exchange value over use value. The reign of exchangeability in commodity production (reified of course in the form of money) corresponds to the concept’s making identical of different objects, or rendering them of equal value, according to Adorno.¹²¹ Thus, the regime of identity imposed by the concept has its source in the value-form. This, of course, distinguishes Adorno’s thinking from any attempt to see him as a champion of “otherness” or pure difference as a methodological principle – since the trappings of conceptuality cannot be wished away any more than the value-form can.

Secondly, it is in that common operation of abstraction, of both labor power and of concepts, that the system of exchange (and with it the whole form of Adorno’s “administered society”) comes to inscribe itself in the concept’s form.¹²² It is in this sense that Adorno insists that the “the truth is that all concepts, even philosophical ones, open up onto the non-conceptual, because they are themselves moments of reality, which requires their creation, mostly for purposes of mastering nature.”¹²³ The system, therefore, comes to inscribe itself in its concepts. But this seems to require us to shift the focus of our critique to the system itself – which we could see,

¹²² Jameson, Late Marxism, 28.
¹²³ Adorno, Negative Dialectics, 12 (Redmond translation).
alternately, as either philosophical or socio-economic. The only problem with this solution is that the problem of the concept’s unthinkable residue of the system cannot be solved by turning our conceptual power of analysis on the system itself. For its concept undoubtedly suffers the same fate as any other concept: “The totality is to be opposed by convicting it of the non-identity with itself, which it denies according to its own concept.”124

The result is that the system or totality cannot be approached by critical thought in any direct manner but only through the ways in which it leaves its mark in its particulars. Or, as Susan Buck-Morss puts it, for Adorno, the particular’s “significance lay in its contingency,” or in the rift internal to it separating what identifies it as an examplar of some concept from what is superfluous content – which is of course a result of the system’s operation, or what makes the concept useful in the first place.125 Thus,

The demand that one should be intellectually honest amounts mostly to the sabotage of thought. It means to hold authors accountable, to explicitly portray all the steps which led them to their conclusion, and thus enable every reader to follow the process along and, where possible – for example, in academia – to duplicate it. Not only does this operate according to the liberal fiction of the popular, general communicability of every thought and inhibit its factually appropriate expression, but is also false as a principle of representation [Darstellung]. For the worth of a thought is measured by its distance from the continuity of what is familiar. It is objectively devalued by the diminution of this distance; the more it approaches the previously established norms, the more its antithetical function disappears, and its claim is founded only in the latter, in the apparent relationship to its opposite, not in its isolated existence.126

124 Ibid., 147.
125 Buck-Morss, 76.
To show how a thought emerges from the familiar is thus to suppress its moment of non-identity, or that which constitutes the trace of unthinkable in it. Isolation here is as much a relation to conceptual identity (or “duplication”) as is coherence; its advantage is that, as opposed to coherence, it always somehow invokes conceptual identity by its isolation or opacity, which therefore appears as negation or antithesis. This is not a negation of this or that universal assertion or a pointing at something that is inaccurate about a concept. Rather, it is a negation of the thought’s status as a particular, or as something subsumable. It is through a negation of the implicit division into particulars and universals that the non-identity of the system to itself is revealed: “The world is a systematized horror, but therefore it is to do the world too much honour to think of it entirely as a system; for its unifying principle is division, and it reconciles by asserting unimpaired the irreconcilability of the general and particular.”

The disruption of the division into universals and particulars in Adorno can be thematized in many ways. Of these, Fabio Durão’s discussion of the gap between theory and close reading in his Modernism and Coherence is of particular importance to us. Durão deals here with one of the methodological problems raised from the beginning – the relation between theoretical discussions of totality and the aesthetic objects coupled with them. What we initially designated as resisting relegating the aesthetic object to the status of mere example, and conversely, resisting seeing our “theories” as lists of philosophical claims, is precisely what is at stake here. Durão

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127 Ibid, 113.
128 Fabio Durão, Modernism and Coherence: Four Chapters of a Negative Aesthetic (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2008).
sets the opposition, following Adorno and Benjamin, as that which inheres between
the experience of the object (Adorno's *Erfahrung*, which designates its experience,
or rather the lasting impression of the object on the subject) and method. According
to Durão:

Dialectics would be unthinkable (and impracticable) without *Erfahrung*. From a methodological point of view, it represents the
bracketing of method to allow receptivity regarding the object, which
in its passivity is the very opposite of that search full of intention that
characterizes so much of current academic writing. But if experience
involves something other than pure conceptuality, which Adorno
would simply call mimesis, this does not mean that it is reducible to
intuition and sheer aconceptuality. *Erfahrung* signifies, rather, a
movement in which what escapes the concept becomes itself
conceptualized without being equated to it.129

What emerges here is of course a claim for the “preponderance of the object” (or,
more accurately, of the object’s impact on the subject) in its own interpretation,
insofar as its conceptualization in *Erfahrung* becomes antithetical to a pre-given
concept of it.130 Conceiving of the object as mere exemplification of this or that
theory is in this sense not cultural analysis at all. For it makes the aesthetic object
truly epiphenomenal, a mere distraction from the theoretical “core” at work all
along. *Erfahrung* thus makes possible elevating the particular to the level of
conceptual universality, and particularizing pre-formed concepts whose limits were
before invisible (which alternately means that they are revealed to be the product of
some specific situation).

129 Ibid., 15.

All our discussion of dynamic of universals and particulars thus stands and falls with the transition from a modernist sensibility to a more postmodern one. To the degree that the latter designates suspicion of any universality, it threatens to make our tension between the universal and particular a thing of the past. To show how Adorno’s usage of system in his writing is indispensible today, we will turn to an aesthetic object, the film Zero Dark Thirty. As is well known, the movie tells the story of Osama bin Laden’s capture and execution by the United States, which would make it a good candidate for analysis in terms of its geopolitical imaginary, and its intervention into nationalist sentiment. No doubt, the post-war Hollywood’s collaboration with American national interest, which has of course its institutional roots, is no big secret. Hollywood’s adoption of post-war abstraction as an anti-communist aesthetic (diametrically opposed to Socialist Realism), followed by the science-fiction movies of the 1950s, whose cold-war referent could not be more obvious, are just few examples.131 Yet, Zero Dark Thirty seems not to easily belong in that history – for Hollywood’s alignment with national economic interests had almost never meant an explicit representation of a “national mission,” which Zero attempts. Contemporary movies such as Zero Dark Thirty, Argo, and American Hustle – films that take some national mission as their direct object of representation - thus belong in a different category (one that has to do with trying to reflect an image of America back to itself), whose trajectory we will not be able to trace here.

Rather, our discussion will begin with the film’s peculiar form: the quick movement between different scenes around the globe, coupled with a heavy emphasis on mundane details, the accidents and contingencies that derail the investigation or put it back on track. If there exists in the movie a figure for this form, it is the image that appears at the start of the “Tradecraft” section: that center for monitoring phone calls, with its the multitude of computers, wires, and surveillance equipment, while in the background we hear the constant babble of phone conversations, an outpouring of information to be analyzed. Something like an informational sublime is thus constructed, impossible to be contained in one consciousness. That needle in a haystack feeling, or more accurately, the impossibility of knowing which thread to follow, is repeatedly invoked in the movie. This form is of course compatible with the long montage that essentially makes up the movie – spanning over almost ten years of investigation.

If finding bin-Laden would seem to call for something like a police procedural or a detective story, Zero Dark Thirty diverges from these familiar forms: the movie’s protagonist is unlike the classical detective insofar she is not some grand synthesizer of all the available information, nor could she ever be aware of it all. Her success depends on the actions of other agents acting relatively autonomously from her, on a mode of organization (of both agents and information) which is not under her control, and on the pure chance of following the right thread. This is best captured by the sudden death of the “abu Ahmad” thread – based on some initially unrelated interrogation in Saudi Arabia, brought to the protagonist’s attention by chance. This is followed by the sudden revival of the thread, no less a
matter of luck – based on much older investigative material. If there is a center that coordinates all activities, it is never presented to us; there is no possibility of containing in mind all of the information processed. In other words, seeing the whole is a structural impossibility; any point of view is necessarily partial.

We thus view the mystery unfolding necessarily from a marginal position whose knowledge is always partial, rather than from the point of view of some central consciousness that coordinates and synthesizes all the evidence. Yet, it is only through that partiality and its attention to the details with which it surrounds itself that one particular perspective ends up – by sheer chance – to be on the right track. It is here that the movie constructs its own concept and gains a degree of general truth to it. For the structure at work in solving the mystery is that of a decentered system, in which any perception of the system is necessarily tied to a point of view and its immediacies. This figure of a decentered system is not unlike the one Bruno Latour elaborates in his actor-network theory. For Latour, different “actors” have their own regional view of the system, each with its own idiosyncracies and details that constitute a localized landscape useful for interacting with and assembling into society.¹³² Any unlocalized view of the whole, one that pretends to transcend localized ones by interconnecting them, is for Latour at best a romantic illusion. Thus, in a typical postmodern fashion, any universality is tossed aside as
restrictive.\textsuperscript{133} Latour fully admits that consequences of actions are sometimes felt elsewhere, but insists that these remain out of reach:

A laborer, who labors all day on the floor of a sweatshop, discovers quite quickly that his fate has been settled by invisible agents who are hidden behind the office walls at the other end of the shop…. So it is perfectly true to say that any given interaction seems to overflow, with elements which are already in the situation coming from some other time, some other place, and generated by some other agency… Although there is indeed, in every interaction, a dotted line that leads to some virtual, total, and always pre-existing entity, this is just the track that should not be followed… Yes, interactions are made to exist by other actors, but, no, those sites do not form a context around them.\textsuperscript{134}

Latour, of course, sees actor-network theory as displacing any need to totalize, which Alberto Toscano has shown to be erroneous.\textsuperscript{135} What is important for us, however, is the suggestive affinity between the concept of investigative system constructed in *Zero Dark Thirty* and that of Latour’s actor-network theory. For, occluding the possibility of viewing the whole then permits us to see our protagonist as one of Latour’s actors, whose way of thinking and acting is not damaged in any way by the partiality of her knowledge. The CIA investigative system functions as a centerless assemblage (to use one of Latour’s favorite terms) of these actor-nodes, rather than by logically managing from above their interconnections and relations. *Zero Dark Thirty* thus comes to include something like Latour’s actor-network theory in its thinking of system.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{134} Latour, 166.
But this is just half of the story. We have so far neglected to mention one of *Zero Dark Thirty*’s most striking feature. Namely, that strange blocking of affect expressed most starkly in the sequence of storming bin Laden’s compound. Not only is heroic music or narration wholly absent, but the emphasis on mundane details, on sheer contingency, and the soldiers’ meaningless chatter rob the scenes of being imbued with triumphant tones or the pathos of sacrifice. The killing of bin-Laden is itself rendered a moment like any other in the fast sequence. “Do you realize what I just did? I killed the man on the third level,” a soldier says, referring to killing bin Laden. In response, he is just ordered to help with gathering files and computers in the compound. That the moment of triumph simply slips by like any other is of course related to the representational ban on showing us bin-Laden’s face, which would have granted, at least visually, a moment of affective closure. That the faces of all the other murdered men are shown repeatedly only serves to highlight this ban.

And the same ban holds for the catastrophe with which the movie begins – the attack on the World Trade Center: in the opening moments, the screen stays black while the audio from the attack is played. A structure of some collective trauma is thus suggested, in which both the initial catastrophe and the final murder are unrepresentable or blocked from experience. Yet, here, surprisingly, is precisely where Latour’s decentered system and its self-defining, self-assembling actors is suddenly unmasked as Adorno’s “administered society” and its damaged subjects. For the mundane-ness of and contingency asserted everywhere is itself revealed to produce an iron logic of identity, making all moments of equal value. Both the draining of affect and the off-center agent depend on it, as we have seen.
system without universalities, supposedly infinitely open to its actors’ production of connections or relations, turns out to be just as oppressively universalizing as its opposite - through the universal draining of affect and its representational bans. The subject’s freedom thus becomes its shackles, or “the subject is against the subject,” as Adorno puts it.

Zero Dark Thirty, thus, develops a concept of an open, decentered, system and asserts its negation at the same time. It is this negation that we can now finally identify with the procedure Durão described above, in which the conceptualization which accompanies Erfahrung somehow negates some preconceived conceptual apparatus that is brought to bear on our aesthetic object. And, of course, the transformation of the decentered system into the rigid “administered society” is precisely where totality still inscribes its logic of identity in its concepts: that the freedom of subjects under the decentered system relegates them to be trapped forever in mundane-ness, or that contingency becomes their prison.

**Jameson, or the Persistence of Totality**

Jameson’s writing on totality, which is at its most systematic in the first chapter of *The Political Unconscious*, seems as first to remove most of the difficulties presented by the historical distance of our previous theorists. Yet, Jameson’s preoccupation with Althusser and poststructuralism in that chapter cannot be
excused away as personal idiosyncrasy that we can safely ignore. Rather, as Phillip Wegner argues, the considerable textual space devoted in Jameson’s writing to poststructuralism or what we have come to call “French theory” is very much a marker of its time.\textsuperscript{136} That Jameson’s theoretical preoccupations are ones that many no longer share should not compel us to distinguish ourselves from it simply by proclaiming the arrival of some post-theoretical period, one in which the philosophical problems previously worked through seem like so many useless debates of the “how-many-angels-can-stand-on-a-pinhead?” kind. For, as Jameson argues in \textit{The Political Unconscious}, the theoretical interrogation of the present by texts never disappears altogether. Rather, the problem of the present’s narration (even when history itself seems to have ended or at least become completely relativized) is relegated to an unconscious level of interpretation.\textsuperscript{137} We should therefore use a different opposition through which to think our distance from Jameson’s writing, one which is less vacuous than the theory versus “post-theory” opposition.

The periodizing scheme to be selected, as the argument above already suggests, is not simply a matter of the empirical facts of history. Rather, it is how we decide to think our own present that will make the past productive for us. What matters, then, is the productivity of the periodizing categories for thinking the present, which will then make the justification of our periodization depend not only on the facts, but on what we go on to do with it. We will therefore propose, without

\textsuperscript{136} Phillip Wegner, \textit{Periodizing Jameson} [forthcoming].
\textsuperscript{137} Jameson, \textit{The Political Unconscious}, 53.
any predetermined justification, to see the difference between Jameson’s situation and ours as one of political background, or of the political contexts available for intervention. Crudely, we can say that the 1980s and 90s – during which Jameson wrote the texts discussed here – at least in the United States, designate a period of relative political quietism, of a withdrawal of overt leftist political projects, particularly in comparison to the upheaval of the late 60s and early 70s. Of course, this can be contrasted to our historical moment, in which political unrest has reawakened globally, making urgent much more directly political interventions. This periodizing scheme allows us to bring into the picture Althusser’s context as well. As Perry Anderson has argued, Western Marxism has generally tended to cloister itself within academic walls.\textsuperscript{138} Yet Althusser’s writing in the mid-60s, when \textit{Reading Capital} was first published, was much more of a direct intervention in actual politics than one would suspect reading the text itself. Althusser’s continuous involvement with the French Communist Party – defending it to its external critics, while engaging in internal debates – has thus come to determine many of his theoretical interventions.\textsuperscript{139}

Thus, when Jameson claims that as far as \textit{Reading Capital} is concerned, “‘Hegel’ here is a secret code word for Stalin,” his suggestion is not as preposterous as it might sound.\textsuperscript{140} For it is precisely with the specter of Stalinism that Althusser is wrestling politically at the time of \textit{Reading Capital}’s writing, attempting to find a

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\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{138} Perry Anderson, \textit{Considerations on Western Marxism} (London: NLB, 1976).
    \item \textsuperscript{140} Jameson, \textit{Political Unconscious}, 37.
\end{itemize}
way to “deal with the fact that the Soviet Union could no longer be identified with
the truth of Marxism.”¹⁴¹ What complicates things even more is of course the
settling of scores after May 68, during which Althusser had taken a stand against the
student movement. As texts such as Ranciere's Althusser’s Lesson attest, Althusser's
critique of the student protests (which echoed the Communist Party's) made many
intellectuals take their distance from his work and from Marxism in general (that is,
if they had not done so already after 1956).¹⁴² It is little wonder, then, that by the
time “French theory” finds its way to the United States, it is almost totally de-
marxified. It is of course the becoming-hegemonic of the various strains of non-
anti-Marxist French theoretical writing in the American academy that then provide
us with the background for Jameson’s writing in the 1980s.¹⁴³ This double context –
the non-relation of Jameson’s writing to any ongoing political project, and the
preponderance of French theory – thus comes to imprint its mark on The Political
Unconscious. In the absence of any immediate context of political intervention, then,
the goal Jameson sets himself in the first chapter is to show the continued relevance
of Marxist critique – an act of preservation rather than of direct political
intervention (and this preservation is of course expressed in the title of the book
itself, connoting for Jameson the persistence of historical thinking and ideological

¹⁴¹ Lewis, 160-2.
¹⁴³ For accounts of this rise and some of its problematic aspects, see Edward Said, “Traveling Theory” in
problem-solving, in the form of an unconscious metacommentary, even in the most
anti-historical or anti-ideological writing).  

This act of preservation does not connote some summing up of the Marxist
canon and a rejection of new theoretical languages. Rather, it is done through
showing how the new French theoretical discourses can be fused with Marxist
critique, or more accurately, that they constitute moments within Marxist
interpretation. Indeed, as Jameson himself declares, his aim in the Political
Unconscious is to combine “the methodological imperative implicit in the concept of
totality or totalization, and the quite different attention of a ‘symptomal’ analysis to
discontinuities, rifts, actions at distance, within a merely apparently unified cultural
text.” Terry Eagleton’s critique of Jameson’s effort as “native pragmaticism”
perhaps captures what must have been at the time a rather bold synthesis.
Yet, as Christopher Pawling convincingly argues, Jameson’s bold attempt to “reconcile”
Marxism with, in this case, a Machareyan approach to literary analysis, is not so far
from Lukács’ own approach to literary works and their analysis. In any case, this
revised version of Marxism becomes in Jameson’s hands no longer assimilable to
some Stalinist doctrine, but one that can rather detect a moment of truth in what
seem to be its most hostile interlocutors. What is added by Jameson at the outset is
of course that we should “always historicize:”

144 Jameson, Political Unconscious, 20.
145 Ibid., 57.
147 Christopher Pawling, “The American Lukács? Fredric Jameson and Dialectical Thought,” in Fredric
We would therefore propose the following revised formulation: that history is not a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious. In this single sentence - with its implicit references to Althusser, Lacan, Lyotard, and Derrida - Jameson sums up his proverbial deal with the devil. For the insistence on historicization is not here simply a result of a belief in some God of History. Rather, it is the historical waning of historical consciousness itself (which the postmodernists would just characterize as history’s relativization as a discourse if not its disappearance altogether) that puts history out of our reach, making its mediation through texts a greater necessity than ever before.

It is here that we can start marking our distance from Jameson in a more substantively productive manner. For it is this staging of the present as necessarily textually mediated that provides an occasion for Jameson to focus on interpretation itself as the key to “the collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Neccesity.” In what follows in the first chapter of The Political Unconscious, then, we will be facing two dialectically related totalizing movements (composing the “unity of a single great collective story”, as Jameson calls it): the first diachronic – telling the story of the historical bifurcation of interpretation into so many levels and the mediations between them; while the second will be synchronic – or the ways of relating to one another different types of knowledge that belong to a given

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148 Jameson, Political Unconscious, 35.
149 Ibid., 19.
period.\textsuperscript{150} As William Dowling has argued, Jameson is thus not occupied with elaborating a “concept” of totality but with the staging of totality itself, or what Dowling calls “thinking totality.”\textsuperscript{151} And it is here that Jameson’s reading of Althusser becomes filtered through the specificity of his concerns: the argument that mediation is a localized operation rather than producing a universal homology; that difference relates in Althusser – or that the latter’s insistence on the analytic separation of reality into different levels indicates their \textit{relative} autonomy, or that this autonomy is inextricable from their points of connection or mutual effectivity; that the different temporalities of each level in Althusser can be read through Raymond Williams’ triad of residual-hegemonic-emergent; that the mediation between levels of interpretation is exactly what makes visible Althuserian discontinuities so that “the appearance of formal unification is unmasked as a failure or an ideological mirage,” etc.\textsuperscript{152} Thus, Jameson’s need to criticize his interlocutors immanently – or using their terms as his own - results in the refocusing of the Marxist critical enterprise on the problem of cultural interpretation, or of reading and the literary’s relation to the non-literary.

The staging of totality gains its particularity precisely through the textuality of our consciousness of the present. And it is not only in \textit{The Political Unconscious} that this thinking of totality is present. Other texts by Jameson from the 1980s display the same recentering of the totalizing project around knowledge and

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{152} Jameson, \textit{Political Unconscious}, 56.
interpretation, many times explicitly and not only performatively. Thus, in “History and Class Consciousness as an Unfinished Project,” Jameson defines totality as “a framework in which various kinds of knowledge are positioned, pursued, and evaluated,” thus centering the totalizing project around knowledge, even as he admits that the aspiration to totality “very much presupposes a collective project.” Similarly, in “Cognitive Mapping,” totality is again discussed in terms of relating subjective experiential knowledge to our scientific knowledge of the system. The term “cognitive mapping” is used by Jameson to designate a spatio-aesthetic analog to this process:

Whatever its defects and problems, [the Althusserian] positive conception of ideology as a necessary function in any form of social life has the great merit of stressing the gap between the local positioning of the individual subject and the totality of class structures in which he or she is situated, a gap between phenomenological perception and a reality that transcends all individual thinking or experience; but this ideology, as such, attempts to span or coordinate, to map, by means of conscious and unconscious representations. The conception of cognitive mapping proposed here therefore involves an extrapolation of [Kevin] Lynch’s spatial analysis to the realm of social structure, that is to say, in our historical moment, to the totality of class relations on a global (or should I say multinational) scale.

Even if in “Cognitive Mapping” Jameson uses the League of Black Revolutionary Workers as an example for the spatial challenges to totalization, it is still in terms of the production of (aesthetic) knowledge that totality is discussed, which for Jameson means, first and foremost, a defense of the concept of totality against its postmodern critics. And, if another example is needed, “Third World Literatures in

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153 Jameson, “History and Class Consciousness as an Unfinished Project,” 211.
155 Ibid., 352.
the Era of Multinational Capitalism” can also be seen an exercise in totalization, in which the relation between different types of knowledge is foregrounded. It is the experience of reading (and therefore interpreting) “third world” novels in the United States - traced by Jameson to their enacting of national allegories - which Jameson relates to our scientific knowledge of capitalism’s uneven development. Thus, the problem of interpretation itself takes precedence as the starting point of the totalizing movement, or as forming the immediacy with which totalization begins. Indeed, that totality should be thought of in terms of representation and its possibilities is probably most decisively captured in his statement that “it is ultimately always of the social totality itself that it is a question in representation, and never more so than in the present age of a multinational global corporate network.” In short, the staging of totality in Jameson is geared toward intervening in the debates over representation defined by the rise of theory. That, of course, does not mean that political problems are ignored. Rather, in the opening of *The Political Unconscious* Jameson explicitly states that “the political perspective [is not] some supplementary method, not an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today... but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all

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interpretation.” This means that political problems do not provide the raw material, the immediate categories with which mediation starts, but rather the horizon towards which the discussion dialectically gears itself.

Thus, Jameson’s staging of totality is inextricably bound with the project of preserving Marxist critique in the context of theoretical postmodernism’s rise in the American academy. In this light we can now finally return to our initial crude periodization through which we characterized Jameson’s historical distance from us. Two kinds of differences distinguish our own context from Jameson’s: first, the fading of theory’s dominance in the humanities, or the so-called “post-theoretical” turn. Secondly, as opposed to the leftist political quietism of the 80s (and the neoliberal triumphalism of the 90s), our political landscape seems much more pregnant with seeds of radical change: the wave of global political unrest following the 2008 economic crisis, spanning mass riots in Western Europe, the events of the Arab Spring, mass demonstrations in Brazil, and political unrest in Eastern Europe, to mention just few of the events that define this difference. We can therefore suggest the following methodological thematization of our historical distance from Jameson: that our analyses should address cultural and theoretical problems whose basic raw material – those immediate categories with which we must start – is not wholly defined by the (shrinking) academic debates over theoretical matters, but rather by those emerging political movements or events. In other words, to make these political problems the starting point for Jamesonian analysis, rather than to

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show how academic debates unconsciously reflect political problems. This does not necessarily mean, to be sure, abandoning “the cultural” for “the political” (which turns on the assumption that the two are distinguishable again today). Rather, it is to let the political situations themselves define the representational medium form which we start.

Of course, it is not the case that Jameson has completely shut himself off from this possibility. Representing Capital, for instance, speaks directly to post-2008 politics in arguing that the first volume of Marx’s Capital “is a book about unemployment.”159 His writing on globalization (from the late 90s into the 2000s), as others have argued, takes the emerging political discourse around globalization as its subject matter.160 Thus, Jameson concludes his “Globalization and Political Strategy” essay with a political recommendation:

...any purely economic proposals for resistance must be accompanied by a shift of attention... from the economic to the social. Pre-existing forms of social cohesion, though not enough in themselves, are necessarily the indispensible precondition for any effective and long-lasting political struggle.161

The shift that we have proposed is therefore suggested, at least to a certain degree, in the trajectory of Jameson’s writing itself. Nor does the shift of focus proposed here entail any rejection of Jameson’s writing or a dismissal of the problems on which he focuses. Rather, as we will now see, it entails fusing them with discussions

of the cultural and political productions associated with the sparks of political unrest that define our new political landscape.

It is here that we will finally discuss our final “cultural object,” which will be the cultural production of the Occupy Wall Street movement. In what follows, we will not be suggesting that Occupy Wall Street had been, in its most visible phase, a revolutionary movement. We will, however, use Jameson’s writing to suggest that Occupy’s image of itself, insofar as it is reflected in the cultural products that we will examine, is engaged in the production of nothing less than a new way of historical thinking, or of a new historically totalizing imaginary. The Jamesonian problematic in which our objects will intervene will be that of the waning of historicity, or the decline of historical consciousness which we have already mentioned.162 Now, the concept of historicity – which comes to play a major role in Jameson’s Postmodernism – designates first and foremost an aesthetic strategy: it allows the readers or viewers to imagine the ways in which the present belongs to a historical trajectory – with a past or a future (or both), thereby allowing us to imagine the present as a space of political practice.163 The historical novel, and, later, science

162 We will not be able to discuss the debates around Jameson’s claim to the decline of historical consciousness here. It should be mentioned, however, that Jameson’s arguments for this decline were criticized heavily after the publication of Postmodernism. In addition, very few scholars seem to have explicitly used Jameson’s argument for the decline of historicity, and the rise of pastiche, in any productive way. Phillip Wegner’s Life Between Two Deaths 1989-2001: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009) seems to engage with the problem implicitly, in its discussion of the production of new temporalities. Eric Cazdyn’s conception of “Chronic Time,” which we have discussed above, also seems implicitly to hark back to Jameson’s diagnosis (as well as Cazdyn’s and Imre Szeman’s coauthored After Globalization, in which they see globalization as a discourse that permits no imagination of an “after”). Yet, in all of these, the Jamesonian problematic is not explicitly developed. In a sense, one could see the fact that Jameson’s particular formulation of this problem was not widely picked up productively as a symptom of the historical distanciation for which we are arguing here.

163 Jameson, Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, 285.
fiction, are the two genres that for Jameson are formally geared towards generating historicity. And it is the pastichization of historical “dead styles” in postmodernism that comes to block the production of historicity, according to Jameson.\textsuperscript{164} This is not because we do not represent the past anymore; rather the opposite is the case: the multitude of “historical styles” with which postmodernism presents us – usually drawn from each period’s representation of itself - are dissociated from any attempt to tie those “pasts” (or “futures”) to the present, making any sincere attempt to do so indistinguishable from any other pastiched style. This is not merely a quantitative question. Rather, what is taking place is the transformation of quantity into quality, “forestall[ing] any global vision of the [future] as radically transformed and different system.”\textsuperscript{165}

This very abstract argument becomes more concrete in Jameson’s “Nostalgia for the Present,” included in \textit{Postmodernism}. Jameson contrasts the 1950s Philip K. Dick novel, \textit{Time Out of Joint}, to two 1980s movies which combine the nostalgia film form with elements of punk films and the gothic. Both Dick’s novel and the later films feature a representation of a 1950’s small American town, and both approach its representation through stereotypes and clichés drawn from that period’s representation of itself. In Dick’s novel, however, the stereotypical representation of the 50s town is a part of a ploy: the year is actually 1997, and the simulation of a 50s town is part of what gives the novel its sense of historicity, or its ability to

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 15-20.  
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 285.
defamiliarize the present in the eyes of its 1950s readers in order to reconstitute it as something to be molded:

*Time Out of Joint*, however, offers a very different machine for producing historicity than Sir Walter Scott’s apparatus: what one might in the strong sense call a trope of the future anterior -- the estrangement and renewal as history of our own reading present, the fifties, by way of the apprehension of that present as the past of a specific future. The future itself -- Dick’s 1997 – is not, however, centrally significant as a representation or an anticipation; it is the narrative means to a very different end, namely the brutal transformation of a realistic representation of the present, of Eisenhower America and the 1950s small town, into a memory and a reconstruction. Reification is here indeed built into the novel itself and, as it were, defused and recuperated as a form of praxis: the fifties is a thing, but a thing that we can build, just as the science fiction writer builds his own small-scale model. At that point, then, reification ceases to be a baleful and alienating process, a noxious side-effect of our mode of production, if not, indeed, its fundamental dynamic, and is rather transferred to the side of human energies and human possibilities. (The reappropriation has, of course, a good deal to do with the specificity of Dick’s own themes and ideology -- in particular, the nostalgia about the past and the "petit bourgeois" valorization of small craftsmanship, as well as small business and collecting.)

In contrast, the invocation of the 50s and of the 60s in the later films (*Something Wild* and *Blue Velvet*) constitutes part of their attempt to generate an “allegorical narrative in which the 50s meet the 80s.” Jameson shows how this allegorization, while still formally enacting a drama of good and evil, in fact hints at the present evacuation of these categories of their social content in the movies themselves. Jameson concludes that “these films can be read as dual symptoms: they show a collective unconscious in the process of trying to identify its own present at the

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166 Ibid.
167 Ibid., 290.
same time that they illuminate the failure of this attempt, which seems to reduce itself to the recombination of various stereotypes of the past.” Thus, what in Dick’s novel is a future nostalgia for a substantive present becomes in the later films nostalgia for having a present at all.

What emerges out of Jameson’s discussion is a slightly different understanding of pastiche’s eclipse of historicity. The localized reification of the past in this or that image or style is present in both Dick’s novel and the 80s nostalgia films. The difference is rather in how these reified fifties are used in the overall structure of the works. In Time Out of Joint, they allow for a return to an estranged present - in which the small American town is both an object of desire and a prison in disguise - through the trope of the future anterior. The novel thus stages a historical totalization, or provides a “cognitive mapping” of its present, according to Jameson, even if it is distorted by its own ideology. In the 80s movies, in contrast, these stereotypes are mobilized only to generate the sense that “the fifties” is an age of generational identity or of historicity, gone by the 80s. It is only their failure to totalize historically – a failure that the movies themselves register – that makes “the fifties” they invoke a collection of “dead styles.”

It is here that we can finally address the cultural production coming out of Occupy Wall Street. Now, the three examples we will address cannot be said to be representative of the movement, or not representative of it. To assert this would be to ethically posit a sense of historicity or generational identity on what confronts us

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168 Ibid., 296.
169 Ibid., 287.
initially as an avalanche of images and very short texts – something like the “informational sublime” we mentioned in the section on Adorno - coming out of the virtual presence of Occupy. The determination of what is representative of the movement is therefore left to the reader. Secondly, there is a generic indeterminacy to the examples – be they blog posts or short video clips. That is, except for the mediums’ own restriction (usually, that of length), we cannot identify any genres to which these examples belong or that they try to modify formally. If the mediation of inherited generic form is what plays a major role in Jameson’s analyses, we are here confronted with a situation in which this path is unavailable. Initially, we would propose that the historical modes of generating meaning with which genre charges an aesthetic object (or the sedimentation of content in form, to use Adorno’s formulation) is here replaced by something else. What Jameson calls “the modification of our perception of things to include their ‘tendency,’”\textsuperscript{170} or that reified temporality as if suggested by the things themselves, blocking any imagination of radical newness, is somehow differently mobilized in our examples, as we will see.

At the outset, our examples present us precisely with the complete domination of pastiche over our historical imagination. Our first example illustrates this fact very plainly. This is a 15-minute video clip made in support of Occupy, in which a mixture of footage from various occupy protests is set alongside footage from Civil Rights movement protests, a speech by Kennedy, and an excerpts from Terry Gilliam’s \textit{Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas} (based on Hunter Thompson’s

\textsuperscript{170} Ibid., 284.
The combination of clips is accompanied at times by a voice-over of politicians and media figures, all expressing their dismay with the 2008 crisis and its aftermath, and their support for Occupy. An obvious parallel is thus drawn between the footage from Occupy protests and reified representations of the “countercultural sixties” – produced either in the 60s themselves or later (as in the pathos-filled monologue form *Fear and Loathing*). This substitutability of Occupy images with the “sixties” moments has of course no relation to the social content of the images invoked; the threats to hegemony embodied in the “sixties” are no ominous evil to rally around (for the “sixties” are not the “fifties”). Rather, what is operative here is the temporalities or finalities that the images themselves seem to fully contain: past moments of righteous struggle that must succeed even when they momentarily fail. The nostalgia for the “sixties” evoked by the monologue from *Fear and Loathing* suggests precisely this *petit-mort* of an object of desire already achieved. In short, it is exactly a specific kind of reified finality that the postmodern sensibility charges its objects with, according to Jameson, that is operative here. We therefore seem to be hopelessly lost in pastiche: if the 80s movies Jameson discusses at least mark their own failure to totalize historically, even that consciousness seems to be gone from our objects. We will return to this clip shortly.

For now, we can turn to our second example to demonstrate the same phenomena. This time, our subject matter has to do with a more specifically radical or revolutionary imaginary. The short text titled “On the Night before the Morning, All the Power to the Communes”, was published in a blog named “Distribution of the

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171 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=b1NwLcik2J#>
Insensible” shortly after Occupy Oakland blocked the Oakland port for several hours.\textsuperscript{172} The text consists in a narration of events that took place in and around the blockade, interrupted from time to time by dramatizing gestures with clear nostalgic overtones, in which narrator seems at times to be looking back at a past revolutionary moment rather than at its own present. As soon as the second paragraph we read: “Like any important historical sequence, the story of what has happened in this city during past two weeks is harrowing and inspiring, beautiful and unbearable.” A little further on, it becomes clear that the “nostalgic” content is a socialist one, conjuring images of an industrial proletariat taking massive action:

This was something like a dress rehearsal for mass resource blockades to come: the US proletariat marching en masse across an overpass into the hidden abode [the Oakland port] where production meets distribution, finding its points of entry and exit, using their bodies to block its passageways.

The temporality invoked in this passage is somewhat puzzling: the present is a rehearsal for what is a truly decisive future moment of struggle; yet, the “past” makes its surprising appearance in a reified image – through the invocation of the proletariat (and other terms from the Marxist vocabulary). Thus, the present’s recognizability as a moment of struggle is premised on equating it with a pastiche of an old socialist fantasy of successful revolutionary struggle. We are here of course not claiming that any invocation of the proletariat must be nostalgic or unreal; it is made to be so in this text only because it does not function as an analytic category.

\textsuperscript{172} Nathan Brown, “On the Night before the Morning, All Power to the Communes,” 13 November 2011 <http://distributioninsensible.tumblr.com/post/12778348442/on-the-night-before-the-morning-all-power-to-the>. The full text is also provided in the appendix at the end of the dissertation.
(as in Lenin or Lukacs) or even as as a category of empirical identity. Rather, it only functions to heighten or buttress a familiar image of revolutionary hope. We therefore encounter the same phenomena as in the first example: the operative element in the equation of the present to the “past” wholly depends on the reified image of the past’s already-containing its eventuality. The strange nostalgic tone effected by this temporality returns again in the conclusion of the blog post: “In 2011, in what hasn’t been the land of the free for more than 500 years, this is what remains of beauty.”

Thus, we seem to be hopelessly lost in the land of pastiche. Yet it is here that the formal arrangement of the images - on which the generation of historicity or historical totalization ultimately depends, according to Jameson - becomes important. The equation of images of the present with images of the “past” that always give themselves up as moments of successful, righteous struggle is significant in this respect. Through this equation, Occupy seems to imagine itself to exist in the future: only from the perspective of a future in which revolution had already happened can the present be equated to past moment that by themselves “contain” the promise of revolutionary success. The “success” of the Civil Rights movement, the fantasy of a proletariat taking over the means of production – both are somehow nestled in the present in our examples – assumes a future perspective from which this equivalence can be established.

In other words, the two examples that we have been discussing seem to rely formally on the trope of the future anterior that Jameson identifies in Dick’s Time out of Joint: a future perspective is imagined (unconsciously, in the case of our
examples), from which the present is identified as moments in the past. In our case, the images of the “past” invoked contain, as if in themselves, revolutionary success. The postmodern “modification of our perception of things to include their ‘tendency’” is therefore here a precondition for this imagination of a future anterior.\textsuperscript{173} This is by no means a fully-fledged cognitive mapping or historical totalization, since the representation of the present falls short of making it “a thing that we can build,” as Jameson puts it. Yet, Occupy’s mere projection of itself into a successful future is pregnant with a historically totalizing impulse. This historical totalizing impulse is then translated into a synchronic one in our third and final example – one of the posters produced by Occupy, called “Declaration Flowchart” (Fig.1):\textsuperscript{174}

\textsuperscript{173} Jameson, \textit{Postmodernism}, 283.
\textsuperscript{174} < http://occuprint.org/wiki/uploads/Posters/DeclarationFlowchart.pdf >
A totalizing impulse is of course evident in the formal arrangement of the poster, asserting visually and literally that “all of our grievances are connected.” That it
remains a totalizing impulse rather than an actual staging of totality is betrayed by
the lack of actual explanatory or narrative mechanisms that relates the different
“grievances” – that include both experiential terms and systematic phenomenon – to
each other. The projection of Occupy of itself into the future, after the success of the
struggle, is made present in the poster in two ways: first, by inviting the viewer to
add anything that might be missing into the picture (thereby assuming again the
compatability or connectability of any possible “grievance” with the charted ones).
Secondly, this in only a “declaration flowchart”: not itself a declaration if compared,
say, to the Communist Manifesto, but a blueprint for a future declaration that will
finally unify the experiential and the systematic.

The transition from a totalizing impulse to an actual program for
transformation is, as we have claimed above, still missing here. An actual staging of
totality would of course require the defamiliarization of these “grievances” in a well-
nigh Lukácsian way: to present actual contradictions (say, between sources of
enjoyment and “grievances”) as the result of systematic determinants. Whether
Occupy is transformed into an actual collective project remains to be seen. Yet, as
we have argued, Occupy’s self representation is both symptomatic of the breakdown
of historical consciousness under late capitalism, while simultaneously producing
imaginary attempts to “solve” this problem. If the eclipse of historicity is to be
traced back, according to Jameson, to the becoming cultural of capitalist production
itself, it is a radical transformation of the relations of production towards which Occupy’s totalizing impulse points.175

Occupy’s cultural production thus comes to revive a utopian temporality, one that is asserted through the pastiched images that it invokes and their “built-in” futures. Even if this temporality and its totalizing impulse remain mostly unconscious, preventing Occupy from becoming a revolutionary movement, it still contains a moment of truth: it can be seen as an attempt to break through the blockage of the utopian imagination with which postmodernism and its reifications are associated. If the Jamesonian totalizing movement has previously made it possible to see the difference between the historicity of Dick’s novel and absence in the 80s nostalgia films, it has in this case made it possible for us to chart the opposite tendency in Occupy’s cultural production – an attempt to reactivate reified temporalities to recreate the estrangement effect so necessary for any attempt to imagine otherness.

175 Ibid., 3-4.
CHAPTER 2: THE IDEOLOGIES OF GLOBALIZATION

The subject matter of this chapter is this specific haunting of the academic imagination by globalization. Or, to put it differently, it is globalization as an ideology of scientific inquiry, rather than as a set of phenomena, on which we will focus in what follows. It should be immediately stressed that we are not here reducing the study of globalization to a sort of imaginative fancy or to a pursuit of ephemeral ghosts and illusions; neither the validity of the study of globalization nor the veracity of its conclusions will be on trial here (doing this, among other things, would undermine the third chapter of this dissertation, in which a very specific effect of globalization is closely examined). Rather, looking for the operative ideological kernel of the study of globalization is an attempt to understand the emergence of globalization as a subject of academic interest in the first place. This attempt, as we shall see below, has as its starting point the theoretical accounts of globalization themselves, including their structure, their thematic composition, and the way they perceive their objects of inquiry, from which we will abstract a motivating ideological kernel.

In what follows, then, we will argue that in the attempts to theorize globalization, the term provides the occasion for a search for nothing less than a
universal agent, or what the Marxist tradition calls a Subject of History. That non-Marxist attempts to understand globalization on some objective level constitute such a search might initially seem outrageous considering this search’s political underpinning, for it is merely a description of this new object – the global – that is usually attempted. Yet, we should by now be persuaded, after the Lukács section in the previous chapter, that there is no description without prescription; rather, all isolated description, no matter how trivial or immediately legible, already contains some philosophy of history in the categories it employs. By “Subject of History,” then, we will designate here not an empirical subject constituted by the forces of globalization, but rather a possible subject, one whose positive characteristics cannot be defined in advance. In this sense, the material conditions in which empirical subjects find themselves serve only as the initial conditions for the production of this Subject. Initially, the possibility of this subject can only be posited rather than positively determined. As we have seen in the last chapter, the process of the Subject of History’s formation or its self-representation depends on conjunctural political interventions, and cannot be deduced purely theoretically. Put another way, a theory of the Subject of History that is not part of some collective transformative project must, at the end of the day, fail to imagine that Subject. And it

176 The classical work on the Subject of History is of course Georg Lukács’ History and Class Consciousness, on which we will draw shortly. As we mentioned in the first chapter, discussions of and debates over the possibility and definition of this subject abound, and are still raging today. These include not only the direct attempts to reevaluate Lukács’ work which we have discussed in the previous chapter, but also Althusser’s notion of History without a Subject, Balibar’s negative definition of the Proletariat in The Philosophy of Marx, Jameson’s remarks on the affinities between feminist standpoint theory and Lukács’ work in his “History and Class Consciousness as an Unfinished Project” and Kevin Floyd’s use of Lukács work in the field of queer studies in The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), to mention just a few examples.
is in this sense that the search for a Subject of History in globalization theory, conducted largely unconsciously, must always ultimately fail. Tracing the search itself will nevertheless prove instructive, as we will see.

For Lukács, the uniqueness of the Subject of History is not to be found in that common caricature of the Proletariat – that it designates empirical factory workers. Rather, its particularity resides in the fact that the formation of its consciousness or subjectivity depends on its ability to recognize itself in the objective world that surrounds it. Since that objective world, today, is ever more commodified than that of Lukács, it is in the commodity that the Subject of History needs to recognize itself, which in turn requires an understanding of the system of commodities and their production:

Above all the worker can only become conscious of his existence in society when he becomes aware of himself as a commodity. As we have seen, his immediate existence integrates him as a pure, naked object into the production process. Once this immediacy turns out to be the consequence of a multiplicity of mediations, once it becomes evident how much it presupposes, then the fetishistic forms of the commodity system begin to dissolve: in the commodity the worker recognizes himself and his own relation with capital. Inasmuch as he is incapable in practice of raising himself above the role of object his consciousness is the self-consciousness of the commodity; or in other words it is the self knowledge, the self-revelation of the capitalist society founded upon the production and exchange of commodities.177

The secret of the process of the Subject of History’s formation is therefore the “commodity system” itself, or the system that dominates the objective world. And it is only negatively, or through the process in which the subjects’ recognizes its own negation or objectification - “inasmuch as he is incapable in practice of raising

himself above the role of object” - that this system gradually unfolds itself, or becomes representable or mappable onto the subject’s experience. The figuration of the system is thus a space of antagonism or contradiction, one that constantly foregrounds the produced nature of the subject’s objectification.

The search for a Subject of History will for our purpose designate an attempt to locate a set of conceptual coordinates through which subjective experience can be mapped onto an absent system. The opposition between subject and object (or experience and system) is therefore the starting point of this search, whose narrative success will depend on the ways in which the conceptual coordinates allow for the reintroduction of subjectivity into the world of objects. With the help of the invented conceptual coordinates, the initial gap or schism between subject and object will itself turn into a space of subjective agency, or something produced by the subject. Two things need to be briefly emphasized about this description of the Subject of History’s formation. First, it is of course completely in line with Lukács’ description of the becoming of the Proletariat, or the Subject-Object of history. For, this is simply another way of describing the process by which the latter’s consciousness is de-reified, or in which the commodity’s “fetishistic forms begin to dissolve,” as Lukács puts it in the quote above. Second, recalling our discussion of Lukács in the previous chapter, the discovery or invention of the conceptual coordinates that the search enacts is precisely an attempt to generate a figurative language for this Subject’s ideology. This process has both a negative moment and a positive one. The negative consists in granting visibility to the placelessness of that
subject in the existing ideological system, or to what Žižek calls “the agent who is out of place in any particular position within the existing global order,” which we have discussed in the first chapter. The positive will then constitute a response to that gap or lack by providing what is essentially a figuration of the ultimately unrepresentable system, one which nonetheless allows for it to be somehow grasped or imagined subjectively. Lastly, it will hardly need emphasizing at this point that this search follows a totalizing logic – an initial contradiction will be mediated by the analysis into other levels of phenomena, gradually engulfing the entire social field – an operation made possible by the fact that reification has gradually subsumed all social relations, as Lukács reminds us. We will come back to the totalizing operations of the search for the Subject of History in our discussion of the theoretical accounts of globalization.

Searching for a Subject of History is of course not limited to the unconscious of globalization theory. Even if we ignore for a moment the critiques of the concept elaborated during the 80s and 90s (in other words, at the same time that globalization became a hot academic topic), recent Marxist writing seems to wrestle with the topic as well. Communization Theory’s foreclosing of the possibility of representing revolution or its agent, or the claims of the proponents of Wertkritik that Lukács was simply wrong to surmise that the proletariat is the Subject-Object of History, both attest to the difficulty in imagining a Subject of History, whether we

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agree with their claims or not. That globalization theory is unconsciously wrestling with the same problem is therefore not such a remote possibility.

Yet, in the case of theorizing globalization, the search for a Subject of History is not a conscious one. As we will see, it drives and animates attempts to theorize globalization, without, in most cases, becoming part of their conscious intention. This search makes the invention of new categories in thinking about globalization somewhat equivalent to the attempt to define new coordinates through which this Subject can be defined (an attempt that must end in failure). And it is precisely in the attempt to imagine these coordinates that globalization theory displays a totalizing impulse – an attempt to map the commodity system, in Lukács’ terms – one that, as we will see below, relates the attempts to theorize globalization to the first chapter’s discussion of totality. Finally, demonstrating that globalization theory constitutes a search for a subject of history will produce an unexpected result, one that we can designate unsatisfactorily at this stage as a peculiar non-contemporaneity of globalization theory, or its somehow belonging to a different temporal imagination than the one we currently inhabit. We will return to this point towards the end of the chapter.

We will not be able to address all (or even most) of the academic discussions of globalization. The choice of texts for discussion below will undoubtedly be

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controversial for some readers, if only because the battle over globalization’s
definition has never been settled. Instead, we will address some of the more
influential texts on the topic of globalization - the “canon” of globalization studies
that is itself rapidly changing - to give the argument a degree of general validity. The
discussion will be arranged thematically, where each section will be devoted to a
different theme of globalization. The two themes selected to organize our discussion
will be social polarization and the fate of the nation-state. The opening section will
discuss academic writing about globalization in general, or theoretical accounts that
do not focus on any specific effect or theme, but rather try to present an overarching
concept of globalization. Most writing about globalization is not, of course, limited
to only one theme. It should therefore come as no surprise that certain thinkers of
globalization will appear in more than one section. Of course, there are other
thematic threads that could have been chosen to center our discussion: increased
connectivity, the “stretching” of social relations, cultural homogenization and
differentiation, international travel and immigration, to name a few. However, as in
Foucault’s catalog of categories in the opening to The Order of Things, the discussion
below will demonstrate that the themes chosen or omitted are in no way mutually
exclusive, nor are they neatly exhaustive of the field in any strict logical sense. Rather, they imply one another in a way that makes a discussion of different themes
intersect with one another.

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Before we begin our exploration of theories of globalization, we should stress one last point. Positing that globalization theory can be read as an unconscious search for a Subject of History is not an arbitrary choice, one that solely depends on a whim or on a personal preference, something like a literary-critical approach that attempts to read its own concerns into whatever subject matter is in front of it. Rather, the argument is borne out of a historical approach to the emergence of globalization theory. For the search for a Subject of History implies its prior disappearance, its failure to appear, or, at the very least, the becoming dysfunctional of ideological substitutes for it. In other words, to claim that attempts to theorize globalization constitute an unconscious search for a Subject of History implies a pressing ideological vacuum at work that makes this search necessary in the first place. This ideological vacuum is opened up by what Fredric Jameson has called the decline of historicity, by which he means a decline in our ability to think our present historically.183 As Jameson makes clear in his writing on 1980s nostalgia films, historicity designates an ideological tool, a kind of aesthetic strategy that allows, through the historical mapping it entails, for the present to be constituted as a space of social practice – a claim that Jameson borrows from Lukács’ discussion of the historical novel.184 It is important to emphasize that according to Jameson, the fading of historicity is not an absolute evil in itself, since historicity does not designate a necessary or a sufficient condition for revolution or even resistance. What is at stake for Jameson in the waning of historicity therefore is not the

184 Ibid., 279-284.
disappearance of an aesthetic strategy, but rather the transformations this disappearance entails for imagining collective human agency over its conditions of existence in historicity’s absence.

And it is precisely this loss that leads to an unconscious need to re-imagine a Subject of History, or an agent that can recognize its own objectivization in the world that surrounds it. The claim that globalization theory constitutes a (mostly) unconscious search for that subject is therefore related to the loss traced by Jameson, and through it becomes a historical argument rather than merely a presentist interpretation. That globalization theory rose to prominence in the 1980s is of course no accident; if postmodernism is usually said to begin in the 1970s, the appearance of globalization theory about a decade later makes plausible the argument for seeing as a search for what has been lost. Moreover, as we suggested above, rather than making the actual study of the phenomenon associated with globalization a chase after ideological ghosts, it permits us to see it as an attempt to reinvent collective agency over the present (an attempt, as we will see, in which history itself is displaced onto a spatial imaginary). Lastly, since our argument revolves around the historical significance of the appearance of discussions of globalization, we will not be concerned here with the most recent writing on globalization, but rather with exactly those texts that can arguably be said to represent its concerns. We will also exclude, for the most part, Marxist or Marxist-related attempts to theorize globalization, or the world-system. Not because their contribution to thinking about globalization is marginal – the opposite is the case.
Wallerstein’s world systems theory with its one-but-unequal world, David Harvey’s analysis of the increasing importance of spatial displacement to the ways capitalism attempts to overcome its contradictions, and Hardt and Negri *Empire*, to name just a few, form the theoretical background for many studies of globalization. Yet, in all of them the search for a revolutionary subject is more or less explicit (evident in, for example, Hardt and Negri’s multitude and Wallerstein’s global proletarianization of the world), and therefore requires no interpretive effort to make visible.

**Theorizing the Global Generally**

Despite the enormous number of books whose title contains the term “globalization” or “global,” few writers have ever attempted a description of globalization that does not end up focusing on one particular phenomenon. Instead, they try to construct a concept of globalization that endeavors to capture it in its entirety. In this section, we will address two such attempts: Roland Robertson’s writing on globalization, in which he pioneered the use of the term in the late 80s in

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the social sciences, and Arjun Appadurai’s *Modernity at Large*. The differences between these two approaches to globalization are enormous, as we will see below. Robertson sees globalization mainly in terms of a developing consciousness, while Appadurai approaches it in terms of disjunctures between different strata of phenomenon. Yet, both writers can be said to suggest a set of conceptual coordinates through which globalization should be thought, and into which we will be able to read the search for a global agent or for a Subject of History. That this unconscious search ultimately fails to achieve its purpose in both cases, as we will demonstrate, should not disturb us here, for it is the failure itself, or the conceptual drama that it entails that will produce interesting results.

Robertson approaches globalization mainly in terms of a development of consciousness, or as a growing awareness to otherness around the globe. This developing consciousness is a result of a process of cultural exchange and differentiation that has been going on for some 500 years, but has recently been accelerated. Interestingly, this process is composed of two oppositional movements, in which something common to all cultures results in the articulation of their differences from one another:

The global field as a whole is a sociocultural “system” which has resulted from the compression of – to the point that it increasingly imposes constraints upon, but also differentially empowers – civilizational cultures, national societies, intra- and cross-national

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movements, sub-societies and ethnic groups [...]. As the general process of globalization proceeds there is a concomitant constraint upon such entities to “identify” themselves in relation to the global-human circumstance.¹⁸⁸

Thus, according to Roberson, a more-or-less homogenous, materially grounded, process of cultural exchange and dissemination brings about each culture’s need to distinguish itself within the many contexts it exists (national, ethnic, religious, etc.). This eventually leads to greater, sharper cultural differentiation, which is for Robertson (at least ideally) center-less. Robertson’s analysis of the role of religion in Japan’s growing global influence (a common topic for scholars of globalization in the 90s) exemplifies this process; the resilience of religious infrastructure in Japan, its ability to absorb certain foreign influences, is seen by Robertson as mediating this double movement.¹⁸⁹

As this passage already implies, however, what was initially a material process that made the world contract – through greater mobility and faster modes of exchange – ends up having an effect on consciousness: it is the awareness of different actors to the entire world as a context or a frame of reference for action (as John Tomlinson characterizes Robertson’s work) which constitutes the core of the latest phase of the globalizing process for Robertson. ¹⁹⁰ In other words, a conception of the world plays an increasingly central role in all subjects’ consciousness of their action. And it is also this awareness that finally contains what seems like a threat of infinite differentiation; as agents become more aware of their

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 85-96.
global condition, the process of globalization becomes that of the ways in which the world moved from being merely “in itself” to the problem or the possibility of its being “for itself.” Essentially, Robertson sees in globalization a promise of a peaceful mutual recognition of differences, in which, as Frederick Buell remarks, each group finds its “global calling,” defining its own identity through an increasing awareness of what it is not.

Robertson’s use of Hegelian terms, particularly “in itself” and “for itself,” might seem to make our work here very easy. The Subject of History, so the argument goes, is simply Robertson’s new global subject, a subject that increasingly defines itself through its interactions with the world. To be sure, despite this superficial similarity, Robertson’s conception of the formation of the global subject is far from being identical to the Lukácsian one – in which the proletariat recognizes its own objectification in the production process and the commodities from which it is alienated. But there is a more interesting point to be made here. For any reader of Robertson’s work today must feel at least a tinge of embarrassed incredulity when facing his vision of the emergent global harmony, a certain awareness of some wish-fulfillment at work in the assertion of the necessary and almost spontaneous coming into being of Robertson’s global subjects. Our incredulity should not be taken as evidence against Robertson’s writing; nor should the presence of wish-fulfillment be taken as a fault in itself (it is rather what produces closure in Robertson’s own writing). Yet, it does signal to us that the sudden return of teleology (or, the fact that

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Buell, 300.
the wish-fulfillment fails to remain hidden) for which Robertson argues somehow fails to convince, or fails to break through the incredulity towards so-called “grand narratives” that is one of the cornerstones of postmodernism.

This incredulity toward Robertson’s global subject’s becoming can now be associated with the broader implausibility of a Subject of History in the eyes of contemporary Marxist writing on Lukács, some of which we have discussed in the beginning of the previous chapter. As we have argued, it is the actual non-relation of these discussions to potentially-revolutionary political projects, or to what Žižek terms a political conjunctural intervention, which gives birth to a theoretical uneasiness with the Subject of History. Now, for Lukács, according to Žižek, it is the placelessness of a subject in ideology, the production of its “non-place,” that preconditions the formation of the Subject of History.193 A similar position is articulated in Jameson’s “History and Class Consciousness as an Unfinished Project,” in which feminist standpoint theory is seen as potentially opening a theoretical space for the totalizing process that leads to the “imputed consciousness” of the Subject of History.194 The assertion of future goals through a historical narrative, or a reinvention of teleology, is inextricably bound with this totalizing process, and thus with a miraculous return of historicity.

Therefore, the search for a Subject of History in Robertson is not to be found at the level of his explicit claim for the becoming of the global subject, or of the

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193 Žizek, 169.
growing awareness of difference through the increased global exchange. Rather, it is to be found in the tension between the surprising return of teleology and the fact that there is no subjective agency in its return. According to Robertson, the process of differentiation-through-contact is not one that the global subject itself controls or steers (even if human agency is involved in instances of inter-cultural exchange). Rather, it simply becomes aware of a need to define a preexisting cultural difference that did not previously require articulation. Put in more Lukácsian terms, the subject remains solely the object of global transformation. It is important in this respect that a subject answering its “global calling,” or the world becoming “for itself,” is not, in Robertson, anything that has any specific content (no utopian program is elaborated, nor specific problems that need to be overcome). The decenteredness of the global system for him means precisely that there is no subject position from which becoming a global subject means taking control of the process of differentiation itself (as opposed to simply playing a part in its inevitability and becoming aware of this part). In other words, “when we speak of contemporary globalization we are very much concerned with matters of consciousness,” but this consciousness can never be given determinate content, except that it consists in “shifting definitions of the global circumstance.” This impossibility of capturing globalization in any determinate sense is expressed most vividly in Robertson's insistence, as Buell celebratorily remarks, that every representation of the world is

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195 Robertson, *Globalization*, 154. Again, it is important to distinguish Robertson’s global subject from any Lukácsian notion of the Subject of History. For the latter, the recognition of the condition of reification leads to an attempt to resist and overturn the process which has given birth to reification, rather than to some affirmation of it.

simply part of the process of globalization, rather than an actual capturing of the process itself.\textsuperscript{197}

It is here that description turns into implicit prescription: Robertson’s undialectical immanentization of any representation of the world to the processes of globalization themselves – or that “conceptions of the world system... are themselves important factors in determining the trajectories of this very process” – makes all such representations incommensurable in the absence of any method or principle of evaluating them (and such principle of evaluation is conspicuously absent from Robertson’s writing). Paradoxically, that any representation of the globe is always-already only part of the operations of globalization thus becomes a strong prescription: it bans us from ever being right or wrong in the way we capture or represent the world. Closure is thus thwarted, and with it Robertson’s “for itself” becomes precisely the Lukácsian “in itself” – that barrier to knowledge, or that unknowable that permeates all Bourgeois thinking.\textsuperscript{198} Once all representations of the world are made partial, any imagined agency over the system as a whole is of course made impossible: everyone is an actor in the play of globalization, including the director. No subject position is imagined to have agency over the global system’s processes.\textsuperscript{199} In fact, the center-less process of differentiation, taking place almost spontaneously, can be seen as a thinly disguised metaphor for the operations of capitalism itself – the “differentiation” created by the latter through subsumption

\textsuperscript{197} Buell, 301.
\textsuperscript{198} Lukács, 114-115.
\textsuperscript{199} Robertson, Globalization, 61.
under exchange value, which makes everything comparable to everything else, and which seems to take place completely independently of subjective agency, precisely as in Robertson’s account. In both cases, it is not that human agency is not part of the process (for we all sell our labor and purchase the product of other peoples’ labor), but that the system of exchange itself seems to exist and be transformed independently of our participation in it.

It is thus the contradiction that Robertson implicitly sets up between grand teleological reconciliation and human agency in shaping that teleology that a search for a Subject of History inscribes itself. And it is this contradiction, to be sure, which gives rise to a sense of incredulity towards Robertson’s imagined worldwide convergence toward “global destiny.” It recognizes its own historical necessity before this destiny even being something new to be defined or struggled over in any concrete terms (which, put differently, reveals the utopian nature of Robertson’s imagined reconciliation). In Robertson’s writing on globalization, therefore, a solution becomes its own problem. Or, in other words, the magical global reconciliation, rather than being satisfying, signals for us that there is still something to be achieved.

If Robertson attempts to present globalization as a tendency towards reconciliation, Arjun Appadurai can be said to argue precisely the opposite:

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200 I is this alienation from the determination of this process which is the critical focus of Lukács’ discussion of reification and the consciousness of the proletariat (Lukács, 83-109).

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globalization for him denotes the production of gaps or “disjunctures” between different dimensions of human existence:

The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries). Nor is it susceptible to simple models of push and pull (in terms of migration theory), or surpluses and deficits (as in traditional models of balance of trade), or of producers and consumers (as in most neo-Marxist theories of development)[...]. The complexity of the current global economy has to do with certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics that we have only begun to theorize.201

Appadurai is very far from adopting a celebratory attitude towards these disjunctures or mismatches (a celebration that Appadurai himself sees in ascribing ironic cultural appropriations to the colonized in postcolonial contexts, ones whose more sophisticated instances can be seen in the work of postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, but also in much more recent discussions of cultural globalization).202 Rather, as the opening of Modernity at Large makes very clear, it is a certain sense of deep crisis that necessitates the complete rethinking of the way the world system should be studied. Appadurai names five phenomenal strata between which these disjunctures inhere: the ethnoscape, the mediascape, the technoscape, the financescape and the ideoscape. The suffix “scape” is used by Appadurai to emphasize that each of these does not designate a set of phenomena that are universally true, but rather “a deeply perspectival construct,” viewed from

an always-already specifically situated point of view, which therefore gains meaning only in relation to that position. Thus, Appadurai refuses to give any single determinate content to globalization as a concept beyond the formal contradictoriness between the “scapes” to which it gives birth, since every perspective would offer different contradictions between the different scapes.

Important for us here is that Appadurai’s disjunctures – that “people, machinery, money, images now follow increasingly non-isomorphic paths” – essentially designate an increasing obscurity of the relation between subjects’ experience and the new global systematic determinants of their conditions of existence. Discussing the interactions of individuals and new media, for example, Appadurai claims that “electronic mediation and mass migration... create specific irregularities because both viewers and images are in simultaneous circulation. Neither images nor viewers fit into circuits and audiences that are easily bound within local regional or national spaces.” It is thus any easy sense of boundedness of viewers to specific images which is dissolved (and which signals for us that this past boundedness itself has become visible only at the moment of its dissolution) in globalization; no single meaning can be given to a specific image for a specific viewer because of the irregularities of their encounters. Any stable relation between actual, subjective, encounters with images and systemic reproduction of sociality (be it local or national) is therefore made opaque if not completely untenable in

203 Appadurai, 33.
204 Ibid., 37.
205 Ibid., 4.
Appadurai’s brief examples in the “disjunctures” chapter of *Modernity* for the mismatch between new ideoscapes and new ethnoscapes – or a contradiction between, on the one hand, new encounters between radically different ethnic groups (due to labor migration, for example) and, on the other, new political ideas to which subjects are exposed – can serve as a good examples here. 206

To compensate for this loss, “imagination in the new postelectronic world plays a newly significant role” and becomes “part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people in many societies.” 207 In other words, subjects’ imaginative faculties are increasingly deployed in order to understand their everyday lives when those everydays are no longer made to stably cohere by an existing institutional framework. Ideology’s role in orienting individuals in their material and institutional environment is therefore made flexible and malleable, as the new functions of the imagination “move the glacial force of the habitus into the quickened beat of improvisation for large groups of people.” 208 And it is to emergent collective imaginaries – those formed through the new unsable interactions of traveling subjects and transnational media – that Appadurai looks for new collective projects, new social groupings, and new “communities of sentiment.” 209 Appadurai’s conception of globalization, then, is one that attempts to describe the contemporary dissolution of older communities, mostly regulated by the nation-state, and the

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206 Ibid., 36.
207 Ibid., 5.
208 Ibid., 6.
209 Ibid., 8.
emergence of new communities through creative acts of collective imagination, which wholly depends on individuals’ new experiential world.210

The drama of the collapse of old ideologies and emergent possibilities is reenacted in Appadurai’s discussion of what he terms “the production of locality” in the last chapter of Modernity. Locality – a “structure of feeling” according to Appadurai, invoking Raymond Williams’ definition of culture - is produced through what Appadurai calls neighborhoods, different forms of immediate interactions between agents that share a common underlying language or code, not unlike Bourdieu’s notion of habitus.211 “Neighborhood,” in this chapter, designates not only the concrete spatial neighborhoods of cities, but also “virtual neighborhoods,” thereby charging the term with a more abstract sense of a culturally-reproducing unity. Neighborhoods produce and reproduce the conditions necessary for producing locality (which inherently misrecognizes its own teleological self-preservation), yet they always contain some awareness of an “other,” an outside, alien or inimical to it. Agents that act within neighborhoods thus come to act in a way that reproduces locality by intervening in the context through which neighborhoods are produced. They affect the context in which the neighborhoods exist, but in doing so they also affect other neighborhoods, which are also related to that context.212

210 Ibid., 8-9.
211 Ibid., 178-179.
212 Ibid., 183-185.
Neighborhoods thus come to be the mediating concept between localities and their outside, and they are strongly tied with a stable ethnoscape. According to Appadurai, globalization makes the reproduction of localities and neighborhoods – controlled repressively until recently by state institutions – very challenging, as processes of subject-production become less strongly tied to national territories and imaginaries through the advent of familiar “globalizers,” including new communication technologies, new media outlets, dependence on transnational flows of capital, and the emergence of transnational social movements. The subject thus becomes less productive of its own neighborhood and locality, or the common “structure of feeling” becomes more fragile.213 Thus, for Appadurai, the disjunctural dynamic of globalization consists of the increasing inability to map human agency onto the increasing pertinence of global forces in determining subjects’ actual conditions of existence. And it is here that we can start tracing an implicit search for a Subject of History in Appadurai’s writing. For the failure to relate experience to its determinants is precisely the point at which alienation suddenly reveals itself, or, in the Žižekian reading of Lukács that we have discussed at the end of the first chapter, the point in which the subject realizes its exclusion from ideology. The strength of Appadurai’s disjunctions, then, is that they implicitly pose the challenge of a new totalizing effort, one that would trace the disjointedness of the scapes brought about by globalization.

213 Ibid., 189-191.
And it is precisely a totalizing impulse that can be detected in Appadurai’s writing, time and time again. This totalizing impulse is expressed in what Fredric Jameson sees as characteristic of globalization theory, namely, the tendency to enact a constant slippage from one “sphere” of discussion to another, so that cultural globalization is thought of in economic terms, political globalization is explained through cultural arguments, and so on.214 Appadurai’s analyses display precisely this tendency. For example:

Deterritorialization, in general, is one of the central forces of the modern world because it brings laboring populations into the lower-class sectors and spaces of relatively wealthy societies, while sometimes creating exaggerated and inflated senses of criticism or attachment to politics in the home state. Deterritorialization, whether of Hindus, Sikhs, Palestinians, or Ukrainians, is now at the core of a variety of global fundamentalisms... In the Hindu case, for example, it is clear that the overseas movement of Indians has been exploited by a variety of interests both within and outside India to create a complicated network of finances and religious identifications, by which the problem of cultural reproduction for Hindus abroad has become tied to the politics of Hindu fundamentalism at home. At the same time, deterritorialization creates new markets for film companies, art impresarios, and travel agencies, which thrive on the need of the deterritorialized populations for contact with the homeland. Naturally, these invented homelands, which constitute the mediascapes of deterritorialized groups, can often become sufficiently fantastic and one-sided that they provide the material for new ideoscapes in which ethnic conflicts can begin to erupt.215

Political phenomena are thus explained through reference to deterritorialization (ethnoscape), mediascapes, and ideoscapes. These “slippages,” as Jameson calls them – and which we can see as attempts to mediate between different levels of social phenomenon, much as in the old Marxist base-superstructure problem.

demonstrate the totalizing impulse nascent in Appadurai’s writing. This totalizing impulse is precisely what grounds the implicit search for a Subject of History in Appadurai’s writing. In other words, the disjuncture between the reproduction of neighborhoods and the “mass mediated discourses and practices” of globalization creates the space in which new collective productions of locality takes place, or in which agency is somehow reattained.\footnote{Ibid., 199.} If we use the quote above, for example, understanding that the “invented homelands” of the new mediascapes are the mediated result of “deterritorialization” or labor migration, can constitute a starting point attempting to imagine how to go about resisting labor migration or negating its causes. The possibility of collective agency is thus reasserted on a different level than that of immediacy or the language of the new mediascape. And this is precisely where we can hear the echoes of the systemic mapping of the search for the Subject of History.

However, this totalizing impulse and the search for a Subject of History that it entails do not lead to a rebirth of totality in Appadurai. For it meets an opposing impulse. It is here that we can finally take note of a formal similarity between the phenomenon described by Appadurai (or the objective realities he traces), and the structure of the concept of globalization that he offers us. For, notwithstanding the empirical grounding of his arguments, the disjunctures between the “scapes” that prevent a subject’s imaginary from effectively latching on to her real conditions of existence are formally similar to the impossibility of giving
a determinate content to the concept of globalization, one that would transcend the limitations of any particular standpoint. The disjunctures of the object thus become a disjuncture in the concept. In other words, the disjunctural state that inheres in the inability of imaginaries to match other types of flows (human, commodities, etc.) is mediated to the level of theory itself in Appadurai’s claim that it is impossible to conceptualize globalization through a positive model, except through the negative chaos of disjuncture.

Appadurai reiterates this claim time and time again, claiming that the “new set of global disjunctures is not a simple one-way street” but that rather “there is a deeper change” constituted by the scapes’ “continuously fluid and uncertain interplay.”217 Indeed, speaking about the world “at large,” a metaphor that Appadurai uses several times in the opening essay of Modernity at Large, invokes precisely a sense of chaos, or at least a sense of the inability to perceive fully the sublime complexities of the disjunctural system. This is, of course, a strong anti-totalizing moment in Appadurai’s thinking about globalization. No particular standpoint - even that of the thinker of globalization - ever makes it possible to transcend conjuncturality or situatedness; every pretension to the opposite must fall into the “simple models of push and pull” or “modest modifications of existing neo-Marxist models of uneven development and state formation” that Appadurai rejects.218 One of the most striking examples of the thwarting of the possibility of positively imagining the system is to be found in what Appadurai calls a double

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217 Ibid., 41.
218 Ibid.
fetishism, itself created by the conjunctures. The first is the fetish of production – in which production is represented as localized, invoking the possibility of “local (sometimes even worker) control” (hiding the fact that production is actually transnational). The second fetish is that of the consumer, in which consumers everywhere are represented as agents (while in reality agency lies in production, According to Appadurai). Agency is thus theoretically affirmed and denied both for the (global) consumer and for the (local) producer. The totalizing impulse that seeks to relate representation of subjective agency to systematic determinants is, at the end, thwarted or blocked on the theoretical level in Appadurai’s analysis.

Appadurai’s work on globalization is thus underwritten by an unfolding contradiction. On the one hand, a search for a Subject of History is implicitly asserted in Appadurai’s writing, through the problems posed by the disjunctural situation and the totalizing view needed to make sense of it. On the other, the possibility of finding that subject is blocked in advance by Appadurai’s insistence on the impossibility of conceptualizing globalization universally: standpoint or situatedness become, at the end, a theoretical prison, dooming the totalizing impulse to failure.

\[\text{Ibid., 42.}\]
Social Polarization, or, the Hermeneutic of Flexibility

Appadurai’s crucial observation (crucial, as we have seen, both as a symptom and as a truth about the world) that no subject position under globalization can offer a transcendence of its disjunctural situation will now take center stage for us, in the guise of an argument for the socially polarizing affect of globalization. This argument, for all its variants, transforms Appadurai’s claim by giving it the form of a contradiction, a figuration that will then grant this contradiction explanatory power in relation to many of the phenomena associated with globalization. As we shall see, the social polarization claim becomes overdetermined by many other contradictions, including global versus local, postnationalism versus new nationalisms, and new elites (and their hyper-mobility) versus the new poor (and their coerced displacement across the globe). If, in the case of Robertson and Appadurai, an interpretive effort was needed to uncover a contradiction that, in turn, helped us locate the search for a Subject of History in their work, we are now faced with a different situation: a single “leading” contradiction becomes a figurative space into which other contradictions are inscribed. As we shall see, however, this visible contradiction is not enough to constitute a search for a Subject of History. Rather, the negating element in this contradiction always awaits a second act, a negation of the negation.

The social polarization claim has by now become somewhat of a tradition in studies of globalization. Benjamin Barber’s 1992 article, “Jihad vs. McWorld” (which
was later expanded into a book) could be said to inaugurate this tradition (as long as
we ignore academic writing preceding Barber’s article, which has not yet used the
concept of globalization, such as that of Immanuel Wallerstein).\textsuperscript{220} Other theorists
were quick to follow. In non-chronological order, these include Leslie Sklair’s
assertion concerning the formation of a global capitalist class and a corresponding
formation of a new impoverished class over and against previous national power
structures; Zigmunt Bauman’s argument for the polarization and bifurcation of
human experience under globalization; Ulrich Beck’s claim concerning the
weakening of national hegemony and its replacement with an ever-growing gap
between new corporate power and defenseless workers; and Immanuel
Wallerstein’s argument for the proletarianization of the world.\textsuperscript{221} Of course, these
are only some of the variations in which the social polarization argument appears.
Even before we begin our discussion of specific theorists, it is important to note the
close coupling of arguments about social polarization with those that concern the
fate of the nation-state under globalization. This is not very surprising when we
consider that most of these thinkers have the post Bretton-Woods welfare state as
their shared frame of reference. For the so-called middle class that has developed in
the Western nations since the Second World War is precisely what is being
dissolved by globalization, bifurcating back into a higher and a lower class, at least
according to some of these critics. The argument for globalization’s social

polarization effect is therefore historically specific to these countries, rather than universally true everywhere on the globe.\textsuperscript{222} Even though the nation-state and its fate provide the historical background against which the arguments for social polarization are played out, we will leave the discussion of the role of the nation-states in theorizing globalization for the next section. For now, the importance of the nation state for our discussion consists only in the state providing globalization with a placeholder for what has preceded the condition of growing polarization.

As we have mentioned above, the social antagonism implied by the social polarization argument provides a figurative space onto which other contradictions can be mapped. Thus, for instance, Ulrich Beck tells us that:

\begin{quote}
People\ldots have become more mobile. If they are rich, they prove more adept at exploiting holes in the fiscal nets of the state; if they have sought-after job skills, they deploy them where they stand to gain most; and if they are poor, they set off for places where milk and honey beckon.\textsuperscript{223}
\end{quote}

Even if this observation about the new types of mobility engendered (or heightened) by globalization no longer seems novel to us, it does exemplify the way in which other contradictions are expressed through the social polarization claim. Here, the transnational migration of capital to the sites preferred by its owners is contrasted to labor migration to the sites in which labor-power can still be sold in

\textsuperscript{222} The argument could be made that poorer countries, those that Wallerstein sees as belonging to the periphery of the world system (keeping in mind that for Wallerstein periphery and center are defined according to the share of the global surplus-value appropriated by a specific nation), are in a certain way “ahead” of the western ones – since in them a substantial middle class had never developed, and therefore in these countries the polarized social state already exists. Leslie Sklair differentiates between forms of class polarization, arguing that it takes place in Third World nations too, albeit in different ways (Sklair, 49-52).
\textsuperscript{223} Beck, 5.
order to survive (which by no means designate the same places). Yet, as this contrast already suggests – the different types of mobility contain a pragmatic kernel, to which we will return below. The opposition between types of mobility is of course not the only one that is expressed through the new social binary. Later for example, we learn that:

The thread of social communication between the (globalized) rich and the (localized) poor is threatening to snap, since between the winners from globalization at the top and the losers from globalization at the bottom there are no longer any arenas in which greater equality and justice can be struggled for and enforced.\textsuperscript{224}

Two more types of antagonisms come to determine the social fracture: an ideological one – each group now constituting its own ideological world in the absence of shared institutions and discourses to be fought over – and a new kind of antagonism, where the new poor are “localized” while the new rich are “globalized.” The ideological contradiction returns us again to the historical background mentioned above, that of the deterioration in the power of the nation-state, but this time in terms of ideology. Of course, Beck is not alone in seeing globalization as constituting new ideological antagonisms. Zygmunt Bauman also sees globalization as giving rise to a new ideological antagonism, yet differently conceived:

The Synopticon [a new mode of watching, according to Bauman] is in its nature global; the act of watching unties the watchers from their locality – transports them at least spiritually into cyberspace... Whatever they may be and wherever they may go they may – and they do – link into the exterritorial web which makes the many watch the few... And the few whom the watchers watch are tightly selected... The few that are watched are the celebrities. The may come from the world of politics, of sports, of science or showbusiness, or just be

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid., 97.
celebrated information specialists. Wherever they may come from, though, all displayed celebrities put on display the world of celebrities – a world whose main distinctive feature is precisely the quality of being watched – by many, and in all corners of the globe: of being global in their capacity of being watched. In the Panopticon some selected locals watched other locals . . . In the Synopticon, locals watch the globals . . . Segregated and separated on earth, the locals meet the globals through the regular televised broadcast of heaven. The echoes of the encounter reverberate globally, stifling all local sounds yet reflected by local walls, whose prison-like impenetrable solidity is thereby revealed and reinforced.225

For Bauman, therefore, the ideological antagonism brought about by globalization has to do with a division into the “globals” who are being watched, and the “locals” who watch. Local sounds are no longer heard when the world of the “globals” is the only one on display; the only relation between the two is constituted by the watching itself, which sharply distinguishes watchers from watched. For Bauman, this stands in sharp contradiction to older modes of watching, in which there was some congruence between the world of the watchers and the world watched. It is here, with the dissolution of the “common world” of representation, that both Beck and Bauman can arguably be said to hint at the dissolution of hegemonic ideology, which Jameson has described as a postmodern phenomenon. This dissolution is therefore expressed here in the form of an antagonism through the social polarization claim.226

The new contradiction that has appeared here between the “globalized” and the “localized” is not used by Beck to designate some outside to globalization that resides in locality. Rather, relying on the work of Robertson, “the local should be

225 Bauman, 52-54.
226 Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, 17.
understood as an aspect of the global,” according to Beck. In other words, what seems to defy what we associate with a homogenizing process of globalization (such as new nationalisms or “local identities”) comes into existence through the very processes of globalization. The local is thus always-already somehow marked by globalization. The term “glocal” is used by Beck, Robertson, and others to express this state of affairs. The “localized” poor in the quote from Beck are therefore just as much a phenomenon of globalization as the “globalized” rich, their locality having to do more with the place they occupy in the global system rather than with resistance to globalization.

The global-local opposition thus also comes to figure into the new polarized social field created by globalization. And it is through this opposition that what Appadurai has described as the threat to the reproduction of locality discussed above enters into the imaginative space created by the social polarization claim. For the always-already global character of the local is asserted many times in discussions of globalization through the invocation of new technological networks of communication. These, according to Buell, Giddens, Buell, Tomlinson, Beck, and others will now allow us to see another contradiction emerge, this time between two different networks of communication. On the one hand, the new communication technologies make possible the new quick movements of capital on which the formation of the class of global capitalists depends. On the other hand, these

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227 Beck, 48 (emphasis in original).
technologies allow for new forms of affiliation, the formation of new “communities” that do not depend on geographical proximity, and in many cases constitute a response to the human displacement (or tearing apart of older social groups) created by capitalism.229 Both poles are thus part of globalization, insofar as they depend on what Anthony Giddens calls the stretching of social relations:

Globalization can thus be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. This is a dialectical process because such local happenings may move in an obverse direction from the very distanciated relationships that shape them. Local transformation is as much a part of globalization as the lateral extension of social connection across time and space.230

And it is this intensification of the globality of local events which results in the formation of new global antagonisms, according to Giddens:

The outcome is not necessarily, or even usually, a generalized set of changes acting in uniform direction, but consists in mutually opposed tendencies. The increasing prosperity of an urban area in Singapore might be causally related, via a complex network of global economic ties, to the impoverishment of a neighborhood in Pittsburgh whose local products are uncompetitive in world markets.231

The global-local dichotomy thus enables Giddens to open up a space for thinking new global antagonisms.

We have thus come very far from the simple claim to globalization’s social polarization. The structure of thought which it opens up – that of an antagonism –

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229 Sklair, 43, 112-113; Buell, 309; Tomlinson, 1-3, 24-25, 106-120.
231 Ibid., 64-65.
quickly becomes an imaginative space through which other phenomenon are figured. Ideological oppositions, oppositional ways of using new information technologies, different forms of mobility – all of these find their expression, or come to overdetermine, the initial antagonism. In addition, the totalizing impulse that we have detected in our discussion of Appadurai – present in the tendency to explain phenomena that belong to a certain “scape” or type of phenomenon using those of another type – seem to apply here too, since the social antagonism is overdetermined by oppositions of all types. The antagonistic space that is thus opened up for interrogation might seem very conducive to the assertion that globalization theory is an attempt to search for a Subject of History. As we have mentioned above, the search for, and the construction of, a Subject of History requires precisely this mapping of a space of contradictions, one that tries to relate subjective experience and systemic determinants. (The social mapping that takes place in what we called the postmodern revenge fantasy in the first chapter enacted a very similar mapping of contradictions). To be sure, the contradictions evoked by the social polarization theories all involve relating personal experience to systematic determinants; the new types of travel, the new impoverishment, the new types of global social networks of affiliation – all of these speak on the one hand to the experience of subjects (mobility, poverty, virtual communication), and on the other, to their systemic backgrounds (new global division of labor, new modes of capital accumulation, new communication technologies). In trying to give figuration to globalization as an antagonism of multiple dimensions, social polarization theories can be said to be searching for a Subject of History. The social antagonism
thus seems to inject new life into the old opposition between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (something which becomes explicit, to be sure, in Wallerstein’s claim for a global proletarianization for example), but on a global scale.232

This attempt to map globalization antagonistically is structurally central to the intellectual projects of each of our writers. Beck’s overview of the social polarizing effect of globalization provides the background for his lengthy overview of possible responses to globalization, calling for “not the end of politics but a new beginning.”233 The political responses Beck discusses all try to somehow diffuse the new antagonisms outlined – which for him means the formation of some kind of a global political apparatus in which global citizens can shape the powers of globalization.234 For Giddens, “the consequences of modernity” are to be captured primarily through a double movement: the dissolution of many immediate social relations, and on the other, the greater efficacy of “long-distance” dependencies.235 These “discontinuities” are what charges the opposition between local and global for Giddens, with great importance – for through it the effects of these discontinuities are registered. Giddens’ loose prescriptions towards the end of *The Consequences of Modernity* – for example, a globally coordinated economic system that does not play a role of a “cybernetic governor” – aims precisely at diffusing the new tensions between the new poor and new rich that emerge only when

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232 Wallerstein, 35.
233 Beck, 129.
234 Ibid., 136.
235 Giddens, 4.
considering their global interrelatedness.\textsuperscript{236} The new oppositions that appear in our thinkers' writing are thus crucial to both their descriptions and their prescriptive horizon – speculative as it may or may not be.

Returning to our new overdetermined space of social polarization, it is important to emphasize at this point what was already insinuated when we mentioned the global-local opposition. Namely, that the poles of each antagonism seem very quickly and incessantly to imply one another, or to collapse into each other. The contrast between the travel of the new global capitalist class and that of labor migration, for example, is easily circumvented through invoking the pragmatic nature of both (implied in the first quote from Beck above); the relativity of poverty on a global scale, mentioned by many of the theorists, opens up the way to seeing poverty as relative wealth, and wealth as relative poverty; the new networks of affiliation which are sometimes seen as expressing or enabling resistance to this or that global trend depend for their existence on the global networks established by the globalizers if the first place. This constant indeterminacy – expressed vividly in Bauman's examples for the way in which the same phenomenon is given antagonistic interpretations under the rule of social polarization - is therefore the rule of the antagonism rather than the exception.\textsuperscript{237} Another such opposition, one that we have not discussed in detail here, between cultural homogenization on the

\textsuperscript{236} Ibid., 166-167.
\textsuperscript{237} Bauman, 4.
one hand and cultural differentiation on the other, displays the same tendency.238

The most striking example of the tendency of the opposition’s poles to incessantly collapse into one another is in the opposition’s most abstract articulation, in the global-local pair. For the “glocal” is an attempt to arrest what begins as opposing local forces to global trends, only moments later to be seen instead as being part of the global, and then, finally, as globality’s only possible expression (or, as Beck puts it “the sociology of globalization becomes empirically possible and necessary only as a ‘glocal’ cultural investigation”).239 The local thus cannot be distinguished from the global in any stable way.

It is for this reason – the constant collapse of the dichotomy’s poles into each other - that the search for a Subject of History stalls, or that it seems impossible or irrelevant: “the quest for political responses to the great issues of the future no longer has any subject or any locus,” as Beck puts it, echoing of course Appadurai’s and Robertson’s similar observations, discussed above.240 Despite the unanimous assertions of the newness of globalization and its creation of new types of agency and subjectivity, the remedies to social polarization suggested by the authors are

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238 See Frederick Buell’s summary of these positions (1-12). In this early summary of the positions the tendency to collapse differentiation into homogenization (or vice versa) is already felt – for example, the export of cultural products, which seems to entail a growing cultural homogenization, is seen to itself promote cultural hybridization of forms, or produce a multiplicity of interpretations or usages of the same cultural product. On the other hand, the supposed differentiation is subsumed again under homogenization by indicating the consumerism or commodification that necessary lies behind the new differentiation. We are thus again faced with a collapsed opposition – homogenization implies differentiation and vice versa. For other presentations of the cultural homogenization versus differentiation debate, see John Tomlinson’s Globalization and Culture for the argument for the differentiation of the ideological uses of the same cultural products, and Leslie Sklair’s Globalization: Capitalism and its Alternatives (164-205) for the collapse of the opposition through focusing on the consumerist ideology that underpins differentiation.

239 Beck, 49.

240 Ibid., 8.
disappointingly familiar, prescribing the establishment of global institutions of social control, something like a Bretton-Woods nation-state on a global scale. The most explicit utopian program among these is perhaps Leslie Sklair’s suggestion of “socialist globalization” as an alternative to the capitalist one. Sklair’s “socialist globalization” denotes an establishment of a global representational structure, the basic units of which are small, self-governed cooperatives. The new institutional form will guarantee human rights for all, and will set limits to commodification and consumerism. Yet Sklair too claims that “there can be no specific formula for the transition to socialist globalization,” which again suggests something like a representational ban on the process by which a Subject of History can be found. For, as we have claimed above, the totalizing process is inseparable from this transitional process itself. Thus, even when political projects are suggested as correctives to the polarizing effects of globalization, they fail to produce a new historical agent for that project, precisely because of the instability of the antagonisms at work.

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241 Ibid., 129-163; Most of the regulative solutions offered in the collection Governing Globalization, edited by Held and McGraw, are reminiscent of the mechanisms of social regulation of the welfare state. Another example is Paul Hirst’s, Graham Thompson’s, and Simon Bromley’s taking of the European Union as a relatively successful experiment in regulating globalization, and arguing that global regulation of labor, capital movements and tax structures is possible, and merely depends on the good will of political elites (Globalization in Question (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009) 190-218).

242 Sklair, 322-5. Sklair here tries to bring together elements from contradictory systems: While the cooperatives invoke socialist or anarchist ideas, he still admits controlled capitalism into his “socialist globalization,” and adds to that the defense of human rights – a project whose origins in cold-war anticommunism and whose utilization in support of expanding capital’s global reach is by now obvious (see for example Eyal Weizman’s Least of all Possible Evils (London; New York: Verso, 2011). The contradictoriness of Sklair’s utopian program, however, should not disturb us, for it is a hallmark of all utopian programs. It is rather the familiarity of the solution, its obvious resemblance to the welfare-state capitalism that globalization is asserted to have left behind, which is important for our purposes.

243 Ibid., 325.
It is here that we can recall our discussion of Adorno in the previous chapter, which revolved around the latter's assertion of the general system's immanence to the form of its particular concepts. It is precisely that form's tendency to make the concepts' own conceptuality vanish or become transparent which enabled the reign of exchange value in the realm of thought, incessantly reproducing the commensurability or measurability of objects for Adorno. No concept is free of this tendency, according to Adorno, not even the concepts generated by critique itself – as his discussion of the reification of reification demonstrates. This inevitable fate of the concept does not mean that we should avoid conceptual thinking altogether (an impossibility, according to Adorno), but that the chase after objects' non-congruence with their concepts is a process whose end we cannot posit abstractly. Adorno's insight can now prove useful for us. For the instability of the antagonisms of globalization theory, the tendency of the opposing poles to collapse into each other, is precisely the formal principle through which globalization (or the system) resides in its antagonisms (or the concepts). In other words, it is precisely the poles' collapsibility into one another that makes the theoretical claims that rest on these antagonisms universally applicable in the first place. Only when the poor are only relatively poor, for example, does the concept of poverty become useful for theorizing globalization.

Thus, the search for a Subject of History is strongly suggested by the totalizing, dichotomizing impulse of the social polarization theorists, only to be

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244 See our discussion of Adorno in the first chapter.
repeatedly stalled or thwarted at the point in which each dichotomy collapses. What the failed hunt for an antagonism makes visible is therefore the need for a stable negation, or for a third term, for a negation of the original antagonisms – in other words, a search for something which is neither global nor local. Before addressing the possible third term, one last point should be made about the social polarization arguments and their structure. To rely once more on our discussion of Adorno in the previous chapter, the commitment to anti-reductionism shared by many of the theorists we discussed (a commitment expressed in a popular sport among thinkers of globalization - flinging accusations of reductionism at each other) can now be problematized, or seen as somewhat of a reified gesture. Appadurai’s rejection of any “simple models of push and pull” for globalization and his commitment to the situated (and therefore particular or non-universal) nature of any specific view of globalization can be taken as an example of anti-reductionism here. If by “anti-reductionism” we mean, like Appadurai, the impossibility of reducing globalization to any specific contradiction, we seem to have constructed a perfect alibi for the failure to think a stable dichotomy: assuming that there is no central contradiction to globalization in the first place, it should hardly surprise us that every dichotomy developed will eventually collapse.

It is important at this point to emphasize the crucial difference between the way “situatedness” functions in theorizing globalization and the way it functions in

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245 For examples of the reified anti-reductionist commitment, see Tomlinson 14-5; Pieterse, 14-19, 48-9; Beck, 10-11; Giddens, 69-79.
246 Appadurai, 32.
Lukács’ theorizing of the proletariat, which we have also discussed in the previous chapter. In both cases, the theoretical effort is situated or conjunctural insofar as it always constitutes a response to specific conditions that are external to the theory itself. In the latter case, the theoretical account itself is universalizing, or is always articulated in terms that seem to ignore the external conditions. In the former case, that of globalization theory, it is precisely that universality which is lost or negated through constant appeals to situatedness or anti-reductionism. There is therefore little wonder that the dichotomies of globalization theory must incessantly collapse: this collapse is occasioned by a reified commitment to anti-reductionism. If the third term for which theorists of globalization are (unconsciously) searching is to present us with a stable negation of the unstable oppositions of social polarization, it should reproduce something like a universalizing, “reductionist” impulse that has been excised from it in the first place. As we will now see, what suggests itself as a possible third term is not at all outside the purview of globalization theory. It is rather one of its most heatedly debated objects of inquiry.

The Nation-State and its Global Inadequacies

If there is anything that almost all thinkers of globalization can agree upon, it is a general rejection of the nation-state as a political institution fit to handle globalization, even if this rejection takes many forms. Yet, this is not a simple
rejection: the first thing to be dissolved in any discussion of the nation-state under globalization is the hyphen separating the state (as an institutional framework or power structure) from the nation (usually regarded in terms of ethnicity, common language and culture, and a shared national sentiment). The institutional is thus dissociated from the affective, and they are usually seen as antagonists, so that “state and nation seek to cannibalize each other,” as Appadurai puts it.\(^{247}\) The rise of the new nationalisms in the 90s (particularly in Eastern Europe), and of anti-state nationalist movements in general are often invoked as examples of this dissociation. Yet, as a general framework it remains mostly implicit, evident only in adopting a double critical approach: state power is critiqued at length as oppressive or insufficient, while national sentiment or sense of belonging is summarily dismissed as false consciousness (either a vestige of an age of nationalism or a new ideological effect of globalizing forces), many times it is not discussed at all. State power, or the state as an institutional framework thus comes to take center stage for theories of globalization, as an object to be critiqued, as we will see.

Generally speaking, there seem to be four different approaches to the state power in globalization theory. In the first two positions, globalization is seen as antagonistic to the power of the state, as acting on it from the outside, reducing its autonomy or sovereignty. The first position celebrates this effect (preferring the rule of capitalism’s “invisible hand” to the seemingly restrictive and oppressive state apparatus), while the other bemoans it (calling our attention to the rising inability of

\(^{247}\) Appadurai, 39.
the state to protect its citizens from the same “invisible hand”). The last two positions tend to see the state as complicit in globalization, or to see globalization as acting through state power rather than approaching it from the outside. This position is sometimes aligned with a historical claim - that the spread of the stateform around the globe is a part of the processes of globalization itself.248 The third position celebrates this view of the relation between globalization and the state, while the fourth position warns us against it. Combinations of two or more the four different positions are also possible, of course.

In what follows, we will not try to adjudicate between the different positions. Rather, what we will see is that, in theorizing globalization, the state emerges as a figure for the third term of the unstable dichotomies of the previous section: it is not local, yet not global; it disrupts transnational corporations’ dominance, but is also antagonistic to new networks of social communication; its culture is particularistic (and therefore ill-suited to accepting globalization’s varied influx of foreign cultural products), yet universalizing (and therefore oppressive towards minority concerns or alternative cultures). The state, as we will see, is therefore always somehow inadequate under globalization. And it is this inadequacy that grants it a stable difference in globalization theory, a stable difference that is suggestive as a starting point in globalization theory’s search for a new Subject of History.

The work of Kenichi Ohmae and Amartya Sen can be taken as examples of our first position, which denotes a celebration of the nation-state’s gradual collapse

248 See for example, Pieterse, 10; Jameson, “Globalization as a Philosophical Issue,” 54; Wallerstein, 23-4.
under the external pressures of globalization. Neoliberal capitalism’s ideologues, of course, never had much good to say about state power and the restrictions it imposes on capital, and Ohmae toes the party line. After asserting in his *The End of the Nation State* that nation-states’ autonomy had been disintegrating since the end of the cold war – a claim that cannot be coherently defended from a historical perspective – Ohmae claims that:

> The nation state is increasingly a nostalgic fiction. It makes even less sense today, for example, than it did a few years ago to speak of Italy or Russia or China as a single economic unit. Each is a motley combination of territories with different needs and vastly different abilities to contribute [sic]. For a private sector manager or a public sector official to treat them as if they represented a single economic entity is to operate on the basis of demonstrably false, implausible, and nonexistent averages. This might be a political necessity, but it’s a bald-faced economic lie... An arresting, if often overlooked, fact about today’s borderless economy is that people often have better access to low-cost, high-quality products when they are not produced ‘at home.’[...][the peoples of today’s world], no matter how far-flung geographically or disparate culturally, are all linked to much the same source of global information. The immediacy and completeness of their access may vary, of course, and governments may try to impose restrictions and control. Even if they do, however, the barriers will not last forever. ... Whatever the civilization to which a particular group of people belongs, they now get to hear about the way other people live, the kinds of products they buy, the changing focus of their tastes and preference as consumers, and the style of life they aspire to lead.\(^{249}\)

After the 2008 crisis, Ohmae’s claims about the absolute good that is capitalist globalization have become by now no more than historical curiosities.\(^{250}\) Yet it is not

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\(^{250}\) If any refutations of Ohmae’s positions (and examples of better English) are still needed, see David Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
the claims’ falsity (if not their bordering on the delusional) which interests us here. First, we can detect here the implicit dissociation of states from nations that we have mentioned: state power is restrictive; national sentiment is a “political necessity” or simply an illusion whose sway over the masses is something that corporations use cynically for their benefit, as Ohmae claims\textsuperscript{251}. What is of more importance to us is the fact that for Ohmae neither state nor nation makes any sense when thinking about the promises of globalization. Everyone seems better off without state power: consumers consume more cheaply, investors invest more profitably, and everyone (read: capitalists) can more easily collect information about where and which commodities are needed at any corner of the world. For Ohmae, the only invocation of nationality by this or that corporation is cynical, harping on residual national sentiments of their consumers, since production under globalization is truly global: commodities actually have no home. Since states do nothing except disrupt the smooth operation of capital, they are bound to disappear. Thus, according to Ohmae, there is nothing but irrationality in the nation-state today (indeed, it is not very clear from Ohmae’s discussion whether the state has ever made any sense at all).

And yet, the ideologues of neoliberalism are not the only ones who have no use for the nation state. The theorists that hold the second position – those that point at the negative effects of globalization’s pressure on the state – are in complete agreement on this point. Here belong many of the theorists that we mentioned in the

\textsuperscript{251} Ohmae, 14.
previous section. Beck, Sklair, and Bauman all notice with some degree of alarm the crumbling of the welfare-state institutions and the social protections it has provided.\textsuperscript{252} Thus, according to Beck,

\begin{quote}
The premises of the welfare state and the pension system, of income support, local government and infrastructural policies, the power of organized labor, industry-wide free collective bargaining, state expenditure, the fiscal system and ‘fair taxation’ – all this melts under the withering sun of globalization.\textsuperscript{253}
\end{quote}

Beck, Sklair and Bauman are joined by others in seeing the troubling effects of the decline of the state power under global pressures. Susan Strange, for example, argues that “. . . state power is declining. It is less effective on those basic matters that the market, left to itself, has never been able to provide – security against violence, stable money for trade and investment, a clear system of law . . . and a sufficiency of public goods.”\textsuperscript{254} As we have discussed above, the attack on state power is one of the central features of globalization - it is what prompts the rise of the new antagonistic space that we have discussed in the previous section. It is therefore the positive power of the western welfare state that is very much the object of discussion here, and whose protective effects need to be saved, even if not necessarily through state power.

What is important for our purposes here, however, is not the alarming effects of the crumbling of state social protections. Rather, it is that the state and its institutions in all these accounts have suddenly become inadequate or ill-equipped

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{252} Bauman, 55-58; Beck, 1-10; Sklair, 8.
\textsuperscript{253} Beck, 1.
\end{footnotes}
to handle the challenges posed by globalization, on all fronts. This inadequacy is expressed in many ways, including the impossibility of delinking from an increasingly interwoven global economy (an impossibility which is very suspect in its obviousness to many scholars); the inability or unwillingness of national institutions to guarantee social rights to “illegal” labor immigrants; the incongruence between the strong territorial imaginary of national culture and the new international types of travel that take citizens outside the national territory; the relative inflexibility of national culture when it comes to accommodating cultural practices of new immigrant communities, etc. State power is therefore seen here as a victim of globalization that can only respond inadequately to its challenges, either withdrawing its social defenses (as in the case of privatization or giving up central economic planning in favor of attracting foreign capital) or violently reacting against new social pressures (for example, denying social rights from “illegal” migrant laborers).

Thus, even if Leslie Sklair, for example, would see Ohmae as his ideological rival, they both agree that the state’s responses to the new realities are always in some way excessive or lacking. But here we encounter a curious slippage, for the imagined inadequacy of the state’s responses to globalization leads Sklair and many others to assert that even thinking in terms of state power, in terms of their institutions and their centralization of power, should be rejected (or at least held at

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255 Examples abound, of course. See Appadurai’s discussion of new Hindu fundamentalism (37-8); or Beck’s lament over what he calls the de-nationalizing and re-nationalizing effects of globalization (3-4, 125-130). The impossibility of delinking is asserted ubiquitously: see Held and McGraw, 2-3; Sklair, 1-12; Giddens, 64-6.
a critical distance) in order to understand globalization. A new conceptual framework has to be developed in order to fully address globalization, one that has its own traditions and predecessors. Thus, according to Sklair,

... the world is divided into nominally sovereign states, some with relatively clear and unified national cultures. These states are usually identified as the basic elements of global systems. State-centrism, thus, is the framework for analysing the world in terms of the state-system. Globalization, on the other hand, is the framework for analyzing the world in terms of the global system... [My approach], global systems theory, represents a dialectical synthesis in the attempt to transcend the contradictions of state-centrism that fails to recognize the global, and a globalism that fails to recognize the persistence of states.256

Other theorists make very similar claims, arguing that the state-system should be abandoned or seen as partial in discussing globalization, warning us that even when an anti-state-system conviction is declared, many analyses fall back into a “state-centric” model.257 One common way in which the nation-state as a conceptual locus is rejected in globalization theory is through asserting that globalization works either “below” the nation state or “above” it, a spatial metaphor that strikingly captures the mutual “misrecognition” of the state and globalization.258 The globalization of organized crime could be taken as an example of the former, while the practices of transnational corporations are the classical example of the latter.259

The state, therefore, loses not only its ability to exert proper agency in relation to

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256 Sklair, 5-6.
globalization; its institutional framework also constitutes an inherently skewed way to understand global phenomena.

With Sklair we have already at least partly moved to what unifies our third and fourth positions; namely, that globalization is not simply a force that acts on state power from the outside. Rather, globalization works through the institutions of the state, making the state apparatus complicit in global transformations, sometimes even against the preservation of its own power. This position is shared by many theorists of globalization, who again are of very different political persuasions. Thus, for example, David Held’s attempt to recommend a “non-utopian” (read: anti-utopian) cosmopolitanism as a framework for assessing the merits and faults of current global governance and its theorizations, a position that fits squarely with a reformist approach to globalization rather than a revolutionary one, calling for greater accountability and democratization of all systems and agents of globalization.260 Held and McGraw see national governments as a major actors in “global governance,” or as active in shaping globalizing process, even as they claim that globalization acts mainly “below” or “above” the scale of state power.261 Aiwah Ong’s *Flexible Citizenship* can serve as a counterpoint to Held and McGraw in terms of politics: she sees globalization (in the Chinese context) mostly in terms of the rise of capitalist exploitation and the creation of new impoverished classes, as well as

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giving rise to vicious new forms of population control. Her analysis shows how social forms and corresponding imaginaries are transformed to support these changes, particularly the new Chinese labor migration demanded by capitalism. But she agrees with Held in one respect – that the state is complicit in global transformations, rather than being more or less their passive victim. Ong is of course no longer seeking to defend the welfare-state (particularly since the east Asian context on which her discussion focuses offers different processes of state-formation than the European or American one), but rather show how the particularities of state oppression change with globalization. National ideology or sentiment is for Ong just another stage on which the battle for a new form of power is waged, and it is state power and mode of control which again takes center stage.

Thus, taking up Malaysia as an example, Ong claims that:

> The state seeks diverse links with global capital to ‘maximize and balance benefits for both and for all, even if the contribution towards the partnership may not be equal.’ This strategy makes more flexible the relationship between state and capital, so that enterprises enjoy greater leverage in regulating labor and trade relations, and legal and social forms of control can be negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

Held and Ong can thus be seen as belonging somewhere along the axis separating the third and fourth positions; both admit the complicity of the state power in global transformations.

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263 Ibid., 216.
Taking these figures to be representative of our third and fourth positions, then, Held and McGraw and Ong subscribe (whether implicitly or explicitly) to the notion that globalization’s effects cannot be countered by national means alone, and to the related claim that the state-centric conceptual framework is insufficient in attempting to theorize globalization. For example, what Ong calls “graduated sovereignty” or the differentiation of modes of social control employed by the state under globalization, cannot be understood without reference to extra-national causes.\(^{264}\) The inadequacy of the state power thus emerges here too, along with the relegation of transformation in national ideology to false consciousness (conducive, in Ong’s case) to the purposes of the ruling elites. It is important to note that this inadequacy gains another dimension here, for in both Held’s and Ong’s analyses the state becomes nothing more than a tool or a mechanism (regulating globalization for Held or managing populations for Ong). Of course, this stands in clear opposition to seeing state economic regulation as irrational vestiges, as Ohmae does. It is here that state power’s ill-suitedness in the eyes of globalization acquires its most self-contradictory form: for some, the state’s excesses – providing that we think of lack as a form of excessiveness – reside in the affective core on which its existence depends, which serve no practical purpose. Yet for others, it is precisely in its efficient functioning, in its role as effective social machine, that these excesses reside. We thus relegate the nation-state either to the realm of total subjective irrationality, or to that of utter function.

\(^{264}\) Ibid., 214-220.
The interpretive way out of this dichotomy will be provided for us now through the work of Saskia Sassen, which belongs, again, somewhere along the axis separating our third and fourth positions. In Sassen’s writing we can see a more nuanced attempt to conceptualize the way in which the state and globalization interact. Sassen’s work is notable mostly for her arguments that the decentralization, “placelessness,” and travel that are commonly associated with globalization actually depend on new forms of centralization. Only through the creation of strongly localized nodes of infrastructural concentration, Sassen argues, can the more visible “placeless” phenomenon of globalization come to be. Thus, these new centers, or “global cities” as Sassen comes to call them, are somewhat like the “hidden abode” of globalization’s storefront phenomena – borderless financial transactions, multicultural environments, internet communication, etc. – that all require the centralization implied by the global city.

What interests us, however, is the way in which the processes of globalization, which according to Sassen, like many others, have little consideration for national borders, heavily depend on the institutional frameworks of nation states. According to Sassen, the state (again, as an agglomeration of institutions) used to be what she calls “the articulator” of different institutional scales:

These [global] processes and practices partially destabilize the scale hierarchies that expressed the power relations and political economy of an earlier period. These were – and to a large extent, continue to be – organized in terms of institutional size and territorial scope: from

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the international down to the national, the regional, the urban, and the local, with the national as the articulator of this particular configuration. That is, the crucial practices and institutional arrangements that constituted the system occurred at the national level. Notwithstanding different origins and starting times around the world, the history of the modern state can be read as rendering national just about all crucial features of society: authority, identity, territory, security, law and market.\textsuperscript{266}

The state, therefore, creates “scalar hierarchies” and is in charge of making sure that the activity on each scale matches that of other scales. The global city intervenes exactly in this coherence, according to Sassen, disrupting the harmonious hierarchy of scales created by the State. Local activity in the global city becomes “multi-scalar” or becomes an agent of multiple scales. The new multi-scalar dynamic that is globalization cannot be organized in a hierarchy any longer.\textsuperscript{267} Even institutions that were traditionally conceived as part of national articulation – like central banks – cease to function as articulators, becoming localized agents of the new global scales and networks, a phenomenon which Sassen calls “de-nationalization.”\textsuperscript{268} Thus, it is not that globalization acts on the state from the outside, as it were; rather, it is strongly embedded in the activity of national institutions.

Sassen’s view of the interaction between globalization and the state easily accommodates the threat to the reproduction of locality with which Appadurai is concerned, which we have discussed above. It also leaves plenty of room for the social polarization theorists’ concern with the crumbling of the welfare state. It can

\textsuperscript{267} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{268} Ibid., 36-7.
also account for the purported “irrationality” of the state invoked by the neoliberal ideologues (since it is now the articulator of forces that are no longer articulable into a coherent system), as well as for its inadequacy in responding to globalization. Yet what is important for our purposes is that Sassen’s theoretical account of the state power – almost completely divorced from national sentiment - whether intentionally or not, provides us with an image of dissolution or loss which at least hints at something beyond an assertion of the impossibility of delinking or a loss of autonomy. For, seeing the state as “articulator,” or as a faculty that was able to coordinate activity on different levels, makes conceptually visible two things. First, it makes possible a mapping of subjective activity onto systemic determinants, a cognitive mapping that is completely lost with globalization’s de-articulation of the scalar hierarchy. Secondly, the possibility of articulation, or of the state as what Sassen calls a “power project,” asserts the presence of a collective purpose or intention at work – something that transcends seeing the state merely as an agglomeration of functions for social control.\(^{269}\) If activity on different scales does not spontaneously harmonize into mutually supportive patterns (as globalization amply demonstrates), it inevitably takes a collectively-imaginable goal or object of desire to make them cohere. And it is precisely the state’s existence as a structure of desire (which inevitably makes the nation appear again as intimately related to the apparatus of state power) – one that has to do just as much with state’s material existence, its functions or institutions as it does with nationalist sentiment and national ideology – that has become unavailable to us.

\(^{269}\) Sassen, 13.
To be sure, Sassen registers only peripherally the desire that had at least at some point animated the state as a collective project. But it is only through seeing the state as the locus of collective desire which has been lost that we can explain the repeated characterization in globalization theory of the state as excessive. The irrational, inadequate, mechanistic, nation-state of globalization theory becomes a figure for the sought-after third term, or a negation of the collapsing oppositions that we traced in the previous section. The determinate difference of the state that emerges out of these characterizations of it, particularly from Sassen’s account, which still senses a vestige of desire in it, is that the state functions in globalization theory as a placeholder for what Žižek would call a Lacanian objet petit a:

The paradox of desire is that it posits retroactively its own cause, i.e., the object $a$ is an object that can be perceived only by a gaze ‘distorted’ by desire, an object that does not exist for an ‘objective’ gaze. In other words, the object $a$ is always, by definition, perceived in a distorted way, because outside this distortion, ‘in itself,’ it does not exist, since it is nothing but the embodiment, the materialization of this very distortion, of this surplus of confusion and perturbation introduced by desire into so-called ‘objective reality.’

The inadequacies of state power, the excesses and lacks attributed to it by the different theorists, and the distortions of a nation-centric point of view in the eyes of globalization, can therefore be seen as a form of expression of a lost desire. Or, in other words, it registers negatively the result of dissociating the nation from the state. The “objective” claims to the state’s inadequacies reflect exactly that point of view from which it is impossible to see the desire with which the state, as a

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collective project, was invested. The nation thus makes a surprising appearance in the rejection of state power by globalization theory – it is expressed precisely in state power’s inadequacy. It is with the recognition of loss of desire that we can finally see the source of the “reductionist,” universalizing, centralizing, particularistic – in short, neither global nor local – excesses of this third term. For according to Žižek, the “distorted” desiring view is precisely what enables us to turn a blurry multiplicity into clear and distinct forms, or “reduces” multiplicity into the coordinates of Lacanian fantasy space, into a staging of desire.271 This blurry, undifferentiated multiplicity is of course in our case none other than the constantly collapsing dichotomies of the previous section, in which inheres the attempt and failure to find new coordinates for defining the Subject of History. The state, or more accurately, state power’s inadequacy, thus becomes a placeholder in globalization theory for our third term, or for something that can provide the coordinates of social antagonism with stability, and thus make the search for the Subject of History a successful one.

Globalization theory thus has the search for a Subject of History at its subconscious core, despite some of its theorists’ claim to the opposite. As we have argued, the totalizing impulse that it contains resides precisely in the space between subjective experience and hidden systematic determinants, a fact that relates it to Lukács’ unification of subject and object. It is this space to which globalization theory tries, time and time again, to give conceptual form, whether through

271 Ibid., 14-5. Also, see Zizek’s discussion of national sentiment in terms of an objet petit a in Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993) 201.
Appadurai’s disjunctures, or through the many oppositions of what we have called the social polarization thesis. Yet, as we argued, the search ends up in failure every time, a symptomatic failure that is sometimes presented as its own solution, as we have seen. It is this failure in imagining the coordinates of a new Subject of History which is many times referred to as the great blockage of utopian thinking under globalization, one that prevents the imagining of a radically different future that is surely a necessary condition, even if not a sufficient one, for revolutionary or even reformative transformations.  

If indeed “globalization involves a certain configuration of time – one that cannot imagine an ‘after,’” as Imre Szeman and Eric Cazdyn argue – this is evident in finance capital’s futures trade as much as in images of futurity which are actually only thinly disguised images of the present – then globalization nonetheless imagines the nation state as a placeholder for that futurity in globalization theory.  

And it is at this point that globalization theory’s non-contemporaneity or untimeliness reveals itself. For, it is precisely the persistence of the nation-state as a figure for radical otherness to existing globalization that must be unsatisfactory for us, or that marks globalization theory as belonging to the end of an era, rather than capturing emergent possibilities for social change. The more overt temporality of globalization theory and its always-already collapsing and fragmenting dichotomies is more akin to that of Walter Benjamin’s Jetzt-zeit, a total fragmentation of reality.


and historical continuity, typical of a crisis period. The only distinguishing feature of globalization theory in this respect is that state power is reluctantly recalled to enact a reconciliation to the contradictions of this fragmentary state. And it is the inevitable pastness of the nation-state itself that can now relegate globalization itself to the past. Strangely enough, therefore, globalization is over. Not in the sense that the empirical phenomena it discusses have ceased to exist. Rather, it is that the reign of the sense of the “end of history” it projects has itself ended – something that we have tried to make felt through exploring the role of the nation-state in globalization theory.

Having shown that the state functions as a utopian placeholder in globalization theory does not mean that globalization’s blockage of futurity is to be broken simply by embracing nationalism. Rather, it means that only a collective project centered around some goal or telos – nation-building being a past example of such project – can bring back to life the utopian imagination. A stable process of totalization, or of mapping the contradictions of life under late capitalism, as Žižek reminds us, thus stands or falls with the becoming of a collective object of desire and a collective social project, something that cannot be detected scientifically any more than it arises spontaneously.

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CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE AND THE WORLD

The following chapter is divided into two parts. The first part constitutes an attempt to present a typology of world literature theories, drawing on influential texts on the topic from the last thirty years. The tendency of discussions of world literature towards formalistic definitions of its subject matter will inevitably make our own discussion formalistic, at least at its point of departure. However, as the argument will suggest, the typology itself will provide us with a way out of this formalism. Indeed, the typology’s reductive operation will prove not to be a bad flattening of otherwise complex theoretical accounts; rather, it will enable us to reintroduce content into our formalistic account of world literature in a way that does not relegate the content of specific novels to the role of a space-filler, mere material to serve as a random example for the operation of this or that conceptual apparatus. Instead, the typology will lead us right back to content, or to the realization that content has something to say about its own form and about the conceptual apparatus that we wield to think it (or in Hegel’s words, that content is a form of appearance of form itself, a form of appearance in which form appears

275 Christian Thorne observes that theories of world literature tend to be highly formalistic. See his “The Sea is Not a Place; or, Putting the World Back in World Literature,” Boundary 2 40.2 (2013): 53-79.
More concretely, in the context of world literature, I will argue that the modification in strategies of aesthetic totalization in literary production itself provides us with concepts with which to approach an understanding of world literature. In other words, world literature can be defined as literature that tries to reinvent or modify aesthetic totalization in response to the transformations brought about by globalization.

It is for this purpose that in the second part of this chapter we will explore the relation between aesthetic totality and world literature. This time, however, we will mediate the abstract categories through an object: Israeli literature. We will trace the transformations in strategies of totalization in modern Hebrew literature from the early 1900s until today. This, in turn, will reveal the ways in which Israeli literature provides its own commentary about the disjuncture that totalization always tries imaginatively to overcome: the disjuncture which exists between subjective experience and systematic determinants, to borrow Fredric Jameson’s formulation. As we will see, contemporary Israeli novels work to transform inherited literary modes of totalization in response to globalization and its implications for the novels’ material conditions of production. It is in these late transformations that concrete conceptualizations of world literature emerge, as a result of attempts to give aesthetic figuration to the relation between subjective experience and its systematic determinants, and precisely at the moment in which

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this system has become global. Aesthetic attempts to totalize do not mean explicit representations of the world itself, or a conscious attempt to generate images of the world; rather, as we will see, the attempt to totalize, to mediate living experience and system, necessarily constitutes a mediated attempt to represent the global condition. Choosing Israeli literature for this task does not imply that it is a “privileged” object, one that offers a better perspective on world literature than other literatures. However, like any other object, Israeli literature has its particularities – its specific ideological and material characteristics. It is these peculiarities that will come to define the ways in which world literature is concretely defined.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that not all literature, according to the approach developed here, is world literature. For, even if all literary texts produced today are somehow marked by globalization or by their conditions of production, not all of them try to totalize, or to provide commentary about globalization in mediated form. It is only texts that try to give figurative expression to these conditions that constitute world literature, and, as we will see, they face their task with a varied arsenal of literary forms.
Theoretical Beginnings

If, as we have argued in the previous chapter, globalization theory necessarily includes a totalizing impulse, then so do its variants in the spheres of culture and literature. However, if globalization theory attempts to give us a scientific account of the global system of forces, it seems that taking the same approach to world literature is in danger of missing the literary altogether. Since literary products are not in themselves a material force in any immediate sense (as opposed to economic crises or immigration waves, for example), any attempt to analyze them as such will unavoidably end up reproducing something like a politicized sociology of culture, or a history of the spread of literary forms and themes, a movement which itself depends on the dynamic of extra-literary forces such as capitalism or political structures and oppositions. The totalizing impulse in these accounts of the globalization of literature is therefore external to the literary texts themselves – the systematic structure that it tries to uncover is an economic or a political one, and not a literary one.

The different models for world literature addressed in this chapter – a term taken here to be synonymous with literary globalization or global literature – all contain this extra-literary moment. However, they also contain a second moment, an aesthetic one, which has to do with the aesthetic expression of that new extra-literary dynamic of the first moment. In positing a connection between an extra-literary transformation (usually a one-dimensional development, such as the global spread of a specific political structure, or the availability of new electronic media)
with a set of aesthetic phenomenon, each theory can be said to constitute a scientific
type of world literature: a set of universal, abstract rules that every text of world
literature supposedly follows. This dual-moment structure, as we will now see, is
common to all theories of world literature.

One of the more colossal attempts to concretely “map” something like a
literature of the world can be found in Franco Moretti’s writing about the spread of
the novel as a literary form throughout the world.²⁷⁸ In his short essay, “Conjectures
on World Literature,” Moretti explicitly expounds the theoretical conclusions that
can be drawn from a study of the novel on a planetary scale. According to Moretti, as
the novel travels from its original European context to other contexts – particularly
as a result of colonialism – the form of the novel has to be adapted to radically
different local situations. Not only do “peripheral” writers have to accommodate
new contents, new natural and human landscapes, they also have to find a way to
bring the form of consciousness which the novel can accommodate – the clear
demarcation of a narrative voice – into dialog with local forms of knowledge.²⁷⁹
What quickly becomes evident, according to Moretti, is that the process of welding
local consciousness with the novel form is manifested in disruptions in the narrative
voice, disruptions that register, according to Moretti, the material struggles, the
transformations of social relations, which underpin the travel of the novel as an
aesthetic form in the first place:

For me, it’s more of a triangle: foreign form, local material—and local form. Simplifying somewhat: foreign plot; local characters; and then, local narrative voice: and it’s precisely in this third dimension that these novels seem to be most unstable—most uneasy [...]. Which makes sense: the narrator is the pole of comment, of explanation, of evaluation, and when foreign ‘formal patterns’ (or actual foreign presence, for that matter) make characters behave in strange ways [...], then of course comment becomes uneasy—garrulous, erratic, rudderless.

‘Interferences’, Even-Zohar calls them: powerful literatures making life hard for the others—making structure hard. And Schwarz: ‘a part of the original historical conditions reappears as a sociological form . . . In this sense, forms are the abstract of specific social relationships.’ Yes, and in our case the historical conditions reappear as a sort of ‘crack’ in the form; as a faultline running between story and discourse, world and worldview: the world goes in the strange direction dictated by an outside power; the worldview tries to make sense of it, and is thrown off balance all the time.280

Thus, the systematic inequality between the parts of the global system (a claim that Moretti borrows from Immanuel Wallerstein) is inscribed into each particular hybridization of the novel’s form, in the case of “peripheral” novels.

The dual moment structure of Moretti’s conception of world literature hardly needs emphasizing – the historical struggles of colonialism and imperialism on the one hand, and the formal aesthetic hybridization of the narrative voice on the other hand. Two other results of Moretti’s conception, however, are important for our discussion. First, there is Moretti’s often-debated practice of “distant reading” and, secondly, the anti-nationalist stance that compliments it.281 Comparative Literature scholars, according to Moretti, should not study literary texts directly when working within his conception of world literature. They should rather rely on analyses provided by scholars of various national literatures.282 This is the practice of

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280 Ibid., 65-6.
281 Ibid., 61-2.
282 Ibid., 66.
“distant reading,” which for Moretti establishes an anti-nationalist impulse at the disciplinary center of Comparative Literature. The distance of “distant reading” comes therefore to constitute more than the methodological indirectness of the comparatist’s work; it also signifies a political imperative to “disrupt” national-literary historiographies, particularly their claim to the relative autonomy of their subject matter. We will return to these points below.

If Moretti’s conception of world literature relies heavily on social and economic transformations, David Damrosch’s approach can be said to form an oppositional approach – one in which extra-literary transformations are admitted into the theory, but fade into the background as the aesthetic phenomenon take center stage. Thus, Wallerstein’s claim to the differentiation caused by the unification of the global system – a common point of departure for both Moretti and Damrosch – is seen to produce the emergence of a new global consciousness, itself differentiated according to context, to which corresponds an emergence of a new, global, literature. World literature, for Damrosch, is therefore not a circumscribed, pre-defined group of texts. Rather, it is a mode of reading (which depends on the circulation of texts from one cultural context to another) in which cultural differences and similarities are constantly scrutinized, elaborated and brought into play in a way which does not reduce any one context to another. For,

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283 An anti-nationalist, internationalist, or at least “nation-neutral” impulse is repeatedly asserted in many attempts to theorize world literature, one which sees itself as keeping up with the anti-nationalist tradition of Comparative Literature. We will return to this point later in the discussion.
284 Moretti, “Conjectures,” 60.
according to Moretti, "works of world literature take on a new life as they move into the world at large, and to understand this new life we need to look closely at the ways the work becomes reframed in its translations and in its new cultural contexts." This process leads to the production of new meanings and new ways of seeing – somewhat similar to what other interpretive traditions would call "estrangement" – that is determined by a complex interaction between the text itself, its reader and her cultural context, and the text's translation. Thus, the production of meaning does not belong exclusively to the original cultural context in which it was written. Rather, the travel of literary texts to different contexts "refracts" their meaning-making process (to adopt Damrosch’s terminology) - making it belong no less to its original (national) context than to the receiving culture. This process of refraction makes possible both increased familiarity with difference and a rethinking of the local culture through this difference. In Damrosch’s words:

This refraction, however, is double in nature: works become world literature by being received into the space of a foreign culture, a space defined in many ways by the host culture’s national tradition and the present needs of its own writers. Even a single work of world literature is the locus of negotiation between two different cultures. The receiving culture can use the foreign material in all sorts of ways: as a positive model for the future development of its own tradition; as a negative case of a primitive, or decadent strand that must be avoided or rooted out at home; or more neutrally, as an image of radical otherness against which the home tradition can more clearly be defined. World literature is thus always as much about the host culture's values and needs as it is about the work's source culture; hence it is a double refraction, one that can be described through the figure of the ellipse, with the source and host cultures providing the two foci that

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286 Ibid., 24.
287 Ibid., 4-6, 22-27, 281-283.
generate the elliptical space within which a work lives as world literature, connected to both cultures, circumscribed by neither alone.\textsuperscript{288}

Therefore, as was the case with Moretti, Damrosch’s conception of world literature creates an opposition between the imagined holism of various national literatures and the emergent world literature.\textsuperscript{289} The spatial metaphorization of this nascent political moment - that of distance – also pervades both scholars’ thinking on world literature: for Moretti, as we have seen, it is the practice of distant reading that allows for recognizing patterns common to the global travels of the novel; for Damrosch, the spatial metaphor - the distance that a text traverses in its travels - designates the estrangement effect that drives the cultural-refractive process.

Many other approaches to world literature that take as their starting point the colonial heritage of the world system - such as those of Graham Huggan, Sarah Brouillette, James English, and Pascale Casanova\textsuperscript{290} - can now be seen, for the construction of our typology, as specific superpositions of the Moretti-Damrosch pair. Moretti’s assertion that the so-called “peripheral” novel bears the marks of historical struggles in the disruption of the novel’s form can be paralleled, for instance, to Brouillete’s claim that authors and readers collude in subverting aesthetic constructions of postcolonial situations.\textsuperscript{291} Or it finds echo in Casanova’s

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{288} Ibid., 283.
  \item \textsuperscript{289} Ibid., 5, 281.
  \item \textsuperscript{291} Brouillette, 7, 67.
\end{itemize}
“revolutionaries,” the peripheral authors that subvert the rules of the literary field with which they have to engage, appropriating universality. On the other hand, Huggan’s description of the formation of a Bourdieu-inspired literary field of value around peripheral exoticism, in which the representation of colonial difference is constantly negotiated, assumes in advance something like Damrosch’s claim of the literary “refraction” of cultures. Thus, one side of the opposition seeks at least to detect instances of global dialogue, if not to trace the contours of a common field of meaning that is being created on a global level, while the other is concerned with the disruptions or subversions of the rules of the field. Since either of these poles has to assume its opposite (the creation of a common field of meaning necessitates the subversion of a previous regime; the subversion of the rules has to assume their existence) – we can see them as complementing each other, rather than standing in absolute opposition to one another.

The imagined opposition between the two positions, however, has yielded some bitter debates. For example, the edited volume *Debating World Literature*, which includes contributions by Benedict Anderson, Emily Apter, Moretti, and others, is dominated by a rejection of any approach that focuses on literary and extra-literary struggle as the point of departure for theorizing world literature. In his introductory essay, Christopher Prendergast vehemently attacks Casanova’s...
World Republic of Letters and Moretti's “Conjectures on World Literature” with an array of arguments (often self-contradictory), in which the charge of reductionism – reducing literary meaning to extra-literary struggles – looms large and ominous:

It is not that the national-competitive model is irrelevant; on the contrary, it can be made to do much useful work [...] it is simply that in [Casanova’s] hands it is made to do all the work, accorded such grand explanatory powers that it effectively posited as capable of accounting for everything. But for this claim to stand up it would have to be subjected, Popper-style, to a range of counter-considerations, none of which get a look in. The most predictable objection to the model is that there are variables other than nation and relations other than competition.296

Prendergast does not offer much in the way of a positive conception of world literature, but his critique seems to indicate a weak dialogical image of world literature, in which both moments of struggle and struggle-free literary value coexist independently of one another, in a kind of pluralistic acceptance of interpretation, which changes according to readers’ perspectives.297

Simplifying the different positions we have addressed so far, we can now map the different approaches to world literature using Fredric Jameson’s rendering of the Greimassian rectangle. According to Jameson’s writing on the rectangle in The Political Unconscious, the rectangle offers a spatial metaphor for the work of dialectical thinking.298 The rectangle is defined by two types of opposition: the top horizontal line of the internal square connects two “contraries,” to use Jameson’s

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296 Prendergast, "World Republic of Letters", in: Debating World Literature, 11-12. Prendergast’s fulmination against “reductionism” is reiterated, for example, in Francesca Orsini’s essay in the collection, “India in the Mirror of world Fiction.” (323-325).
297 Ibid., 3, 24.
term. These are two terms that exclude each other in some sense, while being positive concepts in their own right. The diagonal lines in the internal square connect each of the main contraries with its “simple negation,” or a term that receives its significatory power by negating the term with which it is diagonally connected. The following Greimassian rectangle thus plots the typology of world literature theories outlined in the preceding pages:

![Diagram](image)

Figure 2: Mapping World Literature Theories
Several things need to be emphasized about this mapping of the different approaches. The basic opposition or the pair of “contraries,” in the rectangle is the one between a dialogical conception to one that stresses struggle. Each corner of the outer rectangle represents a combination of the two corners of the inner rectangle closest to it (thus, for example, Moretti and Casanova represent a combination of struggle and non-dialogue). Of course, none of the real approaches match completely the ideal type of that specific corner. Moretti and Casanova, for example, cannot be said to reject dialogue altogether. However, it is clear that their theorization of world literature stresses struggle as what produces world literature, or that struggle is dominant as an explanatory mechanism in their conceptions rather than dialog. The non-dialogical moment of Moretti, for example, can be seen not only in his stress on struggle, but also in the negative characterization of the hybridization of the novel as it travels: the construction of narrative voice is disrupted, it acquires a constitutive lack from the point of view of the European novel. From the point of view of a Western reader, therefore, this effect is registered as a disruption of communication. The “pluralist approach” at the top corner of the outer square designates the weak combination of the two approaches, one that does not commit to either pole as a more fundamental moment, and so is hesitant to asserting any meaningful connection between them except a loose, independent coexistence – a pluralism of interpretations, one which can be considered a Hegelian
“bad” variety. What is missing from the diagram is the bottom term, to which we will return shortly.

For now, it is important to show that other approaches to world literature can be mapped onto the rectangle. Rebecca Walkowitz’s discussion of what she calls “Comparison Literature” can serve as a good example here.299 In her account, Comparison Literature includes texts that both express and constitute a reflection on their quick translation and transnational travel. In terms of both form and content, Walkowitz shows that these literary products are written with their travel in mind, which results in emphasizing events and plot over linguistic play and comparative structures over community-specific forms of expression. It is not that cultural specificity, local histories, and politics are effaced in this transformation; rather, they are expressed through the new formal arrangements of the novels and through the events and action being represented.300 Walkowitz thus presents us with a more concrete model for intercultural literary dialogue in world literature, one that tries to come up with creative aesthetic solutions for the problems arising from the novel’s travels. Walkowitz’s account therefore belongs in Damrosch’s corner of the square, even if her account is very different from Damrosch’s, and is even in some respects antagonistic to his.301 We will return to Walkowitz’s writing below.

300 Ibid., 571, 576.
301 For example, Damrosch puts the onus of becoming familiar with different cultures on the reader, turning her into an amateur scholar of literature. Walkowitz, on the other hand, makes the novels themselves solve the problems of translatability, without having them efface otherness.
This mapping is, of course, a reduction. It is the enigma posed by the bottom term, (which Jameson calls the neutral term), whose exploration will enable us to see that the typology constitutes a productive reduction. Now, the neutral term is occupied by everything that is strongly rejected by our theoretical accounts: if the top term designates some combination of the two types of theoretical accounts, the neutral term is necessarily characterized by an impossible combination of non-dialog and non-struggle. And it is the double cancellation of the initial opposition (the one between struggle and dialog, in our case) that the utopian finds its expression in the imaginative space opened by the rectangle for Jameson, as Phillip Wegner shows. This is how Jameson himself puts it, discussing Louis Marin’s *Utopiques*:

…where as the narrative operation of myth undertakes to mediate between the two primary terms of the opposition […] and to produce a complex term that would be their resolution, Utopian narrative is constituted by the union of the twin contradictories of the initial opposition, […] a combination which, virtually a double cancellation of the initial contradiction itself, may be said to effect the latter’s *neutralization* and to produce a new term, the so-called neuter or neutral term.

That none of the positions discussed seems to correspond to this pole should not immediately tell us that our mapping is wrong in some fundamental way. Nor does it immediately imply that the theorists that we have been discussing are fundamentally wrong or pass over an important possibility for theorizing world

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literature (since it is only their writing that made this last option visible in the first place). Rather, we might begin understanding what the neutral term entails, in the context of theorizing world literature, by looking for what is rejected or excluded from counting as world literature in the different conceptions that we have been considering.

These excluded or rejected options appear in many forms – the archaic or retrograde, the degraded, the bad imitation, etc. – but in general they belong to two groups: those that designate a past situation or consciousness, one that is being overcome, and those that designate an ominous new development that should be distinguished from the possibility of real world literature. National literatures are probably the most conspicuous example of the first kind: they are what is being refracted and broken down in Damrosch’s global literary dialog, and they are what Moretti’s whole program of world literature sees as its main antagonist. Prendergast, Huggan and Brouillette also situate the new global literary language or field - whether it is a good or a bad one - in opposition to the various national literary consciousnesses, deemed to be a thing of the past.304 We can even refine this observation: what is particularly antagonistic about national literatures, from the perspective of world literature, is in one way or another their proclaimed autonomy, their attempt to view themselves as constituting whole subjects, whether through the projection of a cultural center in Casanova, or in Moretti’s rejection of national literatures’ claim to some smooth, wholly internal developments in their respective contexts, or their insufficiency to explain the terms of global dialog for Prendergast,

304 Brouillette, 177; Prendergast, 14.
to mention some examples. In short, we can say that it is the totalizing impulse of national literatures that somehow makes them unsavory to theoretical accounts of world literature. It is no surprise, therefore, that the formation of a “good” world-literary field is by definition non-totalizing, except on a very thin formal level: the universal disruption of narrative voice in Moretti, the appropriation-for-different-ends of literary rules and conventions by Casanova’s literary revolutionaries, Brouillette’s authors of exoticism, or the complete subjectivization of any conception of the literary world in Damrosch – all are anti-totalizing “first principles” of the emerging world literary system.

This is, however, only half of the story. The breaking down of old holisms is complemented by the second kind of rejection that we have mentioned: the “bad” kind of world literature. For some, like Huggan, this is the only kind that exists – the representation of postcolonial otherness always ends up in the commodification of postcolonial exoticism, the transformation of once-antagonistic representational strategies into a new rational of literary value to be consumed and celebrated. If for Huggan the new aesthetic code marks the transition from an antagonistic politics to its neutralization by the global capitalist market, for Damrosch it is this commodification’s expression in what he calls “airport literature” – a mere imitation of engagement with otherness for commercial purposes – that constitutes a degraded form of world literature, a mere imitation of true defamiliarization.

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305 Prendergast, 2-3; Casanova, 39; Moretti, 59-61.  
306 Huggan, x, 6-15.  
307 Damrosch, 18.
through the encounter with otherness. Finally, Moretti’s version of a degraded world literature is to be found in an inversion of what he calls “Jameson’s law” – viewing peripheral novels as degraded or failed imitations of the Western novel.

If the rejection of national literatures is rooted in a temporal claim, namely, the relegation of national cultural autonomy to the past, then the second type of rejection points at either the present or the near future: pointing out – either in reality or as an theoretical error – possible sinister developments of the emerging system (such as the spread of commodification) or viewing it as strongly centered around Western nations. It is important to emphasize here how these alternatives fit into the Greimassian rectangle: for both Damrosch and Huggan, for example, commodification excludes dialog or a negotiation of otherness (“non-dialog” in our rectangle), and at the same time it neutralizes political antagonism or struggle (“non-struggle” in our rectangle). The commodification of a literary language of otherness, therefore, is both non-dialogic and non- (or anti-) struggle – in accordance with the defining characteristics of the bottom corner of the outer square.

We therefore have several examples for the theoretical possibilities included in the neutral term: national literatures, commodification of the aesthetic of otherness, or centralization around the cultural powerhouses of the West or global North. It is here that our particular reductionism starts paying off, for all three of

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308 Damrosch, 283.
309 Moretti, 58-61.
310 Damrosch, 25.
these options have something in common: they all offer us simple allegories of totality, whether the complex totality of national autonomy or identity, or the grand unifying logics of commodification (everything turns into a commodity),\textsuperscript{311} or of a global cultural center which makes particular aesthetic norms into the universal norms of a larger field of literary value. Now, the breaking up of previous totalizing imaginaries – such as that of the nation – are not essentially problematic, since the creation of a new totalizing project always depends on such destructive moments (which, as mentioned in the first chapter, Sartre constantly reminds us). Relegating the nation to the dust-bin of history could have signified the emergence of a new type of historical consciousness. What should give us pause, however—at least if we consider the two other examples that we have for the bottom term in the rectangle—is the undialectical throwing out of the baby with the water: not only a particular, historically determinate totalizing imaginary is rejected here, but totalization itself seems to be antagonistic to world literature.

\textsuperscript{311} We will not be able to discuss here in detail the particular ways in which increased commodification – the becoming-commodity of ever growing areas of life – is itself totalizing. Theorists of world literature themselves seem to have only a vague idea of the concrete effects of commodification, usually summed up as a neutralization of struggle or of “real” dialogue. It is of course in the writing of Adorno on popular culture to which we can turn for an account of the ways in which commodification of culture makes cultural objects’ form match the conditions of its production and consumption under capitalism in general (see, for example, his essay “On Popular Music,” \textit{Studies in Philosophy and Social Science}, 9 (1941)), which then allows us to see the logic of the commodity as making different areas life match each other – and in this “matching” a totalizing impulse is now obvious. As for the effects of commodification on the internal characteristics of aesthetic objects, we can briefly say that the collapse of the distinction between high and mass culture (or, the demise of modernism) in postmodernity poses a challenge to the totality which constitutes the work of art itself (or its autonomy), as described in a recent essay by Nicholas Brown (“Close Reading and the Market,” \textit{in Literary Materialisms}, ed. Emilio Sauri and Mathias Nilges (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) 144-165). Seeing commodification as totalizing, therefore, has to do more with the effects of commodification on the circulation of cultural commodities and their form – Adorno’s argument – rather than with the aesthetic effects of the commodification.
At this point, one possible objection should be confronted. Namely, that we have somehow constructed a paradox. For at least some of the theories that we have been considering seem to be strongly totalizing, rather than rejecting totality. Damrosch’s refraction of national literatures, Moretti’s world literary system, disruptions of narrative voice, and appropriation of local content, Huggan’s commodification of exoticism – all of these seem to be assertions of very strong “essences” though which seemingly disparate phenomenon are connected or understood together (to use a certain caricature of totality). Can such strong centralizing logics be considered to constitute rejections of totalization? It is here that we can remind ourselves of the initial dualism in theories of world literature that we briefly mentioned above, namely, the bifurcation of the conceptual effort into two moments: a literary or aesthetic one, and an extra-literary one. We can now see how this dualism enables the seemingly self-contradictory combination of a totalizing effort (on the extra-aesthetic level) with a rejection of totalization (on the aesthetic level). Moretti’s powerful intervention provides a perfect example for this dynamic: on the one hand, a strongly totalizing extra-literary force is asserted (the “one but unequal” system borrowed from Wallerstein). On the other hand, the novels themselves lose the totalizing imaginary that they were thought to exhibit in relation to their respective national audiences. If anything, the disruption of narrative voice can only count as a disruption of totalization, rather than a productive source for the emergence of new totalizing aesthetic strategies, from the point of view of Moretti’s analysis.
We can now add to our typology several other discussions of world literature, ones that do not necessarily constitute attempts to provide a new theory of it. Prominent among these are reflections on literary studies in general and their relation to globalization, in particular on the disciplinary identity of comparative literature. Many of the commentaries and critiques generated on the topic seem to be centered around a growing dissatisfaction with postcolonial studies and the (related but not identical) growing reliance on “theory” in literary studies in the last decades of the 1900s and early 2000s. This position is shared by many prominent scholars in the field, such as Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said, Rey Chow, Masao Miyoshi, Frederic Jameson, and Imre Szeman. In Spivak’s *Death of a Discipline* and in other interventions, Spivak argues that the turn to theory – intimately connected with the rise of postcolonial studies – has served in the long run to create new means to avoid real engagement with otherness. The Eurocentrism and Orientalism which were supposed to be overcome through postcolonial studies have reinscribed themselves into literary-critical writing through the new tools forged by the discipline.312 In 2001, essays from issues of *PMLA* and *South Atlantic Quarterly* devoted to the topic, Edward Said, Rey Chow, and Imre Szeman and Susie O’Brien seem to advance a very similar position: the turn to theory and the rise of postcolonial studies as a discipline no longer provide a point of view from which effective political critique can be waged.313 While the precise framing of the problem differs from one critic to another, we can take Imre Szeman and Susie O’Brien’s

formulation, appearing in the introductory essay to the *South Atlantic Quarterly* issue, to be representative here:

It seems to us that the solution [to the political challenge of thinking literature and globalization] isn’t to ontologize the margin as the incommensurable and nonrecuperable “residue of representation,” but to read the discourse of the margin as a symptom of postcolonialism’s commitment to a geopolitics and an understanding of the global circulation of power (its causal circuits and lines of force) that has been changed wholesale in the era of globalization. Authenticity, hybridity, margins—these are all names for antinomies that postcolonial studies has identified but has been unable to resolve because of its commitment to a worldview that understands globalization as simply “neoimperialism”: something new, but not different in kind from earlier moments of global capitalist expansion and exploitation.\(^{314}\)

The solutions offered (if any) to the problem vary widely: Spivak urges literary scholars to shift the methodological focus of their inquiries back to the study of marginal languages and histories and abandon more theoretical starting points for literary inquiry. Only this way, she argues, can we reinvent Comparative Literature as an ethical project – one that strives for what she calls “planetarity,” situated against today’s globalization. If globalization seeks to make otherness transparent, the planetary figure is one in which an engagement with otherness commits its practitioners to retention of opacity:

If we imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us; it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away. And thus to think of it is already to transgress, for, in spite of our forays into what we metaphorize, differently, as outer and inner space, what is above and beyond our own reach is not continuous with us as it is not, indeed, specifically discontinuous. We must persistently educate ourselves into this peculiar mindset.\(^{315}\)


\(^{315}\) Spivak, 73.
Even if Spivak’s prescriptive solution is unique – the production of planetary alternative to globalization, which translates for her into a new program for Comparative Literature - her critical starting point is shared by other critics, such as Masao Miyoshi and Edward Said.\textsuperscript{316}

Comparative Literature’s uneasiness about the turn to theory and postcolonial studies are related to deeper anxieties about the discipline’s identity and self-definition. Comparative literature as a discipline is uniquely situated within the field of literary studies in relation to this trajectory. For, comparatists have long regarded non-national (or even anti-nationalist), cosmopolitan, approaches to literary study their own domain.\textsuperscript{317} Thus, the anti-nationalism washing over literary studies as a whole – shattering methodological hegemonies along the way so that comparison as well was no longer the exclusive domain of the comparatist – has made the practices that had previously distinguished comparative literature part of the domain of all literary studies.\textsuperscript{318}

A brief examination of two "reports on the state of the discipline" of comparative literature reveals the changing attitude of comparatists to the fate of their field. The report edited by Charles Bernheimer in the mid-nineties still shows a division between those who are desperately looking for a new raison d’être for comparative literature, and those that welcome the destabilization of disciplinary


\textsuperscript{318} Ibid., 16, 19.
boundaries. However, the report published almost ten years later, edited by Haun Saussy, reveals a completely different picture: while some, such as Spivak, see a need to emphasize certain critical practices (for Spivak, as we have already mentioned, this involves developing a deep acquaintance with more languages, histories and literatures), no one is arguing that comparative literature should be distinguished in any dichotomous way from other disciplines. The anxieties of the nineties, fueled by the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries, make way for an acceptance of this dissolution as an established fact, generating a combination of celebratory attitudes and sweeping critiques of comparative literature, mostly unrelated to issues of disciplinary identity.

It is in this juncture that theories of world literature intervene. Starting with the publication of Moretti’s essay in 2000, the PMLA and South Atlantic Quarterly special issues in 2001, and Damrosch’s and Spivak’s books in 2003, the following ten years have seen a small explosion in publications on world literature. Even if the search for a new disciplinary identity is still very important for Moretti, Damrosch

319 Charles Bernheimer, ed., Comparative Literature in the Age of Multiculturalism (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). In this report, Jonathan Culler, David Damrosch, Michael Riffaterre, Peter Brooks, and others insist that a distinct identity for comparative literature should be sought, though mainly in relation to cultural studies. Others, such as Rey Chow, fully embrace the influence of cultural studies.


321 The celebratory attitude is probably the strongest in Saussy’s opening overview of comparative literature (“Exquisite Cadavers Stitched from Fresh Nighmares,” in Saussy, ed., Comparative Literature in the Age of Globalization, 3-42. Saussy uses a troubling parallel – he compares comparative literature to a laboratory of ideas, from which, like “genetically-modified seeds”, the comparative methods developed spread out to other “fields” (of study). The spread of methods and ideas from comparative literature to other fields is a cause for celebration for Saussy, as if he is an investor that profits from the use of these patented seeds. Critical assessments of the discipline in this report are present in Kadir’s claim that comparative literature is complicit in global power relations, Damrosch’s demand to revise the literary canon and Spivak’s emphasis, once again, on the need to study marginal languages and literatures.
and Spivak, the general tendency of these publications is to relinquish the attempts to redefine comparative literature in favor of looking for literary texts of a new kind, a global or worldly one. The emergence of world literature as a field of inquiry can be seen, therefore, as itself symptomatic of something – as indicative of a loss for which we do not yet have a proper substitute. This diagnosis is strengthened by the fact that most of the attempts to theorize something like a world literature (even as late as Brouillette’s 2011 book discussed earlier) seem to have trouble breaking away from the initial dichotomy of struggle and dialogue, or our opposition of Moretti and Damrosch. Recent publications which still deal with the fate of Comparative Literature, such as Pheng Cheah’s “The Material world of Comparison” (in which Cheah claims, against Saussy, that comparison as a method has actually become a hindrance to the emergence of a new world consciousness) seem to recreate the same dichotomy as well.

A symptom, to use Althusser’s formulation, is the presence of answers for which we have not yet formulated the right questions. (A tension similar to the one between the pre-conceptual figure and the concept that comes to replace the figure, the process of figuration corresponding here to a representation of something that we do not yet know how to interrogate conceptually, or ask questions about). Recalling our discussion of the Greimassian square of world literature theories, we can now suggest that the missing questions have to do with a

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search for new kinds of totalizing aesthetics, active on the level of literary texts themselves. Having relegated (perhaps too fast) the nation-state and its strong totalizing imaginary to the dustbin of history, even the classical opponents of literary nationalism – comparative literature scholars – seem to be left with no clear hegemonies to oppose. The distinction that scholars of world literature draw, in different ways, between “good” global literature from a “bad” one, or of genuine global interaction from its simulation by the commodity form, can be seen as indicative of precisely this loss.

To support the claim that world literature names a search for new totalizing aesthetics, we can briefly turn to more recent attempts to think both literary totalization and world literature. Two recent attempts to wed a totalizing impulse and world literature can be seen in Stefano Ercolino’s definition of the genre he calls the “Maximalist Novel,” and Mariano Siskind’s discussion of what he terms the “novelization of the world.” 325 Even if the world or globalization feature only marginally in Ercolino’s discussion of the “Maximalist Novel,” the genre he is describing is clearly equipped to take on the world itself as an object of representation. The encyclopedic tendency of novels belonging to the genre (which includes, according to Ercolino, novels such as David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*, Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, and 2666 by Roberto Bolaño), through which

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they attempt to capture “everything,” include a multitude of styles or present countless social types and situations. This makes the genre a strong candidate for synthesizing globally differentiated situations, styles, and characters. Even if Ercolino employs a very vague concept of totality in describing the genre, it is clear that the novels belonging to the genre display a strong totalizing impulse, particularly in what Ercolino calls a dialectic of “centripetal” (order-giving) and “centrifugal” (entropic) forces in the genre's novels:

Length, the encyclopedic mode, dissonant chorality, and diegetic exuberance would make the maximalist form ungovernable if there were not countermeasures: rigid structural practices, a capillary control of narrative information through an omniscient narrator, and a holist construction of the plot. Within the internal dialectic of the genre, we thus encounter two powerful and opposed forces: the centrifugal vs. the centripetal; anarchy vs. order; chaos vs. cosmos. These antithetical forces guarantee the maximalist novel’s system-genre its delicate equilibrium, an equilibrium indispensable to its fundamental symbolic need to represent the complexity of the world in which we live.327

If the “maximalist novel” is still only formally defined, Siskind’s discussion of the novelization of the globe offers us both form and content: he considers different literary representations of the world itself, particularly those that fantasize about the conquest of the entire globe by European bourgeois ideals.328 Siskind argues that peripheral attempts to represent the world - those that originate in the peripheral countries of the world literary system - can be meaningfully related to those produced in the European metropoles, mostly through an inversion of formal

326 Ercolino, 245.
327 Ibid., 250-251.
328 Siskind, 342.
characteristics, or through a demarcation of the limits of the possibility of such images.\textsuperscript{329} Even though it is not clear why for Siskind the inequalities of the global literary system are given expression in narratives about the world itself (rather than in narratives that feature other types of content), the theme on which he is focusing – representing the world – obviously contains a totalizing impulse which is relatively autonomous from the totalizing system of global power dynamics.

The types of novels discussed by Siskind and Ercolino contain a strong totalizing impulse. However, here it seems that we have already reintroduced determinate content to what world literature represents – the world itself – a choice that seems arbitrary at best, or at worst borne out of a too-literal understanding of “world literature.”\textsuperscript{330} However, arbitrary as it may be, the introduction of content into purely formal systems does not foreclose possibilities for inquiry, but rather creates a space for a host of productive questions: Can the novel as a form accommodate something like a representation of the world? If it can, what genres are most amenable to representing the world? How does the historical coupling of the novel with the nation state pose restrictions on a novel that attempts such a radical extension of the nation’s strong territorial coordinates? These questions stand at the heart of Christian Thorne’s essay, “The Sea Is Not a Place; or, Putting

\textsuperscript{329} Siskind, 350.

\textsuperscript{330} In this context, it is important to mention Moretti’s \textit{Modern Epic}, in which Moretti searches for a literary text that captures the entire world. According to Thorne (“The Sea Is Not a Place; or, Putting the World Back into World Literature,” 61), Moretti’s examples do not live up to his promise, since “the world” has to undergo too many mediations for the novel in question to be seriously considered to be a representation of the world in any recognizable sense to the reader.
The World Back into World Literature.” In a lengthy and entertaining critique of Casanova’s *World Republic of Letters* and its celebration of abstract literature, Thorne turns our attention to the role of Modernist abstraction and other formal signifiers of cosmopolitanism (which nevertheless serve as the basis of nationalist literature). He then makes a provocative claim. If, following Adorno’s formulation, form is always sedimented content, then:

[…] where are the naively planetary novels of which these techniques are the vaporings? Do we have in front of us the strange case of a sediment that precedes the object of which it is the residue? How could a novel make good on Joyce’s Hibernio-Slavic quotation dashes? Is it possible to reconstitute the body from that trace? Could a world literature actually tell stories about the world? 

Realism on a global scale, or a naive attempt to represent the entire world in a novel, then, is no mere arbitrary choice. Rather, it seems to be a missing term in literary history. Thorne goes on to explore several possibilities, including the role of the colonies in Jane Austen’s novels. In her novels, Thorne argues, the far away colonies act many times as an readily available off-stage problem solver, a place where things happen without an explanation – or in which the realist cause-and-effect narration falters, leaving things to “fortune” and chance. The question of the possibility of realism on a global scale thus remains an open one for Thorne (an open challenge

\[\text{\footnotesize 331} \text{Ibid.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 332} \text{Thorne, 66.} \]
\[\text{\footnotesize 333} \text{Thorne, 76. It is important to emphasize that Thorne does not consider colonial travel narratives, for example, as attempts at narrating the world that could serve as content for the formal worldliness of Modernism. Also, since the content that is supposed to precede the form is supposed to be a naïve narration of the world, then the fact that distant lands become simple placeholders, or colonial mirrors (thus failing to “really” narrate the world) should not disturb us, since they are still naïve narrations of the world, which makes them good candidates for Thorne’s missing planetary realism.} \]
for novelists as well as opening lines of inquiry for scholars); the only conclusion with which he leaves us is that the emergence of abstraction in novels marks a failure to narrate the world, rather than something to be celebrated explicitly, such as in Casanova's writing, or favored implicitly, as in the purely formal level at which discussions of world literature tend to remain.

What is important for us in Thorne's discussion is the totalizing impulse that the search for realism on a global scale presupposes. It is no longer inherent in a simple ability to incorporate globally-diverse contents and forms (such as the "maximalist novel" implies), nor is it a search for images of world-unity (as in Siskind's "novelization of the world"). Rather, considering Thorne's Marxist-Hegelian approach to the problem, it is Georg Lukács' strong coupling of Realism with totality that serves as the implicit background for Thorne's provocation. In other words, as we already argued in the first chapter, it is the realist novel's mediation of different social positions and their corresponding ideological attitudes that make visible the systematic contradictions of Bourgeois society. For Thorne is looking for a specifically realistic answer to Modernism – not just any invocation of far away territories, serving as an easy narratological solution (such as the unexplained "fortune" in Austen) or a placeholder in some national allegory - but an actual attempt to map social relations on a global scale, one in which no geopolitical unit serves merely as a convenient way to solve formal or ideological contradictions. Therefore, it is not an insistence on the representation of the entire world that

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makes Thorne’s realism on a global scale totalizing; it is rather the possibility for reinventing a realism that is not bound by the nation-state.

Thus far in this chapter, we have presented a typology of world literature, which has helped us see that these theories both (unintentionally) reject totalizing aesthetics, while opening up the space for the possibility of new totalizing aesthetics to emerge. Both theories that emphasize dialogue on a global scale and those that highlight resistance implicitly reject literary totalization. However, it is important to emphasize that the Damrosch-Moretti opposition, which helped us form our typology, does not entail a critique of either theorist for this or that lack. Rather, it is the opposition itself that allowed us to see what is excluded from world literature. And it is only through the rejection of a totalizing aesthetics from world literature that we were able to see how more recent discussions of world literature, however unconsciously, try to wed totalizing aesthetics and world literature (as in the cases of Siskind, Ercolino and Thorne).

In conclusion, our overview of different conceptions of conceptions of world literature leads us to suggest the following formulation: world literature is contemporary totalizing literature. Not necessarily because of the holism implied by the image of the globe itself, but because totalization, under globalized capitalism, must necessarily send us beyond the nation-state’s institutions and imaginary.335

335 Jameson’s “Cognitive Mapping” speaks precisely to this point. According to Jameson, it is the stretching of social relations of production over distances too large for direct social contact to become understandable, first under monopoly capitalism and then again under late, global capitalism, which makes every attempt at totalization constitute an attempt to mediate the global system aesthetically, to try and give aesthetic figuration to that system through aesthetic substitution. Jameson’s point – the need
But this formulation is still a completely empty one: it is not even a formalistic definition, let alone a designation of any specific content, since totalization does not designate any specific formal literary feature. This formulation, however, does send us back into the hidden abode of literary production, or to the role of literary texts (and other cultural objects) as generating specific forms of social knowledge, knowledge that has to provide us with imaginary solutions to real contradictions in order to exist at all. In the next section of this chapter we will therefore explore the literary history of totalization in one specific case – that of modern Hebrew literature.

Before we start our exploration of modern Hebrew Literature, we should add a short methodological note about literary-critical definitions. The definition we have suggested for world literature might seem objectionable on some empirical ground: it excludes certain novels that seem to belong in the category (for example, Orhan Pamuk’s *Museum of Innocence*) and includes in it some that do not seem to belong in world literature (for example, Kim Stanley Robinson’s “Mars” trilogy). Yet, these objections, today, only reveal to us that there is in fact no “empirical” ground for typologies, or that references to the empirical always betray some preconceived non-empirical notion already at work about what constitutes world literature (In Pamuk’s case, for example, that his work is quickly translated into many languages and globally circulated). If in the past these pre-conceived notions were disguised to represent social relations that can no longer be lived in subjective experience – can of course be traced to Lukács himself, whose early *Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971) revolves around the novel’s attempt to recreate the lost organic or immanent totality of the epic.
expressions of historicity, or of belonging to a certain collective project (no matter how reified a notion of belonging), they do not seem to perform that work anymore. We therefore cannot rid ourselves of definitional prejudice, and at the same time we cannot really justify any specific definitional prejudice (that "it works" would, again, be circular). If we are not to do away with definitions altogether, we would therefore suggest that we approach definitions in a rather different way: that we ask what we can do with them, or what new connections, analogies, and oppositions they allow us to think, rather than what empirical “truth” is affirmed through them. This approach to defining world literature would, of course, always project some principle of selection, or would again tell us what novels are included and excluded from the category. But this time, the principle of selection is secondary to some emerging newness that the definition helped us see. The past, as it were, comes to be defined by future possibility. It is in this way that our suggested definition to world literature – that it is literature that totalizes under globalization – should be considered.
The Distribution of Utopia in Modern Hebrew Literature

Why, we might ask, should we pick as our point of departure a national literary context in order to explore world literature? Hasn't the national framework for reading literary texts unanimously been rejected by all approaches to world literature? To this objection we can reply that the search for new totalizing aesthetics in literary texts has to begin somewhere; it cannot be created ex-nihilo, but only through the dialectical modification of older efforts to totalize, which, as we have mentioned in the first chapter, is something that Sartre insists upon time and time again. In other words, if the worldliness of a literary text is always defined many times in contrast to a national imaginary, we must first turn to this imaginary in order to know the ideological structures that must be transformed or actively, determinately rejected. And it is here that we can start distinguishing the approach we are developing here from the conceptions of world literature discussed above: instead of reading texts only for the disruption of this or that totalizing ideology, we will read them as trying to put forth a new *ideologically effective* totalizing aesthetic. This means that rather than merely registering the loss or disruption of the national imaginary, we will look for the ways in which a new totalizing aesthetic generates new imaginary solutions to real problems, to use one of Jameson’s formulations.

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336 Here and throughout, we will be using “modern Hebrew Literature” and “Israeli literature” interchangeably, it being implicitly understood that the body of works to which we are referring will consist of Hebrew language literature, mostly written in Palestine or, later, Israel. “Modern Hebrew Literature” can, of course, be used in other ways. Its usage here does not try to imply otherwise, but is rather used as convenient shorthand.
(following Althusser) for the ideological operation of cultural objects. This, of course, will force us to contextualize and historicize the attempts to create new aesthetic strategies of totalization, which is precisely where the faltering national imaginary will become important. In other words, a new totalizing aesthetics depends on point of view, on the material and ideological environment in which it happens. It has to relate to the experience-world of certain subjects. That, however, does not make our new totalizing aesthetics purely ‘subjective’ in any radically relativizing sense. For, on the other hand, the real problems that our totalizing texts will imaginatively solve will inevitably address globalization, which inevitably affects the social and material conditioning of experience. It is in inventing a language or a figurative lexicon for fusing subjective experience with global systematic determinants – even if they are rarely named as such – that new totalizing aesthetics will emerge, as we will see below.

We are not claiming here that Modern Hebrew literature is in some way “privileged” in seeking our forms of literary totalization. It does, however, present its own peculiarities and unique moments. These will emerge in what we will call the double mediation of early Zionist utopian literature, in the peculiar centrality of detective fiction to periods in which a transformation of collective imaginary was needed, and in the importance of the genre of “soldier’s experience” in social mapping and historical totalization. We will discuss all of these extensively in what follows. To be sure, there are several other threads that we could have followed.

337 Jameson, Political Unconscious, 84-5.
(such as the role of the picaresque as a deeper antagonist to social mapping, expressing a critical impulse in the 1940s and moving into more of a hegemonic position on the 90s).

A full literary history of totalization, even if we limit ourselves to Hebrew literature, will inevitably require more space than our context can provide. Therefore, what follows should be seen as an outline of the project’s coordinates and problems, rather than its completion. In addition, since the horizon of all interpretation is political, the reading of contemporary novels undertaken below will be more detailed than the reading of older ones – for the aesthetic solutions to the problems generated by our contemporary globalization manifest themselves in the former rather than the latter. We will start our discussion of Modern Hebrew literature not from its point of origin, traced usually to the early 18th century,338 but rather at the close of the 19th, a time in which secular Hebrew Literature came to be more widely read among European, particularly eastern-European, Jews (as opposed to religious texts and what was seen as their textual extensions into the realms of education, Jewish law, and customs).339 The same period saw the slow rise of Zionism as an ideology, a development whose close relation to the development of modern Hebrew letters has been studied extensively.340 What is important for us is to view the rise of Zionism (a slow rise, to be sure, incurring

338 Miron, Bodedim be-mo’adam (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1987) 57.
339 ibid., 57-62.
340 For example, in Dan Miron, Bodedim bemoa’dam; Hannan Hever, Hasipur Vehale’om (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2007); Gershon Shaked, Hasiporet Ha’ivrit 1880-1980, Vol. 1. (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hame’uchad, 1977); Baruch Kurzweil, Sifrutenu Ha-chadasha: hemshech o mahapecha? (Tel Aviv: Schoken, 1959).
initially nothing but the scorn of both Jewish orthodoxy as well as the remnants of
the *Haskala* movement) as a result of some ideological failure, or of a growing
incongruence between Jewish everyday experience and the narratives that make
that experience identifiable and comprehensible, allowing individuals to imagine a
place for themselves in society.\(^{341}\) It is precisely this claim that guides Gideon
Shimoni’s study of the rise of Zionism in his *The Zionist Ideology*.\(^{342}\) We will not be
able to explore the specifics of the ideological gap into which Zionism was born, but
the extensive literature on the birth of nationalism in Europe gives us the general
transformations to which we can presume Zionism constituted an answer: the
emergence in Europe of the nation-state as the hegemonic force regulating everyday
life, not only in the big European cities but in small towns and villages too.
Urbanization and industrialization, the spread of capitalism as a mode of production
– all of those came together to challenge (among other things) the more localized,
autonomous existence of small Jewish towns and communities. These were
accompanied by the birth of national ideology available to all – no longer only the
business of royalty and the bourgeoisie – that has become the necessary means to
imagining a collective that can no longer be immediately perceived by any one
consciousness.\(^{343}\) It is therefore not that Zionism had an unexplainable magical
appeal in Jewish eyes (as many critics assume, even of only implicitly in their

\(^{343}\) For discussions of the rise of modern European nationalism, see Eric Hobsbawm’s *Nations and
Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press,
1992); and Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and spread of
periodization of Hebrew literature, according to Miron), but that it provided a ideological response to these concrete transformations that, at the same time, resulted in the formation of a substantial Hebrew readership. As Miron puts it:

... in [the 1880s], several conditions have converged to create a real need for Hebrew-language literature and Journalism. These conditions formed as a result of three transformations: 1. Socio-economic developments that brought many of the Jewish middle class to a state in which a need is born to step beyond the pale of the traditional-religious world. 2. The pogroms and institution of anti-Jewish policies by [the Russian] authorities... created among the Jewish masses... a new sense of social self-consciousness...[and] an urgent need for discussion of European Jew's future. 3. The decline of the Haskala's anti-orthodox influence on Hebrew literature, which allowed many to venture beyond the religious world without severing its ties to it. [my translation]

It is these developments that open the way for the rise of Zionist influence over Hebrew literature, at the same moment as this literature becomes necessary for many Eastern European and Russian Jews.

The precise conditions of possibility of Zionism need not detain us here, however. What is more important to us is that with which Zionism infuses the emergent literature. Our first working hypothesis – one which would require a much longer study in order to sufficiently substantiate – is that the emergence of Jewish nationalism brought with it to the newborn literature a new utopian dimension. Of course, it is not that the utopian moments were absent from the Jewish religious textual world; rather, it is the concretization of this utopian impulse into a more properly nationalist program, a secularization and territorialization of it, which is introduced into the mainstay of Hebrew literature through the Zionist

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344 Miron, 74-75.
345 Ibid., 77-78.
imaginary. This is the background to our first literary text to be discussed here, Theodor Herzl's *Altneuland*, which was published in German in 1902 and translated into Hebrew in less than a year (under the Hebrew title “Tel Aviv,” suggestive of the renewal of the old and dilapidated). Herzl's text will allow us to think of Zionism and modern Hebrew literature as constituting a collective utopian project.

However, before developing this line of thought, some political comments are in order, even if only to curtail any over-hasty political judgment of seeing Zionism as a utopian project. First, we should note that this line of inquiry does not in itself constitute some implicit justification of the atrocities committed against Palestinians by the state of Israel. That Zionism can be seen as a utopian collective project does not mean that it was a successful one. Rather, as we shall see, it is the utter failure, the slow falling apart of the utopian imagination of Zionism (and with it its ability to totalize, which will be discussed shortly) that will become the subject matter of many Israeli texts and the main object of our analysis later in this chapter. Second, approaching Zionism through its utopian moments forces us to see its moments of truth, to see it as ideologically active in the positive, constructive sense of ideology (for which we have to thank Althusser), one which highlights what ideology does, what it enables, rather than what it hides or distorts. Simply put, the

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346 For an (unsympathetic) account of the transformation of Jewish eschatological ideology into the Zionist national-territorial one, see Shlomo Sand’s *The Invention of the Land of Israel* (London; New York: Verso, 2012). Herzl’s utopian text was preceded by two other utopias that imagined the resettlement of Jews in Palestine: Edmund Menachem Eisler’s *Ein Zukunftbild (A Sign from the Future)* and Elchanan Leib Lewinsky’s utopian Jewish monarchy of *Trip to Eretz Israel in the Year 2040* (published in Hebrew). Even though each of these were read and debated, Herzl’s utopia was by far the most influential of the three.
possibility of any collective project (whether Socialist or not) depends on our ability to comprehend the ways in which ideology welds together desire and materiality, rather than the ways it blocks some assumed empirical truth, even if these blockages, omissions and elisions are constitutive of it. To be sure, the interesting questions about Zionism today have nothing to do with the tired and predictable ‘leftist’ demonstration of the horribly unethical reality behind the illusion that dupes the Israeli masses (which, again, is not denied here); rather, it is in asking, through a reading of the novels, how people come to participate of their own free will in a collective project such as Zionism, or how the project had allowed them to imagine their own liberation through it in the first place. A mindless appeal to the masses’ naïveté, to the ease of misleading people, will not do here; surely, the evidence of the initial, almost unanimous rejection of Zionism by European Jews can serve as a constant reminder to us that people are not easily ‘duped,’ even in the age of so-called grand narratives. Assuming that an intellectual effort’s goal is not to establish the gullibility of everyone except the researcher and his social clique, it follows that a true leftist critique of Zionism can never remain at the level of ideology-busting (or showing how misinformed the Zionist masses are), but rather in trying to recreate the ways in which narratives capture desire, or the ways in which it imaginatively solves real contradictions, an operation of any ideology if it is to come into the world in the first place.

In light of this critical context, we should also mention that the existence of a strong historical connection between nationalism and utopian literature has been
asserted in Phillip Wegner’s *Imaginary Communities*, a text on which we will draw extensively below.\textsuperscript{347} Indeed, this is where we can start understanding the peculiarities of Zionist utopianism. As Wegner argues, the utopian thought experiment could be considered to be an imaginative development of perceived reality, rather than an attempt to represent it:

...if both literary and theoretical representations approach the narrative present in terms of the past, attempting to grasp it as some form of a completed whole, semiotic itineraries or performances like those of the narrative utopia conceive of the present in terms of the future, as something that is incomplete and continuously coming into being. That is, the present, its concerns, desires, and contradictions, rather than being the end of the representational practices of the narrative utopia (as in those of literature or theory), serves as the very raw material from which the narrative performance will generate something original.\textsuperscript{348}

In this respect, Zionist utopia is a peculiar creature, because its referent, the present reality to be estranged and developed through the future’s vantage point, simply does not exist: there is no single social, institutional or territorial unit on the basis of which the process of utopian figuration can begin. There could be no easy utopian mapping and neutralization of, say, class antagonism where the group in question does not map into one class structure, but a strongly varied multiplicity of class divisions; the Viennese Jewish Bourgeoisie into which Herzl was born, for example, does not stand in any direct opposition to the rural Jewish communities of eastern Europe, and neither do their ideological worlds converge around the same oppositions. It is precisely in this context that we should view Hannan Hever’s...


\textsuperscript{348} Ibid., xix.
assertion that there is no one Zionism at the movement’s inception, but many Zionisms, and correspondingly several Zionist literary traditions, which battled for primacy over Jewish opinion.\textsuperscript{349}

*Altneuland* generally displays a structure which would surprise no reader of utopian novels. A Viennese bourgeois Jew (mirroring to an extent Herzl himself) and a Prussian aristocrat, both disillusioned of their lives (“sunk in deep melancholy”),\textsuperscript{350} decide to travel to a remote island, away from a society in which they cannot find their place. On their way to the island, their ship stops at Palestine, where they take note of the local abject poverty and primitive way of life (very much inspired by Herzl’s own impressions on his visit to Palestine). Many years later they decide to return to Europe, and their ship docks in Palestine again. Much to their surprise, the country has undergone a radical transformation following massive Jewish settlement of Palestine. Here begins the familiar utopian narrative – the travelers explore the country and becoming familiar, through the help of local guides, with the Jewish utopian society.

This is not to say that Herzl’s utopia is somehow only a bad imitation of other utopian novels, or deals with material that does not speak to the social contradictions experienced by most European Jews. Rather, the opposite is the case: the raw material on which Herzel’s utopia works is drawn from the discourse of the Zionist movement and its internal debates (even if at the same time, as Muhammad

\textsuperscript{349} Hannan Hever, 9-46.
Khalidi claims, it tries to reconcile itself to the diplomatic constraints of the Zionist project. Examples abound: Herzl’s adoption of a ‘soft’ utopian socialism (all land is publicly owned, a “syndicate of cooperative societies” manages the state’s affairs), uneasily combined with capitalist free enterprise in the new Jewish state, should be read in light of the failure of the first privately-sponsored settlements of the 1880s and the rising popularity of socialist ideas among young Eastern European Jews. The peace enjoyed by the citizens of the new state, which has no army, attests to the future disappearance of anti-Semitism, which was of course a major concern of the Zionist movement. The character of Reshid Bey, an Arab engineer from Haifa who is an enthusiastic citizen of the new state, testifies to the successful future integration of Palestine’s current inhabitants into the utopian society. His presence in the utopian novel should be read in light of the internal debates in the Zionist movement concerning the “problem” of the current inhabitants of the land. In this context, the obviously Orientalist representation of Palestinians in Herzl’s novel (and in early Zionist discourse in general), with its accompanying fears of oppressed-become-oppressors, and of a civilizing mission gone bad, is very clearly a mediated form of thinking through the problem of the Jews’ own oppression in

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353 Herzl, 105.

354 Ibid.; Ahad Ha’am, one of Herzl’s main opponents in the Zionist movement, criticized the plan for Zionist settlement in Palestine for its lack of consideration of its possible effects on the Palestinian population (see Ahad Ha’am, “Emet Me’eretz Israel,” 1891. <http://benyehuda.org/ginzburg/Gnz019.html>). For a detailed description of the conflict between Ha’am and Herzl, see Goldstein, Yossi, *Ahad Ha’am veHerzl* (Tel Aviv: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2011).
Europe. Edward Said’s insight into the ‘mirroring’ effect of Orientalist discourse – the West’s attempt to establish its own identity through its discourse of the Orient – is thus strongly affirmed here. In speaking about the Palestinian ‘problem’ and the possibility of reproducing oppression through a colonial enterprise, the Zionists (and Herzl’s novel) were actually speaking about the problems faced by European Jews, in an estranged form.\footnote{\textit{Orientalism} (New York: Pantheon, 1978) 3,7. Again, focusing on what the peculiar type of Zionist Orientalism enabled in Herzl’s utopian imaginary is not an attempt to justify Zionist Orientalism, or to question its deleterious effects.}

\textit{Altneuland}, therefore, takes as its basic raw material - the basic contradictions to be neutralized and rearranged by the future - from the pool of categories of Zionist discourse, which themselves turn out to be mediated vehicles for thinking about the real contradictions of Jewish diasporic life in Europe. What we can say at this point is that as utopian imaginaries go, Herzl’s utopia is more boldly utopian, so to speak, than many other utopian novels; the cognitive “distance” between the real contradictions it tries to resolve and the categories it employs is doubly mediated. In an age in which national ideology in general is being “democratized,” or transformed to sustain an imaginary space for a much larger variety of subjectivities than before,\footnote{See Benedict Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities} (London: Verso, 1983).} Herzl’s utopia employs a discourse that, we must remember, is shared by what is at the time of its publication still a minority among European Jews. This, of course, is a very different situation than that faced by the major European nationalisms, including the British one on which Wegner’s discussion of More’s \textit{Utopia} focuses in \textit{Imaginary Communities}. If, for Wegner, the
invention of utopian national space and institutions has for its raw materials not only a territory, but also a proto-nationalist material institutional framework and a corresponding political discourse. Herzl’s utopia has none of these except the political discourse, which at the time had not yet been disseminated widely.

As Wegner reminds us, the work of neutralization – the speculative cognitive game of constantly displacing contradictions onto other contradictions - is where the utopian novel is at its most playful. And this playfulness is completely lost when utopian novels are read long after they have been published. It is precisely this sense of playfulness that we therefore must restore to Herzl’s utopia. Here, for example, is a passage highlighting the uneasy combination of private enterprise and the benefit of common good, in relation to advertising in a spoken newspaper run by a cooperative:

“But this one doesn’t yield any profits, since it carries no advertisements.” [said Kingscourt] [...] “On the contrary, its advertisements command the highest rates. The reader of printed newspaper is not obliged to look at the advertising columns. But he is defenseless against advertisements that come through the receiver” [...] “Sometimes” said David, “the wording is so clever that the listener does not suspect that he is listening to an advertisement. This paper yields enormous profits... there are no expenditures for paper, printing or mailing. However, the municipality of Haifa and the New Society make this enterprise pay them tribute. And representatives of the New Society supervise the ‘paper’ at its headquarters so that no false or alarmist reports or obscenities may be dictated into the apparatus.”

[...] “How can Haifa municipality or the New Society... simply make a private enterprise pay them tribute when it is profitable?” [asked Friedrich]...“This is a very special instance. A telephonic newspaper must lay its lines somewhere. Now, under our streets tunnels have been provided for the reception of all kinds of pipes and cables (present and future) for gas, water, sewage, and so on... All the houses are fitted with subterranean connections for these cables... You may, if you like, regard this as symbolic of our whole system... we, [as opposed to builders of European cities that keep having to destroy parts of the city to accommodate new utilities] knew just
what utilities a modern city required, and therefore laid tunnels under our streets to accommodate them... Since the telephonic newspaper also runs its wires through the street tunnel, it must pay rental in proportion to its income."[... "The first remarkable thing that I've found here," declared Kingscourt, "is that you pave your street with Samuel Kohn's best diamonds [a shop for which they heard an advertisement on the spoken newspaper]. You're a damned clever lot."357

The seemingly whimsical use of the spoken newspaper thus provides an occasion for discussing the ways in which both private enterprise and communal control coexist, which then connects to the uneasy combination of aesthetic enjoyment and profit in the spoken commercials the ways in which city planning itself has changed, which then leads into a metaphor for utopian planning itself. This is, to be sure, just one example of the way in which the constant displacement of contradictions is at the same time the novel's most playful moments.

Yet, for our purposes, it is important to notice the strong totalizing character of the development of the contradictions in Herzl's utopia (which of course is common to all utopian programs, to use Jameson's term), which was surely made more sharply visible to Herzl's contemporaries through the large cognitive distance it traverses.358

As in other utopian programs, Altneuland tries to systematically map the symbolic space of the new society, constituting what Wegner describes as the "pedagogical practices... that enable us to inhabit, make sense of, orient ourselves within, and act through any particular space. This... is the domain of architecture, urban planning,

357 Herzl, 92-94.
358 Jameson, Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire called Utopia and Other Science Fictions. Phillip Wegner relates this strong Symbolic activity of narrative utopia to Jameson’s conception of cognitive mapping, which is one of Jameson’s most well known formulations of the process of totalization (see “Cognitive Mapping”).
nation building, and social engineering.” As both Jameson and Wegner emphasize (and as we have shown to be the case in the first chapter), the totalizing aspect of utopian programs does not end up constituting a closed system, but rather a radically open one, as the contradictions it takes as its subject matter are never resolved ideologically, an operation which Wegner calls, following Louis Marin, “the refusal of non-contradiction.” In Marin’s words:

> Utopic practice, through the play of its discursive topics, does not construct a theoretical concept; rather, it sets the scene, the space of representation, the place of figurability, which is its imaginary schema and the sensuous framework. It would be, to speak the language of Kant, the schematizing activity of the social and political imagination which has not yet found its concept; a blind activity, but one that would trace for knowledge and for action the place, the topic, of its concept. A schema in quest of a concept, a model without structure.

It is no wonder therefore that from today’s perspective, Herzl’s *Altneuland* would by summarily judged to be a naïve daydream. This judgment is probably the best evidence for *Altneuland*’s having played a major role in figuratively pre-defining, at least in part, the discursive and institutional spaces of Zionist nation-building even to this very (so-called post-Zionist) day. Indeed, the uselessness of utopian texts after their historical moment has passed - expressed in labeling them “naïve” or “cynical” – is by no means special to *Altneuland*; nor should we chalk it up to a postmodern incredulity towards utopias in general. As Wegner remarks, narrative utopias are vanishing mediators, “cultural interventions that in retrospect appear as

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359 Ibid., p 15.
361 For example, on the occasion of *Altneuland*’s republication in Hebrew in 2002, critic Ariana Melamed claimed the book is “naïve to the point of arousing pity” in “Ma asita li, Herzl,” *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 7 September 2002 <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-2103414,00.html>.
bridges over the ‘holes in time’ between different organizations of social life, and whose particular effectivity disappears once these transitions have been accomplished.”

The radical openness of the totalizing operation of Altnelund is therefore lost today. As we will see, however, the foundational totalizing impulse with which it imbued Hebrew literature is still being interrogated in literary works.

Meanwhile, it is important to keep in mind that Herzl’s utopia is in no way representative of Hebrew literature of its time. Even if we ignore the fact that it was originally published in German rather than Hebrew (and therefore one can debate its belonging to Hebrew literature at all), its utopian optimism is very foreign to the somber tones of texts written by Uri Nissan Gnessin, Yosef Haim Brenner, and other prominent (or rising) authors. More representative of the literary works published in Hebrew around the turn of the century are, for example, the existential undertones of Gnessin’s novellas (all set in eastern European towns), his protagonists’ loneliness and their trademark retreat into their internal world from a social reality that seems not to understand them. As literary critic Dan Miron convincingly argues, it is the teetering on the brink of non-existence of Hebrew literature in the 1890s – its readership, in pure numerical terms, expanding just above some necessarily minimum to give it a legitimate existence outside writes’ imaginations, then contracting again, only to expand once more – it is precisely this uncertain reality that gives rise to Gnessin’s self-doubting protagonists, and makes its way into many of his contemporaries’ writing in the form of doubt, and general

hopelessness and anxiety. We need to keep in mind this important trend in Hebrew literature of the 1890s to the early 1900s, for it will soon come to exert its influence over later literary works, ones that are relevant for our discussion of totalization.

To conclude our brief discussion of Altneuland, we can point at the ways in which the totalizing dynamic of Herzl’s utopia is related to our discussion of totality in the first chapter. At first glance, the Lukácsian point of view of totality, that dynamic in which the Proletariat comes to see its own self-estrangement in the object world, seems to have nothing to do with Herzl’s text, or with generic utopian programs in general. Nor does the Sartrian group-in-fusion seem to be related to it, and Adorno’s immanence of the system in its concepts seem to tell us nothing beyond enabling us, once again, to point at the refusal of Herzl’s text to resolve the contradictions it takes up. Underlying utopia, however, is a desire, the adventures of which are narrated by the utopian text. And it is this desire through which we can relate Herzl’s text to the peculiar totalizing impulse found in the postmodern revenge fantasy, the plot of which is very explicitly driven by desire. Now, as we have seen, the particular fantasy of revenge discussed in the first chapter produces a complex allegory of Lukácsian class formation; the achievement of the trivial goal of the revenge fantasy was secondary to the process of mapping desire itself through the coordinates provided by the fantasy. Žižek’s claim that fantasy underlies reality, that it maps desire for us, is what comes to guide the process of figuration. In the

Miron, Dan, Bodedim bemo’adam, p. 23-78.
revenge fantasy, these were the spaces of work and leisure, home and public, and the characters that inhabit them, though which the social antagonism is elaborated. The equivalent of this process in the utopian text is precisely the totalizing logic of the utopian refusal of non-contradiction, the elaboration of a system through the development of these contradictions. If we remember that the contradictions that Herzl’s utopia develops relate to the European Jews’ diasporic existence in estranged form, we can now see how Herzl’s utopia opens up an allegorical space for the remolding of that identity, whose relation to revolutionary projects is clear enough. The direct social mapping of existent class antagonism in the revenge fantasy is here transmuted in the refusal of non-contradiction of the utopian text, which itself drives the overt totalizing impulse of the narrative utopia, discussed above.

Now, however, we will have to take a short detour through the non-literary development of the Zionist collective project, which will inevitably lead us to the “other scene,” that of settlement in Palestine. For it is in Palestine that Altneuland’s totalizing imaginary came to be concretized, or articulated as a real, working ideology, creating a way for individuals to imagine their relation to their real conditions of existence (to use the Althusserian definition once again) for some of the Zionist colonists. What has developed among these settlers can be called, lacking a better term, a utopian vanguardism, or in Hebrew, the ideology of the halutzim. As Historian Boaz Neumann tells us, the Hebrew word halutz, in the Zionist context, was meant to be a rough translation of “vanguard,” the word itself borrowed from
the Old Testament, in which it referred to soldiers leading the charge. According to Neumann, the halutzim's imaginary is best described as an immense desire for laboring towards a transformation of the self and its social, material, and natural surroundings. We should note that 'labor' is not to be taken metaphorically here, but rather refers to actual agricultural labor in the Zionist settlements, expanded into a transformative project. The ideological world, the structure of feeling, that this transformative labor entails is a strongly spatialized one, and (as utopian imaginaries tend to be) a very self-contradictory one: it is both a transformation of nature and landscape, and a becoming-one with nature; it is both a conquest or harnessing of natural forces (through technology and conscious efforts) and a complete merging with them; in it one can both take control of a social destiny, and become immersed in historical forces oblivious to individual agency. Significantly for our purposes, the intimate connection with the land formed through this transformative labor - a connection which is strongly eroticized - is wholly antagonistic to ownership; it cannot be acquired in the market, but only through productive labor, as Neumann emphasizes, discussing the writing of some of the halutzim's main ideologues:

Berl Katzanelson defines the [the halutzim's imaginary] as total self control, man's conquest of his world, and his control of this world. For Katzanelson, the uniqueness of the Zionist halutzim movement among its contemporaries lies in the fact that it does not revolve around leadership or a pre-defined program, but is rather centered on man's life and labor [...] the halutzim do in their lives what the collective will do in the future. They are soldiers, and as such their role is to conquer.

365 Ibid., 16-19, 29, 32-5.
Not a violent conquest, but a subduing and harnessing of land and labor. It is their job to take on agricultural labor [...] construction, agricultural industry and other tasks.\[366\]

The concept of “conquest,” as Neumann hastens to emphasize, designates something like a taking control, a learning how to master a skill or a space of labor – and not military conquest. Furthermore, it is this basic project of agricultural labor, in the center of which stands transformative interaction between human and land that then spills over, as it were, into other realms: from an eroticized fascination with the landscape and the creation of an almost mystical connection with it, to larger social projects such as education, the advancement of society, a corresponding politics, and an ethos of self-transformation and sacrifice. Or again, labor transforms the land and, later, society, but it also entails a process of subject-forming. In the halutzim’s imaginary, therefore, we can see a textbook example of how a mediated relation (relating the human to the land through labor) ends up reconstructing a lost immanence, or becomes its own reason and cause, in the becoming-one of human and nature, much as in Marx’s definition of “species-being.”

Now, Neumann’s attempt to avoid any explanation of the halutzim’s structure of desire enables him, as he puts it, to stay clear of both a romanticized celebration of this desire or seeing it as a cynical excuse for taking over land (both positions, of course, strongly politically overdetermined).\[367\] His attempt to take a purely descriptive, “a-political” approach, however, also prevents him from distinguishing

\[367\] Ibid., 21-5.
between explaining that desire and explaining it away.\textsuperscript{368} For there is no need to assume that looking at the ways in which material historical forces provide the background for the development of certain ideologies, and find their mediated expressions in them, cancels their effectivity as structures of desire. Rather, the opposite is the case: desire’s effectiveness, its realness, can only be felt when its particular form and content become part of a larger reality. What Neumann avoids seeing – even though it is a direct result of his study – is the totalizing nature of the *halutzim’s* structure of feeling, something that Neumann touches on when he says that “the *halutzim* [...] were the first to identify their existence in the land of Israel with existence in general. To-be-in-the-land-of-Israel was for them not only to be in a specific, concrete, place. Rather, it was for them to be”\textsuperscript{369} [my translation. Emphasis in the original]. The description of the *halutzim’s* ideology that follows makes this totalizing impulse very clear: working the land ties together the making of an individual – or subject-making - with the forging of a new society and taking control over collective history, and at the same time relates individual, society, and history to nature (in the contradictory way we have already mentioned: both as mastering nature and its forces and as the ultimate way of being part of it). The similarities between the *halutzim’s* imaginary and utopian ones in general hardly need emphasizing: the totalizing impulse of utopia - that which Darko Suvin calls its “cognitive” kernel and which Wegner aptly calls its spatially-orienting aspect (through which an individual learns to understand herself in the new setting) – is

\textsuperscript{368} See also Peled, Yoav and Gershon Shafir, *Mihu yisraeli: hadinamika shel ezrachut murkevet* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2005).

\textsuperscript{369} Neumann, 12.
constantly worked and reworked in the *halutzim’s* imaginary and everyday lives.\(^{370}\)

Its sharply visible self-contradictoriness is in this context nothing but utopia’s refusal of non-contradiction, which sets utopia apart from ideology’s reconciliatory operations. The *halutzim’s* imaginary, then, can be seen as a direct continuation of the Herzlian utopian vision.

As Neumann amply demonstrates, it is through this synchronic totalization that a diachronic one is born: the landscape becomes charged with biblical meaning, with which the *halutzim* constantly identify as they travel the land.\(^{371}\) The proto-national territory, becoming a repository of beauty, also becomes something akin to a spatially coded biblical text, with which the *halutzim* can gain an intimate connection. What Neumann designates as “biblical myth” is actually therefore what Jameson would call a sense of historicity. The present organization of society thus carries with it a philosophy of history, both of which combine to open up reality as a space of collective practice, whose contradictions are always on the move, always developing, taking new shapes as the project progresses.

Herzl’s utopian program, which as we have seen is itself a meditation on social contradictions of Jewish existence in the European diaspora, therefore informs to a large degree the early Zionist *halutzim* to concretely construct a new society. The old – the appropriation of the Jewish orthodoxy’s tradition by the Zionists – paves here the way to imagining newness concretely in the Zionist

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\(^{371}\) Neumann, 52-60.
colonies. As we have claimed before, it is the contradictoriness of the utopian program that keeps its totalizing imaginary effective, opening up spaces for the development of the contradictions, instead of resolving them ideologically. It is only in the late 1930s and 40s that the halutzim's imaginary encounters a challenge that would prove to be insurmountable, as we will see below, an obstacle that would require the abandonment of the halutzim's imaginary, relegating its gutted contents to a different status. This disillusion will be the subject of the next section.

From Utopian Project to National Ideology

Given the argument so far, we still need to address the halutzim's material conditions of possibility. The Zionist collective project has already started taking material shape at the time of Altneuland's writing, producing by then mostly unsustainable colonies or settlements.\textsuperscript{372} According to Gershon Shafir,\textsuperscript{373} the settlements’ existence under the rule of the Ottoman Empire depended on a peculiar contradiction between the necessity to obtain land and the conditions of labor in the first settlements. On the one hand, land for the small settlements had to be purchased, which meant pressuring the Ottoman rulers to allow their rentier class to sell their Palestinian land to “foreign investors,” which meant a basic

\textsuperscript{372} According to many, (and this is an interpretation accepted by Herzl himself), the early Zionist settlements failed because of their operation as private businesses.

commodification of land to take place in Palestine. This, of course, meant that the
Palestinians living on the land being sold were driven out of it, a fact that did not
escape those purchasing the land – mostly representatives from the world Zionist
Organization, and not the halutzim themselves.374 On the other hand, in order for the
settlements to operate, capitalism could not be allowed to be the sole master of
labor, since Palestinian labor was cheaper and more skilled and productive than
that of the inexperienced Jewish immigrants. Therefore, some form of capitalist
land-trade had to be introduced into Palestine to make land available for purchase,
just in order to allow the settlements to resist capitalism on the level of labor and
ownership of the means of production. In order to maintain the settlements, not
only did the world Zionist Organization have to come up with funds to purchase
land; it also had to heavily subsidize their operation. As could be expected, many of
the settlements – particularly those established by private Zionist entrepreneurs,
did end up turning to Palestinian labor in order to sustain themselves, a move which
created heated debates among settlers.375

From the point of view of the settlers themselves, it was therefore on the
terrain of labor and work, rather than of land acquisition, that the collective utopian
project took shape. The buying of land for settlements functioned as a vanishing
mediator for the halutzim: it set the stage for their utopian projects, but it did not
constitute part of the everyday experience for which the utopian projects had to
answer. The “borderlessness” of the halutzim’s territorial imaginary described by

375 Shafir, 45-68.
Neumann, their ability to disregard land acquisition and focus on the labor of its cultivation, is precisely the result of this vanishing mediation. That a defensive dimension - protecting the small utopian colonies from harm – only marginally developed in the late 1920s, followed by a more aggressive offensive one in the late 1930s, attests once more to relative primacy of transformative labor in the halutzim’s imaginary over the inevitably aggressive acts involved in purchasing land. Yet, it is precisely the contradiction between the two that has posed a crucial test for the totalizing utopian dimension of the halutzim’s collective project and its associated imaginary, as we will now see.

The 1948 war marks a significant challenge to the way the Halutzim narrated their utopia. Instead of purchasing land, the Zionists now took it by force. On the eve of the war, only 6% of the cultivated lands in Palestine were under Jewish ownership, according to Ilan Pappe. The Jewish armed forces grew considerably in the late 1940s through the British mandate’s implicit support, and a few weeks into the war, they employed more than 10% of the Jewish population in active duty (80,000 out of 650,000). It is this abrupt shift in the way land was acquired which acts as background for our second literary coordinate: the short story Khirbet Khizeh published in 1949 by S. Yizhar. The story, which won massive critical attention after its publication and is still discussed today, narrates the occupation of a Palestinian village by a group of soldiers and the subsequent deportation of its

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376 Neumann, 31.
377 Pappe, 30.
378 Pappe, 45.
Palestinian inhabitants across enemy lines. Yizhar’s firm standing in the midst of the canon of Modern Hebrew letters, and his background – having grown up in an environment suffused with halutzim’s ideology - is important for us.\(^{380}\) For it is here that the Zionist totalizing imaginary encounters a real challenge through a narrative encounter between the totalizing imaginary of the Halutzim, the becoming-visible of the violent acquisition of land in the everyday lives of settlers, and literary history.

Yizhar’s stories, making their appearance in the late 40s, take part in the formation of a genre that will prove to be very durable in the history of Israeli literature, one that we can name, for lack of a better term, the soldier’s experience genre. Moshe Shamir’s 1946 *Hu halach basadot (He Walked in the Fields)*, often contrasted in early criticism with Yizhar’s stories, can be said to inaugurate this genre, thematically organized around a young soldier’s life. It is here that military commitment to the emerging nation is strongly coupled with Kibbutz life and a commitment to the totalizing imaginary of the halutzim, of course (and its contradiction with the hero’s love interest, here coupled with the imagined ideological deficiencies of Holocaust survivors).\(^{381}\) Later examples of the genre that attest to its centrality to the imagination of collectivity include Yehushua Bar-Yosef’s *Khayav umoto shel yionatan argaman (The Life and Death of Yionatan Argaman, 1959)*, and later Yehoshua Knaz’s *Hitganvut yikhidim (Infiltration, 1986)*, Yitzhak Laor’s *Am, ma’alach melachim (The People, Food Fit for a King, 1993)* and to a certain


degree Yuval Shimoni’s *Kheder (A Room, 1999)*. We will return to this genre later, with our analysis of Ron Leshem’s *Im Yesh Gan Eden*. What is important for us at this point is simply to note this genre’s importance in Israeli literature’s attempt to imagine collectivity, precisely when the military component of the Zionist enterprise is becoming much more central in the lives of rural settlers and urban dwellers alike. The strong coupling of this experience with the *halutzim*’s ideology at the moment of its formation is of course not accidental, for it is here that totalizing transformative labor of settlement meets the coming, more properly national imaginary and its monopolization of violence, on which we will have more to say later.

It is on the grounds of form, rather than content, that Yizhar’s stories stand out in their genre. Famously, Yizhar’s narrator starts out by saying that the story he is telling is something he has been trying to forcefully forget, but that keeps bothering him:

Indeed, all this has happened long ago, but since then has yet to let me go. I had decided to drown it in days’ clamor, to diminish its insignificance and to dull it in the daily rumble of things. I even succeeded, at times, with a sober shrug, to see that the thing was not, after all, so terrible, and I congratulated myself for my patience, which is, as is well known, the sister of true wisdom. But every now and then I’d be shaken anew, wondering how easy it is to be tempted, to be deceived open-eyed, and to join that large crowd of liars – made of ignorance, self-serving apathy, or simply shameless egoism – and to replace one big truth with the shoulder-shrug of a seasoned criminal. I’ve realized that the time for hesitation is over, and that even if I do

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not know the way out of here, it seems to me that instead of remaining silent, I’d better start telling the story.\textsuperscript{383}

Some critics, mostly since the 60s, have taken this beginning to indicate a failed act of repression leading to trauma, or a failed attempt to not-know the atrocities that were committed by the Israeli forces during the ’48 war.\textsuperscript{384} But here a curious slippage already occurs, for critics immediately take the narrator’s need to repress to indicate something else: the existence of a nationally imposed censorship of the atrocities, on the behalf of which repression is necessary. Accordingly, they see Yizhar as attempting to give voice to silenced crimes committed against Palestinians. The problem with this interpretation is that the atrocities were not silenced at all: the deportation and killing of Palestinians during the war was a hot political topic at the time, and other literary and poetic texts produced around the same period dealt extensively with it.\textsuperscript{385} Why then, did Yizhar’s story stand out among the other texts that at least acknowledge the expropriation, deportation, and killing of Palestinians? And if the events were not silenced, what is Yizhar’s narrator battling to forget, or, put another way, \textit{why is he having such a hard time remembering}?  

For it is not exactly failed repression that the narrator is battling. Rather, the problem he is facing is a slightly different one: it is a problem of narration. As many 

\textsuperscript{383}Ibid., 36. My translation.  
\textsuperscript{385}A famous example is Nathan Altermann’s Poem, “Al Zot” [“On That”].
passages in the story indicate, the narrator does not quite know how to narrate the events. He cannot decide on a starting point for the story, beginning the narration anew several times. Furthermore, throughout the narrative he keeps offering ways of relating to the events, only to end up being dissatisfied with them, or contradicting them in a never-ending process of picking up narrative possibilities and then dropping them as soon as they run into contradiction (usually expressed in passages that end with a sudden, deep feeling of dissatisfaction, of something troubling that has failed to be articulated, such as “suddenly it became clear that for us it’s all lost, that we’re not fit for the way things used to be” or “I did not know why a feeling of loneliness suddenly loomed.”) 386 In short, These multiple beginnings and sudden stops, which early critics have denounced or celebrated as a moral weakness or moral sensitivity in the narrator-protagonist, or a heightened, potentially destructive self-doubt, gives the story its dominant formal feature. This form should be read through Adorno’s ingenious formulation according to which form is nothing but sedimented content. 387 For it is here that the often-mentioned influence of an earlier writer, Uri Nissan Gnessin, over Yizhar’s work is most noticeable. 388 As we mentioned before, following Dan Miron’s claim, Gnessin’s novellas, with their gloomy and misunderstood protagonists who inevitably retreat into their internal world, thematize the uncertain existence of Hebrew literature at the turn of the century. What happens in Yizhar is the sedimentation of that content into the form

386 Yizhar, 42.
387 See, for example, in the articles by Mordechai Shalev, Chaim Nagid, Yitzhak Sade and David Kna’ani in Chaim Nagid (ed), S. Yizhar: mivkhar ma’amarei bikoret al yetzirato.
388 Many critics have noted the affinities between Yizhar’s and Gnessin’s protagonists. See for example in Chaim Nagid, 8.
of the self-doubting protagonist, a protagonist whose political implications were so heatedly debated among the early critics of the story.

This form – whose brokenness makes Yizhar’s work a perfect example of literary Modernism – enables in Yizhar’s story the repetition of cycles of attempt-and-failure to narrate the events. For example, the ethical perspective taken by the critics themselves, one that either condemns the soldiers’ violence or justifies it as a necessary part of nation-building, informs some of the narrative solutions that the narrator tries to employ, never ending up being satisfied with any of them. Another example of the failure to narrate emerges in the conversations between the soldiers; time and time again the narration emphasizes their failure to communicate what is bothering them. However, whether this formal feature is interpreted as evidence of the soldiers’ trauma or, again, as indicating a social need to repress the deportations and killing of Palestinians, it is far from being the whole story.

Here we can finally consider the relevance of the halutzim’s totalizing ideology to Yizhar’s story. For, as many of Yizhar’s early critics have noted, it is precisely to that utopian structure of feeling that Yizhar’s narrator turns for solace, a momentary escape from the failure to narrate the events taking place. The landscape descriptions, the constant imagining and re-imagining of agricultural labor to come (both back in the narrator’s home and in the village being occupied and its land) and its temporalities, and the familiar social relations associated with it - all spring from the discourse of the halutzim, (or that of the ‘settler aristocracy’, as

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some critics have called it) with which Yizhar had an intimate familiarity. Even the buildings, tools, and farm animals in the Palestinian village – now expropriated – are at times imagined as dead labor to be reutilized in resettlement. In short, it is this content to which the narrator constantly returns which relate the failed attempts to narrate the events to the utopian narrative of nation-building, which as I claimed above, relied heavily on narrating collectively organized agricultural labor. The personal trauma with which we easily associate the failure to narrate is therefore in this case a mediated form of the crisis in narrating utopia, the mediation of a crisis of collective imagination onto the level of individual experience. This, finally, signals us that the constant search for a narrative solution is driven by a strong utopian impulse, constituting in this case an attempt to continue narrating utopia. Therefore, it is not that the ethical interpretation insisted upon by many critics is wrong. Rather, this interpretation itself, at the time the story is written, is but one strategy that the narrator uses to find a narrative solution that could reconnect personal experience of the war with the collective utopian narrative. The need to bridge this rift, as I have argued earlier, arises from a the shift from buying land - a vanishing mediator as far as settlers’ experience is concerned - to taking it by force, which increasingly informed many settlers’ experience.

To sum up the argument over Yizhar’s short story: its ‘broken’ form, arising from a dissatisfaction with different ways of narrating the events, signifies the historical decline of the halutzim’s totalizing ideology, its failure to incorporate

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390 Yizhar, 55. See Kna’ani, 96.
ideologically the transition from purchasing land to taking it by force. First, it is important to note that this argument should not be construed as a general argument against violence, or as indicating a general incompatibility of utopianism and violence. For, the halutzim's utopianism did not shy away from constructive violence, particularly the violence done to the Zionist body in its becoming and to the land to be subdued and cultivated. Secondly, it is important to emphasize how the early critical responses to the story reaffirm the same failure. These responses feature heated debates over the educational or ideological value of the story to the national project – some critics claiming that Yizhar's protagonists (in Khirbet Khizeh and in other literary texts, especially in his 1200-page magnum opus dealing with the 1948 war, Yeme Ziklag) end up making the right choice, despite their doubts, ideological ‘emptiness’ or weakness, while others decry the moral lostness of the generation, viewing the story as harmful to the nation-building project. The first (and by far the larger) camp usually ends up viewing the story as a courageous portrait of a generation that does not shy away from doubt, while the opposing camp views it as unrepresentative of anything except the moral and social bankruptcy of Yizhar and his social milieu.

391 See Chaim Nagid’s survey of the early political critical responses to the story. Nagid, 16-17. 392 Deploiring the early critics’ focus on the ideological dimension of the story (and contrasting it to its aesthetic features), as some critics today tend to do (see, for example, Gidi Nevo, Shiv’a yamim banegev (Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hame’uchad, 2005) 11), is nothing but a gross misunderstanding of historical transformation. For, the inseparability of the ideological and the aesthetic in the context of a living collective project is strongly implicit in the early critics’ own writing. Every ideological point that they make is at the same time an aesthetic one, sometimes very explicitly tying together aesthetic features and ideological ones – or mapping aesthetic forms onto social ones.
Now, the interpretation offered here does not negate these interpretations. Rather, it identifies their moment of truth: the critics are completely correct in identifying the basic contradiction in the story – and in much of Yizhar’s early writing – as the one between individual and society. Many of them comment on the inability to mediate between personal experience and ‘societal values’ (read: the *halutzim’s* ethos) in one form or another. Thus, the inability to give words to the experience of the war satisfactorily, on which Eliezer Schweid comments, or the desire to be part of the collective project that cannot be reconciled with the soldiers’ inner world on which Gershon Shaked focuses, can serve as good examples here.  

Even closer to the interpretation offered here is Joseph Auerbach’s description of the generational ideological crisis involved, and the particular social group to which it pertains – the children of the *halutzim* – which becomes apparent during the war. Auerbach claims claim that even though Yizhar’s work is far from any Lukácsian-realist social mapping, it does affect a kind of ideological mapping, in which different ideological attitudes are taken up only to be dropped again when they prove to be unsatisfactory. All if these interpretations highlight in different ways the crisis in narrating utopia discussed above.

Yet, to the degree to which different critics read Yizhar’s protagonists as justifying or negating the collective Zionist project, they display a certain transformation in the location or the function of the *halutzim’s* imaginary, a

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395 Auerbach, 126-7.
difference that can be called a transition from utopia to ideology. The difference, to recall Wegner’s discussion, is between the persistence of contradiction in the utopian, versus ideology’s constant attempt to reconcile contradictions. If Yizhar’s work keeps the halutzim’s utopian contradictoriness open – however minimally – by thematizing the failure to narrate utopia, most critics try to put the contradiction to rest by trying to convince us, and themselves, that Yizhar’s protagonists end up “doing the right thing,” or continue participating in the collective projects despite their brave confrontation with their doubts. It is this transition of the halutzim’s imaginary from utopian totalization to ideology, soon to become hegemonic national ideology, which serves as background to Yizhar’s story. This process, which we could arguably call one of reification, closes off the utopian totalizing potential which Yizhar desperately works to keep alive.

It is precisely this totalizing potential that is completely missed when more recent critics of Yizhar’s story raise points that sometimes seem, when not read historically, to be very similar to the older critiques of the story. The ethical contradictions that Yizhar’s story thematizes are taken to be an indictment of the national collective project, rather than its utopian interrogation; the soldier’s trauma is either celebrated for “realism” or seen as the ultimate horizon of the story; the descriptions of the atrocities committed against Palestinians are taken to indicate the narrator’s anti-nationalist stance or to articulate some abstract pacifism rather than a search for utopian continuity; Yizhar’s protagonists’ non-rebelliousness – their ultimate complicity with injustice – are seen as cowardice, or
as signifying Yizhar’s ultimate justification of the wrongdoing, not for a second considering the fact that Yizhar, unfortunately, was never a science-fiction author. These critiques emerge out of a later moment in Israeli history, one that we will shortly discuss.

To conclude our discussion of Yizhar’s story and the transformation of the halutzim’s imaginary from utopia to ideology, we should mention that it does not matter for our purposes that the halutzim, from a purely numerical perspective, were a small minority, even in the first decades of Zionist settlement. Nor does it matter that by the 1940s, a robust urban working-class has developed, one whose everyday experience had very little to do with the halutzim’s agricultural vanguardism (and who had its own version of the halutzim’s ‘conquest of labor’). Indeed, the half-mocking attitude of several critics (such as Auerbach and Kna’ani) towards second-generation halutzim such as Yizhar is particularly telling in this respect: the ideological crisis of the “settlement aristocracy,” as they put it, is a much more private one than Yizhar would have us believe. As Auerbach puts it, Yizhar avoids Lukácsian sociological totalization, opting instead for a psychological

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396 Yitzhak Laor sees Yizhar as “cowardly” confirming, in the last instance, the ideology that he challenges in his stories (See Nevo, 40-42).
397 See Nuemann, 18-19.
398 Auerbuch, in Nagid, 119.
399 Ibid., 119-125
naturalism. All of that holds true, of course, but it does not change our main claim here – that the halutzim’s imaginary had been a strongly totalizing one, opening up imaginary space for conceiving of a radically-different society, and that Yizhar’s story intimates the crisis of this imaginary in the face of material changes - the becoming-visible of a contradiction - between the experience of taking of land by force and the halutzim’s totalizing imaginary.

From National Hegemony to Globalization

We will now jump over many important transformations and developments in Israeli history, including the second great wave of expropriating and deportation of Palestinians in the 1967 war; the expansion of Israeli state capitalism to increasingly subsume Palestinian labor and markets (making the Palestinian economy wholly dependent on Israeli politics); the growing dependency (politically and economically) of Israel itself on the United States since the mid-1970s; and the political transformations of the late 1970s in Israel, particularly the end of the 30-

400 Auerbach, 119-121. Although I will not be able to argue this position persuasively here, it seems likely that a Lukácsian Realism could not have developed in the context of the Zionist project of the first half of the 20th century – if only for the fact that it was formed by immigration waves from radically-different contexts, which were numerically comparable to the size of the present Jewish population. In other words, there is no stable society to speak of, nothing that could give rise to a social typology necessary for a Lukácsian Realist literature. This is not to say that attempts at a figuration of a social whole, or the pre-conceptual beginnings of social-mapping were completely absent from the literary landscape. For example, it is possible to argue that the picaresque as a literary form is a far more useful tool for social mapping in this context than the realist social mapping, but we will not be able to discuss this in any depth here.
year domination of Israeli politics by a single party, the Mapai labor party, and other transformations. Nor should we assume that the period skipped over is bereft of ideological transformations pertaining to utopian imaginaries. For example, one of the routes which we will not explore here but which could nonetheless constitute a productive challenge to existing political sensibilities, has to do with the way in which the Israeli military itself had become charged with utopian energies: its mandatory conscription and grand ‘melting pot’ imaginary opening up a space for totalizing social engineering (and not only an imaginary one), however deplorable the role that the Israeli military has played and is still playing in the region. The seemingly natural connection that still seems to exist in the Israeli imaginary between that Yizhar-ian “settler aristocracy” and the Israeli military’s top command (white, secular Kibbutz-grown Israeli men seeming somehow more right for the job) is of course indicative of this transference of utopian potentiality from the reified halutzim’s imaginary to the military. In short, what prominent sociologists such as Baruch Kimmerling have condemned as the militarization of Israeli society, should be dialecticized to include the transformative utopian potentiality through which this militarization was made possible in the first place. Again, this proposed line of inquiry is not an attempt to celebrate the Israeli military as some ultimate model for revolutionary success. Its role in the oppression of Palestinians, both historical and ongoing, is of course extensive and undeniable, and so is its related role in

401 For a detailed political-economic critique of Israeli economy, see Shimshon Bichler’s and Paul Nizan’s Merivchei milchama ledividendim shel shalom (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2001).
serving the needs of Israeli state capitalism until the late 1980s, as Nitzan and Bichler show.\footnote{Nitzan and Bichler, 307-393.} However, it would be a mistake to ignore the totalizing potential that the military has offered (and the literary production which touches on it) or the radically transformative social imaginary that it makes possible, including not only a promise of full employment (through universal conscription), technological research and innovation (even if mostly aimed at military application), but also cultural production itself, as exemplified by the Israeli military's musical military bands, even if today they seem to be recalled only when a nostalgic fetish, or, alternately, a musical object of ridicule is needed.

But we will not be able to explore this period extensively here in terms of its literary production. For our purposes, it is important to note that until the late 1980s, as Nizan and Bichler claim, Israel had enjoyed a relative economic autonomy (even if that autonomy was predicated, particularly since the 1970s, on US approval and political support). Capital circulation was a national business, one that was managed in order to achieve this or that national goal, heavily protected by national and international political regulative measures (both international trade agreements and a strong trade-unionism). Indeed, during this period, as Nitzan and Bichler suggest:

Israel’s “national interest” fit well with the interests of the American “oil and guns” coalition. This confluence of interests reached its zenith during the Reagan - Begin period. This period saw the completion of Israel’s transition into a regime of war-capitalism, which was wholly dependent on American foreign policy. Israel functioned as an
important part in the circulation of profits; Both through importing American weapons, subsidized for the sake of the American weapon groups, and as a keeper of regional military tension – and as a protector of American bases in the region, particularly after the fall of the Iranian Shah. In return, the Israeli military and governing powers were accorded a special status of a preferred client state [...] [the American government] even allowed Israel to maintain a closed market, relatively protected from American commodities – as long as it will not compete with American weapons firms in peripheral states.404

It is in the early 1990s that globalization, or the erosion of that economic autonomy, starts to be felt in Israel, both socially and culturally. Here we can see reiterated what is a familiar story by now. A middle class which had developed under the social welfare state (one which is, no doubt, deeply complicit in the production reproduction of ethnic, religious, and gender divides in Israeli society), starts being eroded as processes of neoliberalization appear, slowly dismantling unionized labor’s substantial power in Israel, and slowly commodifying economic sectors which were previously under heavy state regulation, if not outright control.405 What Wallerstein, Bauman, and others see as the social polarization brought about by globalization raises its head in Israel, as described in detail by sociologist Uri Ram, creating a new imaginary dichotomy between westernized, rich and post-national Tel Aviv, and poor, religious, and nationalist Jerusalem.406 If the

404 Ibid., 17. My translation.
405 Ibid., 175-178; Uri Ram, Haglobalizatzia shel Israel: Mcworld betel-aviv, jihad beyrushala’yim (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2005).
406 Ram’s approach is based on seeing social bifurcation – Barber’s Mcworld vs. Jihad – as the most important social factor of globalization. For our purposes, globalization’s social polarization thesis, whether in its Wallerstiniian version or otherwise, will be taken as the main evidence for the crumbling of national hegemony in ideological terms, which we will discuss further below.
post-67 period was characterized by Israel’s attempt to subsume Palestinian labor under its own regime of surplus-value production, the outbreak of the first Intifada in 1987 sent the Israeli economic sectors that were dependent on Palestinian labor – mostly in construction and agriculture – to look for cheap labor on the international market.\textsuperscript{407} Agricultural production along the coast of Israel – one of the older sources of symbolic pride for nation-building - became less profitable and sometimes unsustainable as a result of shifts in international trade agreements, making way for private real-estate development.

The loss of relative national economic autonomy – itself sanctioned and encouraged by the state – has subsequently led to what Jameson has called, in his work on postmodernism, the erosion and death of hegemonic (national) ideology. According to Jameson, national hegemonic ideology’s death does not equal its disappearance but the loss of its special status as a reference point for political intervention. It becomes one more style to be imitated, which for Jameson leads to the eclipse of parody by pastiche.\textsuperscript{408} This is by no means solely an invisible or immaterial transformation in the Israeli context. For discussions of postmodernism, even when they are based on Jameson’s writing, too often ignore the material change that undergirds it. Thus:

...aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh

\textsuperscript{407} See Nitzan and Bichler; for the effects of these transformations on the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, see Eyal Weizman’s \textit{Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation} (London: Verso, 2007).

\textsuperscript{408} Fredric Jameson, \textit{Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism}, (London; New York: Verso, 1991) 17.
waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation. Such economic necessities then find recognition in the varied kinds of institutional support available for the newer art, from foundations and grants to museums and other forms of patronage.409

It is therefore the changes in the institutional framework available for the development of new art on which the emergence of postmodernism hinges. Now, Israel until the 90s fostered a strongly national institutional framework for producing culture. For example, until the 90s, only one TV channel that offered programming in Hebrew was available to Israelis. State-owned and operated, the programming on this channel had been determined according to an imagined national interest – even when specific programs were imported from abroad. The 90s brought with them, first, another TV channel, partly privately owned and operated, and later cable TV, offering a multitude of foreign channels that of course no longer had anything to do with the forging of national identity. The loosening of the state's hold over cultural production and circulation resulted in the emergence of private production companies. In the literary market, the politically-associated publication houses, ones that were related somehow to the national project (the reader might have noticed how many of the books referenced here have the word “kibbutz” in the name of their publisher), lost their prominence. Yet, as we will see, the feeling of crisis in Israeli literature from the 90s seems to have preceded most of

409 Ibid., 4-5.
these changes. We will not be able to explore the institutional dynamic that gave
birth to an Israeli version of postmodernism extensively here, yet we can assume,
for our present purposes, that the early feeling of crisis is a result of being at the
wrong end, as it were, of American postmodernism; of being a market, that, for the
most part, was invaded by American cultural production just before it had
structurally adjusted to produce postmodern culture.

Anyway, if Yizhar’s context was one that we characterized as a transition
from a utopian imaginary to an ideological one, it is this 1990s context which we can
now see as the felt dissolution of that ideology. And, as is always the case with such
ideological transformations, it is first manifested on the level of subjective
experience as a radical disorientation, an evacuation of meaning from different
spheres of familiar social interaction.410 Israeli fiction from the 90s is replete with
thematizations of this ideological crisis, with its strong tendency towards
fragmentation (on the level of literary form), absurdities, communicative failures,
and alienation from both immediate surroundings and familiar national narratives.
Orly Castel-Bloom’s novel Where am I? (Heichan ani nimtzeit, published in 1990), can
be taken as a good example of the literary thematization of this crisis, seen by critics

410 A point which we have so far ignored, but is important to mention, is that an ideological dissolution is
always experienced as such only by subjects who were able to imagine themselves through it in the first
place. The death of Israeli hegemonic ideology is thus only a death for certain subject positions, most
strongly in this case for white, Jewish citizens of Israel. Palestinian citizens of Israel, for instance, for which
the entrance to the Zionist imaginary of nation-building has been made almost impossible, did not
experience this ideological crisis, or did not experience it as crisis. Lukács’ description of crisis as it is
perceived by Bourgeois consciousness describes precisely this dynamic, which we will not be able to
explore in any detail here.
as giving birth to something like postmodernism in Hebrew literature.\(^{411}\) If in Yizhar’s case the crisis of the utopian imagination is still something to be overcome, a lack from which some collective effort is supposed to emerge, this is no longer the case in Castel-Bloom’s world. For in her novel, the communicative failures, the failures of inter-generational transmission, the alienation from work and family, and the failures of the various national motifs (most importantly, the 1987 stock market crash and the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon) to generate meaning for the heroine - all these are happily embraced if not outright celebrated. Indeed, if the label of postmodernism is one that could be applied to Castel-Bloom’s texts at all, it is a postmodernism that constitutes a strong response to the subjective imaginary tied up with the Israeli nation-state, with its strong connections to the realms of family (gender relations, generational transmission) and labor. The affirmation of fragmentation and meaninglessness associated with this postmodern turn, therefore, should not be so easily abstracted from its ideological nationalist content, the dissolution of which is a direct result of globalization. Thus, wandering disoriented through the streets of Tel Aviv, the narrator peeks into a carpenter’s workshop:

I said to myself: I’ll go in for just a moment. I’ll take a peek at what’s inside, for if I won’t, who will? Nobody today does the kind of peeking that I do, which is quick peeking. And free of charge. Detective services without a case, murderer without a corpse, murder weapon without a victim, espionage without a state, happiness without a single smile.\(^{412}\)


\(^{412}\) Ibid., 16. My translation.
The narrator then proceeds to talk to the man inside, who turns out to be both a soldier on leave and a murderer for hire. This short passage exemplifies the collapse of a national imaginary that used to attach a determinate meaning to the spaces the heroine visits, and the people she encounters. The absence of social mapping imbues everything with indeterminacy, with a loss of an ability to connect cause and effect, and with the loss of an ability to relate individual experience (here, the “detective without a case”) with a larger imaginary of its surroundings. In short, a failure to totalize is manifested in Castel-Bloom’s writing.

Yet, even the total meaninglessness that Castel-Bloom’s novel tries to effect is not bereft of a utopian impulse. For, the instability of identity that inevitably emerges from the fragmentation and alienation turns into an infinite malleability, a capacity to switch identities and to become one’s other: the carpenter who is indeterminately both a soldier on leave and a killer for hire can serve as a good example here, as well as the protagonist’s experience at the acting school, in which the acting a role is something which is extended from the theatrical context to life in general, blurring the distinction between theatrical acting and being manipulated in everyday life. “…we are indeed theater people” the acting school director tells the Heroine,

but we are definitely not puppets in someone’s theater. And even if we are puppets... we refuse to be moved by you... I’m admonishing you now as a person rather than as a student. I’m admonishing you because your personality structure is full of such stupid contradictions, that who knows if you'll ever manage to resolve them and be capable of authentic acting.\textsuperscript{413}

\textsuperscript{413} Ibid., 42.
Most importantly, the picaresque form of the novel itself, the voyeurism that makes formally possible the discovery of placelessness and fragmentation in the first place, depends on the lack of clear social mapping, or of making the heroine lack any social identity. The failure to belong anywhere thus suggests possibilities of new belongings, of radical transformations and of new social forms, even if no concrete transformation is developed in the novel.

But every dissolution and play offers up raw materials for new developments. And it is here that new totalizing aesthetics will begin to emerge, this time under the condition of globalization. As a rule of thumb, what distinguishes the literary ‘postmodernism’ of the 90s from new attempts to totalize that emerge (mostly) in their wake is the dissipation of the celebratory attitude, or its concretization as belonging to specific subject positions. The state of fragmentation celebrated by Castel-Bloom and others becomes the starting point for new totalizing imaginaries. One early example can be found in the explosion of detective fiction in the 1990s in Israel, in which of particular interest to us is Batia Gur’s series of detective novels, written between 1988 and 2004. As other critics have mentioned, Gur’s detective novels are more than a simple solving of a crime-riddle through the familiar detective hermeneutic, as they provides along the way social

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414 The 90s wave of detective fiction includes writers such as Batia Gur, Shulamit Lapid, Ram Oren, Ruth Almog, Arieh Sivan, and others; Gur, Batya, Retzach beshabat baboker (1988); mavet bakhug lesifrut (1991); Hamerchak hanachon (1996); Retzach Bederech beit lekhem (2001); Lina meshutefet (2001); Retzach, metzalmim (2004).
commentary about different spaces of Israeli society, about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and about the Zionist ethos.\footnote{See Ariel Hirschfeld, “Hansicha she’al ha’adasha,” Haaretz, 16 June 2005 <http://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/1.1019632>}

Yet, that Gur’s detective fiction is strongly attached to a national imaginary is not primarily the result of the writer’s idiosyncratic interests. For the history of the genre in Zionist and Israeli imagination points at a very strong coupling of the genre with the need to imagine collectivity in moments of transition. Hebrew detective fiction was born almost together with the first moment of transition we have described – Yizhar’s 1940s – with the detective stories narrating the adventures of detectives David Tidhar, Gad Magen and others.\footnote{See Eli Eshed, Mitarzan ve’ad zbeng (Tel Aviv: Bavel, 2002). Hebrew detective fiction started appearing in the mid-1930s, but it is in the 1940s that a true avalanche of detective fiction is published.} Concerned mostly with urban settings instead of Yizhar’s rural settlers, these detective stories were mostly concerned with constructing national allegories: the solving of the crime by the detective always requiring the cooperation of different types of Zionist Jews (notable in this case is the attempt to reconcile the more affluent Ashkenazi detective with his poorer Mizrachi “assistant”: David Tidhar and Sa’adya, Gad Magen and Rahamim). The criminals populating these novels are of course mostly Palestinians, drug lords and other social types that were to be purged from the emerging national body. That the necessity to cognitively map the urban setting in service of national imaginary has diminished in the 50s and 60s is evident in its confinement to children’s literature. Israeli young adult fiction had featured long series of detective stories, such as the HASAMBA series, authored by Yig’al
Mosenzon, and later Galila Ron-Feder’s Jinji series, both of which contain an overt political educational dimension with roughly the same attempt to reconcile social contradictions into a national subject.\textsuperscript{417} The detective story genre in Hebrew was therefore strongly coupled with constructing an imaginary social map, serving almost as a national literary institution. Its strong appearance in the 40s and the 90s strongly signal for us that these are moments of transition requiring a renewed social mapping. Gur’s fiction preoccupation with national social contradictions is therefore something like a rule of the genre in its Hebrew instance.\textsuperscript{418}

A few more remarks about genre are in order. Marxist evaluations of detective fiction have sometimes tended to see it as a hopelessly bourgeois form of knowledge, in which the role of social determinants is substituted with occult or fantastic events, or in which a battle of good and evil intelligences relegates everything else – in particular, the social realities from which the genre springs - to

\textsuperscript{417} For a discussion of the national ideological dimension of these series (that undialectically criticizes them for promoting nationalist agendas, which is undoubtedly true) see Talmon, Miri, Blues latzabar ha’avud (Tel Aviv: Hauniversita Haptucha, 2001) 42; Uriel Ofek, Mitarzan ve’ad hasamba (Tel Aviv: Masada, 1969); Eli Eshed, Mitarzan ve’ad zbeng (Tel Aviv: Bavel, 2002) 84-102.

\textsuperscript{418} We should therefore disagree with Dan Miron’s assessment of Hebrew detective fiction as being inherently conservative. Miron claims that detective fiction that involves an exploration of social problems is inherently worse than one more centered around the detective’s and the criminal’s idiosyncracies (which of course immediately condemns the overtly socio-political Hebrew detective fiction). The assumption of some inherent separation between political and a-political fiction is of course the problem with Miron’s assessment. That social mapping in it is historically inextricably tied with nationalist interest in Hebrew literature does not of course mean that is a necessity of the genre, and Gur’s detective fiction’s popularity attests exactly to the opposite of what Miron claims – that the overt social or political dimension makes detective fiction less interesting. It’s rather a modernist sensibility that still survives in Miron’s approach, one whose relevance to the 90s Hebrew detective fiction we can of course contest (Miron, “Komriya beyisrael: kama he’arot be’inyan hasipur habalashi umekomo batarbut hayisraelit,” in Hasifriya ha’iveret (Tel Aviv: Yedioth aharonoth, 2005).
mere background material. Yet, bracketing ideological effects for a moment, that the hermeneutic impulse of detective fiction easily lends itself to social mapping - the detective’s deduction exposing social contradictions as the murder’s cause - is almost self-evident. Indeed, that the genre emerges with the wave of urbanization brought about by industrialization and the subsequent establishment of modern police forces seems to hint at its indissoluble connection with attempt to help figure the new social universe of the city. An effort of spatio-social orientation, or of generating some figurative language through which social positions are geographically mapped, are thus essential to the genre rather than being a specific distortion of it for political purposes. It is of course this totalizing impulse that enabled Cuban authors, according to Persephone Braham, to develop a Lukácsian approach to detective fiction, in which the detective’s efforts produce “a realistic representation of society rather than a flight into bourgeois fantasyland.”

Yet, it is aesthetic closure that must be affected in the detective novel (or indeed any novel), one that pertains both to its handling of social contradictions (however these are disguised) and to the solving of the crime. It is precisely this closure which postmodern detective fiction explodes, according to Jameson, “reconfirm[ing] the value of closure over and over again by its intent to thwart and

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421 Persepho Braham, Crimes Against the State, Crimes Against Persons: Detective Fiction in Cuba and Mexico (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) 31.
frustrate it. Thus, the earlier Hebrew detective novels always worked towards a reconciliation of social antagonisms, figured in the successful solving of the crime. But the later detective fiction, such as Gur’s, is no longer satisfied with this closure (which must seem to them childish or too naively nationalist). As we will see, not only do Gur’s novels’ uniquely turn non-closure to its advantage in mapping social contradictions, but also in the process manage to register the social effects of globalization.

Gur’s detective stories, then, are markedly different from these earlier instances: in the earlier cases, the successful solving of the crime coincides with a simple resolution of social contradictions in the service of the national imaginary: the group of young detectives in the HASAMBA series, for example, serving as a national allegory, as each character represents a specific “type” of Israeli child, a division that corresponds to a clear division of labor that assigns to each a role in the national whole. But this is no longer the case in Gur’s writing. For, the detective story’s hermeneutic is here split - one riddle is the familiar one of the crime itself, collecting evidence and testimonies and logically connecting them into a narrative that recreates the events leading up to the crime. Meanwhile, a related cognitive effort takes place on the level of social mapping, one that is strongly tied to a specific place or setting. Through the detective’s inquiries, different attitudes, behaviors, and ideological attitudes are mapped onto class, ethnic, gender, and religious positions, now placed in their localized historical context.

Thus, for example, the plot of the fifth book in the series, *Murder in Jerusalem* (the literal translation of the Hebrew title is *Murder in Bethlehem Road*, which refers to a specific neighborhood of Jerusalem, but would of course not sell as well as an English title),\(^4\)\(^2\)\(^3\) takes place in Jerusalem’s Baq’a neighborhood. Home to well-off Palestinian families, Baq’a was occupied by the Israeli army during the 1948 war, and its Palestinian inhabitants were deported to Jordan. Its proximity to the border had made the neighborhood a common target for attack in the 50s, despite its stone-built, spacious villas. As in many other similar cases, the Israeli governments’ ethnically discriminatory settlement and housing policies had meant that the peripheral neighborhood was to be settled by newly-arrived Mizrachi Jews, who immigrated to Israel from Arab countries (as opposed to Ashkenazi Jews, immigrants from European countries, who were more likely to end up in less peripheral towns). Only after the 1967 war, when the border receded further east, and particularly in the 80s, the architectural gems of Baq’a were “miraculously” rediscovered and the neighborhood became a popular place to buy a house for well-off Israelis, usually Ashkenazi Jews. Rent and real-estate prices (kept low until then by national policies for many of the buildings in the neighborhood) went up sharply, and tensions around gentrification increased.

It is precisely with real estate that our novel begins – it is a real estate agent that finds the body in one of the neighborhood’s building, and later turns out to be a

good friend of our protagonist, the police detective. The detective’s investigation then provides the opportunity for the narrative to explore the history of the different social types that make up the neighborhood: from the old Mizrachi families to the relatively wealthy newcomers and to the opportunistic real-estate agents. As in Balzac, the descriptions of the Bshari and Benash dwellings codes class content (mediated to be sure through ethnicized codes), and almost stands in for the truth of different characters (in this respect, the relation between abandoned buildings and the Palestinian workers that illegally inhabit them becomes yet another Balzacinian ploy). Through the small interventions of history in the narrative, ideological attitudes are mapped onto class, ethnic, and gender oppositions, an act of social mapping which proves indispensible for reconstructing the events leading up to the crime. Thus, for example, we learn that the victim was conducting an investigation into the disappearance of children of Yemenite Jewish immigrants to Israel in the late 40s and early 50s, which has come to be known in Israel as the “kidnapped Yemenite children affair.” The babies, claimed to be dead by state officials, were then given up for adoption by more “civilized,” childless, Ashkenazi couples, according to several investigations (a claim vehemently denied by the state of course). The murder victim, Zahara, daughter to a Yemenite Jewish family, suspected that her older sister (claimed to be dead) has been one of the vanished children. Yet, she has to conduct her investigation covertly, because of family pressures. Moreover, one of the neighborhood’s more affluent families seems to

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424 Ibid., 7-9.
have been involved in Zahara’s sister’s kidnapping. Thus, the heroine’s journalist friend tells the detective that

Zahara did not want to have the story published... and it is only natural that she, [the journalist], would recognize the social potential of this family’s private story, which is sort of an allegory of the crimes committed by the state against the newly arrived Mizrachi immigrants; and not only this, but also how a big picture of Zahara in the news article, of her beautiful face, and a few words on her musical talent would go a long way to helping her cause. But Zahara objected to public exposure without getting her parents’ approval first, and kept what she found out even from her brother.425

The detective’s investigation thus provides the occasion for laying bare the contradictions ripping the neighborhood apart, superposing historical antagonisms onto the contradictions offered up by gentrification, family relationships, and others.

The details of the investigation and murder will not concern us here, aside from the fact that the solving of the murder shows how the social contradictions accentuated by the gentrification of the neighborhood help bring the crime about (and from which one can deduce the novel’s ideology – that the dissolution of the welfare state is disastrous despite its injustices). What is more important from our perspective is that, as opposed to the national-allegorical detective stories that we mentioned above, the contradictions are not resolved in any way with the solving of the crime. The neighborhood does not come together as some collective national subject who is finally able to catch the murderer. Nor is the detective himself a figure for such national subject, as the same contradictions that he is exploring seem to split his own character (and the police force generally), without being resolved.

425 Ibid., 139. My translation.
Most importantly, it is not through his exclusive agency that the crime is solved: a young girl who lives in the neighborhood and does some of the sleuthing herself provides some indispensable help. Therefore, the contradictions laid bare by the investigation are never reconciled, even as the crime is finally solved and the murderer captured.

Two things are important for us here. First, the plot of Gur’s detective novels is propelled by a strong totalizing impulse: the detective work’s hermeneutic constantly mediates between history, various social positions, ideological attitudes, and individual psychology, almost as a mere byproduct of the detective’s riddle-solving effort. As we have mentioned many times before, here, too, totalization opens up a space for the possibility of understanding a given social situation and acting in it – in this case, solving the crime - rather than foreclosing it. It is here that we can finally return to what we called the splitting of the hermeneutic effort and to the novel’s ingenious handling of the problem of closure. For we are here faced with two opposing results: on the one hand, the murderer is captured, but on the other, the solving of the crime no longer signals the reconciliation of social contradictions (as opposed to what has been the case in the earlier detective fiction). Closure, therefore, is thwarted, and our interest in the actual murderer is somewhat diminished. However, the failure of closure paradoxically coincides with a successful social mapping in which the contradictions remain untouched: the nuclear family (of both the murdered woman and that of the murderer) falls apart under their pressure, the injustice of the kidnapped children is not acknowledged or rectified on
some national level, and class tensions remain in the air as the novel comes to its conclusion. The detective, by the way, ends up buying a house in the neighborhood through his friend the agent.

And it is here that globalization makes its mark on the novel’s form. For the nation state is here embedded both in the coding of social contradictions and in the possibility of solving the crime. On the one hand, the nation-state is the evil system itself, that which used to “solve” social contradictions through enacting discriminatory policies and suppressing resistance to them (as in the story of the kidnapped children mentioned above). On the other, through the figure of the police detective, the nation state remains the only thing keeping the situation from getting worse. This is a little more difficult to detect in the novel, because it is present in the detective’s peculiar passivity – his mere presence allows for mediation and for secrets to be aired in a controlled manner, with minimal actual intervention on his part. It is only through his passive presence, for example, that the Palestinian squatters, who immediately become prime suspects in the eyes of most of the neighborhood and of some policemen, are cleared of suspicion. This passivity also marks the scene, towards the end of the novel, in which the detective’s mere presence allows for Hagar Bshari to confront her husband about his affair with one of the real-estate agents, Linda O’Brien. The detective is thus something like an empty form of mediation, an empty sign of the state’s role as mediator and arbiter.

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426 Ibid., 165-174.
427 Ibid., 263-264.
The nation-state is therefore against the nation-state: its past social programming is responsible for suppressing social contradictions in the first place, yet it is what still makes minimal social coherence possible - even as its social protections slowly wither away. It is here, of course, that globalization's effects are negatively registered in the novel's form: the withering away of the state's authority is what makes possible the “return of the repressed” of social contradictions, their exposure without reconciliation, but at the same time it still acts to diffuse the tensions borne out of a darker, vaster system of determinants that lurks behind.

We have been concerned with a failure to totalize under globalization (as in Castel-Bloom’s case), or with the literary figuration of globalization as the cause for the failure to totalize, even where a totalizing impulse is found (as in Gur’s detective novels). Now, however, it is time to turn to more elaborate attempts to articulate a totalizing logic with globalization. And it is here that what could be described as an explosion of interest in utopia in early 2000s Hebrew literature becomes relevant. To be sure, we are not dealing with any fully elaborated utopian programs (or with science fiction in general), which have been absent from the Hebrew literary landscape since Herzl’s Altneuland. Texts such as Ron Leshem’s Beaufort, Ofir Touche-Gafla’s End’s World and The Day the Music Died (in which death itself acts as a utopian schism), Einat Yakir’s Sand (in which Castel-Bloom’s Tel-Aviv voyeurism is recast as a figure of underemployment and privatized dream-scapes), Asaf Schurr’s Motti, and Eshkol Nevo’s Neuland (to name only a few) - all construct themselves around some formal feature of the utopian novel. We will focus here on two of
these, Leshem’s 2005 novel *Beaufort* (published under the Hebrew title *Im yesh gan eden* [*If There’s Heaven*]) and Nevo’s 2011 novel *Neuland*, both of which are related to the now-defunct national-hegemonic ideology.\(^{428}\)

For all its cultural specificity, Ron Leshem’s 2005 novel *Beaufort* has warranted considerable international attention, both as a novel, translated into several languages, and in the form of an adaptation into a 2007 film bearing the same title, nominated for an Academy Award and winning several prestigious international awards. While its positive international reception is a matter we will not be able to discuss here at length, it should at least be noted that the novel belongs to “world literature,” if the latter is understood in terms of the reception of a literary text outside its context of production. The novel tells the story of a group of Israeli soldiers posted in the Beaufort outpost in southern Lebanon, just before Israel’s withdrawal from the area in 2000, after having occupied it in 1982. Hezbollah’s constant attacks on the outposts of the occupying Israeli army, particularly in the period prior to the withdrawal, are well documented in the novel, as some of the soldiers are killed during the attacks. And so is the killing of Hezbollah fighters by the Israeli soldiers.

To begin with, we must avoid the mistake, not uncommon among Israeli critics of the novel, which judges it as if it were an article of political criticism rather than a literary text. This is precisely the case when the horizon of criticism is

\(^{428}\) Even though both of the novels enjoyed immense popularity in Israel, there is still a paucity of serious critical writing on them. It is for this reason that few critics will be mentioned below in our discussion of the novels.
contained, for example, in the claim that the novel contains “a critique of the [Israeli] security and political establishment, particularly of its policies dealing with the occupation of southern Lebanon, which nonetheless reinforces the social convention according to which military service should be undertaken and military orders obeyed.”  

It must be outrageous, or so it seems, that the low-ranking officer whose consciousness narrates the novel is not a staunch anti-nationalist. Yet, even this type of criticism identifies correctly the way the novel itself constructs its historical context. For the criticism of the establishment sounded by the low ranking officer who is narrating the novel emerges from what the novel imagines to be the historical contradiction around which it evolves: a generational communicative crisis, one in which the young soldiers fail to grasp history itself (or fail to understand its representatives in the political sphere and military high command). On the other hand, the older generation of politicians and commanders fail to transmit that history to the young soldiers. The initial alienation of the officer-narrator from Israeli society and from his commanding officers, the feeling that they cannot in any way understand him, all speak to this crisis. Passages that stress that feeling of total alienation abound; going on leave back into Israel, for example, and seeing people on the street, the narrator repeats several times that “there is no way they can understand us.”  

As an example, note the following passage:

And then we reached the pickup point. And the slight tremble became an anxious excitement as we approached Israel, and relief, shocked because of

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430 Leshem, Ron, Im yesh gan eden, 143.
this crazy thing that ended safely. And when the gate opened, and we crossed it, and jumped off the vehicles to the white asphalt surface, just as dawn was breaking. Inhale the air, I said to River, look at the sky and calm yourself down. There's nothing like going into Israel at this hour, when everybody is waking up just when you do, a new day, not knowing where you came from, not understanding what you went through. And the dairy trucks offloading merchandise at Zagorie's grocery store in Kiryat Shmona, and the bakery puts out new croissants [...] and people go jogging, waving to you. A different planet. These are sweet moments, like in a movie, everything looks harmless at first sight. A kind of village, of calm people that smile to each other, not able to grasp what goes on three feet from them, under their nose really. No way they can.431

Or again, despairing of the possibility of explaining his experience in the outpost to his girlfriend, the narrator ends their relationship with no explanation.432 The same communicative failure raises its head with regard to friends, family members, and the narrator's commanding officers. After establishing this alienation, the novel proceeds to dramatize the process in which this alienation is overcome: the soldiers' consciousness returns to history, or they come to understand themselves as part of a larger collective entity, just as the high-ranking commanding officers learn to communicate to the soldiers their understanding and sympathy (an ideological reconciliation of contradiction that culminates in the withdrawal from the outpost, perceived by the novel to be a historical necessity).

But the way that the novel itself imagines its historical context - its lower case ‘h’ history - should not be confused with its real historical determinants. We can begin approaching that context by considering the structure of the novel's imagined environment. For, the Beaufort outpost functions as an enclave in the

431 Ibid., 143-4.
432 Ibid., 157.
novel, an isolated space that is physically outside the territory of Israel. It takes but a small imaginative effort to see the strong similarities between the outpost and a utopian enclave, or to see the strong spatial break between the Beaufort and Israel as a utopian schism, that which enables the utopian thought experiments to take place. For many of the characteristics of that enclave surprisingly hold true for the description of the soldiers’ existence in the outpost. First, entry to Beaufort enacts a strong neutralization of ideological attitudes and of the ideological oppositions borne out of ethnic, religious, and other social contradictions, which is a familiar operation of utopian texts. As we mentioned before, neutralization does not simply imply the bracketing of social identities and ideological attitudes. Rather, it acts as a specific development of their underlying contradictions without resolving them. Thus, for example, both center-right (“Zionism”) and center-left (“Post-Zionism”) Israeli political positions are constantly mocked by the soldiers (particularly evident in linguistic inventiveness caricaturing either political commitment), but are also diffusely reasserted in describing the soldiers’ personalities and interests. It is the strong totalizing character of life in the enclave that neutralizes these contradictions, to which we will now turn.

434 This is most visible in regards to different soldier’s attitudes toward the withdrawal from Lebanon. See for example the cooperation between Ziv (the ‘leftist’ who supports the movement for withdrawal from Lebanon) and the narrator (who is strongly against it): the ideological contradiction slowly stops mattering when they work together. (Leshem, 118) . A neutralization of religious divides – between the more secular soldiers and their religious friends – takes place when one of the religious soldiers decides to question his devotion, which is, again, a result of the collective activity in the Beaufort (Leshem, 66).
435 Ibid., 28.
Secondly, and more importantly for our purposes, a strong totalizing dynamic shapes the soldiers’ everyday experience, not only in the trivial material sense of having all material aspects of life governed and controlled, but also in the sense of mapping individual roles into a larger imagined goal. This is suggested in the brief passage in which the outpost commander describes to the outpost soldiers how their individual assignments fit into larger missions, which are then seen within the larger logic of the goal of the military’s presence in southern Lebanon.\textsuperscript{436} This constitutes a mapping of individual everyday experience into a larger, systematic goal (which is by nature absent from felt experience), something that is totally missing from the narrator’s experience outside the Beaufort. The detailed descriptions of the different kinds of military operations, stake-outs, and ambushes that the group of soldiers undertakes discloses a fascination with cooperative functioning itself: each soldier is trained for a particular role in each of these contexts, and each role fulfils some necessary collective function.\textsuperscript{437} And, just as in utopian texts, the strong collective systematization is paired with individual play: from linguistic inventiveness, culinary experiments, and playing makeshift musical instruments, to the (plainly apparent yet constantly disavowed) homoeroticism among the soldiers, their couples dancing, to filming with a video camera and reciting Shakespeare (notwithstanding the strong ideological overdetermination of all of these scenes). These both highlight the absurdity of the utopian dream itself – for the Beaufort is doomed to be evacuated soon, as everyone knows – but at the

\textsuperscript{436} Ibid., 55.  
\textsuperscript{437} Ibid., 84.
same time show the opening up of a determinate space for personal play within the tightly-knit group.\textsuperscript{438} Even grieving over the soldiers that die is given somewhat of an institutional framework of expression, endowed with strong elements of personal play, through the game of “he will not get to . . .” (each participant completing the sentence any way he wants), which they play every time a soldier is killed.\textsuperscript{439}

It is the intimate mutual understanding that develops between the soldiers caught in this dynamic that stands in stark opposition, at least in the first half of the novel, to their strong feeling of alienation when they go on leave back to Israel. And it is this communicative failure that, as we mentioned above, stands in the center of the novel’s own conception of its immediate historical context. Here we can rewrite the novel’s attempt at ideological reconciliation in terms of the evacuation of the enclave of its utopian dimension. For, the novel is made up of two major parts, each one corresponding to different periods of sojourn in the Beaufort outpost. The later part corresponds to the period right before the evacuation of the outpost and withdrawal from southern Lebanon, and the earlier period takes place only months prior to that. If, in the first period, the schism between the Beaufort and Israel is strongly maintained, the later period is characterized by an evacuation of the utopian enclave of its utopian elements: both materially (‘non-essential’ equipment, all of that which enables individual play, is slowly sent back to Israel) and in terms

\textsuperscript{438} This absurdity is highlighted in the film version of \textit{Beaufort}, which is consistent with the filmic adaptation’s general tendency to diminish the utopian elements of the novel.

\textsuperscript{439} Ibid., 7-8, 137.
of practice (in the beginning of the second period, the narrator is informed that they will no longer be performing any operation outside the confines of the outpost, or anything that will require any of their specific specialization and training). This is combined with the weakening and disappearance of utopian neutralization, since the political discourse prevalent in Israel now creeps into the outpost itself.

The ideological turning point in the novel - after which the narrator’s fulmination against the withdrawal (into which we can now read a utopian impulse) stops, as he slowly returns to the nation’s embrace - is the visit of the older high-ranking officer to the outpost. Only through the high ranking officer’s demonstration that he understands the soldiers’ experience – expressed in his participation in their rituals and in his emotionally-charged narration of the battle over the Beaufort in 1982 – does the narrator’s alienation from Israeli society and its political discourse begin to dissipate. It is through the figure of the top-ranking officer, Kaplan, that ideological reconciliation becomes possible, and the subversive elements of the utopian state (expressed, for example, in the soldiers’ refusal of direct orders or their mockery of any ideology alienated from their experience) is finally contained. The generational crisis that the novel perceives itself to overcome through the figure of the older, top-ranking officer is here generalized into a larger conception of history. During his visit, Kaplan eats with the soldiers, and tells them the story of the occupation of the Beaufort outpost, an operation in which he has participated,

\[440\] Ibid., p. 255, 188.
mentioning that all his friends had died defending it. One of the soldiers asks Kaplan whether it was worth losing all these people. His answer is worth quoting at length:

“I’ve always asked myself that. Whether its worth it or not,” he said. “I hope it was. I remind myself how many human lives we’ve saved. How we’ve avoided all but essential risks, to honor each and every one of your lives. More than that I don’t know what to say.”

[...] “These are different times,” Kaplan smiled, “you are of a different generation, a generation that asks questions. And we must answer them. It's good.” I prayed to hear him say, “between us, this is shit, this withdrawal [from southern Lebanon], it's dangerous, a crazy country's act.”

“Yes,” he said, “I’m one of those stubborn guys who still think that in order to protect the north from Hezbollah, it is vital to keep our presence in Southern Lebanon. And control of the Beaufort, with its topographical advantages, makes all the difference.”

[...] “But who knows if maybe, actually, when it’s all over, we’ll ask ourselves how we did not come up with this withdrawal a few years earlier, how we were submerged in tactics, without strategy. It’s not simple, not at all.”

[...] ”Is there a chance that you weren’t supposed to capture this mountain on that day, but you charged anyway?” [I asked]. Kaplan breathed heavily [...] “There is,” he answered, “It seems that there was an order to abort, an order that didn’t make it to us. Until today no one knows why we didn’t get it.”[...] “You should know this, because this is the real history,” Kaplan continued, “It all began here. Not only the heroes and the symbols, but also that deep social fracture, and the protests [for the withdrawal], and the ‘Peace Now’ movement. It is here, for the first time, that thoughts about the meaninglessness started [...] today they are stronger among soldiers than they ever were [...] and our role is to hold inside the pain, not let it show. Same goes for the doubt. Make everyone stronger, this is what we need, for now.”441

Kaplan, therefore, reconciles the subjective experience of the soldiers – its combination of alienation on the one hand, and the strong sense of meaning and purpose they acquire in the Beaufort outpost on the other – with the possibility of withdrawal from Lebanon, or of return to the nation. And more importantly, he grants it a historical explanation, in which the novel’s conception of its own

historical moment is revealed. According to this conception, the Soldiers’ experience of the Beaufort is not simply negated, deserving of reproach or punishment, but brought back into the national fold, or subsumed to be seen as an essential part of national history after the mistake of conquering the Beaufort. Instead of the alienation from Israeli society felt by the narrator throughout most of the novel, his experience is now understood by Kaplan, thus making a place for it in national identity and its historical development. It is through this historical assertion that the novel tries to perform a second totalizing operation, this time a historical or diachronic one. The attempted reconciliation of the narrator’s consciousness with national discourse is nothing less than an assertion of the historical continuity of the national structure of feeling, now dialectically expanded to include the narrator’s consciousness itself, no matter how distant its experience seemed, in the beginning, form national ideology.

However, it is here that we can rewrite our interpretation of the novel one last time. For, what should strike any reader familiar with the bildungsroman based on national bildung is the poverty or the content-less nature of national ideology offered by the high-ranking officer. Aside from some comments suggesting that conquering the Beaufort in ‘82 might not have been, after all, a good idea, he does not offer any grand speech about Israeli history, national identity, or anything else that can be seen as the new positive content of national hegemonic ideology. In other words, even if the preponderance of national hegemonic ideology is asserted in the novel, its new content is completely absent. Nor does a language in which this
ideology can be stably expressed reveal itself – no new Symbolic order emerges out of the ashes of the previous one.\textsuperscript{442} And this, of course, should come as no surprise, for the novel cannot but fail to imagine what is already completely defunct in its historical moment - national hegemonic ideology itself. What we are faced with, therefore, is not really an ideological reconciliation that positively reasserts the livelihood of a national structure of feeling, but rather \textit{an allegory of this reassertion or of a resuscitation of national ideology}.

The allegorical reading of the novel, then, will now enable us to see in a new light the reconciliation of the antagonism between the utopian enclave of the Beaufort outpost (which amounts to containing the utopian rift) and Israel; this reconciliation allegorizes the way national ideology itself is dialectically transformed by making space within itself for subjects’ everyday experience.\textsuperscript{443} Yet, this dynamic suggests an antagonism between an ideological background – the previous imaginary, the one in need of transformation – with some incongruent experience, which will have to transform that background as it is internalized by it. It is precisely this dynamic around which our novel revolves; the alienation of the narrator’s experience from Israeli ideology is what the novel tries to overcome. But here it will be instructive to contrast \textit{Beaufort} with previous attempts to do precisely that, one of which we have discussed above, in S. Yizhar’s writing. The

\textsuperscript{442} On the relation between Lacan’s Symbolic order and ideology, see Zizek, \textit{The Sublime Object of Ideology} (London; New York: Verso, 1989); also see Philip Wegenr’s “Greimas avec Lacan.”

\textsuperscript{443} Here we are using, again, the positive definition of ideology as something that enables an imaginary mapping of everyday experience, or a representation of subjects’ relation to their real conditions of existence.
formal affinities between *Beaufort* and Yizhar’s *Yeme Ziklag* are very clear: in both, the narrating consciousness moves abruptly between considerations of hopes, dreams, the dynamic between the soldiers (in short, the ideological background), and the experience of the soldiers, a movement most sharply felt when sudden bombardments or attacks disrupt the narration. But there is a crucial difference. In Yizhar, as discussed above, the ideological background in which the narrator's consciousness finds solace from its troubles is inseparable from the totalizing imaginary of the *halutzim*, with its emphasis on agricultural labor, connecting personal desire with intimate knowledge of the land acquired through that labor. In *Beaufort*, however, that ideological background is no longer centered on the *halutzim*’s imaginary or national ideology (even if they appear cursorily here and there). Rather, it is dominated by thoughts of sexual exploits (more particularly, of sex with women of this or that ethnicity), plans for post-military service trips to South America or India, and future professional plans. There is no principle – temporal, spatial or thematic (not to mention a unified imaginary with its specific temporalities and themes, as was the case with Yizhar) to which these hopes and dreams cohere; what the dead soldiers will not get to do – expressed in the “he will not get to...” game that the soldiers play - is completely identical to the living soldiers’ hopes and dreams, which again betrays the lack of any ordering principle.

This is where globalization makes its surprising appearance. First, it appears in the putative content of what we called the ideological background of the soldiers, in which world travel and Hollywood movies, for example, feature prominently.
Secondly, and more importantly for our purposes, is that the only connecting logic of this ideological background is that of complete exchangeability of experiences and immediacy of access, since no spatial or temporal logic binds them together. In other words, it is only commodity logic that relates the different objects of the background together, suggesting a complete commodification of the experiential world, an effect which we can undoubtedly associate with globalization. It is here that we can finally return to our allegory. For, if, as we claimed above, the novel should be read as an allegory of national historical totalization, we can now say that it is an allegory that imagines the nation reasserting itself after the fact of globalization. The ideological background, in which globalization finds its expression, does not disrupt the allegorized historical totalization, but rather finds its place within it. It is no longer the case, as was in Gur or Castel-Bloom, that globalization is only that which disrupts the totalizing impulse; rather, what Beaufort offers us is an allegory of the return of the nation in which globalization is internalized by a national imaginary. The containment of the soldiers’ feeling of alienation in the national narrative through asserting a historical mistake – conquering the Beaufort – is therefore at the same time an attempt to contain the nation’s “mistake” in letting globalization into it, since it is globalization itself, finally, which is the cause for the collapse of national ideology. And it is precisely in this sense that Beaufort belongs to world literature: in thematizing the effects of globalization though a historical national mistake, it opens up the possibility for a national struggle against globalization, for an attempt to correct the mistake (and, at the same time, shut down the revolutionary possibilities inherent in the utopian enclave).
With *Beaufort*, then, we have an instance of globalization being contained in the way aesthetic totalization happens. If, as we suggested in the first part of this chapter, world literature should be sought after in attempts to reinvent aesthetic totalization under conditions of globalization, we have with *Beaufort* come a very long way from the way world literature is discussed in Moretti or Damrosch. For example, instead of the simple rejection of the totalizing logic of the autonomous national literary imaginary on the one hand, and of commodification on the other, what *Beaufort* offers us is an attempt to totalize, which contains both its previous national moment, and its concurrent commodifying one, yet is identical to neither: not quite a national imaginary (since there is no reinvention of positive national ideology), but not quite a surrender to the commodification of experience (since the allegory asserts its containment and overcoming by the national-historical totalization). In short, all of the disruptions of totalization – be they Moretti’s disruptions of narrative voice, Damrosch’s “refraction,” Huggan’s commodification of otherness or others – are here the subject matter through which an emerging totalizing aesthetic has to be thought, or which poses itself as the undifferentiated material with which any attempt to totalize must contend. Since a new national narrative fails to emerge in *Beaufort* – a fact which had made a “national literary” reading of the novel ultimately untenable, making it necessary to read the novel allegorically – we can now claim that the moment of truth of the novel does not reside in its purported intention - the return to national hegemonic ideology. Rather, it lies in the borrowing of the totalizing impulse still recognizable in the structure of feeling of the nation state – including both a synchronic space (the Beaufort outpost)
and a diachronic one (national history) – in order to pose the challenge of totalization under the conditions of production dictated by global capitalism.

Lastly, the conceptions of totality discussed in the first chapter also make their mediated appearance in the novel: for example, the group of soldiers at the outpost provides us with a concretization of the Sartrean group in fusion. The utopian insistence on remaining in the Beaufort outpost, their initial implicit threat not to evacuate it when the order comes – a desire which cannot find its place within Israeli society – can be seen as the rudimentary presence of the Lukácsian subject of history, that subject that cannot find its place in ideology, and has to change reality itself in order to become a subject at all (an option not realized in the novel). What is important to emphasize, however, is that the concretizations of the theoretical accounts of totality are in some way superior to the empty theoretical accounts themselves: only they offer up imaginary spaces for actual resistance. Reading the novel for the ways it attempts to totalize proves to be more productive than being satisfied with abstracting a conception of totality from Sartre or Lukács, even if it is only through their writing that we have managed to read the novel at all.

If Beaufort can be read as an attempt to re-imagine totality from within the conditions of globalization, our next – and last – novel takes this attempt one step further. Eshkol Nevo’s 2011 novel Neuland, whose title explicitly references Herzl’s Altneuland (and not, tellingly, the Hebrew translation of Herzl’s novel’s title, Tel Aviv), is centered on two Israeli characters, Dori and Inbar, who travel to South
Their journeys begin separately. While Dori is looking for his missing father, who is an ideal of Israeli manhood (former military general become successful businessman), Inbar’s journey starts out with her travel to Berlin to meet her mother. Instead of returning to Israel, she finds herself on a plane to Peru, where she meets Dori. The superficial similarities to Herzl’s Altneuland are clear: the travelers in both novels are disillusioned with their lives. The Prussian aristocrat and the Viennese Jew who cannot find their place in society in Altneuland become Neuland’s two travelers: Dori – a history teacher who lives in the shadow of his successful father, with whom he could never communicate - and Inbar – a producer of a radio talk show dispensing psychological advice to callers (shortly into the novel, the reader learns that one of the callers committed suicide, an incident which propelled Inbar to take a break from work and travel to Berlin), deeply estranged from her mother. Both are involved in marriages that are on the brink of falling apart. And there is a truth to this superficial similarity, for the bourgeois and aristocrat who embark on the voyage in Herzl’s novel are here replaced by people of a very specific class. Far from representing all Israeli society, both Dori and Inbar belong to the world of middle class Jewish, Ashkenazi, Israelis. It is this particular class from which Israeli hegemonic ideology had taken its archetypal subject. And as a result, the crumbling of that hegemonic ideology brought about by globalization, (and the middle class which it helped sustain), has been most acutely felt by this class. The general feeling of purposelessness and powerlessness of both characters in the beginning of the novel, are the markers of

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^444 Nevo, Eshkol, Neuland (Or Yehuda: Zmora-Bitan, 2011).
the crisis experienced by this particular class, a feeling of powerlessness shared with the Viennese aristocrat of Herzl’s bourgeois Vienna.445

There is, however, a less obvious similarity between the novels. One of Altneuland’s peculiarities is that the visit to utopian Palestine is purely accidental. The travelers make their way to a remote island – of which the reader is told almost nothing – and on their way back from the Island after 20 years, when their ship docks in Palestine, they discover the Herzlian utopia and decide to make it their home. Similarly, Dori and Inbar’s South American destination is only a temporary stop, for they plan to return to Israel (and they do return to it in the end of the novel). But here we have an inversion. For, almost the entire plot of Neuland happens not at the last stop of the trip – back in Israel – but at the “remote island” on the way to utopia, consisting of Inbar’s and Dori’s journeys. And only during that journey do they pass through something like a utopia, the Neuland commune in Argentina, to which we will return later. At this point, it is important to note that the commune is only another station, even if the final one, through which the characters pass, rather than a final resting place as in Herzl’s Altneuland. Indeed, it turns out that all of the commune’s members are only temporary residents, merely stopping on their way to somewhere else.446

This structure – inverting the focus of the novel from the utopian endpoint to the journey toward it - is important for our purposes for two reasons. First, it signals

446 Nevo, 495-6.
to us that the novel is not a utopian novel. This is not an arbitrary choice but one
that emerges, as Nevo puts it, out of the fact that “everyone’s skeptical, everyone’s
desperate, quietly and darkly [...], everyone thinks that it’s pointless to talk about
the future, because everything moves in an endless loop of ‘that’s just how it is,’
from which there is no way out.”447 It is here that the classed feeling of crisis that we
mentioned above is thematized as a crisis of the utopian imagination itself,
extensively discussed by Adorno, Jameson, and others.448 The inversion implied by
Neuland’s structure, therefore, is no mere authorial preference, but nothing less
than an expression and a problematization of the blockage of the utopian
imagination in the novel’s structure. On the other hand, as Omri Herzog has pointed
out, if narratives of travel in Hebrew literature have tended to work in the service of
national ideology,449 (coming into the fold of the nation through the transformations
of the journey), this is not the case in Neuland. The return to Israel is not
accompanied by a reconciliation of Dori and Inbar to some national mission from
which they were previously estranged (nor could it, considering the dissolution of
national hegemonic ideology discussed earlier). Rather, as Herzog claims, it leaves
the contradictions that it detects open. Thus, the structure of Neuland’s plot defies
both the national coming-of-age story (or its negation), as well as the generic
utopian novel, despite the obvious resonances it has with both.

447 Quoted in Omri Herzog, “Neuland me’et Eshkol Nevo: Magi’a l’aretz hamuvchat,” 6 June 2011
<http://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/1.1177186> (my translation).
448 Jameson “Future City,” New Left Review 21 (2004), 65-78; Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia:
Reflections on a Damaged Life (London; New York: Verso, 2005), §22. Imre Szeman and Eric Cazdyn, After
449 Herzog, ibid.
And yet, there is no reason to celebrate the novel’s ambiguity for its own sake, or for some deeper ethical truth that it supposedly reflects, as Herzog seems to do. For, here we have arrived at a problem: on the one hand, as we have seen, the generic utopian novel depends on what Wegner calls “a refusal of non-contradiction,” or on leaving ideological contradictions undecided, even as it develops them. On the other hand, the postmodern rejection of so-called grand narratives tends to be accompanied by a celebration of contradictoriness and ambiguity.\textsuperscript{450} This, in turn, makes it difficult to distinguish between the utopian version of keeping contradictions open and its postmodern version (something brilliantly captured by one of Jameson’s early formulation of one of the effects of postmodernism: the becoming identical of the utopian and the ideological, a fusing together the predecessors of which can be found, as always, in modernist art, as Adorno’s essay on Beckett’s Endgame demonstrates).\textsuperscript{451} What, then, is the role of ideological ambiguity in Neuland? Is it simply a reaffirmation of the tired postmodern truism that there is no such thing as absolute certainty? Or, is it an attempt, seemingly doomed to failure, to revive a dimension of utopian literature?

We can start answering the question with what we have already discussed: that the novel constitutes an attempt to think utopia – in this case Herzl’s – in the face of the great blockage of the utopian imagination, which it fully admits. If the novel centers around the path to utopia, rather than on utopia itself, we can now

\textsuperscript{450} For the rejection of grand narratives, see our discussion of Lyotard in the first chapter.
finally look at Dori and Inbar’s actual journeys in a new light. For, what the journey dramatizes and opens up for figuration is precisely the process of ideological neutralization so strongly associated with utopian texts, that which molds and remodels ideological contradictions without resolving them. Thus, for example, the narration of Inbar’s journey to Berlin to visit her mother provides an occasion for the novel to raise what is a familiar ideological trope to all Israelis – the Holocaust and its relation (or non-relation) to the foundation of Israel. The part of the novel describing Inbar’s journey is made up of passages narrating her memories of conversations with her grandmother (who at a young age had escaped Nazi-occupied Europe to Israel), her fights with her mother, and the events leading to her brother’s suicide during his military service.\textsuperscript{452} The family is destroyed by the disaster; not only do they lose whatever allegiance to the state they had, but her parents separate, her mother moving to Berlin, and her father to Australia, where he marries again. Inbar is initially very hostile to the idea of travelling to Berlin. She is very close to her grandmother, who harbors a deep hatred for all things German. Inbar’s visit to Berlin acts on several levels: first, her interaction with her mother reveals that the move to Berlin had been a form of coping with loss for her mother (much like Inbar’s own trip to Berlin), which also enabled her to reconnect to other Israelis (also leaving in the city) and to rediscover Judaism not through the state-sanctioned channels.\textsuperscript{453} Even the city itself, after the fall of the Berlin wall, becomes a symbol of unification in Inbar’s Mother’s eyes (psychological compensation for the

\textsuperscript{452} Nevo, Neuland, 113, 185.
\textsuperscript{453} Ibid., 162.
family’s shattering). What is important to emphasize is the sheer number of ideological contradictions inscribed in Inbar’s three-generational story: deeply engrained Holocaust fears versus the new émigré community in Berlin; neoliberal post-Zionist present versus a past of strong connection to the nation-state; the older nuclear family versus alternative family structure. All of these contradictions are going to be neutralized in the novel, as we will now see.

Two things are important to mention here. First, this is not simply a psychologization of social and ideological conflicts: the alternative community of expatriates in Berlin, for all its multicultural underpinnings, still preserves a nascent impulse of a collective project. Rather than a simple psychologization – explaining away some apparent social contradiction through positing some psychological problem in its stead - what Neuland presents us with is the overdetermination of contradictoriness itself. The antagonism between mother and daughter provides a figurative mechanism through which other contradictions are made visible: nationalist hatred of Germany versus post-nationalist multicultural cosmopolitanism (Inbar’s “they were all here during the Nazi period” versus the fusion Jazz-Klezmer concert that Inbar says “she would never have attended if she were in Israel”); psychological dispositions (the emigration to Berlin as a coping mechanism with the death of Inbar’s brother as opposed to being a form of escapism or non-confrontation); and social contradiction (the alternative community in Berlin, one of whose members invites Inbar to their meetings, as opposed to its ‘fakeness’ or its commodified Jewish-ness: “they are buying our silence,” Inbar tells
her mother).\textsuperscript{454} None of the contradictions are resolved, least of all the antagonism between mother and daughter; rather, what is emphasized is the transmutability of the contradictions, the way they can be narrated as substitutes for one another. Social structure, psychological attitudes, and political positions thus inflect one another and each offers some kind of modulation of all the others. This concretized re-molding of contradictions (which is present in Dori’s much longer story too, dealing with different sets of contradictions) is precisely the work of neutralization attributed to the utopian novel.\textsuperscript{455} The ambiguity of the novel, or its preservation of contradictoriness, is therefore not a statement of postmodern truth but an adaptation of one of the narrative processes associated with utopian literature.

And it is on this slippery level of neutralization that the novel’s totalizing impulse can be found. Not only are the large number of ideological contradictions evoked here important; so is their re-molding, their transmutation into different contradictions on all levels. In Dori’s case, neutralization begins with his realization that he tends to view any new landscape with a “securitizing gaze,” a habit he needs to drop when he lands in Quito (a city which for Dori looks divided, like some strange combination of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, a division which stands in opposition to Berlin’s symbolization of unification and reconciliation in Inbar’s

\textsuperscript{454} Ibid., 158-169.
\textsuperscript{455} Examples abound. The tying-up of contradictions in the novel consists of several layers. The overarching contradiction can be said to be the one symbolized by Dori and Inbar themselves: Inbar’s debilitating brokenness (the broken family, the broken career, the failed nationalism, etc.) as opposed to Dori’s no less debilitating reified wholeness (holding together the family structure at all costs, his frustrating career as a history teacher, the old welfare-state Zionism which seems out of date, etc.). Again, Inbar and Dori’s love story does not end in unification or marriage – the contradiction thus remains open at the end of the novel.
story, an opposition which is itself a reworking of the opposition between masculinity and femininity).\textsuperscript{456} This initial moment is then developed in all directions, through Dori’s reflections on his parents’ relationship and its relation to Zionism, as opposed to his own failing marriage and his reified belief in ‘national values,’ which seems to make him an object of ridicule; his relationship with his son is contrasted with his father’s relationship with him and others. Historical, psychological, and social connections are constantly made and re-made in an ever growing complexity that we will not be able to address here. The sudden eruption of forgotten events into his memory, constantly adding more material to be totalized, turns out to be both the result of the journey and its catalyst.\textsuperscript{457}

It is this process of neutralization that accompanies the entire journey, encompassing more and more ideological contradictions as the novel progresses. This becomes inextricably tied with the hunt for Dori’s father. The detective work that goes into finding his father – the effort led by a local guide with a talent for sniffing out lost Westerners – can be seen as a metaphor for the process of spatial orientation that Wenger sees as work in the narrative utopia’s description of the novum (the local guide providing a substitute for the resident of utopia that answers the visitors questions, solving the puzzles of the utopian society). What is significant for us, however, is that the search and the process of neutralization culminate in finally finding Dori’s father in a utopian commune in Argentina, which the father helped established. Now, it is true that the novel does describe the social structure

\textsuperscript{456} Ibid., 50, 61.
\textsuperscript{457} Ibid., for example, 268.
of the commune (which displays some easily recognizable reified utopian themes, from egalitarian decision-making to an equal distribution of necessary duties, freeing as much time as possible for pursuit of personal interests, a unification of exploring “personal potential” and a collective one). However, it is also very clear that there is not much newness to be explored in the commune; everything described is easily recognizable as a reified utopian trope, without any surprising connections between technological, social, and cultural rearrangements. Even though our travelers admit to each other that there is much they do not understand about the commune, the unexplored remains unexplored. It is therefore not in the actual description of the utopian society that the novel invests itself.

Instead, we must remember that the utopian community is for all its residents only the final station on the journey back to Israel. And we quickly learn its purpose: it was established according to “Herzl’s values,” Dori’s father tells us, and its purpose is that the habits formed in it and the sense of collective agency gained will somehow help transform Israel itself. “The change,” Dori’s father says, “cannot come from the inside, so it has to come from the outside, by creating an alternative, the existence of which will bother people and challenge them.”

According to Dori’s father:

A state cannot exist only to survive, Dori. The original purpose behind the Establishment of Israel was to have all the Jews come to a country in which they will not be persecuted. But that was the goal. Past tense. A nation needs

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458 Ibid., 495-6.
459 Ibid., 495 (My translation).
a goal. A nation without a vision is like a family without love, and if there’s no love, why keep the family together?\textsuperscript{460}

It is here that the novel finally exposes its imagined historical context. It is to be found in what Dori’s father calls “the lack of vision” in Israel, that feeling of aimlessness and purposelessness that the novel detects on a personal level, but also on the scale of national leadership. That this is the novel’s conception of its own history need not detain us too much for its falsity; rather, what is interesting for us is that even this misrecognition provides the occasion for a totalizing effort.

Yet, the absence of such an alternative vision in the novel is telling, signaling for us again that the problem is not one that is surmounted by the novel. Rather, the problem is how this blockage is to be overcome, the road to its overcoming, that is finally its question. The lack of futurity is here translated into a spatial metaphor – the lack of an outside (so common a statement among thinkers of globalization), the same outside which can provide us with the alternative, and which is in utopian literature created by the great schism – separating the known world from that far away island or planet. And it is the creation of that outside, the production of it (rather than its discovery) that becomes the center of the novel. We can now, finally, read the novel as complex allegory for the possibility of the utopian itself. The various sites of ideological neutralization, sites that concretely refer to specific ideological and social situations familiar to Israelis (of a specific class), act in this allegory as a figuration of the process that any thinking about utopia in the Israeli context will have to work through. This process, the allegory tells us, leads to the

\textsuperscript{460} Ibid., 488.
rebirth of the utopian enclave to which we currently have no access. It is important to note, finally, that the absence of an alternative “future vision” in the novel seem to tell us, on the allegorical level, that no such vision will be available before the process of neutralization actually takes place, and before an actual attempt to create an alternative social form – for which the Neuland utopian commune is a figure – takes place (which amounts to the same claim).

Globalization, needless to say, is present everywhere in the novel. First, it is present in tropes like international travel, cosmopolitanism, the contradiction between post- and neo-nationalism, or the consumption of exoticism through commodities. It is also present, of course, in the possibilities it offers for the process of neutralization, which we have discussed above. But more importantly, the breaching of national economic autonomy and the collapse of national hegemonic ideology are here thematized both through the “no outside” claim, which it develops (the outside can no longer be found, it has to be produced) and the tracing of the blockage of the utopian imagination, in concrete terms. Both of these, of course, strongly inform the novel’s aesthetics, including both its structure – trying to circumvent the “no outside” problem by focusing on the road to utopia instead of utopia itself – as well as exploring the ways in which one can neutralize the ideological contradictions born out of the collapse of national hegemonic ideology. And it is this embeddedness of the effects of globalization in the novel’s totalizing aesthetic, the incorporation of its effects into the system of contradictions that the novel tries to map in search of newness, that makes *Neuland* world literature.
Conclusion

Histories of aesthetic totalization are essential for any attempt to think radically different transformations of social structures and modes of being. What the search for totalizing imaginaries forces us to do is to trace the emergence of so-called real abstraction, or the very real historical appearance of imaginary structures (no matter how “illusory” or full of untruths they are) in response to certain material conditions. Yet, every historical materialist study of culture attempts just that: to trace the emergence of ways through which individuals and collectivities imagine their relation to their real conditions of existence. Tracing modes of totalization offers us something more than that, for in totalizing aesthetics the process of relating experience to system is somehow given figuration in the aesthetic object itself. In following this process, we are forced to engage in what Adorno would have called “immanent critique,” or what Raymond Williams names a “structure of feeling”; the diagnosis of the present in the totalizing aesthetic object is done in the terms of the aesthetic object itself and the discursive world in which it was produced. Thus, the imaginative possibilities to which it points are those that concretely emerge from that situation, rather than a-historically foisted on it from some reified political stance.

To blame S. Yizhar’s *Khirbet Khizeh* for a politically incorrect representation of Palestinians, one which does not grant them a voice, or indicting Ron Leshem for
having his characters reaffirm national ideology in *Beaufort*, is thus to miss the point of political critique entirely. For what this criticism cannot in any way conceive of are the imaginative efforts these texts put into interrogating their bad realities for the seeds of transformation towards radically different possibilities inherent in these realities. This is not to say, of course, that Israeli authors and critics should ignore Palestinian plight, or that they should celebrate what is over what ought to be; rather, what is sought after are the ways in which the desire for what ought to be is already present in the texts. Only through tapping into the ways in which this desire is already expressed, the moments in which its potentialities threaten to collapse the existing order - even when they are articulated in that order's terms - can political criticism be used to expose possible channels of revolutionary transformation.

The texts discussed above are of course not revolutionary texts, but they do consciously try to produce a revolutionary imaginary out of their subject matter. In reading the last two novels, we have mentioned the conception of history that each text offers us. This conception betrays their un- or even anti-revolutionary stances. Yet, the attempt to represent the historical moment has provided an occasion, in both texts, for a particular type of mapping of individual experience onto a system. Even if, for example, *Beaufort* ends up containing the utopian possibilities that this mapping opens up, it makes them visible despite its intentions. And even if Gur's detective must, at the end, catch the criminal rather than transform reality to make crime disappear, it still exposes the historical contradictions that make the crime
understandable in the first place. The totalizing aesthetic of these texts, even if they fail – as indeed they must – to make newness appear, provides us with the coordinates from which every concrete attempt to articulate a revolutionary political project must start.

The almost-conscious (in most cases) preoccupation of recent Israeli literature with utopia should not be taken to signify merely the nostalgic death-throws of an old hegemony, even if it surely is related to it. As Jameson puts it, the utopian seems to emerge historically at times in which social dissatisfaction and unrest cannot find clear political agency, or any already-available means for transforming the system in which it finds itself.\textsuperscript{461} Israeli literature's preoccupation with the utopian, therefore, attests to the existence of revolutionary political potential, one which would have been unthinkable thirty years ago. The urgency of mapping the social and ideological terrain, or the urgency of totalizing in the last two novels discussed above is precisely the result of the political crisis that fuels the utopian imagination. At times in which the underlying global system increasingly determines the experience to be totalized, it is no wonder that globalization itself is somehow figured in these novels. World literature, in its definition as literature that totalizes, is therefore one of the imaginative fronts on which ideological battle is waged today.


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Appendix: “On the Night before the Morning, All Power to the Communes”

We live in a time when tents have become the singular weapon of the people which power cannot tolerate, and against which it does not know how to defend itself. The bureaucrats are in shambles; the “city” and its “police” are at each other's throats; middling reformists have no idea where to position themselves. Everyone agrees: it’s about to explode.

This is the situation as I write on the night before the morning of what will be the second police raid on the Occupy Oakland encampment, announced in a memo leaked this afternoon. It is a situation that devolves, primarily, from the fallout of the first eviction on October 25. Like any important historical sequence, the story of what has happened in this city during past two weeks is harrowing and inspiring, beautiful and unbearable.

Occupy Oakland has distinguished itself within the US occupation movement by its radicalism—its “intransigent elements,” the City Council likes to say. In defiance of city policies, it makes use of a sound system for its General Assembly and of open flame in its kitchen. Unlike the majority of occupations, and to the chagrin of

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civic authorities, it refuses to seek permits or to negotiate with the Mayor’s Office, though it is camped directly on its doorstep outside City Hall. “I want to remind you all,” the Mayor’s husband has written in an email to neighborhood organizers with whom he hopes to divide and conquer the occupation, “that OO HAS NO NEGOTIATING TEAM. They are the only ones in the country that do not. You need to know how exasperating this has been for this type of encampment to exist in a city with a progressive mayor who is offering to help but nobody to talk to about it.” Oakland’s “progressive Mayor,” Jean Quan, wants to “help” insofar as she wants to move the Occupation elsewhere, out of plain sight at the main intersection of downtown Oakland, off to some other place where it will not impinge upon the operations of business as usual. Suffice it to say, this is not the sort of help Occupy Oakland is seeking.

Having authorized a police raid early in the morning on October 25, in which the camp was cleared by some 500 officers using teargas, flash-bang grenades, and rubber bullets, the Mayor found herself under less literal fire on the morning of October 26. The night after the camp was cleared, well over 1000 protesters marched through downtown Oakland toward the former site of the Occupation, breaking through two police lines on the way. We were met by lines of riot cops determined to deter us from taking back the plaza. After a tense standoff, the police dispersed the crowd with more teargas, flash-bang grenades, and rubber bullets—only to have to repeat
these measures several more times over a long night as the growing crowd regrouped and returned. In the middle of all this, the cops managed to shoot an Iraq War veteran in the head with a teargas canister. As he lay bleeding in the street, they lobbed a flash-bang grenade right in his face as a group of people gathered to help him. Scott Olsen suffered a broken skull and required brain surgery. He still cannot speak as I write this.

Expecting a war the following night, thousands returned to the plaza only to find the cops nowhere in sight, with nothing but a paltry wire fence surrounding the lawn where the Occupation had been. The fence was eventually torn down, despite the incoherent hand-wringing of “pacifists” who tried to physically defend the same police barrier they had marched against the night before. The next morning, maintenance crews would arrive to find sections of the fence transformed by the general intellect into two constructivist sculptures.

Having completely reversed her stance, the Mayor now hypocritically declared “support” for the Occupation, “regretting” the excessive use of force by police. The OPD responded by expressing its “confusion” and denouncing her in print. More consistent and significant positions, however, were being staked out by the regrouped General Assembly. On the night of October 26 in Oakland, 1500 people voted to call a General Strike for the following week, the first in the United States since the Oakland General Strike of 1946. Before the proposal passed, the packed amphitheater waited for the announcement
by chanting “Long Live the Oakland Commune.” Out of disaster the night before there was now mass joy, a mass movement in a revolutionary city.

If it seemed improbable that Occupy Oakland could organize a General Strike with six days notice, then what took place on Nov. 2 was a hugely improbable success. Major unions supported the action and helped to organize workers. Thousands withheld their labor and flocked to Broadway and 14th throughout the day. A Children’s Brigade marched from the public library to the demonstration. Flying pickets shut down banks throughout downtown. The black bloc of an anti-capitalist march destroyed the facades of Chase, Wells Fargo, and Bank of America with impunity, pushing through pacifist “peace police” to attack Whole Foods and write STRIKE in massive letters across its windows with a fire extinguisher. At 4:00pm, a first wave of marchers headed toward the Oakland Port from downtown. At 5:00pm, a second wave followed. In a city of 450,000, some 20,000 to 50,000 people marched on the fifth largest port in the United States that day, completely shutting it down. This was something like a dress rehearsal for mass resource blockades to come: the US proletariat marching en masse across an overpass into the hidden abode where production meets distribution, finding its points of entry and exit, using their bodies to block its passageways.

That night, a smaller group took over a building formerly housing the Traveler’s Aid Society, a non-profit center for the homeless which had lost its lease due to cuts in government funding. A dance party broke out inside and
outside the building as a crowd gathered and a communiqué was read, renaming the building the Crisis Center. As nothing else had that day, this drew the attention of the police. Having publicly denounced the Mayor for her earlier flip-flop, the cops had been on a tight leash. Now they amassed in force as occupiers responded by building barricades out of dumpsters and setting them on fire. More tear gas was fired; bricks were heaved at lines of riot police; these were answered by rubber bullets. Despite an inspiring readiness to confront the cops with concrete resistance, the crowd was eventually dispersed, one hundred arrests were made, and the building was put back under lock and key. Meanwhile, another Iraq War veteran suffered a ruptured spleen from being beaten with batons. It seems the domestic army of the American Empire is now tasked with destroying the bodies of its imperializing counterparts the moment they come home from war, disenchanted.

Over the ten days since the General Strike, tents and resources have continued to flood back into the Occupy Oakland encampment; General Assembly meetings have debated tactics and continued to refuse compromise with the city. The Oakland Commune, as it has come to be called, is now over one month old—“three decades in commune years,” a friend quips. Letters of solidarity arrive from Cairo, met by Egyptian solidarity demos in Oakland. And now the possibility and importance of occupying foreclosed properties, as the winter months approach, is percolating through
the national occupation movement. On November 11, 80 people occupied a 10,000 square foot Chrysler Building in Chapel Hill and held it for 48 hours, declaring solidarity with Oakland in the first sentence of their communiqué.

But today that occupation was evicted by police brandishing handguns and assault rifles, loaded with live rounds and pointed straight at the bodies of occupiers. The problem for the police is that people return to the scene of the crime after being teargassed and shot with rubber bullets. These measures suffice to clear a space temporarily, but it seems they do not terrorize sufficiently to keep people from fighting back. The Oakland Commune is reconstructed, and a building occupied in Oakland becomes a occupied building in Chapel Hill. Perhaps, then, the solution will be to start shooting people with live rounds. But as we’ve seen in Greece and elsewhere, this will only fan the flames of insurrection further. Like capital, power has to grow to sustain itself. This is also true of resistance. The tension and the movement of that contradiction is what is both terrifying and exhilarating about the twenty-first century in the United States, as the world’s largest economy well and truly falls apart, as people have no choice but to resist, and as nobody knows what will happen.

As I write this, and as comrades prepare to defend the Oakland Commune later tonight, I watch a video of what happened in Portland yesterday, where thousands of people successfully defended their occupation against eviction, pushing back police lines and forcing them to retreat. In
2011, in what hasn’t been the land of the free for more than 500 years, this is what remains of beauty.