Is Jameson's Theory Althusser's Philosophy?

Eleanor Kaufman

From the perspective of the twenty-first century field that studies twentieth-century French thought, there would seem to be little reason for calling that field anything other than twentieth-century French philosophy, or modern French philosophy.[1] To call such a field French theory, or, perhaps worse, poststructuralist theory, or, still worse, postmodern theory, would be to adopt wholesale the purported misnomers that are the result of the Anglophone and predominantly US based appropriation of that thought, dating back at least to the late 1960s. In other words, why would those who work concertedly on this field wish to credence it with a nomination—theory—that is now so oft abused and maligned? For all the baggage that a term like philosophy brings with it, and certainly many if not most of the twentieth-century French thinkers in question interrogate this matter directly, isn't philosophy still a much preferable and more accurate nomination than theory, at least at this twilight moment of the now decades-long "theory wars"? After all, most of the thinkers at issue were professional philosophers (Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Alain Badiou, Louis Althusser, and many others). Not to mention that they are the product of a remarkably homogeneous and centralized education system in which they continued their professional work, having studied the

[1] A slightly truncated version of this essay was published in *The Future of Totality: Fredric Jameson and the Prospects of Critical Theory*, eds. Nicholas Brown, Maria Elisa Cevasco, Fabio Akcelrud Durão, and Robert T. Tally Jr. (Duke University Press, 2026).

same things, with the same teachers, in the same place.[2] Why wouldn't one want to study this material as the philosophical ensemble that it is, rather than as an oddly displaced and dispersed sequence of arrivals on the American theory stage (Foucault and Derrida in the 1960s and 1970s, Deleuze in the 1990s, Badiou in the 2000s), belying the fact that those in the most celebrated group are a mere dozen years apart in age? Why should anyone who takes this thought seriously call it anything but philosophy? If there is a rebuttal to the above, an argument for why we would still want to insist on preserving the term theory, it is staged nowhere more emphatically if not audaciously than in the work of Fredric Jameson and Louis Althusser. Jameson will advocate for theory in strong distinction from philosophy, whereas Althusser will position the two terms in an intricate and variable relation that could almost be called dialectical.

Before attempting to parse the valences of "theory" and "philosophy" in Jameson and Althusser, it is incumbent to situate such a project within the distinctive set of alignments and displacements between these thinkers. On the one hand, these Marxist fellow travelers share a desire for abstraction, for unearthing contradictions if not antimonies, that at times sets them apart from Marxist orthodoxy, and certainly Marxist humanisms. They both affirm the necessary alliance between theory and practice, and in this regard consider psychoanalysis as an intriguing realm with certain parallels to Marxism. Whereas for Jameson the dialectic's preeminence never falters, Althusser employs the term more cautiously and generally only in the late Marx's sense of dialectical materialism. Still, their respective methodologies might be considered preeminently dialectical. On the other hand, Jameson affirms a Hegelianism that Althusser is at nearly all points (except, perhaps, when considering Feuerbach[3]) at pains to extirpate, even denouncing Marx's earlier writings—up to and including the first part of *Capital* Volume One—as being mired in a Hegelian language of humanism and alienation that, starting in small steps with the works of 1844, Marx was slowly able to overcome if not articulate in fully philosophical form. While Jameson emphasizes the question of totality, Althusser dismisses a Hegelian movement where the whole is reflected in its parts, considering this a form of "expressive causality," and one that is necessarily subordinate to his preferred model of "structural causality," in which a cause is only readable and derivable through its effects.[4] Furthermore, while Jameson appeals to the framework of utopia, Althusser if

[2] See the discussion of the French education system's reliance on mimetic logic in Davide Panagia, *Sentimental Empiricism: Politics, Philosophy, and Criticism in Postwar France* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2024).

[3] See Louis Althusser, "On Feuerbach," in *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2003), 85-154.

[4] See Louis Althusser, Étienne Balibar, Roger Establet, Pierre Macherey, and Jacques Rancière, *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition*, trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2015), 15, 342, 346; and Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 23-50. For a helpful overview of Jameson's well-known reframing (if not sidestepping) of Althusser's structural causality, see Ian Buchanan, *Fredric Jameson: Live Theory* (London: Continuum, 2006), 7-10; and Sean Homer, "Narratives of History, Narratives of Time," in *On Jameson: From Postmodernism to Globalization*, eds. Caren Irr and Ian Buchanan (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 71-91, esp. 73-75. Jameson's recent lectures on Althusser in *The*

anything appeals to a salutary but backwards-looking solitude—one he finds in such sundry spaces as Machiavelli, Rousseau's notion of origin, Freud, and certainly in his own life, magnified in the exile of his last decade.[5] In short, the disjunctions between Althusser and Jameson arguably exceed the alignments. It's notable that Jameson will evoke Althusser with a respectful distance, often including turns of phrase that highlight distinctions even when expressing the potential for alliance.[6]

As a first approach to this slightly uneasy juxtaposition of Jameson and Althusser on the question of theory and philosophy (or theory versus philosophy), it is worth noting the consistency of Jameson's approach to this question. Although Jameson produced a notable constellation of (often occasional) "apologias" for theory in the first decade of the twenty-first century, some of which will be taken up in what follows, these formulations are not substantially distinct, except perhaps in tone, from earlier ones dating back at least to *The Political Unconscious*. Indeed, the two most considered accounts of the creation of "French theory" in the wake of its Anglophone reception—by François Cusset and Johannes Angermuller—cite Jameson as a fundamental actor in this process,[7] highlighting that his support for "theory" has not wavered, even when others uphold this thought by calling it "philosophy," so as to distinguish it from the much maligned "theory" which Jameson's writings from the early 2000s explicitly and implicitly defend. Such an allegiance might be compared to Alain Badiou's adherence to Maoist thought

Years of Theory: *Postwar French Thought to the Present* (London: Verso, 2024), delve a bit more into Althusser's structural causality, linking it to Freudian *Nachträglichkeit* and noting that "the present, the symptom, reactivates the cause for Freud. It's a very funny kind of temporality. Look out for this kind of inversion of time, because it's characteristic of a lot of our people from now on, and certainly you will find it in Lacan as well" (224).

[5] See Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2007); *An American Utopia: Dual Power and the Universal Army* (London: Verso, 2016); and Louis Althusser, "Machiavelli's Solitude," trans. Ben Brewster, in *Machiavelli and Us* (London: Verso, 1999), 115-130; *Lessons on Rousseau*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2019); "Freud and Lacan" in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 129-150, esp. 134; and *The Future Lasts Forever: A Memoir*, trans. Richard Veasey (New York: The New Press, 1993).

[6] For example, in "Symptoms of Theory or Symptoms for Theory?" *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 403-408, Jameson will define "theory" as "the coming to terms with materialist language," commenting further that "all truths are at best momentary, situational, and marked by a history in the process of change and transformation. You will have already recognized deconstruction in my description, and some will wish to associate Althusserianism with it as well" (403). Jameson is characteristically reticent to pinpoint his own relation to this "Althusserianism." In an extraordinary course on the dialectic from 1996, Jameson discussed how different formulations of mode of production from *Reading Capital* "disappear without a trace in the de-Marxification of the late 70s and early 80s," adding that we should "take as our motto anti-anti-Althusserianism" (author's notes, p. 82). The awkward double-negative rather than a simple positive perfectly captures this respectful distance toward Althusser, one that tends to keep him at arm's length. For more on this lecture class, see Andrew Cole, "The Rebus in Fredric Jameson's *The Hegel Variations*," *Verso* (blog), June 24, 2024: https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/the-rebus-in-fredric-jameson-s-em-data-mce-fragment-1-the-hegel-variations-em

[7] See François Cusset, *French Theory: How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, trans. Jeff Fort (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 32,78, 211-15, 282; and Johannes Angermuller, *Why There Is No Poststructuralism in France: The Making of an Intellectual Generation* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 16, 19.

when many around him jumped ship, or to an allegiance Jameson himself has eloquently highlighted, which is Freud's insistence on the primacy of the sexual even in the wake of his many followers who sought to "dilute" it.[8] This essay considers the entity called "theory" that Jameson holds on to, asking if it aligns with what Althusser calls "philosophy," which for the latter is not theory's opponent, as it is for Jameson, but rather theory's minor and belated—yet nonetheless indispensable—companion.

In "Antinomies of the Realism-Modernism Debate," a response to a collection of essays emphasizing "peripheral realisms," Jameson makes an appeal for realism as a term that, importantly, problematizes itself:

> We ourselves are… drowning in abstractions of all kinds, the accumulation of centuries of philosophizing, of thinking, defining, and naming, and we face the problem of mapping navigable paths through them…. This means that every use of the generic term will involve contested terrain and needs by definition to be problematized; every analysis of a realistic work needs to be theoretical as well as critical. We may even wonder whether the most useful 'definition' of *realism* may not lie in the capacity of a text to raise the issue of realism as such within its own structure, no matter what answer it decides to give. In that case, we might call realist any literary work which raises the question of realism, whether to problematize it or to attempt to reinvent it.[9]

It would seem that, for Jameson, the term "theory" does similar work to "realism" as it is outlined here. That is, in somewhat recursive fashion, a theoretical and critical problematizing of "theory" would itself count as theoretical. This is not far removed from what Paul de Man famously pronounced in the concluding line of "The Resistance to Theory": "Nothing can overcome the resistance to theory since theory *is* itself this resistance."[10] Jameson and de Man might be claimed as theory's most stellar and intransigent defenders, and also the ones who delineate most insistently theory's intrinsic relation to the literary, to narrative for the former and poetics for the latter. This is all well and good, except that for most of the major thinkers in the modern French tradition, it is philosophy itself that serves this problematizing role, it is philosophy itself that so approximates literature as to be at times indistinguishable from it.[11]

A cursory summary will not do justice to the richness and range of problematizations of "French philosophy" by its actual practitioners, not to mention

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[8] See Fredric Jameson, "Lenin and Revisionism," in *Lenin Reloaded: Toward a Politics of Truth*, eds. Sebastian Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 65-66.

[9] Fredric Jameson, "Antinomies of the Realism-Modernism Debate," *Modern Language Quarterly* 73, no.3 (September 2012): 478.

[10] Paul de Man, "The Resistance to Theory," in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 3-20 (19).

[11] See my "Literature and Modern French Philosophy" in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern French Philosophy*, eds. Mark Sinclair and Daniel Whistler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 663-679.

many volumes of secondary literature related to this question.[12] At the beginning of the twenty-first century, in "The Adventure of French Philosophy" (later expanded to a book-length engagement), Badiou succinctly outlines his vision of modern French philosophy's key concepts and engagements, including a relation to the political, to practice and to militancy, as well as its "long-running conversation with psychoanalysis" and proximity to the literary.[13] He writes, "One could even say that one of the goals of French philosophy has been to construct a new space from which to write, one where literature and philosophy would be indistinguishable."[14] All of this is quite proximate to claims often made for "theory," a term Badiou does not engage. Similarly Deleuze and especially Deleuze and Félix Guattari rarely take up "theory" as such, but in their valedictory *What is Philosophy?* outline about two dozen expansive definitions of the term "philosophy"— including its relation to language and literature, psychoanalysis and the unconscious, politics, and modernity—and consider it as a new style, a mode of creating concepts, a form of encounter, resistance, and utopia.[15] In his earlier work, Deleuze writes empathically about philosophy as a posing of problems (rather than solutions).[16] Derrida, for all his touted critiques of Western metaphysics, will consistently defend the function and especially the importance of teaching philosophy. We now have access to Foucault's extraordinary treatise on philosophical discourse from 1966, in which philosophy is considered as "diagnostic," among other things.[17] Even thinkers like François Laruelle and Badiou who espouse varying notions of "non-philosophy" do so on the terrain and with the methodology of philosophy.

So, to return to Jameson's sense above that we are "drowning in [the] abstractions" of "centuries of philosophizing," we might counterpose that much of modern French philosophy is similarly contesting the hegemony of the term it is gathered under, while still adhering to that term. What would be a reason, then, to insist on the use of "theory" over "philosophy," at least in the French instance, when most of the "theorists" themselves engage with a remarkable range of problematizations of philosophy, barely mentioning theory? Jameson gives us several good reasons for retaining theory, and, as we shall see in what follows, Althusser gives us reasons for retaining both terms in complex relation to one another. Together, Jameson and

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[12] The latter ranges from Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J.M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980) to Stephen Gaukroger and Knox Peden, *French Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). For an extension of this lineage back to the nineteenth century, see Pierre Macherey, *Études de philosophie "française": de Sieyès à Barni* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2013) and Mark Sinclair and Daniel Whistler, "Introduction" in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern French Philosophy*, 1-24.

[13] Alain Badiou, "The Adventure of French Philosophy," *New Left Review* 35 (Sept-Oct 2005): 67-77 (74).

[14] Alain Badiou, "The Adventure of French Philosophy," 73.

[15] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[16] See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

[17] Michael Foucault, *Le discours philosophique* (Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 2023).

Althusser (alongside de Man, who will be left aside) are the shining exceptions to the otherwise well-advised practice of calling this material "French philosophy." This is especially evident in their deep engagement with the theory/philosophy problem's dialectical dimensions, an engagement which is outlined in very different terms in the two thinkers but arguably shares more common ground than Jameson would generally concede.

Philosophy ≠ Theory

In the introduction to *Valences of the Dialectic*, Jameson defends the use of theory in magisterial fashion—at a moment (2009) when it needs defending more than ever—as that enterprise which attempts to resist the reifications of philosophy:

> It is no doubt always amusing to observe the compulsion offered by professional philosophers from Hegel to Althusser to Deleuze to waste their vital energies in the philosophical defense and apologia of philosophy as such. No doubt—and the work of Pierre Bourdieu is there to remind us of it—those of us in other institutional disciplines are driven in much the same way to our own analogous institutional self-justifications; but the emergence of theory in the past years has seemed to offer a space outside the institutions and outside the rehearsal of such compulsory rationalizations, and it is the claims of theory (if not its achieved realities) which allow us to grasp the limits of philosophy as such, very much including dialectical philosophy. I believe that theory is to be grasped as the perpetual and impossible attempt to dereify the language of thought, and to preempt all the systems and ideologies which inevitably result from the establishment of this or that fixed terminology. Deconstruction is thus the very paradigm of a theoretical process of undoing terminologies which, by virtue of the elaboration of the terminology that very process requires, becomes a philosophy and an ideology in its own turn and congeals into the very type of system it sought to undermine. The persistence of the proper name in theory, indeed—as when we identity various texts as Derridean, Althusserian, or Habermasian—only serves to betray the hopelessness of the nonetheless unavoidable aim of theoretical writing to escape the reifications of philosophy as well as the commodifications of the intellectual marketplace today.[18]

If not exactly realized, theory has an aspirational aspect that for Jameson comes from an emplacement outside institutions and beyond the proper name, thus serving to "dereify the language of thought" in a fashion not possible for philosophy. Of course Jameson himself recognizes the impossibility of such an attempt, and also the way in which theory

[18] Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009), 8-9.

can become an ideology-laden philosophy which itself is reified in the form of a proper name, Derridianism and Althusserianism being two of Jameson's examples. Interestingly, theory's fall from grace back into the reified philosophy it sought to escape engages in a contrarian, even antinomous, movement that seems to approximate Jameson's privileged dialectic, though here ironically and in negative fashion.

In "How Not to Historicize Theory" (2008), Jameson gives another fall from grace example in which theory slides back into philosophy despite its best efforts, here citing a thinker who elicits more ambivalence than Althusser: "But Pierre Bourdieu's work—the most complex rationale for anti-intellectualism available today—is as theoretical as it is philosophical. It seeks, in other words, to undermine and discredit all the ideologies in play in the intellectual market today (such is its theoretical vocation) at the same time that it finds itself fatally rationalizing its own disciplinary position as a place of truth—an attempt to square this circle that surely betrays a philosophical commitment to system rather than a theoretical refusal of it."[19] While Derrida and Althusser are arguably reified by their reception—by others— in spite of their best efforts, Bourdieu's commitment to system brings it on himself, as it were, clearly a more damnable instance of theory's negative reification as philosophy, or as philosophical system. At different points, Jameson expresses suspicion for systems, sometimes also evoking Althusser's penchant for them. Jameson clearly isn't aiming for a unified philosophical system, whereas Althusser's structural inclinations arguably put him more in the camp of Bourdieu, as odd as that sounds**.** Rather than pursue this difference between Jameson and Althusser on the terrain of system— that is, whether Althusser, if not Jameson himself, betrays a philosophical commitment to system—I would like to reorient the focus (as Fred Jameson would put it) to our "old friend" the dialectic.

Theory = Dialectic?

As noted above, the stance on the dialectic might be considered a line of demarcation between Althusser and Jameson, to use a formulation of the former. While Althusser certainly recognizes the import of dialectical materialism, as will be considered below, he—like most of his French contemporaries, in particular Deleuze and Derrida—will treat the dialectic as such with some wariness. Is this the same wariness with which Derrida will treat Althusser's notion of "Theory," if not theory as such?[20] Or, alternatively,

[19] Fredric Jameson, "How Not to Historicize Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 34 (Spring 2008): 575. This essay is also published in Fredric Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory* (London: Verso, 2008), 286-301. In what follows, I will cite the original journal publication for relevant works that were later published in collected volumes.

[20] A more comprehensive version of this argument would need to consider Derrida's formidable reading of Althusser's notion of theory in his course lectures from 1976-77, collected as *Theory and Practice*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019). Focusing in particular on Althusser's "On the Materialist Dialectic" in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2005), Derrida traces the trajectory of Althusser's notion of philosophy, from "a regional dependency of theory in general" (46) to a rather different—and quite dialectical—"Marxist philosophy," denoted by Althusser as capital "t" Theory. Derrida thus deduces: "Indeed, if Theory (uppercase) is dialectical materialism, another name for Marxist

is French philosophy's wariness toward the dialectic the same wariness it has toward theory, insofar as it thinks about theory, which often it doesn't? Althusser will be addressed as an exception to this provisional rule, for his wariness toward the dialectic is distinctly separate from his sense of theory. Jameson, by contrast, while minimally wary of theory at best,[21] is the one who gives us the series of equivalences for a possible alliance of theory and dialectics.

There is a wonderful note at the end of Badiou's *Logics of Worlds* where he considers whether his concept of "inexistence" could be equated with Derrida's concept of *différance*: "In homage to Derrida, I write here 'inexistence', just as he created, a long time ago, the word 'différance'. Will we say that $\emptyset_A$ = inexistence = différance? Why not?"[22] The equation of theory and dialectics for Jameson is nowhere so blithely stated, perhaps because both are for him mediated by an antagonistic relation to philosophy itself, and complicated by a necessary relation with praxis, something exemplified in the Marxian as well as the psychoanalytic traditions. Jameson writes in *Valences of the Dialectic* that "I've said enough to suggest that it will be unwise to identify the dialectic as a unified philosophical system…also because we are no longer tempted, in the age of theory, by the traditional rhetoric of philosophy itself and its philosophical self-justifications."[23] For Jameson, Badiou's use of "anti-philosophy" to describe the work of thinkers like Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Lacan is still too close to the philosophy it seeks to distance itself from.[24] Rather, the Marxist notion of the unity of theory and practice conveys the way both Marxism and psychanalysis require a connection to praxis distinct from the purported autonomy of philosophy.[25] I say purported because the idea that philosophy is not itself in fundamental relation to theory and to practice will be interrogated and largely

philosophy in its specificity, it is also, and I am quoting, "the Theory of practice in general' [168], that is to say the Theory of all those definitions" (66). Effectively, if philosophy is a subordinate category to theory, one still needs the very terms of philosophy to maintain that subordination; or, you need the language of philosophy, which comes at a later stage than theory, to properly describe the earlier stage. As Derrida's analysis implies, this is a thoroughly dialectical conundrum. Derrida concludes that "[n]othing is more philosophical than the act of defining or situating the philosophical within the general field of what is, of being this or that, here production or practice" (72).

[21] Jameson does express occasional moments of reservation or disappointment with theory: "Theory, which once eagerly fed on these new sources of thought [rivalry of communism, fascism and capitalism in Benjamin], has itself become a purely aesthetic and consumerist process." See Fredric Jameson, *The Benjamin Files* (London: Verso, 2020), 207.

[22] Alain Badiou, *Logics of Worlds*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Continuum, 2009), 545.

[23] Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 10.

[24] Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 10. "I'm not particularly tempted by Alain Badiou's notion of anti-philosophy, a term he deploys for Lacan, as well as for seemingly non-systematic or fragmentary thinkers like Pascal and Nietzsche. One sees what he means, but the formulation tends to restore a certain centrality to that very philosophy of which such thinking was alleged to have been the critique or the negation."

[25] Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*, 11. Jameson writes that "the conceptualities of psychoanalysis are ultimately fully meaningful only by way of the analytic situation itself…while in Marxism significance is finally only achieved by way of our concrete class situation…. These unities of theory and practice are therefore distinct from the implied autonomy of the philosophical concept and cannot in any sense be completed by philosophy but only by praxis."

dismissed by Althusser. In some sense, philosophy for Jameson is not unlike the monologic viewpoint that distinguishes Flaubert from the earlier range of "heterogenous narrative registers" visible in Balzac, according to the well-known argument of *The Political Unconscious*.[26] By this logic, Althusser's notion of philosophy would align with the mobile, de-centered, desiring subject of Jameson's Balzac, and Jameson's notion of philosophy with the reified moment of Flaubert, in which the Balzacian Real and fantasy structure are erased, and "tension or inconsistency between levels" is absent.[27] What is incongruous or hopeful about philosophy in Althusser is simply a bad reification for Jameson.

Dialectic ≠ Philosophy

For Jameson, theory works in almost inverse relation to philosophy, the former having many of the dialectical complexities that the latter lacks. In a 1995 interview with Xudong Zhang entitled "Marxism and the Historicity of Theory," Jameson expresses the disconnection between dialectic and philosophy in particularly strong terms: "That is another reason why it is wrong to think of the dialectic as a philosophy. Because presumably in a philosophy you can write down your truth once you have found it. Hegel thought he was doing that (or at least pretended to think so). Capitalism is a much more complicated thing than ontology."[28] There is a lot to criticize in this formulation, on behalf of philosophy and ontology, and Jameson's own qualifications—"presumably," "or at least pretended to think so"—already point us in that direction. That most of twentieth-century French philosophy—with the interesting and important exception of Badiou—follows Nietzsche in questioning the very possibility of finding your truth is yet another indication of the problem this formulation raises. But to keep to the task at hand, the more simple observation is that, while theory and dialectic go together for Jameson, philosophy and dialectic clearly do not.[29]

What, then, does dialectic do that so exceeds the philosophical? For Jameson, it does a lot, as a number of excellent studies of his work have argued.[30] I will limit my response to two things, both of which put Jameson in close proximity to Althusser in terms of what these two thinkers seem to be *doing*, if not exactly *saying* with respect to theory, philosophy, and dialectic. The first matter regards causality. As noted above,

[26] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 179.
[27] Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 184, 159.
[28] Fredric Jameson and Xudong Zhang, "Marxism and the Historicity of Theory: An Interview with Fredric Jameson," *New Literary History* 29, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 353-383 (377).
[29] Jameson comments in the same interview that "Marxism is not an ontology, and should be neither an ontology nor a philosophy…. What is very peculiar about both Marx and Freud is that they are this thing which in the Marxist tradition is called a unity of theory and practice" (Ibid., 363-364). Notably, Jameson says this à propos of Derrida's just published *Specters of Marx*, that it "reminds us insistently that Marxism is not an ontology" (363). I would regard Derrida's juxtaposition of Marx with Hamlet's "out of joint" time as insistently ontological, even if those are not the words Derrida uses.
[30] See especially Robert T. Tally Jr., *Fredric Jameson: The Project of Dialectical Criticism* (London: Pluto Press, 2014); and Phillip E. Wegner, *Periodizing Jameson: Dialectics, the University, and the Desire for Narrative* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2014).

Jameson famously defends a Hegelian expressive causality, in which the desired totality would be contained in its parts, over and against Althusser's notion of structural causality, in which a cause is only readable in its effects. Despite the different positions on Hegel, both notions of causality entail a similar kind of retrospective reading and narrative reconstitution or rectification.[31] In the interview cited above, Jameson affirms that "I think that narrative and causality go together, and that narrative logic is causal logic. But the dialectic would be an undermining of the received forms of narrative and historical causality."[32] Thus for Jameson, the dialectic, compatible with theory but not with philosophy, undermines received forms of causality, if not Althusserian structural causality. Just before this remark, Jameson presents the example of theory itself to illustrate this causal undermining, proposing a counterargument—three decades in advance—to those of us who might wish to call it philosophy:

> Another question is what to do with theory today. A complicated answer, a Hegelian answer to that is: what we often observe in the dialectic or opposition between subject and object is that the subject is part of the object, the subject is being produced by the object. I would say the same thing about theory: that theory did not just come from nowhere, then people liked these disembodied abstractions and took it over and did awful things with them. Theory came out of the situation. Theory is an integral product of this whole new late capitalist situation. So it is itself a newly emerging content and then, as an objective reality of the world, it undergoes its own autonomous development and reacts back on reality, makes changes in thought, in the university system, in the role of the intellectuals, in the production of culture, and so forth.
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> If one sees theory as just something subjectively willful over and against this subjective cultural, historical, and social reality that we know, then one is not thinking about theory historically. But theory is part of that historical situation. Therefore, the emergence of theory itself becomes a crucial cultural and historical question to be looked at. And I think this is being done more today than in the early period when all this was new. But there is a reason why it came into being, why, if you associate theory with poststructuralism, structuralism emerged.[33]

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[31] In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson suggests that both Althusser and Hegel oppose an "unreflected" or "premature" immediacy, claiming that "Althusserian structural causality is therefore just as fundamentally a practice of mediation as is the 'expressive causality' to which it is opposed" (41). For a critique of a Jamesonian position that would similarly conflate dialectic and structuralism, see A. Kiarina Kordela, "Dialectics, or Valences of Structuralism" in *Epistemontology in Spinoza-Marx-Freud-Lacan: The (Bio)Power of Structure* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

[32] Jameson and Zhang, "Marxism and the Historicity of Theory," 375.

[33] Jameson and Zhang, "Marxism and the Historicity of Theory," 370.

This meditation deftly anticipates the problematic aspect of harboring a bad-faith nostalgia for theory's non-existent origin (as philosophy), which would disavow the particular situation or conjuncture that produced the thing called theory in the first place.

Leaving aside the question of subject and object for the moment, theory features in Jameson's response as both product and producer, a product of its late capitalist moment but also something that transforms intellectual life—much as Jameson's work itself has done—and something to be considered historically and culturally. Perhaps we could call this theory's expressive causality. But then there is the enigmatic reference to the emergence of structuralism: "why, if you associate theory with postructuralism, structuralism emerged." The latter formulation appears, and perhaps inadvertently, as a remarkable illustration of Althusserian structural causality, insofar as it suggests that structuralism itself only fully emerges with the phenomenon of poststructuralism, a notion coined by theory's Anglophone reception and not in France. One might say France had a thought of "structure," which later morphed into the much-denounced "structuralism," something that had not quite existed until it was produced retroactively by a "poststructuralism" that also never existed in France.[34] We could alternately denounce theory for provoking this mess, or celebrate the counterintuitive causalities it helps us to perceive. (Jameson does the latter when he argues at different points that the attendant instabilities of the modern/postmodern distinction in fact allow us to put their antecedent realism in sharper focus.) Such a logic is very close to Althusser's model of structural causality and epistemological break, except that Althusser will leave Hegel out of the picture and make the relation between theory and philosophy central to it.

Before examining Althusser's distinctions between theory and philosophy, there is a final dimension of Jamesonian dialectics to address, one that may help pinpoint what philosophy does for Althusser that it doesn't do for Jameson. This is the relationship between subject and object, which like the Hegelian lord and bondsman, is eminently reversible. The subject is in the object and vice versa.[35] As Jameson writes in "How Not to Historicize Theory," "[t]he only truly original solution, which does not claim to resolve anything but rather to incorporate the dilemma of oppositions and binaries into its very structure and method, remains the dialectic, which posits a permanent gap between subject and object within all our thoughts as well as in reality itself (herein lies its kinship with Lacanian analysis as well as its foundational and inextricable relationship with Marxism itself)."[36] For Jameson, the subject and object appear in some sense inextricable *and* in a relation of permanent gap, a situation condoned and enabled by both the dialectic and the general category of theory, which, as we have seen, converge on each other. While

[34] See my "Do Dual Structures Exist? Deleuze and Lacan in the Wake of Lévi-Strauss," *Yale French Studies* 123 (2013): 83-99.
[35] For a discussion of the lord and bondsman dynamic that upholds the centrality of Medieval logic in conjunction with Hegel (and rather differently than the Althusserian model presented here) as a necessary precursor to "theory," see Andrew Cole, *The Birth of Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).
[36] Jameson, "How Not to Historicize Theory," 574-575.

it is not my concern here to question this logic,[37] it is hard to deny, in the spirit of the Balzac-Flaubert distinction inherited from Lukács, that Jameson has a singularly polyvocal sense of theory and dialectic, and a singularly monologic one of philosophy. By contrast, it is philosophy's relation to its *object* (which it must find), in conjunction with its specific lag with respect to theory, that is crucially different for Althusser, allowing philosophy to star in a belated but innovative role replete with precarious pivots and quasi-causal leaps,[38] one which for Jameson is exclusively reserved for theory and the dialectic.

Many Theories

If Jameson continues to evoke theory in a strikingly consistent and positive fashion, even in the wake of other possible periodizations and appellations, Althusser's approach raises an almost diametrically different set of problems. In the first place, Althusser's vast posthumous archive is indispensable to the formulation of the problem at hand, which is occluded by the outsized reputation of the "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" essay (1970) and the events and work of Althusser's last decade (1980-1990), including his notion of aleatory materialism and his late autobiographical writings.[39] In *The Years of Theory*, Jameson will identify Althusser's two crucial points of intervention in terms of the categories of ideology and modes of production.[40] Although these are undeniably important terms for Althusser, they don't quite capture the unrepentant scholasticism of Althusserian mereology and causality, in conjunction with the extraordinary compilation of unpublished work during the two years following the publication of *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* (both 1965). Althusser attempts and reattempts formulations of the relation between theory and practice—which formulations also hinge on the relation between science and ideology, if not always mode of production—in a remarkable set of writings predominantly from 1966 and 1967.[41] This is not to say Althusser doesn't continue to reflect on similar issues in later work, but more nearly that there is a particular condensation in the work from these two years, insofar as it retains the earlier structural causality logic and uses this to investigate the relation of philosophy to the theory-practice nexus. As with Freud's model of the dream work, there is a constantly shifting set of terms and frameworks, and a resulting overdetermination that makes Althusser's use of

[37] For a critique of Jameson's "anti-political formulation of the dialectic" (738), from the perspective of the field of political theory, see Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo, "Fredric Jameson: Dialectical Criticism and the Politics of Theory," *Polity* 55:4 (October 2023): 720-744.

[38] While Althusser's interests put him in real proximity with the quasi-causality outlined in Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), Jameson's first book on Sartre considers wonderful quasi-causal examples of objects "leap[ing] into their opposite to be presented." See *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 109.

[39] See Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," trans. Ben Brewster, in *On the Reproduction of Capitalism*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2014), 232-272; and *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987* (London: Verso, 2006).

[40] Jameson, *The Years of Theory*, 214-217, 236.

[41] See Louis Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings, 1966-67*; and *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster et al. (London: Verso, 1990).

"theory" in particular quite challenging to parse. In other words, and in contrast to Jameson's consistent appeal to a notion of theory at once dialectical, utopian, and distinct from philosophy, Althusser employs "theory" into different systems of categorization.[42] While there is a logical consistency across most of these arguments—in particular, the idea that Marx produced advances in the practical state that had yet to be derived (by someone like Althusser) in the dialectical or philosophical state—the terms theory, philosophy, science, and dialectical materialism are sometimes organized on the same level and sometimes in a relation of subordination to one of the other terms.

Thus, while Althusser's terminology, and especially his use of "theory," is strikingly non-homogeneous even between essays composed in the same year, the problem of the highest term's *décalage*, or lag, with respect to historical materialism or praxis, is basically rehearsed over and again, whether that term is called Marxist philosophy, Theory, or dialectical materialism. Therefore, in singling out one essay from 1967 to illustrate my argument with respect to theory and philosophy, I do so with a small disclaimer: while the specific terminologies are not exactly replicated in other of

[42] See "On Theoretical Work," in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, 43-67; "The Philosophical Conjuncture and Marxist Theoretical Research" in *The Humanist Controversy*, 1-18; and the earlier essay from 1963, "On the Materialist Dialectic," in *For Marx*, 161-218. To give a very cursory overview, in "The Philosophical Conjuncture and Marxist Theoretical Research" (June, 1966), Althusser specifies the *object* of Marxist theory as the distinction between Marxist philosophy (dialectical materialism) and Marxist science (historical materialism), each containing multiple sub-categories that include, for example, the theory of structural causality and the theory of theoretical practice for the former (*The Humanist Controversy*, see esp. 10-13). In "On Theoretical Work," published as an essay in *La Pensée* in April 1967, Althusser distinguishes between "theoretical concepts" which bear on "abstract-formal determinations of objects," such as the capitalist mode of production (*Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*, 47) and "empirical concepts," which bear on "concrete-real objects," such as the 1966 French social formation that Althusser uses as an example (49). Althusser notes that "[t]he difficulty of a theory in the strong sense derives, then, from the abstract and formal character not just of its concepts, but of its *objects*" (51). Althusser then gives a whole list of properly abstract objects, including historical materialism, dialectical materialism, science, philosophy, dialectic, and mode of production (51). In this schema, philosophy is, along with both historical and dialectical materialism, one of theory's abstract objects. Moreover, the French social formation in 1966 which will effectively become known as "French theory" is itself a more basic real-concrete object and not the more encompassing formal-abstract one. So we have one kind of theory that is global on the level of capitalism and another kind that is local on the level of France in 1966.

As discussed in note 19, Althusser himself makes a specific distinction between variants of "theory" in an earlier essay collected in *For Marx*, "On the Materialist Dialectic" (1963), op. cit. Here, Althusser posits "Theory (with a capital T), general theory, that is, the Theory of practice in general, itself elaborated on the basis of the Theory of existing theoretical practices (of the sciences)…. This Theory is the materialist *dialectic* which is none other than dialectical materialism" (168). This is contrasted with the italicized *theory*, which is defined as "any theoretical practice of a *scientific* character" (168). There are further sub-categories of theory elaborated, but the crucial insight, anticipating the controversial argument of *Reading Capital*, is precisely that Marx himself did not give us a capital T notion of the dialectic in the theoretical state, but rather the small t dialectic in the practical state (175). Althusser writes: "Look at Marx. He wrote ten books as well as the monument that is *Capital* without ever writing a *Dialectics*. He talked of writing it, but never started. He never found the time. Which means that he never took the time, for at that period the Theory of his own theoretical practice was not *essential* to the development of his theory, that is, to the fruitfulness of his own practice" (174).

Althusser's essays, the problems presented here, namely, of 1) the whole and the parts (mereology) and 2) philosophy's lag behind theory/science/historical materialism (in effect, structural causality) are, for the most part, consistent across Althusser's work from this period. We may wonder if the non-publication of some of this work was due to its not having arrived at a fully replicable naming of terms (Althusser's ultimate realism being thus at the mercy of his fluctuating nominalisms). In any case, if Jameson's notion of theory is built on resistance to the reifications of a Goliath-like philosophy that looms rather monolithically over the landscape, Althusser seems to be aiming for the reification of a belatedly comprehensive concept (comprehensive for its very belatedness) called sometimes Theory, sometimes philosophy, sometimes dialectical materialism, or sometimes even science. This reification is identified with the austerity and rigor of medieval transcendentals, but unlike truth, unity, or goodness (or even *res* or *aliquid*), it is always imperfectly named. While Jameson and Althusser are coming at the thing from wholly different sides, Althusser from a drive toward system and Jameson with a resistance to it, it is my claim that they meet clandestinely at a middle point—a middle which is also always focused on Marx—that is improbably well aligned.

Philosophy = Theory

In conclusion, I will try to illustrate this proximity between Jameson's "theory" and Althusser's "philosophy" through an analysis of Althusser's formulations about philosophy in "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," an essay written in 1967 upon solicitation from a leading Soviet philosophy journal. The conclusion on "Philosophy and Politics" that Althusser added belatedly is particularly notable, G. M. Goshgarian even maintaining that the "dense" ten page conclusion makes this essay "one of the pivotal texts in the Althusserian corpus."[43] I concur with this assessment and propose using this text for a continuation of the opening thought experiment, which substituted the term "theory" for "realism" in Jameson's formulation. Instead, we might here substitute "theory" for "philosophy" in Althusser's formulations and consider what further rapprochement of the thinkers in question such a substitution would allow. As noted above, there are two critical logical operations that come to the forefront in Althusser's largely unpublished work from 1966-1967: the relation of parts and wholes (mereology), and what Althusser terms structural causality, or the belatedness inherent in a cause only being discernible in its effects. In both dynamics, philosophy appears as either the narrower or more belated term. However, although it is seemingly the minor player next to theory, it turns out in the end to be the crucial support for the whole framework.

In the concluding "Philosophy and Politics" section, Althusser discusses how the desired union of theory and practice necessarily entails an attendant philosophy, and in doing so provides a parenthetical definition of "Marxist theory" in which the separation

[43] Goshgarian, introduction to "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," in *The Humanist Controversy*, 156.

between whole and parts is clearly designated.[44] He writes: "But we must go further still. The union of theory and practice must also appear within Marxist theory (the articulated ensemble of Marxist science and Marxist philosophy), and even within Marxist philosophy itself. To make my meaning absolutely clear, I would say that the primacy of politics must be expressed in forms that are specific to Marxist theory, and that *it is by definition the responsibility of philosophy to ensure the primacy of politics in theory*."[45] The second part of Althusser's italicized phrase,[46] "the primacy of politics in theory," is an oft-cited Althusserianism about which there is more to be said, but to stick to the argument at hand, this memorable slogan itself tends to eclipse the confounding and perhaps shifting relations of parts and wholes from which it proceeds, and which in fact seems anything but "absolutely clear." What is clear is the parenthetical definition in which "Marxist theory" encompasses both "Marxist science" (what Althusser will consistently define as "historical materialism") and "Marxist philosophy" (what Althusser will consistently define as "dialectical materialism"). In no uncertain terms, then, Marxist philosophy is a subset of Marxist theory. Except, wait: this union of theory and practice that appears within the umbrella term theory *also appears already* within Marxist philosophy. Is this an instance of something like expressive causality in which the whole is readable in the part? Perhaps Althusser veers closer to Hegel than he would aver. Yet it seems we are dealing with something more recursive, as highlighted in the other part of Althusser's italicized definition: "*it is by definition the responsibility of philosophy to ensure the primacy of politics in theory*." If philosophy is a part of the larger theory, it is also indispensable to the functioning of said theory, so much so that without it, it's not clear if theory would be theory.

Philosophy's *nachträglichkeit*-function with respect to theory—if we can apply such a term to the more spatialized mereology above—is even more evident when presented temporally, which Althusser does with particular force in this essay. He highlights (with italics) the "*objective paradox*" of Marxist philosophy, which is that it lags behind Marxist theory's other half, historical materialism, but does so for theoretical reasons: "In the last instance, then, the lag between Marxist philosophy and historical materialism is a

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[44] Although this merelogical relation is not absolutely consistent in Althusser's archive, we see variants of theory serving as the umbrella term for philosophy in a range of other writings, including "On Theoretical Work" in *Philosophy and the Spontaneous Philosophy of the Scientists*; *Philosophy for Non-Philosophers*, trans. G. M. Goshgarian (London: Bloomsbury, 2017) (esp. 206, n.6); the 1975 "Soutenance d'Amiens" entitled "Is it Simple to be a Marxist in Philosophy?" in *Essays in Self Criticism*, trans. Grahame Lock (London: New Left Books, 1976), 163-207; and a project Althusser spearheaded for a new journal, to be called *"Théorie*," but later abandoned. See Matheron, "L'Impossible revue *Théorie* de Louis Althusser," *La Revue des revues*, no. 32 (2003): 33-51.

[45] Althusser, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," 208.

[46] Jameson presents a tellingly amusing caricature of Althusser's italics in *The Years of Theory*: "If you look at Althusser's text, you will see that, every so often, you get a word in italics. It's as though Althusser were saying, 'Here, this is really an important word. Keep your eye on this one.' And, in all these cases, when you see a word in italics in Althusser, you know that a fundamental distinction is being established, and you're being alerted to a whole set of phrases and terms which replace the ones you must not use any longer because they are irredeemably idealistic" (219).

difference in conceptual rigour and precision as well as theoretical sy[s]tematicity."[47] This passage expresses Althusser's controversial assessment of Marx's oeuvre, namely the break, starting in 1844 but only realized in *Capital*, between the Hegelian Marx of alienation and the rigorous, systematic, and scientific Marx of *Capital*. This leads to an easy elision, which Jameson makes in the otherwise stunning *Representing 'Capital'*, which is the idea that Althusser is renouncing philosophy insofar as he is rejecting the earlier Marx, whose writings were more steeped in philosophy than the Marx of *Capital*.[48] Althusser's concern, expressed emphatically in "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," is more nearly with the leftover philosophical language Marx had no choice but to employ in the earlier work, itself the baggage or remnant of the old epistemological obstacles that it is the task of Marxist philosophy proper to overcome. We could say that there is a "bad" philosophy (the obstacle, Marx's Hegelianism) that is slowly controverted by the enabling practice (historical materialism) which leads to systematic theory (*Capital*), its precision and rigor in turn allowing for the delayed theoretical overcoming of the bad philosophical obstacles; this theory, with the help of "good" philosophy as both its subordinate and enabler, eventually becomes the true Marxist philosophy; however, even Marx did not fully articulate Marxist philosophy, which must be derived by someone like Althusser. Like the problem of parts and wholes above, philosophy comes in the wake of theory but also alongside it, and is confusingly contrasted with Marx's earlier work which appears to most readers as more philosophical but, for Althusser, was merely philosophical in a retrograde way, perhaps not unlike all philosophy seems to be for Jameson.

Now, we might take issue with this interpretation of Marx, as Jameson not infrequently does, in remarks scattered throughout his work, but the more complicated question is whether this Althusserian logic, crowned by the acrobatics of "philosophy," is not itself more proximate to Jameson's crowning of "theory" and "dialectic" than Jameson would admit, some significant differences notwithstanding (e.g. the favoring of the political for Althusser versus the economic for Jameson, as well as the obvious differences regarding Hegel). Indeed, it is the consistency of Althusser's logic that is the rather breathtaking unifier of an otherwise unruly set of published and unpublished materials from this period. Philosophy at its best—not unlike Jameson's aspirational notion of theory—is able to avoid certain reifications precisely because of its capacity for a retroactive perception that is not outside of but *integrated into* the very problem it is investigating. It is Althusser's brilliance to find this dynamic in various and sundry surprising places.[49]

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[47] Althusser, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," 170.

[48] See Fredric Jameson, *Representing 'Capital'* (London: Verso, 2014), 2-4, 11-12.

[49] This is what Althusser and his students will elaborate in *Reading Capital* as the break effected by Marx vis-à-vis Smith and Ricardo. While employing the same constructs of value, labor and wages as the British political economists, Marx was able to derive what was fully present in their work but not yet articulable. Althusser employs a similar logic for Rousseau versus Hobbes and Locke in *Politique et histoire, de Machiavel*

In the conclusion to "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," Althusser elaborates on the *object* proper to philosophy, as distinct from other domains. Here, in particular, the hypothesis is that a substitution of Jameson's "theory" for Althusser's "philosophy" in the passage that follows does not substantially change the import: "One can form a schematic idea of the specific nature of philosophy as opposed to all the sciences by noting, for example, that it does not take as its object, as all the sciences do, a region of reality…. Quite the contrary: philosophy takes as its object what is traditionally, and improperly, called the 'totality' of the real."[50] Just as theory for Jameson has the potential for innovation and critique precisely because it is not sutured to the ideology of disciplines, so too philosophy here has the capacity to pronounce on the totality, admittedly a Jamesonian term that Althusser generally disfavors.[51]

Moreover, and this is the other crucial connection—for it explains why philosophy for Althusser is at once a subset of theory and its enabler—philosophy's very systematicity is grounded, paradoxically, in its capacity to enable transformation. This transformation entails replacing older "bad" philosophical language that has become an epistemological obstacle: "in stipulating that philosophy takes as its object not only the nature of this complex ensemble [*the system of theoretical practices* and *the system of the different social practices*] but also the tendential law of transformation governing it, we are not merely adding a detail; we are stating an essential thesis."[52] It seems that this essential thesis—of philosophy's shape-shifting role in articulating the transformation of ensembles, and through this capacity for articulation actually assisting in that transformation as the retrospectively crucial link—is not at far remove from the operation of what Jameson will designate and enact as "dialectic," and also "theory."

Admittedly, for Althusser this process is specifically not Hegelian, as he makes clear in his concluding summary: "To say that philosophy has to provide us knowledge of the tendential law governing the transformation of the complex ensemble that comprises its object, and to observe that philosophy itself makes up part of the ensemble of which it must provide knowledge, is therefore to say one and the same thing. It is to say that this complex ensemble cannot be the object of an *Absolute Knowledge*; that philosophy cannot be the *Science of the sciences*; that the law of the transformation of this complex ensemble is never given in advance, *but has to be deciphered step by step*."[53] However, if the renounced Hegelianism (that "this complex ensemble cannot be the object of an

à Marx: Cours à L'École normale supérieure de 1955 à 1972 (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 2006), 303. See also "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," 172.

[50] Althusser, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," 212.

[51] See Althusser, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," 216: "no science concerns itself with the state of the theoretical system as a whole. That is not the object of any science, whether it be mathematics, physics, biology or even the science of history. It is, however, the specific object of philosophy. This is because philosophy is directly concerned with politics, by virtue of its nature, theory (materialism), method (the dialectic) and categories."

[52] Althusser, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," 213.

[53] Althusser, "The Historical Task of Marxist Philosophy," 214.

Absolute Knowledge") would seem to set Althusser and Jameson apart, we might then question whether this is even an Hegelianism Jameson adheres to.[54] Wouldn't Jameson's critique of a tendency to form systems, something he frowns upon in Althusser, be an even greater problem in Hegel, for Jameson's Hegelianism is itself a bit wary of the *Absolute*? And maybe Althusser's "good" philosophy is also a tad more Hegelian than he would concede? These points are certainly debatable, and undeniably there are some very real differences between Jameson and Althusser, but Jameson's practice of "theory" (if not always his theory of theory) seems remarkably resonant with Althusser's outsider "philosophy" that both lags behind and transforms the historical materialist theory that precedes it. Could we return to Badiou's equation of his notion of inexistence and Derrida's *différance*, and here, substituting Jameson's "theory" and Althusser's "philosophy," say: why not?

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[54] See Fredric Jameson, *The Hegel Variations: On "The Phenomenology of Spirit"* (London: Verso, 2010).

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