

# Affect, Realism, and Utopia: Fredric Jameson's Dialogues with De Man, Karatani, and Williams

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## I

Undoubtedly, Fredric Jameson's new book, *The Antinomies of Realism*, published in 2013, is a decisive contribution to a serious discussion of modernity in terms of realism and utopia. What characterises and distinguishes the book is Jameson's powerful foregrounding of the dialectical structure or dynamics of realism, its inner contradictions, paradoxes, or antinomies as the driving, destructive, and constructive force of modern novels at large:

My experiment here claims to come at realism dialectically, not only by taking as its object of study the very antinomies themselves into which every constitution of this or that realism seems to resolve: but above all by grasping realism as a historical and even evolutionary process in which the negative and the positive are inextricably combined, and whose emergence and development at one and the same time constitute its own inevitable undoing, its own decay and dissolution. The stronger it gets, the weaker it gets; winner loses; its success is its failure. And this is meant, not in the spirit of the life cycle ("ripeness is all"), or of evolution or of entropy or historical rises and falls: it is to be grasped as a paradox and an anomaly, and the thinking of it as a contradiction or an aporia. (6)

Importantly, Jameson regards these dialectical contradictions or antinomies primarily as what fundamentally divides the temporality of realism into the chronological and the non-chronological. Jameson describes the latter — the non-chronological temporality of realism — as 'the opposite number of that chronological temporality' which 'has somehow to do with a present; but with a different kind of present than the one marked out by the tripartite temporal system of past-present-future, or even by that of the before and after.' Here 'a present' refers to 'the insurrection of the present against the other temporalities — as the realm of affect'(10). In Jameson's

dialectical history of realism, 'affect' plays the part of non-chronological or non-temporal temporality, thus manifesting itself as the *negative* constituting power inherent in realism. Moreover, this 'present' — as 'the realm of affect' — is also connected with 'a painterly moment in which the onward drive of narrative is checked if not suspended altogether' (8). We may consider this 'painterly moment' as a description of landscapes in a narrative or 'impulses of scenic elaboration, description and above all affective investments' (11) in the course — or rather in the *way* — of a narrative chronological progression. Thus, Jameson's 'affective theory' pays careful attention to the way in which 'impulses of scenic elaboration' are often charged with affective intensities. This argument allows us to gain a fresh perspective about the historical significance of scenic depictions in the *affective* formations of modern realistic narratives.

Given these perspectives, we can read Jameson's dialectic of realism as a historical movement in which narrative chronological temporality — which is the fundamental element or drive of any narrative — is radically negated by an affectivity imbued with a 'painterly' a-temporal impulse. Such dialectical interaction of these contradictory narrative components at once negates and constitutes the historical formations of realism.

Here is another account of such dialectical driving force of contradictions:

[W]hat I will want to insist on in such images is the irrevocable antagonism between the twin (and entwined) forces in question: they are never reconciled, never fold back into one another in some ultimate reconciliation and identity; and the very force and pungency of the realist writing I here examine is predicated on that tension, which must remain an impossible one, under pain of losing itself altogether and dissipating if it is ever resolved in favor of one of the parties to the struggle. (10-11)

This means

[W]e now have in our grasp the two chronological end points of realism: its genealogy in storytelling and the tale, its future dissolution in the literary representation of affect. A new concept of realism is then made available when we grasp both these terminal points firmly at one and the same time. (10)

This implies that any dialectical reading of realism must demonstrate the radical impossibility of the final reconciliation of the 'fundamental distinction between telling and showing' (35). As I will argue later, this impossibility also accounts for the unique ontological status of affect in modern

realistic narratives.

The 'realm of affect,' which is related to 'showing' as 'a painterly moment,' should be taken for a direct contradiction to 'emotions': the discursive and institutional products of the nineteenth-century bourgeois literature:

[I]t will be appropriate to associate rise of affect with the emergence of the phenomenological body in language and representation; and to historicize a competition between the system of named emotions and the emergence of nameless bodily states which can be documented in literature around the middle of the nineteenth century. (32)

From this viewpoint, Jameson regards this 'competition' as 'the irreconcilable divorce between lived experience and the intelligible which characterizes modernity, between the existential and the meaningful' (33) while adding that '[e]xperience — and sensory experience in particular — is in modern times contingent: if such experience seems to have a meaning, we are at once suspicious of its authenticity' (34). I will demonstrate the importance of such contingency in Jameson's concept of Utopia. Thus, Jameson, tracing the sensory or affective history from Baudelaire to Proust, highlights the unique ontological status of 'odor' while simultaneously reinterpreting the affectivity of such sensory dimension as the Deleuzian 'intensity.' Jameson concludes: '[a]ffects are singularities and intensities, existences rather than essences, which usefully unsettle the more established psychological and physiological categories' (36). In addition, affect — something in excess of narrative chronology or modern psychology and physiology — obtains what may be termed non-place or time, 'an eternal present' (36) or 'a pure present' (40), thus haunting itself as a reminder of the Heideggerian *Stimmung* (38).

It is noteworthy that 'around the middle of the nineteenth century' such affective intensity materialises itself as something negative, 'nameless, or unclassifiable' (33). This negativity is a direct contradiction to and subversive of 'the system of named emotions' or 'the more established psychological and physiological categories.' The latter could be viewed as a *positive* or positivist product of the nineteenth-century realist novels or the contemporary psychological and physiological languages, an indicator of their discursive sophistication and hegemony around this period. This suggests that the formal completion or sophistication of the nineteenth-century realism *at once and at the same time* can be read as its own "undoing" from *within*, which means that affect thus historicised is to be regarded as a product and simultaneous negation of the discursive maturity of modern literature and psychology. Indeed — as Jameson contends — 'the stronger realism gets, the weaker it gets' at the same time. We could say that something affective is as it

were the *outside* of the inside of realism — this paradoxical ontological status has much to do with what Jameson regards as ‘an opposition at work within realism itself’ (7). Again, it is thus precisely *within* the essentially positivist, bourgeois literary, and scientific discourses that this kind of affective negativity forms itself as the *outside* of the inside of their realist narratives.

It is understandable that Jameson also focuses on Flaubert and *Madame Bovary*. This novel may be seen as a kind of discursive limit in the process of formal refinement of the nineteenth-century realism, whose descriptions of something ‘everyday’ become too ‘everyday’ to be ‘everyday.’ Jameson’s reference to Auerbach is suggestive: ‘[the] crucial point in Auerbach’s differentiation of this “everyday” reality from all the other traditionally named and categorized situations lies precisely in the fact that there is no name for what this one represents.’ Hence Jameson’s redefinition of ‘a new disease called “*bovarysme*” as a failed naming — or an attempt to ‘ratify the disease itself as nameless in the very act naming it’ since Emma’s feeling ‘escapes all easy categorization’ and therefore ‘[i]t is not boredom in any strict sense, nor frustration’ (142). Jameson discerns in Flaubert’s language ‘the two faces of that unnamable thing which we have ourselves named as affect — the everyday as the outside, or Stimmung; the existential as the lived or inside, namely affect as such’ (143). Quite interestingly, Jameson seems to complicate his dialectic as what he calls ‘an opposition at work within realism itself,’ which means that he evidently tries to introduce another inside/outside dialectical movement into ‘affect’ as the dialectical outside of the inside of realism.

## II

With this regard, the historical and affective significance of ‘landscape’ in modern narrative desires reminds us of Karatani Kojin’s *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, to which Jameson wrote a rather long “Foreword.” Similar to Jameson’s, Karatani’s focus is on the historical and structural formation of realism — in his case that of modern Japanese literature — in which a set of problematics of psychology, affect, and landscape are intermingled. Jameson is interested in the way in which ‘two hundred years’ of Western history — in terms of the institutionalisation of modern literature — is ‘compressed into a century’ in Japan. This explains ‘why Karatani’s vision of the modern leaps out at us with such blinding force’; therefore, ‘the modernization of Japan allows us to see the features of our own development in slow motion, in a new kind of form’ (ix).

Karatani’s ‘antinomies of realism’ signify the simultaneity of the emergence of modern psychological *subject* and ‘landscape’ as its *object*. Karatani’s reference to the ‘Mona Lisa’ is relevant to our argument because it indicates the structural and historical parallels between Japanese and

European literature and because of its insight into the 'origins' of the modern 'invention' or 'discovery' of psychological 'interiority' and 'landscape' at the same time:

According to van den Berg, the first landscape painted simply as a landscape in Europe was the "Mona Lisa," in which for the first time the human was presented as alienated from the landscape, and vice versa. But we must be wary of the question which seeks the meaning of the Mona Lisa's smile. We must not regard this as expressing some kind of interiority. For here, too, the case is the reverse of what we assume. It was because for the first time in the Mona Lisa the naked face, not the face as signified, appeared, that some kind of inner meaning expressed by this face has been incessantly posited. Interiority was not expressed here — the naked face, suddenly disclosed, began to signify interiority. This inversion took place contemporaneously to, and in the same manner as, the liberation of "pure landscape," from the figurative. (62)

Here 'the figurative' refers to 'the medieval conception of figurative space which was assigned meaning in qualitative terms'(62). In this context, Karatani, referring to T.S. Eliot's essay on Dante, remarks: 'the figurative nature of Western medieval thought, in terms of which conceptions of the transcendental belonged to the realm of the visual'; therefore, 'allegory, however abstract, was thoroughly visual'(53). Evidently, Karatani suggests a certain division between 'the medieval' and 'the modern': the latter is a historical period that witnessed the semiotic collapse of the Christian representational system that had structured 'pre-modern' experience and perception in a transcendental manner. What caused this semiotic gap or chasm is the modern bourgeois humanism and individualism, after which what Karatani terms as 'a semiotic constellation'(57) underwent a radical disintegration to the point where 'the figurative' completely lost the medieval or Christian meaning (allegory) that it had so far enjoyed, thereby 'suddenly' disclosing itself as a 'naked' face or thing itself. This is the case or situation in which — Karatani argues — 'human was presented as alienated from the landscape, and vice versa.' In this regard, the 'Mona Lisa' is an allegory of the end of medieval allegory (as I shall discuss, this allegory is the De Manian allegory).

This representational and semiotic predicament made it crucial to rebuild another 'modern' epistemological constellation. The case of the 'Mona Lisa' reminds Karatani of Eto Jyun's discussion of Meiji literature:

According to Eto's interpretation, "description" (*byosha*) in Meiji literature should not be

understood as a process of describing something, but as the emergence of the “thing itself,” and hence, of an entirely new relationship between “words” and “things” (30).

In Eto's own words: ‘[i]t was an effort of consciousness, a bold attempt to name that which they had no way of naming — the new “things” which had appeared in the wake of disintegration’ (30-31). Therefore, a completely new kind of subjectivity, or rather the *subject* of this ‘consciousness’ and the *object* of such ‘consciousness’ as interiority — ‘landscape’ — occurred or rather were ‘invented’ at the same time. From this perspective, Karatani observes: ‘Van den Berg has accurately analyzed the process whereby an alienation from the external world — or what we might call an extreme interiorization — led to the discovery of landscape’ (28-9).

Karatani's chief interest is in Kunikida Doppo and his text ‘which severed the connection between landscape and “famous sites” — such sites as ‘nothing other than a place imbued with historical and literary significance’ (65). Karatani contends that Doppo's language is suggestive of ‘Marx's observation that what we see as “nature” is always already humanized’ — a point of view which is ‘made possible by discovering landscape beyond literature’ (66). Here ‘literature’ refers to the pre-modern (pre-Meiji) representational space of Japanese classical literature ranging from the ancient to the Edo writings. In this pre-modern literary space, any landscape was an intertextual production by citation, where there was no inseparable correspondence between the subject and object in the modern sense of the terms (or rather there was no ‘interiority’ which Karatani finds in Doppo's texts).

Hence ‘the radical scission’ (66) in Doppo's ‘new writing’ indicates the fundamental transformation of his subjectivity:

Doppo accepted the new writing as natural, and because he had undergone this process of familiarization, we can speak of Doppo as possessing an interiority “that could be expressed.” Words for Doppo were no longer to be identified as written or spoken, for they had already sunk deeply into interiority. Or rather, it was only when language was perceived this way that interiority could be seen as something self-sufficient, immediate, and present. The origins of interiority are simultaneously repressed from memory. (67)

Karatani thus historicises Doppo's writing as one of the important ‘origins of modern Japanese literature’ — a literary institution enabled by:

The illusion that there is something like a “true self” has taken deep root. It is an illusion

that is established when writing has come to be seen as derivative and that voice which is most immediate to the self, and which constitutes self-consciousness, is privileged. The psychological person, who begins and ends in interiority, has come into existence. (69)

Thus, Karatani's discussion reveals the 'origins' of modern Japanese literature as the repression or avoidance of its 'true' origins — or traumatic encounter with a 'naked' thing itself. As Eto suggests, this repression is accompanied by the invention of the 'consciousness' as 'the inside' to name what cannot be named as its outside 'landscape.' Therefore, the origins of modern Japanese literature should be regarded as a process of psychologisation — or the 'invention' of the inside/outside of subjectivity. It is thus that we can witness the simultaneous birth of Japanese realism and romanticism. This historical perspective serves as a deconstruction of that dichotomy of realism and romanticism as well as that of *écriture* and *parole*. Karatani rightly says: 'it [realism] has actually emerged from an inversion of romanticism' (29). The term 'romanticism' should be considered related to the modern invention and discovery of subjective interiority.

### III

Karatani mentions that Doppo referred to Wordsworth in his endeavour to create new writing and modern psychologised subjectivity. Karatani's mentioning of Wordsworth in this context indicates that Paul de Man inspires his discussion. Originally, Karatani's argument was a part of the lectures he delivered at Yale University in the 1970s, where De Man was highly influential (the paperback edition of this text was devoted to De Man). It is noteworthy that De Man's 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' privileges Wordsworth as a key witness of such a 'radical scission' as Doppo's. De Man's another text, *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, provides a more concise textual analysis of Wordsworth from this viewpoint.

In his reading of Wordsworth, De Man draws our attention to the historical and literary progression from scenic descriptions 'firmly controlled by an inherited typology' to 'the romantic condition of landscape naturalism.' In the midst of this historical process, we can find the same kind of traumatic scene as the 'Mona Lisa' where 'naked' things — in this case 'places' — 'suddenly' disclose themselves:

As one watches the progress of a poet like Wordsworth, however, the significance of the locale tends to broaden into an area of meaning that is no longer literally bound to a particular place. The significance of the landscape is frequently made problematic by a suc-

cession of spatial ambiguities, to such an extent that one ends up no longer with a specific locale but with a *mere name*, of which the geographical existence has been voided of significance. (emphasis added; 99)

De Man states that the 'contemporary criticism' or by extension and implication, modern literature in general, is characterised by a set of symptomatic reactions to, or avoidance of, such 'disclosure' of nakedness:

[Geoffrey] Hartman shows quite convincingly how the category of nature is superseded in Wordsworth, but then smuggles nature back in through the back door. In all these cases, the critics seem to have gone to the right kind of evidence but to have shrunk from back before the full *impact* of their findings. We never had to go far beyond the texts they used to show their reversal of the original position: it is not that they loaded the scales by ignoring certain aspects of their authors, rather that they seemed reluctant to stay till the end with evidence they had themselves discovered. (97; emphasis added)

De Man further argues that 'this recurrent pattern' can be ascribed to 'the feeling of crisis that comes over all thought when it comes into close contact with its own source.' An important example of the 'recurrent pattern[s]' is 'an empirical psychologism' (97) which is a strong reminder of Karatani's critique of the origins of modern literature as the *psychological* and romantic repression of its 'true' origins. De Man connects this psychologisation with romanticism:

Something similar is certainly going on in the case of romanticism, and it proves, by itself, how powerful a source romanticism still is for our own consciousness. Put in more programmatic historical terms, it seems as if the critics in question were hampered from reaching their conclusions by certain postromantic assumptions, reached in the course of the nineteenth century, from which they are not entirely able to free themselves — although they have come quite a way in doing so. It might be that between the later eighteenth century and ourselves stands a long period that is regressive, in terms of self-insight, in relation to romanticism, and that we have to overcome this obstacle before we can reestablish contact with the real source. (98)

In this context, De Man's deconstruction of the romanticised is crucial; hence so is the psychologised correspondence between the subject and object. Undoubtedly, this is a romantic



and realistic reaction to the representational crisis 'in which for the first time the human was presented as alienated from the landscape, and vice versa.' It is worth recalling that De Man's reading is often an exposure of the rhetorical functions of metaphor or symbol, which works as an aesthetic and psychological invention of the outside/inside tropes, whose differences are exploited as the figurative material for the ultimate metaphorical reunion or reconciliation of these two subjective spaces.

#### IV

Jameson's dialectic, re-evaluated with Karatani's and De Man's, implies that from the beginning, the modern literary form of realism constitutes itself as a dialectical impossibility. As we have observed, the 'origin' of realist narrative should be historicised as a symptomatic interiorisation, the psychologised and spatialised production of the subject/object dichotomy. I say 'symptomatic' because it is an avoidance of, or 'shrinking' from, the traumatic materiality of 'nakedness' as a consequence of the disintegration of the pre-modern 'semiotic constellation.' This might be termed as the realist repression of *the real*. This suggests that the origin of modern realist narrative is a dialectical division of the diachronic and the synchronic, or the fundamental narrative desire for the chronological and the spatialisation of the subject/object. In other words, modern realism institutionalised itself by negating its own constituting principle — fundamental diachronicity — thus forming itself as an im/possible narrative discourse. That is, the modern, bourgeois form of 'onward drive of narrative' is significantly generated by the negation or repression of this impulse.

Such antinomies of diachronicity/chronology and synchronicity/psychology are further complicated by another contradiction within the latter — the institutionalised psychology and affect as its negation. It is the sophistication of the psychological institutions — psychological disciplines per se or modern realist narratives — that produces affect as their own negation: the negative outside of their inside. At the same time, Karatani and De Man allow us to witness the 'original' affectivity in the scene of the birth — or the primal scene if you like — of modern realism: what materialises itself as the 'naked face' of the 'Mona Lisa,' for instance. This uncanny materiality or nakedness at once induces (constitutes) and denies (negates) 'empirical psychologism.' That is, this psychologisation is a negative product of — traumatic 'shrinking' from — its own affective origins. Affectivity is considered *negatively* 'built into' the very beginning or origin of modern realist narrative.

The affectivity, thus documented, enables us to describe a historical process in which some-

thing originally repressed or negated emerges itself as a new form under the pressure of this dominant repression. This is highly reminiscent of Raymond Williams's 'the residual,' 'the dominant,' and 'the emergent' (121-27). In this context, we can render the 'original' affectivity as 'the residual,' the bourgeois institutional psychology or literature as 'the dominant,' and what Jameson terms as 'a pure present' or 'an eternal present' as 'the emergent.' Despite that, what Jameson calls 'pure' and 'eternal' sounds misleading since they suggest the a-historical repetition of the Freudian trauma. With regard to Williams, the historical re-production of 'the emergent' is driven by the dialectical differentiation of 'the residual' under the hegemonic weight of 'the dominant.' This is the trans-historical 'dominant' progress of preserving but at the same time differentiating and transforming 'the residual' into 'the emergent.'

Jameson and Williams lead us to conclude that this historicity — the dialectical, differentiating process of negating or reproducing the outside within the inside, or the dialectical dynamics in which differentiating process negates or reproduces identical structure — can be compared to Jameson's conception of 'enclave' in his *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia*:

The fundamental dynamic of any Utopian politics (or of any political Utopianism) will therefore always lie in the dialectic of Identity and Difference, to the degree to which such a politics aims at imagining, and sometimes even at realizing, a system radically different. [...] (xii)

Indeed, in the case of the Utopian texts, the most reliable political test lies not in any judgment on the individual work in question so much as in its capacity to generate new ones, Utopian visions that include those of the past, and modify or correct them. (xv)

What does this interesting picture of social differentiation have to offer a theory of Utopian production? I believe that we can begin from the proposition that Utopia space is an imaginary enclave within real social space, in other words, that the very possibility of Utopian space is itself a result of spatial and social differentiation. But it is an aberrant by-product, and its possibility is dependent on the momentary formation of a kind of eddy or self-contained backwater within the general differentiation process and its seemingly irreversible forward momentum. (15)

The historicity of affect, regarded by Jameson together with the im/possibility of realist narrative, thus plays a crucial part in this process of Utopian productions. Undoubtedly, this discus-

sion is a brilliant contribution to and powerfully dialectic intervention into the recent 'turn to affect' in the humanities, given its tendency to reproduce institutionalised positivist historiography, a possible realist — by implication conservative or rather reactionary — 'shrinking' from the 'real' origins of modernity.

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