Chapter 1

The Logic of Periodization

"Always historicize!,” writes Fredric Jameson, beginning the "Preface" to *The Political Unconscious* (1981a: 9). This "transhistorical’ imperative" demands a close perusal of "the historical origins" of things and the "historicity of concepts and categories" (Jameson 1981: 9). It is, thus, only logical to first place Jameson’s critique of postmodernism in its proper historical context and then evaluate its relevance and significance in the study of postmodernism.

When Jameson delivered his lecture “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” at the Whitney Museum of Contemporary Arts in the fall of 1982, the postmodern had already “crystallized as common referent and competing discourse” (Anderson 1999: 44). But in this discourse, as Jameson himself observed in the lecture, there were several postmodernisms which emerged “as specific reactions against the established forms of high modernism . . . which conquered the university, the museum, the art gallery network and the foundations” (Jameson 1998a: 1-2). Among the writers responsible for this crystallization of the postmodern, the views of Arnold Toynbee, Charles Olson, Irving Howe, Harry Levin, Leslie Fiedler, Susan Sontag, Ihab Hassan, Charles Jencks, Jean Francois Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard and Jurgen Habermas deserve more attention.

It has been pointed out that the English historian Arnold Toynbee was one of the early scholars to use the term ‘postmodern’ to describe the condition of the world after
the second World War (Brooker 1992: 5, Denzin 1992: 18-19, Pippin 1991: 156, Anderson 1999: 5-6). Toynbee felt that the world has moved into its fourth and final stage of history characterized by irrationalism, anxiety and lost hopes (Pippin 1991: 156). That "an element of Spenglerian doom" is apparent in Toynbee's use of the term 'postmodern' has been pointed out by Charles Jencks who says that the former used the term to refer to "the end of Western dominance, Christian culture and individualism" (quoted in Rose 1991: 10). This is corroborated by his "essentially negative" definition of the postmodern epoch, writes Perry Anderson (1999: 5). Toynbee was sceptical of Western imperialism and "the complacency of a post-Modern Western bourgeoisie," and, confronted with the prospect of a nuclear war, his feeling was that civilization had lost "pertinence." Toynbee's use of the term as an "epochal" category, continues Anderson, suggested two developments specific to the emergence of the postmodern epoch: "the rise of an industrial working class in the West, and the bid of successive intelligentsias outside the West to master the secrets of modernity and to turn them against the West" (1999: 5-6).

Across the Atlantic, Charles Olson, the American writer, chose to use the term 'postmodern' as an aesthetic category. In an article entitled "Projective Verse" (1950), considered to be his aesthetic manifesto, Olson declared the emergence of a new age in poetry and demanded a projective literature beyond humanism. This post-War American avant-garde literature challenged the homocentric philosophy of modernism and attempted to embrace the ideas of the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger. "Post the modern" was how Olson described it (Brooker 1992: 8). Olson advocated an "open-field composition as a development of the objectivist line of [Ezra] Pound and [William Carlos] Williams" and his criticism of rationalist humanism was "close to a Heideggerian
sense of Being as primal integrity.” Nevertheless, for Olson the future was “a collective project of human self-determination—man as ‘prospective’.” Olson’s concept of the postmodern linked aesthetic theory to prophetic history “with an agenda allying poetic innovation with political revolution in the classic tradition of the avant-gardes of pre-war Europe” (Anderson 1999: 11-12).

In Olson’s declaration of a new age of poetry can be seen latent the efforts to redefine and reevaluate modernism afresh in America in the light of its new geopolitical status as the superpower of the post-war world. This is a very significant factor in the evolution of postmodernism as a concept and the recognition it has enjoyed internationally during the last few years. Important among those efforts are two essays: Irving Howe’s “Mass Society and Postmodern Fiction” (1959), and Harry Levin’s “What Was Modernism?” (1960). Both the essays share the position that postmodern literature is a weak continuation of the energetic seriousness of modernism. Howe argues that postmodern fiction is unable to sustain the tension with contemporary society whose class divisions become more amorphous with the increasing prosperity of the post-war years. His conclusion was that it was the loss of the writer’s critical distance from society that was responsible for this weakness. Howe seemed to be disturbed by the efforts in the fiction he refers to as ‘postmodern’ to erase the distinction between high and low culture and to cater to the taste of mass society. He didn’t think highly of the mass society which, he felt, was atomized, inert and complacent and in which the individual is reduced to no more than a consumer (Howe 1959: 420-36).

Peter Brooker has drawn attention to an ambivalence in Howe’s position. He points out that in a later essay called “The Idea of the Modern”(1967), Howe was very
much critical of modernism's distaste for the street and its dirt. Though he admired the energy and insight of modernism he was disappointed by its frequent withdrawal into esoteric silence and nihilism. Howe thought that modern art was ruined by the political affiliations of the writers/artists; hence the political and ideological implications of art are to be repressed and instead, an aestheticising approach is to be adopted in order to retain modern art's status as a revolutionary movement (Brooker 1992: 10-11).

In “What Was Modernism?” Harry Levin presents the much similar idea that postmodernism is nothing but reproduction in which individuals are converted from their position as producers of art to its consumers. He complains that the richness and vastness of modernism have been imprisoned in the academies and it has compromised with the mass society of mechanical reproduction and material consumption. This complicity between the artist and the bourgeois society has robbed the former of the critical distance so essential to maintain the negative edge of art which is in fact drowned in the tide of irrationality of postmodernism (Levin 1960: 609-30). According to Anderson, Levin's ideas of the postmodern, drawn from Toynbee, present “an epigone literature” which renounced the hard and strenuous intellectual standards of modernism for “a relaxed middle-brow synthesis” of culture and commerce. Anderson says that “the beginnings of an unequivocally pejorative version of the postmodern” lay here (1998: 13).

Leslie Fiedler, one of the earliest theoreticians of literary postmodernism, contributed two essays of significance towards the definition of the aesthetics of postmodernism. The first, “The New Mutants,” originally delivered as a lecture at the Congress of Cultural Freedom “set up by the CIA for work on the intellectual front of Cold War,” “celebrated the emergence of a new sensibility among the young generation
in America” (Anderson 1999: 13). These “cultural mutants,” as he called them, were “drop-outs from history” who adored nonchalance and disconnection and articulated these ideas in the new literature they created. These mutants gathered energy from the mythical and visionary potential of popular art forms (Fiedler 1965: 505-25). In the second and more famous piece, “Cross the Border---Close the Gap” (1969), Fiedler declared that with end of the Second World War the high modernist era of T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and Marcel Proust has come to an end and with it ended the hegemony of the esoteric aesthetic concepts that led the academic critics to institutionalize them. He called for the erasure of the border between the elite high culture and the low mass culture. Inspired by the mythical and visionary potential of the popular art forms, the new postmodern literature, he claimed, challenged the modernist criteria of aesthetic judgement founded on the distinction between high and low culture. He felt that the primary function of the new fiction was to put an end to this distinction which carried the burden of class distinctions and social hierarchy. Postmodern writers freely adopted the methods and traditions of the kind of fiction dubbed “Western,” crime fiction, science fiction and pornographic literature hitherto never recognized as “literary” by the pundits. Fiedler’s was a vigorous attempt to validate mass culture as a challenge to the canonized high art, modernist or traditional. He thought that popular art was subversive in that it questioned the legitimacy of the existing system that prescribed a high art for the social elite and a low subsidiary art for the masses. His call to cross the border and close the gap between high art/culture and low art/mass culture, Andreas Huyssen says, implied “a political critique of what later came to be called ‘Eurocentrism’ and ‘logocentrism’” and, it served “as an important marker for subsequent developments within postmodernism” (1990:

By the end of the sixties was created an atmosphere in which one could turn one's attention to the hymns of the modes of popular media without much ado and critics like Susan Sontag and Ihab Hassan could write seriously on the existence of a postmodern art. Susan Sontag spoke of the revolutionary nature of the postmodern artists who rebelled against the institutionalization of art and the systems of meaning established by bourgeois rationality. The modernist culture is a bourgeois culture and the modern classics, displaced from their oppositional status to a hegemonic institution, have become a set of dead classics which find their place in academies and museums. The answer to the negative aesthetics of an elite high modernism is a postmodern art of surfaces that is anti-interpretive, and, a sensibility that quarrels against institutional morality. The claim of art to truth was exhausted and as such it was to represent the ultimate liberation of instinct and consciousness. The sophisticated cosmopolitanism of Sontag saw the postmodern times as that which introduced a new pan-cultural sensibility. This was alive both to the beauty of the machine and to its mechanical solution and responsive to and appreciative of a creative work (Sontag 1967: 297).

Ihab Hassan published his first essay on postmodernism which discussed a wide spectrum of subjects such as literature, music, visual arts, technology and sensibility at large. This essay, "POSTmodernISM," pointed out faction, impermanence, aleatory reduction, parodic extravaganza, happening and intermedia as the major features of postmodernism that expressed the "anarchies of the spirit" which sought to subvert the
elitism of modernism (1971b: 5-30). Hassan thought that the emergence of postmodernism led to a new mode of criticism and to a new episteme. “[S]ubversive in form and anarchic in its cultural spirit” the postmodern “dramatizes its lack of faith in art even as it produces new works of art to hasten both cultural and artistic dissolution” (1975b: 200). Taking the cue from Fiedler by crossing borders and closing gaps, he presented a postmodern tradition that included Blake and de Sade, Dada and surrealism, late Joyce, the French *nouveau roman* and popular fiction, New journalism and poststructuralist thinkers. The new postmodern literature of silence is a response to a change in the life world; the new formal experiments in fiction are bound up with vital questions of life; the new introversion of form in writing is the fictional correlative of the self in recoil, says Hassan. Contrary to modernism which is centred, postmodernism is characterized by the play of indeterminacy and immanence evoked by tendencies such as heterodoxy, pluralism, eclecticism, deformation, difference and so on. To Hassan postmodernists are “ironists of history” and “waiters to indeterminacy” who “give themselves to the deepest parodies and negations.” The postmodern author in “imitating the role of an Author” “parodies himself in the act of parody” (1971a: 258, 250). Hassan presents an elaborate taxonomy of the differences between modernism and postmodernism in a table of binary opposites and complementaries in the essay, “The Culture of Postmodernism.” The table draws from a variety of subjects like literary theory, aesthetics, linguistics, philosophy, politics, economics, theology, rhetoric, anthropology, psychology and so on. Hassan acknowledges that a major problem one confronts when thinking about postmodernism is the question of whether it is only an aesthetic development confined to the world of art or if it is a social phenomenon (Hassan
1987: 46-96). Though he does not give us a coherent answer to this question he observes that “postmodernism suggests a different kind of accommodation between art and society” (quoted in Anderson 1999: 19). Thus Hassan’s conspectus of the postmodern included neither the social nor the political, for he thought that distinctions like the “left and right, base and superstructure, production and reproduction, materialism and idealism” had become “unserviceable, except to perpetuate prejudice” (Hassan 1987: 227). His prejudice was, of course, for “the bluff tolerance and optative spirit of American pragmatism” (1987: 205).

Hassan’s construction of the postmodern, though stretching across the arts and crossing all borders, had nothing much to say about architecture, perhaps the most experiential and functional of all the art forms of the new era. Ironically, it was architecture that projected the term ‘postmodern’ into public attention giving it a wide currency and stressing the ideological and the social with which theories of the postmodern until now failed to engage. Charles Jencks uses the term as “a temporizing label, as a definition to describe where we had left rather than we were going.” He defines postmodernism as “doubly coded, one-half Modern and one-half something else . . . in its attempt to communicate with the public and a concerned minority.” Jencks announced the “social failure” and “mythical death” of modern architecture and its “ideology of progress.” Wanting to offer “technical solutions to social problems,” he proposed a postmodern architecture that was “professionally based and popular as well as one that was based on techniques and old patterns.” The notion of pluralism, he says, is basic to postmodernism which calls for catering to different “taste cultures” and to “differing views of the good life.” In postmodern architecture there are “popular and elitist signs;”
the styles are "essentially hybrid" and "eclectic." Only eclecticism "can adequately encompass the pluralism that is our social and metaphysical reality." Postmodernism is a "set of plural departures from Modernism." To Jencks, philosophical and stylistic pluralism and "a dialectical or critical relation to a preexisting ideology, are key definers" of postmodernism (Jencks 1987: 33-39).

Jencks goes on to distinguish postmodernism from what he terms "late modernism." The latter is a totally different category which is "still committed to the tradition of the New." Fundamentally, it is not concerned with "a complex relation to the past, pluralism [and] the transformation of Western culture." Nor is it concerned with "meaning, continuity, and symbolism." It is, in fact, "a difference of values and philosophy" (1987: 49). The "Post-Modern," on the other hand, is a global civilization that celebrates pluralism and the superabundance of choice "making nonsense" of the outmoded polarities of "left- and right-wing, capitalist and working class" (1986: 44). Postmodern architects, he argues, are "involved in allegory and narrative," and their concern is for "content and subject matter" whereas late modernism concentrates on "the autonomy and expression of the individual art form--- the aesthetic dimension" (1987: 42). In a postmodern society, information is more important than production and, because "there is no enemy to be conquered," "there is no longer an artistic avant-garde." Only there are infinite number of individuals in various places across the world "communicating and competing with each other," and, from their myriad creations may emerge "a shared symbolic order of the kind that a religion provides" (Jencks 1986: 44-47, 43).
By the late seventies the discourse of the postmodern began to assume wider proportions as scholars from other disciplines also began contributing to the subject and a plethora of definitions were offered to explain the new concept. By now, writes Andreas Huyssen, "the maze of the postmodern became ever more impenetrable" and "the modernity/postmodernity constellation in social theory had become one of the most contented terrains in the intellectual life of Western societies" (1990: 237). More important among them, for the purpose of the thesis proposed here, are the theories of Jean Francois Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard and Jurgen Habermas. For the French philosopher Lyotard, the term ‘postmodern’ indicates an epistemic shift and describes “the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies.” Modernity is more a form of knowledge than a social condition and he uses the term ‘modern’ to “designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse . . . making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative.” (Lyotard 1984: xxiii). In postmodernity legitimation by appeal to any metaphysical philosophy or any form of grand, universal narrative like the Enlightenment view of human progress, liberalism or the Marxian narrative of emancipation, has fallen out of repute. They have neither credibility nor legitimation. Baudrillard goes a bit further and describes postmodern society as the site of the implosion of all boundaries and distinctions like high and low, appearance and reality, and all other binaries created and maintained by traditional philosophy. Modernity, the era of production and industrial capitalism, has come to an end to be replaced by the postmodern era of simulations, hyperreality, and implosion made possible by a proliferation of signs and images, the reproductions of the new technology. Both Lyotard and Baudrillard fail to engage with developments in culture and both are unwilling to
discuss politics and changes in socioeconomic life. The details of these theories of Lyotard and Baudrillard will be discussed in relation to the theory of Jameson in the third chapter. For the moment, suffice it to say that their writings on the postmodern gave a new direction to the postmodern debate carrying it beyond the parameters of aesthetic theory to the realms of social theory, and stamped it with a philosophical authority.

Habermas’s abrasive treatment of the postmodern was something new since its celebrated inauguration in the literary circles more than two decades earlier. His principal thesis that the various theories of the postmodern are a form of antimodernist attack by a group of young neoconservatives bent upon abrogating the project of reason added a new dimension to the discourse of the postmodern. Habermas complains that neither the conservatives nor the postmodernists come to terms with the exigencies of culture in late capitalism or with the successes and failures of modernism. He agrees that the “spirit of aesthetic modernism has recently begun to age.” But that doesn’t mean that it “signal[s] a farewell to modernity” as has been misconstrued by the neoconservatives (1981: 162). He claims that the use of the prefix ‘post’ in the term ‘postmodernism’ is symptomatic of a desire in its protagonists “to dismiss the past” and, of their inability to answer “the recognizable problems of the future” (1988: 317).

Habermas makes a distinction between aesthetic modernity and societal modernization and says that the “neoconservative doctrine blurs the relationship between the welcomed process of societal modernization on the one hand, and the lamented cultural development on the other” (1981: 163). The development of the autonomous spheres of science, morality and art, and the efforts of Enlightenment philosophers “to develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to
their inner logic” constitute what Habermas calls “the project of modernity” (1981: 165).
This project was intended to enrich everyday life by a process of “social integration” and “socialization” that required adherence to “communicative rationality” (1981: 164). This project, Habermas says, remains incomplete. Instead of communicative rationality guiding the project of modernity to its logical completion, the life world has been colonized by the dynamics of economic and administrative rationality with the result that each autonomous sphere has developed into esoteric segments absolutely separate from “the hermeneutics of everyday communication” (1981: 165). Art became a critical enclave alienated from life and withdrawn into “the untouchableness of complete autonomy” “showing the irreconcilable nature of the aesthetic and the social worlds” (1981: 166). Revolutionary avant-garde movements, like surrealism, attempted to level art and life but to no avail. In the fields of theoretical knowledge and morality, “there are parallels to this failed attempt of what we might call the false negation of culture” (1981: 167).

Though Habermas defends the unfinished project of modernity he recognizes “a certain fin-de-siecle mood, a feeling that time is running out” and acknowledges that “[e]veryday postmodernism is gaining ground”(1989a: 7, 189). It is Nietzsche who sets the tone for academic postmodernism by initiating a totalizing critique in which reason is subjected to an “unmasking critique. . . that sets itself outside the horizon of reason” (Habermas 1987b: 96). Thus practical action— the emancipatory mode—is disintegrated from reason and grounded in the aesthetic. The totalizing critique of postmodernism and its esoteric specialism deny any connection between the theoretical and the practical and deprive society of the possibility of a democratic self-organization which, Habermas says,
can be achieved through rational communicative action. Thus the neoconservative construction of postmodernism is a “New Obscurity” which is “part of a situation in which a welfare state programme . . . is losing its power to project future possibilities for a collectively better and less endangered way of life” (1989a: 54).

Habermas wants to preserve the distinction between modernity and postmodernity and, hence, emphasizes the need to unmask modernity without stepping outside the horizon of reason. Here is the challenge of the postmodern, as Habermas sees it:

An anonymous society without a subject is taking the place of an association of free and equal individuals who regulate their communal life themselves through democratic will-formation. One’s will to give form to social life vanishes with one’s confidence in the possibilities for doing so. (1989a: 293)

It is this absence of emancipatory interest in the postmodern that compels Habermas to retain what Richard Wolin calls “the universalistic ethical qualities of modernity” (Wolin 1989: xxiii). The project of modernity that “aims at a differentiated relinking of modern culture with an everyday praxis” demands the creation of “unconstrained interaction of the cognitive with the moral-practical and the aesthetic-expressive elements” to reanimate the life world which has been reified by its increasing mediation by “system relationships that cannot be given form” (Habermas 1981: 167; 1989a: 18). In other words, the life world has been colonized by money and power, or, market and administration which “can neither buy nor compel solidarity and meaning” (Habermas 1987b: 363).

The response to this colonization of the life world has been of three varieties which he calls the “false programmes of the negation of culture”: the anti-modernism of
the "young conservatives" who, based on "the revelations of a decentred subjectivity [and] emancipated from the imperatives of work and usefulness," "step outside the modern world," and with modernistic attitudes "justify an irreconcilable antimodernism;" the pre-modernism of the "old conservatives" who, not "contaminated by cultural modernism," acknowledge the decline of modern rationality and "recommend a withdrawal to a position anterior to modernity;" and the postmodernism of the "neoconservatives" who welcome the development of science and technical progress, capitalist growth and rational administration and "recommend a politics of defusing the explosive content of cultural modernity" (Habermas 1981: 165, 169). Habermas's is an attempt, writes Andreas Huyssen, "to salvage the emancipatory potential of enlightened reason which to him is the sine qua non of political democracy" (1990: 253). Jameson himself has observed that for Habermas "the vice of postmodernism consists very centrally in its politically reactionary function" to discredit the modernist Enlightenment impulse and "its still universalizing and Utopian spirit." He says that we are "indebted" to Habermas for his "affirmation of the supreme value of the modern," the "essentially negative, critical, and Utopian power of the great high modernisms" (1991a: 58).

Habermas's criticism of the theories of the postmodern and defence of modernity, though seemingly compact in form, has been described as "ambivalent" and "dualistic" (Kellner 1988: 265, Anderson 1999: 39). Margaret Rose says that his "use of the phrase 'project of modernity' conceals the fact that it is in fact a 'postmodern' project in modern clothing." She argues that the postmodern project is also "concerned with criticizing, and transforming those negative elements of society . . . associated with . . . modernity and which postmodernist architects have also been concerned to reform" (1991: 88). That this
is a rather blind adulation of post-modernist architectural project that does not consider its capitalist orientation needs no explanation. Arthur Frank adopts a different approach and calls Habermas’s project “postmodern modernism.” He chooses to cite the following passage from Habermas to illustrate his point:

But praise of multiplicity, apology for the contingent and the private, celebration of rupture, difference and the moment, the revolt of the marginal areas against the centers, the mustering of the extraordinary against triviality— all this should not become an escape from problems that can be solved, if at all, by daylight, only cooperatively, only with the last drops of a solidarity that is almost completely drained of its life blood. But what do the new mythologies put in the place of self-determination and solidarity? (Habermas, quoted in Frank 1992: 149)

Habermas’s theory which at once reaffirms the Enlightenment ideals and denies them any chance of realization, writes Anderson, expresses “eudaemonism of the intelligence, defeatism of the will” (1999: 44).

The postmodern was now on the agenda, being the common reference point of various aesthetic and social discourses. This was where matters stood when Fredric Jameson delivered his first lecture on postmodernism in the fall of 1982, addressing in some detail the various aspects of the new age. The interventions of the writers referred to above did not help the formation of a consensus about what this term ‘postmodern’ meant nor could any account of the postmodern formulated up till then be deemed to have addressed the concept historically. What we had were the expressions of varied interests, perspectives, and positions, and a diversity of assertions and emphases, and denials and
negations. But this maze of opinions was given a uniformity by the fact that none of them had any periodic weight. This scenario of the postmodern into which Jameson stepped cannot be more succinctly presented than in the words of Perry Anderson:

The net effect was a discursive dispersion: on the one hand, philosophical overview without significant aesthetic content, on the other aesthetic insight without coherent theoretical horizon. A thematic crystallization had occurred . . . without intellectual integration. (1999: 45)

But there was an ideological consistency in the opinions aired which added an element of unity to the otherwise incoherent discourse. “The idea of the postmodern,” adds Anderson, “was in one way or another the appanage of the Right.” Habermas, who attacked it from a leftist point of view, “conceded the idea to the Right, construing it as a figure of neoconservatism.” The one fundamental idea underlying all these theories was the acknowledgement of the idea of liberal democracy as the “unsurpassable horizon of the time” (Anderson 1999: 45-6).

Jameson’s intervention altered the whole complexion of the discourse, added new dimensions to it and gave lucidity and fresh meanings to the muddle of the debate on postmodernism, liberating it from its limited confines and extending it to the realms of history, economics, and political theory. “Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” Jameson’s seminal essay on the subject of the postmodern, is the revised and expanded version of “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” his Whitney Museum lecture, and it has remained the cornerstone of all his subsequent work. But to think that it was Jameson’s first encounter with the question of the postmodern would be far from the truth. Jameson himself has claimed that the analysis of postmodernism is “a logical
consequence" of his earlier work (1991a: 399). As early as 1971, in the "Preface" to Marxism and Form, we find Jameson genuinely concerned about a new world governed by capitalism with a modified structure, a world of "neocolonialism, oppression, and counterinsurgency warfare," a world of fragmented experiences, mystified by the advertisement industry and the media, defined and controlled by "postindustrial monopoly capitalism," which create the impression of a "dream world of artificial stimuli," where "the fundamental questions of being and of the meaning of life" seem "utterly remote and pointless." Any genuine political question in such a situation, he was sure, had to be a theoretical question as well, addressing the issue of "whether the old-fashioned street as such still exists in the first place in that seamless web of marketing and automated production" (1971: xvii-xviii). It is these questions of immiseration and exploitation, reification and fragmentation, issues regarding the socioeconomic and cultural forces responsible for these, and the strategic forms of praxis counterhegemonic to such forces which concern Jameson here--- in what Douglas Kellner calls the "Jamesonian Urtext"--- that get specific attention and detailed treatment in his later texts on the postmodern (Kellner 1989d: 20). In "The Ideology of the Text," an article written in 1975, Jameson lays the theoretical foundation for a historical analysis of the postmodern condition. It is on this theoretical foundation that Jameson later builds his periodizing hypothesis of postmodernism. These are evidences substantial enough to disprove Martin Donougho’s argument that “[u]ntil [the late seventies] postmodernism had not figured even peripherally in [Jameson’s] scheme of things” (Donougho 80; emphasis added). That is why Perry Anderson says that “Jameson’s movement towards a theory of postmodernism . . . seems virtually inscribed in his trajectory from the start--- as
if with the uncanny coherence of an ‘original choice’ in the Sartrean sense” (1999: 68). In his later texts on postmodernism we find Jameson’s “genuinely dialectical attempt to think our present moment of time in History” (Jameson 1984a: 85).

Jameson’s theoretical mapping of the present historical situation was also necessitated by those Right-wing theories referred to above which seemed to throw a challenge at Jameson’s own claim for Marxism as a grand narrative--- that “collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity”--- and as that “untranscendable horizon” able to provide us “an adequate sense of the essential mystery of the cultural past” (Jameson 1981a: 19, 10, 19). Jameson’s writings on the postmodern represent his responses to these challenges and also to the changing theoretical, political and cultural demands of the period, and they provide a Marxist narrative as an alternative model of postmodern social theory (Kellner 1989d: 22, Anderson 1999: 53-54). Sean Homer says that as a Marxist it was a “political imperative” for Jameson to develop a theory that would articulate the “complex mediations between a global economic market and our discrete, fragmented cultural experience” (1998: 4). In formulating such a theory Jameson’s attempt is to produce “a sophisticated, non-reductionist, non-mechanistic form of Marxism” capable of meeting “the challenge” of providing a comprehensive “understanding and critique of contemporary society and culture,” and also of “reasserting Marxism’s traditional emancipatory narrative” (Homer 1998: 5). For Jameson himself, the proposition of “the right-wing theorists of postindustrial society” that the advanced Western society with its shift from industrial production to the production of knowledge and information has displaced the older capitalist dynamic of profit and competition, and that social classes in the classical sense have disappeared in the new consumer society,
was a “pernicious idea, and the ideology of a whole new technocratic stratum” which challenged Marxist theory “to produce an account of the mutation . . . in properly Marxist terms” (Jameson 1982e: 9,7). Jameson’s theorization of the postmodern is an attempt to meet that challenge and to provide a narrative of the postmodern condition that will serve as a counterhegemonic political practice.

Jameson’s concept of the postmodern is a periodizing one which suggests that postmodernism constitutes “a cultural and experiential break” (1991a: xiii). The genesis of this hypothesis can be traced back to “The Ideology of the Text.” There he proposes the basic ideas of a historical hypothesis which he would explore and develop in the postmodernism essays of the eighties and nineties. The theory of the postmodern, he writes, is “predicated on,” and “heuristically confirmed” by a periodizing hypothesis “about the nature of capitalism itself as a system and a mode of production” (1988a: 67). This “economic and social hypothesis” is founded on Ernest Mandel’s historical account of capitalism in *Late Capitalism* where it is proposed that capitalism has passed through several stages of “specific mutations” necessitated by “quantum leaps in the organization of capital” (1988a: 67). These are the stages of market capitalism, monopoly capitalism and multinational capitalism. The “cultural moments” that “correspond” to these periods are realism, modernism and postmodernism respectively. But, they are not to be understood as period “styles,” warns Jameson. They are, on the other hand, cultural “dominants” that “inform a whole range of social and existential phenomena beyond the realm of the aesthetic or of culture, a realm which in any case is modified in each of these moments and knows a dialectically distinct ‘space’ within each one” (1988a: 67). These moments are felt as “breaks,” and, writes Jameson, “as the emergence, particularly in
culture and the superstructures, of a radically new existential and cultural logic” (1988a: 67). In the “Foreword” to Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) he writes that postmodernism “involves a radical break both with a dominant culture and aesthetic and with a rather different moment of socioeconomic organization” (1984c: vii). So, it is this “cultural logic” of “multinational” or “late capitalism” that Jameson’s postmodernism essays explore and analyse, and, it is in them that we find the formulation of a systematic and coherent theory of the postmodern.

In the Whitney Museum lecture referred to above, Jameson says that he uses the term ‘postmodernism’ as a periodizing concept that “correlate[s] the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order” (1998a: 3). This emphasizes the fact that ‘postmodernism’ is not used merely as an aesthetic category descriptive of formal or stylistic innovations in art nor as cultural logic. Thus, to Jameson, as Victor Li says, postmodernism is “a conceptual model in which aesthetic, cultural and theoretical productions” are “dialectically related to the contemporary global system and its mode of production,” a system which Jameson, following Ernest Mandel, names “late capitalism” (1991: 132). This naming of the system as ‘late capitalism’ anchors postmodernism in “objective alterations of the economic order of capital itself” (Anderson 1999: 54). Originally used by the critics of the Frankfurt School, the term ‘late capitalism’ emphasized “a tendential web of bureaucratic control” and “state capitalism,” explains Jameson. But in his use, the emphasis is apparently on the emergence of new forms of multinational and transnational capitalist business organizations, “beyond the monopoly stage,” and the “vision of a world capitalist system fundamentally distinct from the older imperialism.” Concomitant to this new
development is the emergence of "a new international division of labour, a vertiginous new dynamic in international banking and stock exchange," "new forms of media interrelationship," "computers and automation, the flight of production to advanced Third World areas" and the social consequences of all these, like the "crisis of traditional labour, the emergence of yuppies, and gentrification on a now-global scale" (Jameson 1991a: xix).

In Jameson's usage of 'late capitalism', 'late' does not carry any "latent teleology" suggesting that this is the last stage of capitalism conceivable, but indicates that it is "the most recent" stage of capitalism (Jameson 1998a: 139). 'Late' implies not "the ultimate senescence, breakdown, and death of the system as such" but conveys the sense that something has changed, that things are different, that we have gone through a transformation of the life world which is somehow decisive but incomparable with other convulsions of modernization and industrialization, less perceptible and dramatic, somehow, but more permanent precisely because more thoroughgoing and all-pervasive.

(Jameson 1991a: xxii)

Thus understood, "late capitalism" is "something like a literal translation" of "postmodernism," the "temporal index" directing attention "to changes in the quotidian and on the cultural level as well" (Jameson 1991a: xxi). This means that the cultural and the economic indices of Jameson's title "Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," "collapse back" into each other and suggest the same in an implosion of the borders between base and superstructure that is characteristic of the postmodern, and, that "the base, in the third stage of capitalism, generates its superstructures with a new kind of
dynamic" (Jameson 1991a: xxi). That is why Jameson says that "late capitalism" varies with "appropriate synonyms" like "multinational capitalism," "spectacle or image society," "media capitalism," "the world system" and "even postmodernism" (1991a: xviii).

This historical hypothesis of Jameson, as mentioned above, is based on Ernest Mandel's periodization of capital into three stages in accordance with the three technological revolutions within capital itself. Each of these fundamental moments of "quantum leaps in the evolution of machinery under capital" marks a dialectical expansion over the previous stage. These three moments are:

- Machine production of steam-driven motors since 1848; machine production of electric and combustion motors since the 90s of the 19th century; machine production of electronic and nuclear-powered apparatuses since the 40s of the 20th century; these are the three general revolutions in technology engendered by the capitalist mode of production since the "original" industrial revolution of the later 18th century. (Mandel quoted in Jameson 1991a: 35)

Mandel's argument is that the history of capitalism is a succession of cyclical movements of fifty to sixty years called 'long waves,' within which there will be small business cycles of periodic expansion and contraction of commodity production lasting seven to ten years. The first long wave, which Jameson does not include in his scheme, was the period from the end of the eighteenth century to 1847 characterized by the spread of "machine-industrial production of commodities by means of hand-made machines" (Mandel 1975: 187). The second long wave which Mandel calls the first technological
revolution, from the late 1840s to the 1890s, was characterized by the generalization of the machine-made steam engine. This revolutionizing of production through "the progressive introduction of machine-made, steam-driven machines . . . combined with the growing generalization of railway construction" led to the industrialization and automation of almost all capitalist production (1975: 187). The second technological revolution brought about the third wave which generalized the application of electric and combustion engines. The contemporary age, he says, is witness to the third technological revolution characterized by nuclear power and electronic apparatuses (1975: 120-21). The second technological revolution of electric motors led to the concentration of capital in big business and helped the "transition from competitive to monopoly capitalism" (1975: 188). This was followed by a long period of "broken accumulation and relative economic stagnation" until the new revolutionizing of production through the third technological revolution that fueled a "long wave with an undertone of expansion" (1975: 189-90).

Jameson claims that decisive in the present context marked by computer technology, nuclear energy and the mechanization of agriculture is Mandel's "notion that, with the world wide recession of 1973-74, the dynamics of this latest long wave are spent" (1988b: 207). The one reason Jameson adopts this periodization for his analysis of the postmodern is that Ernest Mandel's proposition establishes that the current historical moment, which he calls the "Third Machine Age," far from being beyond the dynamics of capital as asserted by the neo-liberals, is the "purest form of capital yet to have emerged" and this is very much consistent with Marx's analysis of capital (1991a: 36).

Jameson generalizes Mandel's description of late capitalism in the following words:
Late capitalism in general constitutes a process in which the last surviving internal and external zones of precapitalism—- the last vestiges of uncommodified or traditional space within and outside the advanced world—- are now ultimately penetrated and colonized in their turn. Late capitalism can therefore be described as the moment when the last vestiges of Nature which survived on into classical capitalism are at length eliminated: namely the Third World and the Unconscious. (1988b: 207)

This “new and historically original penetration and colonization of Nature and the Unconscious” by capital through the Green Revolution and the electronic media and advertisement industry has initiated a process of systematic restructuring of capital on a global scale (Jameson 1991a: 36). In other words, this new colonization involves “a single process at work in the First and Third Worlds, in global economy, and in consciousness and culture, a properly dialectical process, in which ‘liberation’ and domination are inextricably combined” (Jameson 1988b: 207). This new stage of capitalism characterized by the radically new technology of cybernetics, and information and communication influences social life “from the quotidian to the organization of industry and warfare,” says Jameson. He adds that the beginning of this new age coincides with the end of the colonial system. But the new system of transnational corporations affiliated to the USA Japan and Western Europe holds sway in these decolonized states.

Expansion in this third or postmodern stage of capitalism [is, in fact,] the more intensive colonization of the older areas of capitalism and the postmodernization of the newer ones, the saturation with commodities and
the remarkable post-geographical and post-spatial informational simultaneity that weaves a web far finer and more minute and all-pervasive than anything imaginable in the older semaphore routes of cable and newspaper and even those of airplane and radio. (1996a: 25)

During this contemporary moment of capitalism "uneasily balanced" between Europe, the United States and Japan, with the "deregulation" of Eastern Europe and third world countries in the eighties and nineties of the twentieth century, the penetration of capital is "qualitatively greater than in earlier stages of capitalism." So, late capitalism is "clearly far more 'global' than the preceding age of imperialism," writes Jameson (1996b: 2). It is this expansion of capital on a global scale, and the subsequent colonization by capital of those hitherto restricted large geographical areas that compels Jameson to define late capitalism as "the current or postmodern stage of the world system" (1990a: 255 n8).

Globalization and information technology are the principal novelties of this new global system in which technology is its "cultural logo or preferred code." In other words, technology is "late capitalism's own preferred mode of representation, the way it would like us to think about itself," writes Jameson (1996a: 54). Postmodern technology, he adds, has enabled capitalism to

transform its relationship to its colonies from an old fashioned imperialist control to market penetration, destroying the older village communities and creating a whole new wage-labour pool and lumpen proletariat. . . .

[This is] a far more thoroughgoing form of penetration and colonization [by capital] than the older colonial armies. (1988b: 206)
This transformed relationship is "one of necessary subordination or dependency, and that of an economic type rather than a primarily military one" (Jameson 1990b: 48). Thus imperialism has been "restructured" in the new world system where the internal dynamics of the relationship between the First World and the Third World have replaced the rivalry between imperial powers for exploitation. But it has not much altered the basic "imperialist structure of colonialist appropriation." The only change is that the "colonized other" has become "invisible," asserts Jameson (1990b: 50). It is the "axis of otherness," in late capitalism that designates the relationship between the imperial subject and its "various others or objects" (Jameson 1990b: 48). Most often this imperial subject is the United States. It is because of this dominant status of the U.S. in the new world system that Jameson comments:

[T]his whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror.

(1991a: 5)

This, it has to be admitted, is in accordance with Jameson’s conviction that all cultural texts, in one way or another, have "a vested interest in and a functional relationship to social formations based on violence and exploitation" (1981a: 299). This belief, obviously, is inspired by Walter Benjamin’s celebrated statement in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" that "[t]here is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (Benjamin 1982: 248). What Jameson uncovers in his periodizing document on postmodernism is the way in which the logic of the agent of
this barbarism works. Terry Eagleton, also inspired by Benjamin, observes that in the building of a civilization the
dynamic, exuberant release of potential is also one long unspeakable human tragedy, in which powers are crippled and squandered, lives crushed and blighted, and the great majority of men and women condemned to fruitless labour for the profit of a few. (1997: 61)
In other words, following the above two statements on the nether side of civilization, it can, quite justifiably, be said using the words of Benjamin that Jameson documents the manner in which this “barbarism” has been “transmitted from one owner to another” in the latest stage of capitalist expansion (Benjamin 1982: 213). It is this transmission of “barbarism” that he refers to when he speaks of the domination of a new imperial subject.

The new imperial subject’s “other” is not just the former colonized countries of the Third World, but the “internal Third World” as well. This latter is the creation of the “uneven development of late capitalism, whose First World produces a Third World within itself by its own inner dynamic,” says Jameson (1991a: 159). Uneven development is inherent to the capitalist system and its latest “abrupt new expansion” has “equally unevenly” done away with older forms of inequalities and has replaced them with a multiplicity of new ones “we as yet understand less well” (1990a: 249). This is why Jameson says that “the face of imperialism is brute force, naked power [and] open exploitation” (1990b: 59). The exposition of the ways in which these forces work so diligently to reproduce the system they have contrived to formulate, and how they express themselves in the cultural texts have been the central concerns of his writings. His critique of postmodernism is no different.
Jameson’s thesis of the relationship between the First and the Third Worlds in his periodization of the postmodern adds a new dimension to the very concept of postmodernism. Most other theorists prefer to look at it as a condition that applies only to the western advanced society. The “Other” of the West has never been their concern. Jameson’s theory underscores the significance of developing a new critique of Eurocentrism and suggests that the analysis of postmodernity will be incomplete without a proper understanding of contemporary geopolitics as well. Jameson looks at the postmodern geopolitical situation from a different perspective also. Differentiating the First and Third Worlds he states that the First World thoughts and dreams about the Third World have nothing in common with what the Third World is required to know about the First World--- being subaltern carries the possibility of knowledge with it, whereas domination entails forgetfulness and repression (1992b: 199). What Jameson implies is that the postmodern imperial culture engenders a geopolitical amnesia; that inside the bastions of the new “Empire” an essentialized vision of the newly colonized areas erases the fact of conquest and represses the very history of domination and exploitation. Conversely, the peoples of the Third World, being the colonized and the subaltern, are induced to acquire knowledge about the First World. They are denied the luxury of forgetting the quotidian implications of their geopolitical conditions. The “realities of the economic have seemed to supplant the possibilities of collective struggle” and “human agency and politics seem to have been dissolved by the global corporate institutions we call late capitalism” (1992b: 86). These passages suggest that while the Third World is exploited by the First, the neoliberal globalization policies of the former and the
sequent power of the economic appears to have affected badly the possibility of collective struggle and political opposition.

What this critique of the contemporary relationship between the First and the Third World shows, contrary to the neo-conservative argument that the capitalist dynamic is displaced in the postmodern world, is that there is a continuity in the deeper structure of capitalism, and, as this structure “convulsively enlarges” and undergoes mutations, effects “experiential differences” in the life world globally (Jameson 1996a: 26). These experiential differences that Jameson refers to will be discussed later. Suffice it to say for the moment that what has happened is a prodigious expansion of capital on a global scale. In late capitalism, Jameson says, this global deployment of capital effectively destroy[s] the older coherence of the various national situations. The total system is also marked by the dynamism with which it now penetrates and colonizes the two last surviving enclosures of Nature within the older capitalism: the Unconscious and the precapitalist agriculture of the Third World--- the latter is now systematically undermined and reorganized by the Green Revolution, whereas the former is effectively mastered by . . . the media, mass culture and the various techniques of the commodification of the mind. (1988b: 47)

The colonization of “the unconscious of the mind, of the libido” has resulted in a prodigious expansion of the cultural sphere (1982e: 9-10). What Jameson implies is that postmodernism is a historical break, but the transition is a shift within the general conditions of capitalism.
Jameson acknowledges that it was Ernest Mandel’s *Late Capitalism* and his theorization of the third stage of capitalism that made his own thoughts on postmodernism possible, and, therefore, he says, they are “to be understood as an attempt to theorize the specific logic of the cultural production of that third stage.” His hypothesis, he insists, is “not yet another disembodied culture critique or diagnosis of the spirit of the age” (1991a: 400). Before examining Jameson’s thoughts on that specific logic of cultural production, the logic of his historical “reconstruction” of postmodernism presented above has to be analyzed.

In the “Foreword” to *Marxism and Form* Jameson says that it is apparently with “the development of postindustrial capitalism” since “the onset of the Cold War” that the new world emerged (1971: xvii). In “Notes Toward a Marxist Cultural Politics” he argues that “something ended with the 1960s” (1975a: 35). In his Whitney Museum lecture, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” he says that “the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order” can be dated from the “late 1940s and early 1950s” in the United States, and in France from the “establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958.” He also observes that the 1960s are “the key transitional period” (1998b: 3). In the essay “Architecture and the Critique of Ideology” he says that by “the late 1950s” the “new social system” named as variously as “consumer society, media society, consumer capitalism” and “postindustrial society” seems to have emerged. Later, in the same essay he says that “in the 1960s... something decisive had changed in the ‘very reality of the appearance’ of capitalism” (1988b: 46, 47). In “Periodizing the Sixties” he says that the sixties “have been the momentous transformational period when this systematic restructuring [of capital] takes place on a global scale” (1988b: 207). In the same essay,
and in "Pleasure: A Political Issue" he claims that the sixties came to an end by 1972-74 (1988b: 205, 65). But in "'End of Art' or 'End of History'" he says that "the dissolution of the modern as a lengthy cultural process" began in the 1960s, and its "unveiling as a new guilded age" in the 1980s has not yet been completed (1998b: 84).

Seemingly inconsistent statements like these have prompted critics to allege inconsistency in Jameson's periodization. Mike Davis remarks that "there are intractable difficulties in establishing a first 'fit' between postmodernism and Mandel's concept of the late capitalist stage." He argues that Late Capitalism's opening sentence declares that "its central purpose is to understand 'the long postwar wave of rapid growth'. All of his subsequent writings make clear that Mandel regards the real break . . . to be the second slump of 1974-75." For Jameson himself, "the sixties are a point of rupture in the history of capitalism and culture." This is a "crucial" difference: "was late capitalism born circa 1945 or 1960? Are the sixties the opening of a new epoch, or merely the superheated summit of the postwar boom?" asks Davis (1989: 81). Barry Smart also complains that there is a lack of focus, and an ambiguity in Jameson regarding "the question of the historical moment at which postmodernism, or a condition of postmodernity emerged" in that he traces the emergence of postmodernism to the new stage of capitalist mode of production after the Second World War and "more precisely to the moment in the early 1960s" (1992: 191).

Sean Homer takes the cue from Davis and Smart and points at "the non-synchronicity of [Jameson's] own periodization and Mandel's." For Mandel, Homer seems to suggest, 'late capitalism' refers to the economic history of the period after the Second World War. The contemporary world is in the second phase of the long wave
whose deceleration can be said to have started with the oil crisis of 1973. Homer writes: “This raises the question, for Mandel, of whether or not ‘a new long wave can be predicted from the second half of the 1960s onwards— the ebb after the flow’” (1998: 108). Jameson’s “equivocal” periodization of postmodernism defines it at once as post-Second World War, and, as “the moment emerging from the late 1960s and early 1970s.” Homer goes on to argue that if late capitalism marks the final colonization of the psyche and the total erosion of aesthetic autonomy as Jameson suggests, then, “how does [his claim for] economic, psychic and cultural autonomy persist?” He asks if the logic of postmodernism, as Jameson claims, is totalizing, then, how can he achieve the “non-synchronicity that his periodization requires?” He argues that “electronic control, nuclear power and early generation computerized data processing systems” of Mandel’s third machine age are not postmodern, which is, in fact, characterized by information and communication technology. Postmodernism, then, Homer concludes, is “irrevocably the cultural logic of [the] fourth technological revolution, characterized by the new technologies of the microchip and cyberspace, and not Jameson’s third.” He agrees that though postmodernism emerged in the 1970s it “came of age” only in the 1980s (1998: 108-11).

The questions the arguments regarding the discrepancy between Mandel’s and Jameson’s use of ‘late capitalism’ raise are, in a sense, scholastic in that they insist on some kind of linear progression and chronological punctuality for these technological, economic and cultural changes. They strategically ignore Jameson’s unequivocal statements on his concept of postmodernism as a “cultural dominant.” In his Whitney Museum lecture itself he makes this very plain. There he declares that
radical breaks between periods do not involve complete changes of content but rather the restructuring of a certain number of elements already given: features that in an earlier period or system were subordinate now become dominant, and features that had been dominant again become secondary.

(1998b: 18)

The cultural periodization that Jameson is engaged in suggests that the logic of late capitalism is hegemonic in the postmodern period. He has categorically stated that the postmodern moment "is itself less a matter of chronology" (1991a: xix). We have also to remember that no revolution is a punctual historical event. Discussing the concept of cultural revolution in *The Political Unconscious* Jameson remarks:

The triumphant moment in which a new systemic dominant gains ascendancy is . . . only the diachronic manifestation of a constant struggle for the perpetuation and reproduction of its dominance, a struggle which must continue throughout its life course, accompanied at all moments by the systemic or structural antagonism of those older and newer modes of production that resist assimilation or seek deliverance from it. (1981a: 97)

He points out that though the economic preparation of postmodernism began in the 1950s with the new technologies and new products, culturally "the precondition is to be found . . . in the enormous social and psychological transformations of the 1960s" (1991a: xx). What he means is that the force-field for the emergence of the new world economic system was set in the 1950s: the processes of decolonization, the modernization of the newly decolonized states, the emergence of new geopolitical powers and the reorganization of international relations enabling the logic of capitalism to function on a
global scale. "[T]he psychic habitus of the new age demands the absolute break, strengthened by a generational rupture," says Jameson, and it was "achieved more properly in the 1960s" (1991a: xx). He continues:

"[I]t is my sense that both levels in question, infrastructure and superstructures--- the economic system and the cultural "structure of feeling"--- somehow crystallized in the great shock of the crises of 1973 . . . which, now that the dust clouds have rolled away, disclose the existence, already in place, of a strange new landscape: the landscape [of postmodernism]." (1991a: xx-xxi)

Thus understood, the question of the "first 'fit' between" Jameson's "postmodernism" and Mandel's "late capitalist stage" that Davis brings up, and the question of focus and ambiguity that Smart raises do not arise at all. From Jameson's statements referred to above, it can be seen that the fourth technological revolution that Sean Homer speaks about only helped accelerate the functioning of the logic of late capitalism that was set rolling in the 1950s. Postmodernism, as Jameson historicizes it, is not to be understood as the cultural dominant of "a wholly new social order" (an idea which the ideologues of the "post-industrial society" propagated) but as "only the reflex and the concomitant of yet another systemic modification of capitalism itself" (1991a: xii).

What this historical scenario emphasizes, as David Gross points out, is "what humans have done, produced, in response to necessity and desire" and "how all that has changed in time" (1989: 101). In other words, it foregrounds the active human response to a concrete social situation, to questions posed by historical and material necessity. To bring such matters to the foreground is in itself part of the praxis that aims at building
resistance against these forces in a movement towards an ultimate political revolution. That is why Gross writes that to foreground such matters "is to stand up against pain, suffering, exploitation, oppression, privilege, and deprivation--- so that it seems indeed that 'history is what hurts'" (1989: 101). Jameson’s concern in the postmodernism texts, continues Gross, is “to show that the forces of repression, resistance, denial, and distortion which helped shape high modernism in reaction to the rise of monopoly capitalism . . . continue to constitute key features of postmodernism in (non)reaction to late capitalism” (1989: 108)

It is also to be noted that Jameson has repeatedly emphasized that the “socioeconomic functionality of culture” differs in the various stages of capitalist development. And, it is on the basis of this difference in functionality that Jameson identifies three stages of bourgeois culture with the three stages of capitalism: realism, modernism and postmodernism. Postmodernism, Jameson says, is “inseparable from, and unthinkable without the hypothesis of, some fundamental mutation of the sphere of culture in the world of late capitalism, which includes a momentous modification of its social function” (1991a: 47-48). In accordance with this thesis it is the “social functionality” and status of postmodernism as the “dominant or hegemonic aesthetic of consumer society” which serves its commodity production as a virtual laboratory of novel modes of forms and fashions that marks its “historical specificity” as the cultural logic of late capitalism (Jameson 1988b: 195). This locating of postmodernism in the matrix of capitalism reminds us of the remarkable ability of the latter to reform itself and continue in a restructured form, and insists that we recognize the effects of the functioning of the logic of late capitalism in the phenomena we experience in our everyday life. In late
capitalism, Perry Anderson says, economic life itself has become "so pervaded by the symbolic systems of information and persuasion" that any theory of culture is bound to encompass more of "the civilization of capital than ever before." That is why, he continues, Jameson regards postmodernism to be "intrinsically the cultural ether of a global system that overrule[s] all geographical divisions" (1999: 73, 74).

It is in order to theorize this cultural ether of the new global system of capital that Jameson uses the Marxian category of "mode of production." He claims that his analysis of postmodernism attempts "to make a contribution" to the notion of mode of production (1991a: 399). Discussing the details of this concept in the essay "Marxism and Historicism," Jameson points out that this "master code" which projects "a total synchronic structure" is not a "state" in some "linear or evolutionary narrative," nor is it a "necessary" moment in a "teleological historical process," but an "absent cause." He refers to various modes of production such as primitive communism, neolithic agriculture, the Asiatic mode of production, the polis, slavery, feudalism, capitalism and communism, and states that the "local and empirical transition from one of these forms to another . . . demands reconstruction, not as a narrative of emergence, but rather . . . as a genealogy" (1988b: 149-50, 172).

Each form of these modes of production designates not just economic or productionist processes, or labour processes and technology, but "a specific and original form of cultural and linguistic (or sign) production" as well. This means that in the formulation of a mode of production no "seam" is sealed off from the "social totality." Emphasis is laid on the "structural unity" of a mode of production which is not to be understood as a homogeneous unity. Jameson reiterates that his is a "differential" concept
in which "each mode of production structurally implies all the others" so that any given mode of production presupposes all previous modes and anticipates a future mode as well. "[T]he contemplation of any given mode of production . . . must always implicitly or explicitly involve a differential relationship to all the others." In other words, what Jameson underlines is that no mode of production exists in isolation "in any pure state" at any given moment, but each exists in a kind of structural coexistence with the others (1988b: 172-74). It is, thus, made unequivocally clear that "mode of production" is the concept of a totality which "invites us to see culture and the economic, or superstructure and base . . . as a structural unity in which neither is determinant in the older sense of economic determinism" (Jameson 1982e: 5). But at the same time this concept is not an a priori or ahistorical representation of any of the social levels or instances. That is why Jameson says that "no satisfactory model of a given mode of production can exist without a theory of the historically and dialectically specific and unique role of culture within it" (1984e: xv).

These clarifications regarding the differential concept of the mode of production Jameson uses in his analysis of the postmodern period answer the critical objections Barry Smart refers to in his discussion of Jameson's theory: that his "periodizing hypothesis constitutes historical periods as homogeneous" and that it "diminishes the significance of similarities or continuities between modernism and postmodernism" (Smart 1992: 186). Similarly, the objections raised by Philip Cooke that Jameson's "equation of postmodernism with Mandel's conception of late capitalism is . . . unnecessarily reductionist," and, by Radhakrishnan that his "sense of history is monothetic and synchronic" seem irrelevant and out of place (Cooke 1988: 481;
Radhakrishnan 322). The total synchronic structure that the concept of the mode of production projects does not present history as a linear narrative nor is it teleological. The structural unity implied by the concept is differential; each mode is as much autonomous as it is related to the other. In other words, the empirical transition from one mode to the other is not an evolutionary process but a dialectical expansion. The reconstruction that takes place is, thus, not as if in a linear narrative but genealogical. The use of the concept of mode of production also shows that for Jameson history is neither a teleological narrative nor a mere diachronic sequence, but a structure of complexly related events forces, and conditions. It is, in other words, an absent cause.

Mike Davis’s objection to Jameson’s periodizing raises a more serious issue. He argues that late capitalism has not eliminated the last enclaves of pre-capitalist production as Jameson’s periodization tends to show. On the other hand, he continues, it has brazenly recalled the most primitive forms of urban exploitation. . . .

[The] restructuring of the relations of production and the productive process is, to be sure, thoroughly capitalist, but it represents, not some higher stage in capitalist production, but a return to a sort of primitive accumulation with the valorization of capital occurring, in part, through the production of absolute surplus value by means of the super-exploitation of urban proletariat. (1989: 83-4)

It is to be remembered that in his consideration of late capitalism as a mode of production Jameson does not rule out either the existence of other modes of production alongside the former or the immiseration and exploitation which are endemic to capitalist system. He draws our attention to Marx’s remarks in the Grundrisse that “a mode of production
never disappears until it has completely worked out its own potentiality” (1982e: 13). Jameson does not propose a late capitalist period in which the earlier modes of production, having fully realized their potential, have disappeared. What his concept of modes of production emphasizes is the very synchronic presence of heterogeneous enclaves of production at a given moment in history. He says in unequivocal terms that the uneven development of late capitalism produces a Third World within its own First World “by its own inner dynamic” (1991a: 159). The “global dynamics” of late capitalism, writes Jameson, create such internal effects that “we speak of the way in which an ‘internal Third World’ and a process of internal colonization [which] has seemed to eat away at the First World itself” (1996a: 26). Therefore, at any given moment of capitalist history its logic of uneven development will have it that “[s]ome parts of the economy are still archaic” while others are “more modern and futuristic than the future itself.” Borrowing the terminology of Ernst Bloch he explains this situation as “simultaneity of the non-simultaneous” and the “synchronicity of the nonsynchronous.” In other words, it is “the coexistence of realities from radically different moments of history” (1991a: 307). The historical situation and the capitalist system’s logic of the production of surplus value that Davis points out in the passage quoted above are exactly the same as that Jameson underlines as being the very structure within which postmodernism has emerged. Jameson’s approach, on the other hand, it has to be admitted, is a totalizing one. This is a deliberate choice he makes, and a political one, too, because he believes that for “political people who are still committed to radical social change and transformation” it is essential to ask “systemic questions” (1984e: xv).
The objective alterations of the economic order of late capital in which Jameson anchors postmodernism is summarized by Vincent Leitch. He says that the distinguishing elements of late capitalism are

- new kinds of transnational business, new international divisions of labour,
- new dynamics in international banking and stock exchanges (including massive debts), new types of media interrelations and forms of transportation, computerization and automation, flight of production to the Third World, crisis of organized labor, gentrification on a global level, obsolescence of the nation-state (vis-à-vis the flows of capital), market penetration of remaining archaic enclaves, and broad extensions of the ethic of consumption, not to mention the survivals from earlier eras like modern mass production and state capitalism. (1992: 117)

Jameson says that Marx had insisted on the significance of the world market as “the ultimate horizon of capitalism”, and, what we find now in the world system of late capitalism is the “end of national autonomy” (1996a: 17). The cybernetic and informational revolutions have created a system of totality which signals “the end of a Promethean conception of production.” In this new system it is difficult for people to continue to think of development as “a conquest of nature.” This, Jameson adds, is a system in which “the market suffuses the world” and “the entire world is suddenly sewn up into a total system from which no one can secede” (1998a: 90-91). Integration into the world market rather than the preservation of the autonomy of the state is an idea perpetuated by what Jameson calls “a nauseatingly complacent market rhetoric” assisted by “world information circuits and exported entertainment” which not only reinforces
“international consumerist styles” but more importantly stalls “the formation of autonomous and alternative cultures” (1996a: 17-18). This saturation of the world with the culture of consumerism was accompanied at the discursive level by “the systematic delegitimation” of modern welfarist slogans and concepts like nationalization, welfare state, economic rights, and socialism (Jameson 1996a: 18). Also, this “implacable integration” of the global market, observes Jameson, has brought with it the problem of enormous national debts. This, he continues, “is a problem of the world monetary system as a whole” which is not without its concomitants (1996a: 29):

Stagnation . . . seems to have coincided with the emergence of the Debt... as First World banks began to lend their uninvestable surpluses with abandon to the Second and Third Worlds in the early 1970s; and also with the invention of the word and of the strategy of “deregulation”. (1996a: 47)

With this deregulation, as pointed out earlier, immensely vast areas of Brazil, India, Eastern Europe, selected areas of China, and other parts of the Third World were open to the penetration of capital and the market to a degree qualitatively much greater than in earlier periods of capitalism. But, Jameson says, the “convulsive stages of emergence” of this third moment of capitalist expansion, were not fully complete until the end of the Cold War (1996b: 2). The process of globalization involving deregulation, liberalization and privatization, assisted to a great extent by information and communication technologies “has transformed the world of business” (Jameson 1996b: 3).

Jameson discusses the new dynamics of international banking and stock exchange and other financial business in his two later texts on postmodernism, “Culture and
Finance Capital” and “The Brick and the Balloon: Architecture, Idealism and Land Speculation.” In them Jameson develops his account of the postmodern in relation to the “financial or speculative final stage” in the cycle of capitalist development, based on Giovanni Arrighi’s The Long Twentieth Century (1994). This “trend” of the flight of capital from productive industry to speculative finance, Jameson says, is part of the historical development of capital. Giovanni Arrighi explains this in spatial terms. Arrighi, Jameson says, proposes the theory that every moment of the capitalist development “replicates itself and reproduces a series of three moments” in a repetitive cycle (1998a: 141). The first of these moments is the period when by way of “the violence and brutality of primitive accumulation” money is brought for “eventual capitalization” (1998a: 141). This capital is invested in agriculture and industry in the second moment. Capital thus “territorialized” consequently transforms its associated area into “a centre of production.” Once this process reaches its limits in terms of production, distribution, consumption and further investment for generating surplus value, the third moment begins. Speculation, withdrawal, and redirection of profits from “the home industries” and the search for new forms of profit available in financial transactions characterize this new moment. Separating itself from “the `concrete context’ of its productive geography” capital becomes “free-floating” and lives its own life in the new context of “speculation” and “spectres of value” competing against each other in “a vast world-wide disembodied phantasmagoria” (1998a: 141-42). This moment of finance capital, as a result of the new information and communications technology, has abolished space and time producing “new and unrepresentable symptoms in late-capitalist everyday life” (1998a: 143). Jameson says that the movement of capital into the realm of speculation is inseparable
from "the contradictions that produce these uneven investment possibilities" and also from "the impossibility of resolving them" (1998a: 169).

Arrighi’s thesis of the three stages of the historical development of capital can be explained in spatial terms thus: during the first stage, there is the investment seeking implantation of capital in a new region; then, the productive development of that region in terms of industry and manufacture; and finally, a deterritorialization of capital in heavy industry in order to seek its reproduction and multiplication in financial speculation—after which this same capital takes flight to a new region and the cycle begins again. (Jameson 1998a: 170)

Arrighi’s is a diachronic account which, Jameson says, suggests that the development of capitalism, though discontinuous, is expansive and organizes itself spirally. It follows Mandel’s doctrine that “[w]ith each crisis [capitalism] mutates into a larger sphere of activity and a wider field of penetration, of control, investment and transformation” (1998a: 139). Whereas Ernst Mandel emphasized the development of capital in a temporal scheme, Arrighi’s cyclical scheme coordinates the discontinuous and expansive movement of capitalism both in its temporal and spatial planes. Jameson says that the capitalist system is better seen as “a kind of virus” and its development as “something like an epidemic . . . a rash of epidemics, an epidemic of epidemics” (1998a: 139-40). Douglas Kellner has complained that Jameson “does not provide a detailed narrative of the transition” of the stages of capitalism and that he simply relies on “a rather brief synopsis of Mandel.” He charges that Jameson’s “failure to say much about the supposed new stage of multinational capitalism is, arguably, the weakest part” of his
analysis (Kellner 1988a: 258, 261). But this analysis of late capitalism in his latest essays on postmodernism can be seen as Jameson’s response to Kellner’s pointer, and, it provides the detailed narrative that the latter has called for and thus makes up for the weaknesses in the early essays.

What Jameson calls postmodernity is the “finance-capital moment of globalized society.” Its abstractions of cybernetic technology “articulates the symptomatology of yet another stage of abstraction.” This abstraction, “of which finance capital is a part,” has to be “grasped in its cultural expressions” (1998a: 143). That is why Jameson says that any comprehensive new theory of finance capitalism will need to reach out into the expanded realm of cultural production to map its effects: indeed mass cultural production and consumption themselves--- at one with globalization and the new information technology--- are as profoundly economic as the other areas of late capitalism, and as fully integrated into the latter’s generalized commodity system. (1998a: 143-44)

What Jameson means is that in the postmodern condition the economic referent has become an internal element and integral part of aesthetic construction. Consequently, culture becomes a battleground for power and a central political issue much more than in earlier periods of capitalism. And, Jameson’s concerns in his critique of postmodernism have been the “passionate and partisan assessment of everything that is oppressive” and the unmasking of the “complicity” of the cultural artifacts with “privilege and class domination” in particular, and, of “History itself as one long nightmare” (1981a: 299). It is this ideological decipherment of the cultural texts and the traces of history embedded in them that separates Jameson’s theory of the postmodern from the others examined above.
The thesis proposed by both Mandel and Arrighi and which Jameson appropriates for his analysis of postmodernism is that capitalism has undergone structural changes in its efforts to overcome the periodical crises it has had to face over the years. He discusses the consequences of the latest of these changes in the object world of multinational capital, a process by which what he calls the "nonhuman' logic of capital" works incessantly to produce a world abluted of nature (1991a: 408). It is in order to expose and explain this logic that he describes the "economic base" of postmodernism outlined above. He says that it is

a starting point and a problem, an imperative to make connections, something as undogmatic as a heuristic recommendation simultaneously to grasp culture (and theory) in and for itself, but also in relationship to its outside, its content, its context, and its space of intervention and effectivity. (1991a: 409)

In the postmodern world, culture, "as the inescapable tissue of life," has become coextensive with and inseparable from economy where, as Perry Anderson says, "every material object and immaterial service becomes inseparably tractable sign and vendible commodity" (1999: 55). Jameson himself says that in this "more fully human world" of the postmodern there has been "an immense dilation" of the cultural sphere, "an immense and historically original acculturation of the Real" so that culture becomes "a veritable 'second nature',' "a product in its own right" (1991a: ix-x). It is to Jameson's analysis of the specificity of this "second nature" that we turn our attention in the next chapter.