Chapter 3

The Political Logic:

Jameson, Lyotard and Baudrillard

One of the few points of agreement among the large number of theoretical discourses available on the subject of postmodernism is that there are as many postmodernisms as there are theorists on it. But this wide variety of theories does not exclude the possibility of their categorization based on the ideologies they articulate and the space their proponents choose to occupy in the vast political spectrum of the postmodern world. Fredric Jameson has made such a categorization in his essay, "The Politics of Theory: Ideological Positions in the Postmodernism Debate." There he writes:

The problem of postmodernism---how its fundamental characteristics are to be described, whether it even exists in the first place, whether the very concept is of any use is, on the contrary, a mystification---this problem is at one and the same time an aesthetic and a political one. The various positions that can be taken on it, whatever terms they are couched in, can always be shown to articulate visions of history, in which the evaluation of the social moment in which we live today is the object of an essentially political affirmation or repudiation. Indeed, the very enabling premise of the debate turns on an initial strategic presupposition about our social system. (1988b: 103)
Based on this premise, Jameson categorizes theorists of the postmodern as either politically progressive or politically reactionary. Following this lead, it will be the concern here to discuss the political positions Lyotard's and Baudrillard's theories on the postmodern occupy in relation to that of Jameson's.

Jean-François Lyotard's widely acknowledged *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984), and Jean Baudrillard's various writings on the postmodern society served along with Jameson's critique of postmodernism to place postmodernism at the centre of critical discussions in the nineteen eighties. It is, then, only logical to examine the theories of Lyotard and Baudrillard with a view to locating the political space they occupy so that Jameson's theory of postmodernism can be placed in its proper political perspective.

Lyotard, who introduced the term postmodern into current discussions of epistemology, contemporary society and social theory, considers the postmodern to be a mode and not an epoch. His *Postmodern Condition*, the *locus classicus* for contemporary debates on postmodernism, presents a study of "the condition of knowledge in the most highly developed societies" and describes the postmodern as designating "the state of our culture following the transformations which, since the end of the nineteenth century, have altered the game rules for science, literature and the arts." The transition to the postmodern age has been "under way since the end of the 1950s, the completion of European reconstruction" (Lyotard 1984a: 3). That the focus of Lyotard is epistemological rather than historical, unlike that of Jameson, is amply suggested by his concern with the status of science and technology, with the differences between the grand narratives, the practice of legitimation and contemporary science, and what he calls
"postmodern science" which he prefers to traditional narrative forms of knowledge. Lyotard's identification of the postmodern with the trends of what Daniel Bell calls the "post-industrial society" of advanced technology, scientific knowledge and information makes it very much similar to Baudrillard's description of the society of simulations which shall be discussed later. But for the moment it is to be mentioned that there is nothing in Lyotard similar to Baudrillard's dramatic pronouncement of a fundamental break in history and the ritual end of a historical era, and the celebrated arrival of an entirely new postmodern era. This is how Lyotard puts it: "The status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the post-industrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age" (1984a: 3).

Originally formulated by the American sociologist Daniel Bell, the concept of a postindustrial society designates a knowledge society in which theoretical knowledge plays a key role in technological advancement and policy formulations. Bell's argument in his *The Coming of Postindustrial Society* (1973) is that an earlier industrial society characterized by an economizing mode of goods production or productivist economy has now moved on to an entirely new socializing mode or service economy. Margaret Rose has pointed out that Lyotard does not use the term "postindustrial society" in the same sense as Daniel Bell uses it. She claims that the latter uses it in the sense of "a society in which theoretical knowledge or science should be regarded as the axial principle" and not "merely as discourse." Also, Rose continues, Bell distinguishes it "from any discourse shared with the literati or critics of postmodern culture" (1991: 56). She complains that Lyotard takes scientific knowledge to be merely a discourse, and "reduces" it to "something which can be commodified and alienated from its producer" (1991: 56). This
assumption, as Rose rightfully points out, is closer to Marx’s concept of “the production and alienation of the goods of industrial society” (1991: 56). Lyotard’s view of the commodification of knowledge is discussed below. Charles Jencks objects to Lyotard’s “conflation of the postindustrial society with Postmodernism” and says that the connection between the “two posts” is “not the simple and direct one” that Lyotard implies (1987: 50).

Lyotard locates the transformations mentioned above “in the context of the crisis of narratives” and defines postmodern as the “incredulity toward metanarratives” (1984a: xxiii, xxiv). He speaks of two such metanarratives—“major versions of the narrative of legitimation”—one political and the other philosophical, which have been of great importance “in the history of knowledge and its institutions” (1984a: 31). The former, with “humanity as the hero of liberty,” is the narrative of emancipation enshrining the Enlightenment project of progress which has as its aim the gradual emancipation of humanity from social oppression, privations, and other socioeconomic imbalances ultimately leading the human race to the realms of freedom (1984a: 31). The latter, speculative narrative of the Hegelian tradition, is one in which knowledge plays the central role in the gradual evolution of the self-conscious mind from unselfconscious matter (Lyotard 1984a: 31-37). Teleological in nature, with an itinerary towards an ultimate goal, both these emancipatory and speculative narratives are characterized as metanarratives because they subsume other little narratives which then have to depend on the metanarratives for their meaning, confirmation, and legitimation. Lyotard says that it is “the unification of these two sets of discourse” which has until this day governed the legitimation of the incommensurability of narrative knowledge and scientific knowledge,
and thus formed “the entire history of cultural imperialism from the dawn of Western civilization” (1984a: 27). But in “postindustrial society and postmodern culture,” Lyotard says, the grand narratives have lost their credibility, regardless of what mode of unification they use, regardless of whether they are speculative or emancipatory (1984a: 37).

Lyotard suggests that this loss of credibility is a consequence of “the blossoming of techniques and technologies since the Second World War” which, he says, “has shifted emphasis from the ends of action to its means” (1984a: 37). Another reason he cites is “the redeployment of advanced liberal capitalism,” “a renewal that has eliminated the communist alternative and valorized the individual enjoyment of goods and services” (1984a: 38). Thus Lyotard associates the postmodern with the coming of the “postindustrial” society. And it is here that he loses his credibility. For, as Douglas Kellner has rightly pointed out, he does not “adequately analyze the relations between technology, capital and social [and cultural] development” (Kellner 1988: 250). Steven Connor agrees with Kellner and states that “Lyotard is infuriatingly vague about what he takes the cause of this decline of metanarratives to be” (Connor 1989: 31). Connor complains that Lyotard fails to substantiate the first cause and the second is “both unargued and tautological” (1989: 31). “Why,” he asks, “is a shift from ends to means consequent upon the growth or multiplication of techniques and technologies?” And if it is “this shift of emphasis might just as well be seen as a symptom of that decline rather than as its cause” (1989: 31). The question Connor raises and the argument that follows it are invited by Lyotard’s own failure to explain satisfactorily the “how” and “why” of the theoretical collapse he points out as signifying the postmodern.
So, what we have in the postmodern condition, Lyotard would like us to believe, are micronarratives or "little narratives" which do not require legitimation with reference to anything external to it, instead of the foundationalist macronarratives of the modern period (1984a: 60). "The principle of a universal metalanguage is replaced by the principle of a plurality of formal axiomatic systems" (1984a: 43). In other words, society is best conceived as a web of a plurality of language communications contrary to the modern idea of an organic whole or a field of class conflicts. The social bond of language itself is a multiplicity of games with incommensurable laws and agonistic interrelations. Here science is just another language with no claim to any kind of superiority over any other language. Hence, in the postmodern world we have a proliferation of new languages forced to legitimize on their own terms in terms of performativity. The very forces responsible for the collapse of the grand narratives, according to Lyotard, have forced changes in the realm of knowledge, too. Knowledge, Lyotard claims, has ceased to be "an end in itself" and has lost its "use-value" (1984a: 5). He says that "the nature of knowledge" cannot "fit into the new channels, and become operational," unless "learning is transalated into quantities of information," for which the orientation of new investigations will be "dictated by" the condition of translatability of the "eventual results " into "computer language." Consequently, "knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, and is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its "use-value"" (1984a: 4-5). As a result, the question often asked at the centres of learning is "no longer 'Is it true?' but 'What use is it?'" This question is "equivalent" to "Is it saleable?" and "Is it efficient?" (1984a: 51). Postmodern science with its emphasis on performativity
is projected by Lyotard to the role of avant-garde liberator, which is destined to have at its disposal a world of “perfect information” in which “data is in principle accessible to any expert” (1984a: 52). In a computerized society, suggests Lyotard sketching the “outline of a politics that would respect both the desire for justice and the desire for the unknown,” databanks will be the encyclopaedia, and to ensure the success of the prescriptive system of agonistics he proposes he wants that the public be given “free access to the memory and data-banks” (1984a: 67, 51, 67).

This, no doubt, sketches a wonderfully just picture of a society of heterogeneous language games, which has chosen the cognitive option of the agonistics of language. But, unfortunately, Lyotard’s text itself questions the veracity of the genuineness of the claims he makes for such a society. For The Postmodern Condition’s insistence that knowledge has become “the principal force of production,” produced in order solely “to be sold” and consumed solely in order to be “valorized in a new production” has created an entirely new situation that is entirely incompatible with the one Lyotard sketches out and which demands the social relations to be rewritten. The “mercantilization of knowledge,” and its new status as a form of “informational commodity indispensable to production of power,” Lyotard writes, have made it “the major stake in the world-wide competition for power” (1984a: 5). The nexus developed, as Lyotard himself says, between capital and knowledge in a postmodern condition where knowledge and power are “two sides of the same question” leaves no room for anyone to doubt “who decides what knowledge is and who knows what needs to be decided?” (1984a: 9). This is what prompts Jameson to comment in his “Foreword” to The Postmodern Condition that “The dystopian project of a global private monopoly of information weighs heavily in the
balance against the pleasures of paralogisms and of ‘anarchist science’” (1984e: xx). This monopoly which, obviously, is a threat to the free access of information that Lyotard envisages can be challenged, as Jameson argues, “only by genuinely political (and not symbolic or protopolitical) action” (1984e: xx).

Unfortunately, Lyotard does not have any concrete proposals for such a political action. On the contrary, his engagement with the whole question of the new “commodity” of information on the basis of his pragmatics of performativity and delegitimation goes against the very construction of such a political agenda. The simple fact is that the effects of delegitimation, performativity and paralogy have only helped to aggravate the social, economic and cultural inequalities, and far from breaking down national barriers, as Lyotard claims, have only taken advantage of them for speculation, financial as well as commercial, evidently proving that it is not advisable to embrace a delegitimated postmodern world. Terry Eagleton comments that it is not difficult to see a coalition between the various neo-Nietzscheanisms of a poststructuralist period and the newly originated multinational corporations. He writes:

It is not surprising that classical models of truth and cognition are increasingly out of favour in a society where what matters is whether you deliver the commercial or rhetorical goods. Whether among discourse theorists or the Institute of Directors, the goal is no longer truth but performativity, not reason but power. (1986: 134)

Lyotard’s recommendation for the abandonment of the “grand Enlightenment story of emancipatory knowledge” for the reason that it cannot any more “frame the strategic inquiries of the information sciences” is dubbed “doubly positivist” by John
O'Neill, and his whole political project is condemned as “Lyo-retardism” (1995: 194). It is not only the issue of the ownership and control of the computerized data, memory banks and databanks that poses serious questions about the political alternative of Lyotard. His silence about the identity of the groups “discussing metaprescriptive” with the information they are provided in order to make knowledgeable decisions also doesn’t help to convince us of his project. Are they “social movements? Citizens’ groups? institutions? interest groups? or lobbies?” asks Seyla Benhabib (1990: 122). Albrecht Wellmer raises a related issue. He writes:

"It is not simply a problem of the accessibility of information, it is a matter of both the interrelationship of the technical, systemic, economic process on the one hand, and political processes on the other and also of the organization and self-organization of the political processes as such. (1991: 93)"

Lyotard’s political project does not engage in any such political issues, and this leaves it an unsatisfactory and superficial document. Wellmer agrees that Lyotard’s call for free accessibility of knowledge “represents an important concession to the democratic universalism of the Enlightenment” against which, ironically, Lyotard himself is projecting his agonistics of language games (1991: 91). David Harvey comments that though Lyotard’s radical proposal for open access to information is “silly,” it is “instructive” as it indicates “how even the most resolute of postmodernists is in the end faced with either making some universalizing gesture . . . or lapsing, like Derrida, into total political silence” (1989: 117). It is not for these reasons alone that Lyotard’s political alternative fails to carry conviction. Seyla Benhabib’s comments sum it up all:
In the absence of radical, democratic measures redressing economic, social and cultural inequalities and forms of subordination the pluralistic vision of groups Lyotard proposes remains naïve. It would fail to redress the plight of those for whom the question of the democratization of information is a luxury, simply because as marginalized groups in our societies they fail even to have access to organization, let alone informational resources. (1990: 123)

Lyotard’s politics of neoliberal pluralism, though it seemingly encourages all sections of peoples with their varied language games and strongly recommends access of information (read power) to all, is, in fact, anti-democratic and even anarchist. This is why Wellner makes such a statement against Lyotard’s politics:

It is characteristic of the anarchist line in postmodern and poststructuralist thinking that Lyotard really only deals in subordinate clauses with the central problem for the liberation struggles of subjugated peoples or oppressed minorities, the struggle for a democratic psychiatry, and ultimately all conflicts and crises in contemporary industrial society. (1991: 91)

In the absence of a powerful mechanism to ensure the public free access to information one would have expected Lyotard to fall back on the machinery of State to fulfill that need. Here, again, Lyotard disappoints us. His approach helps only to reemphasize the points raised against him above. He writes:

The reopening of the world market, a return to vigorous economic competition, the breaking down of the hegemony of American capitalism,
the decline of the socialist alternative, a probable opening of the Chinese market--- these and many other factors are already, at the end of the 1970s, preparing States for a serious reappraisal of the role they have been accustomed to playing since the 1930s: that of guiding or even directing investments. (1984a: 6)

The implication is that this last be left completely in the hands of the “multinational corporations” (Lyotard 1984a: 5).

Jameson’s critique, on the other hand, is radical and oppositional against the very forces that Lyotard seems to be promoting. Addressing the same issue of “deregulation” and the opening up of new and vast areas for the penetration of capital and global market, Jameson argues that until such time as all ideological arguments promoting this market rhetoric are replaced by “the perspective of radical change and the collective project [of socialism]” it is necessary to strongly defend the concepts of big government and the welfare state and “to continuously attack market rhetoric on the basis of the historical record of the destructiveness of the free market” (1995b: 5). Martin Donougho comments that “Lyotard’s paralogical quietism” “reduc[es] the question of justice to ‘gaming’ and paralogism” and that the only guarantee that the new information technology and science “will not be used coercively would be political” (1989: 88, 94, n16). What Jameson advocates by way of the defence of an expanded welfare state government is this very political guarantee that he himself recommends in his “Foreword” to Lyotard’s The Postmodern Condition (1984e xix-xx).

After all the rhetoric of Lyotard about the fall of the grand recits and the self-legitimation generated by the little narratives we are not to understand that the
postmodern is an absolutely new condition which suggests a total break from the previous epoch of modernity. Nowhere does he suggest that there has been a historical break between the modern and the postmodern. The latter is not regarded by Lyotard as a historical category following the former. Hence, Lyotard does not address the issue of the break between the two periods. This is what elicits the following remarks from Jameson in his “Foreword” to The Postmodern Condition:

Although Lyotard has polemically endorsed the slogan of a postmodernism and has been involved in the defence of some of its controversial productions Lyotard is in reality quite unwilling to posit a postmodern stage radically different from the period of high modernism and involving a fundamental and cultural break with this last. (1984e: xvi)

The postmodern, for Lyotard, is not something separate from the modern, but is “undoubtedly a part of the modern” (1984a: 79). It is interesting to note how he defines the postmodern in “Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?” appended to the main text of The Postmodern Condition. The postmodern, he writes,

would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unpresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unpresentable. (1984a: 81)

This passage does two things at once: it links Lyotard’s definition of the postmodern to Kant’s conception of the sublime and secondly, it celebrates modernism as “a constant
and ever more dynamic revolution in the languages, forms and tastes of art" (Jameson 1984e: xvi). Lyotard's invocation of the sublime, it has been pointed out, refuses "the possibility of a bridge between the aesthetic and the political" and draws "a distinction between determinate judgements that measure a thing against a concept or set of rules, and indeterminate or reflective judgements for which there are no standards external to the experience" (Melville and Readings 1995: 18). The celebration of modernism is reiterated by a previous statement Lyotard makes which forms a sort of preparation for the final definition: "A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern." Thus understood, postmodernism is "not modernism at its end but in the nascent state" which is "constant" (1984a: 79). This seems to imply that postmodernism is "the recovery of a suppressed but essential dimension" of modernism: "not a new episteme but a rewriting of modernism in terms of what it has repressed by privileging the beautiful over the sublime" (Melville and Readings 1995: 26). Lyotard's argument advocates an aesthetic experience beyond historical time, and emphasizes the irrelevance of historical thinking altogether. In "Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity" Jameson writes that the proposition that postmodernism precedes modernism rather than follows it is "impertinent," and adds that it prepares the "reemergence and some new and historically unexpected flowering of what was once the New of high modern art" (1998a: 113).

Lyotard's preference for the intensified dynamism, excited experimentation and unending quest for novelty usually associated with the modern has made writers like Charles Jencks suggest that though it has the merit of "being original" it is a "crazy idea which no one has dreamed up before" (Jencks 1987: 51). Whether Lyotard's definition is
off the target or not is not the important issue. The fact is that it posits the postmodern as a counterforce to the commodifying tendencies of modern capitalist societies. He writes:

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art is looking for. The artist and the writer then are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what will have been done. Hence the fact that the work and the text have the character of an event: hence also they always come too late for their author, or, what amounts to the same thing, their being put into work, their realization . . . always begins too soon. Postmodern would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (post) anterior (modo). (1984a: 81)

This situating of the postmodern art in the “future anterior” by Lyotard, David Carroll points out, “make[s] art for him always a ‘thing’ of the future. . . . [W]hat art is depends on the experiments to be performed and the forms to be invented, rather than on what has already been performed” (1987: 155). It is an overt commitment to the contestatory potential of the modern that is implicit in these statements, and, as Jameson has argued, they “determine an aesthetic that is far more closely related to the traditional ideologies of high modernism than to current postmodernisms” (1984e: xvi). The aesthetics of postmodernism, Jameson asserts, has replaced the “modernist claims to Sublimity” by “more modest and decorative practices in which sensory beauty is once again the heart of
the matter" (1998b: 123). As a result, cultural and aesthetic production has very well been assimilated into commodity production. Jameson’s thoughts on this commodification of the aesthetic realm have already been discussed.

Though the piece appended to The Postmodern Condition is intended to explain what postmodernism is, as is implied in the title, Lyotard not only fails to satisfactorily answer the question that he takes on, but the whole exercise remains “highly superficial,” “most disappointing and unpromising” (Kellner 1988: 253). This is not surprising at all given that Lyotard’s focus has been on “the condition of knowledge” though he uses the term ‘postmodern’ to designate “the state of our culture” as well (1984: xxiii). But Lyotard’s answer is “lame” and is “in patent contradiction of his account of scientific postmodernity as a stage of cognitive development” (Anderson 1999: 31). Nevertheless, a partial defence of Lyotard would be that it is the methodological compulsion that limits his essay to the problem of “knowledge” almost completely excluding the realm of culture. It does not demand “a theory of the historically and dialectically specific and unique role of ‘culture’” in the postmodern social situation that Lyotard attempts to narrate (Jameson 1984e: xv). “[T]he context of the crisis of narratives” where Lyotard locates the postmodern condition leads him into a dialogue with Jurgen Habermas’s scheme for a modified continuation of the Enlightenment project of emancipation (Lyotard 1984a: xxiii).

In the context of the crisis of legitimation by metanarratives Lyotard offers a cognitive and a social option as alternatives to the legitimation by consensus offered by Habermas in The Theory of Communicative Action. Habermas’s main concern is to develop a model of communicative action founded on reason, democracy and justice and
guided by the principle of consensus. Habermas believes that the “life-world” is formed by the three components of culture, society and personality which are correlated with modes of reaching understanding through communicative action. Douglas Kellner has pointed out that it is Habermas’s considered opinion that once this life-world is colonized by a system constituted by the subsystems of capitalist economy and “state bureaucracies governed through the media of money and power” crisis develops in the life-world and consequently culture, and social relations are eroded. This, Kellner continues, gives rise to “such things as the loss of meaning, alienation and anomie, or psycho-pathologies” (1989b: 199). To overcome this crisis he proposes that the social actors arrive at a shared understanding of the world. This shared understanding, embodied in tradition, forms “the horizon within which communicative action is always already moving” (Habermas 1984: 119). It is, he continues, “prior to any possible disagreement and cannot become controversial in the way that intersubjectively shared knowledge can be; at most it can fall apart” (1984: 131). His proposal for a communicative action based on consensus, in other words, is for a dialogic conception of subjectivity and rationality with a view to escaping the dilemma between the choice of a neoconservative modernity dominated by instrumental reason and the radical critique of this modernity. This dialogism, Habermas claims, will form the basis of the communicative rationality that will ensure free and undistorted communication. By this proposal Habermas hopes to salvage enlightened reason’s emancipatory potential.

Reason, Habermas believes, can confront questions not only of truth, but of justice and taste as well by the logic respective to each sphere (1987b: 122ff). In The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity Habermas addresses language not as a realm of
representation but as a realm of communication. When language is understood as belonging to the subjective realm of representation it excludes the "other," as the individual, the rational agent, is engaged in a sort of dialogue with his own self. For Habermas, to think about language is to think about a whole society engaged in communicative action and not as a system of representation. Language rooted in society is not a soliloquy of an individual self. Its circulation is not in the private realm of an individual but in the public sphere. This is communication, and the "other" is necessarily a precondition for communication. In this sense, language is not subjective but intersubjective or, in other words, communicative and dialogic. Communicative action does not suppress differences but embraces them in a space of consensus and every moment of it keeps alive the possibility of the presence of truth. It "suggests a concrete form of life" that enables individuals "to realize concrete possibilities for a better and less threatened life, on their own initiative and in accordance with their own needs and insights" (Habermas 1989a: 69). This whole project, as Andreas Huyssen says, is directed at once against "political conservatism (neo or old) and against... the cultural irrationality of a post-Nietzschean aestheticism embodied in surrealism and subsequently in much of contemporary French theory" (1986: 137).

Lyotard’s polemic against Habermas focuses on the latter’s problematic notion of consensus, the principle of which, Lyotard says, "as a criterion of validation seems to be inadequate" (1984a: 60). Lyotard has his own reasons for rejecting Habermas’s recommendation of legitimation through the dialogue of intellect and free will. Habermas’s theory of communicative action is dependent on the legitimation of the grand narratives; "the various networks of the heteromorphous classes of utterances," the
various incommensurable language games cannot be expected to have metaprescriptives
common to all to determine them (Lyotard 1984a: 61). Lyotard argues that Habermas's
case for universal consensus implies two assumptions: the first is that it is possible to
agree to the metaprescriptions universally valid for all language games. Lyotard does not
approve of this. His argument is that "language games are heteromorphous, subject to
heteromorphous sets of pragmatic rules" (1984a: 65). The second assumption Habermas
implies, according to Lyotard, is that consensus is the aim of dialogue. But, Lyotard
claims, "consensus is only a particular state of discussion, not its end. Its end, on the
contrary, is paralogy" (1984a: 65-6). Habermas's beliefs that humanity is "a collective
(universal) subject that seeks its common emancipation through the regularization of the
moves permitted in all language games" and that "the legitimacy of any statement resides
in its contributing to that emancipation" are unacceptable to Lyotard (Lyotard 1984a: 66).
"Is legitimacy to be found in consensus obtained through discussion as Jurgen Habermas
thinks?" he asks. "Such a consensus," he claims, "does violence to the heterogeneity of
language games" (1984a: xxv). Moreover, in the pragmatics of postmodern science
invention is always born not of consensus but of dissension (Lyotard 1984a: xxv).

Lyotard's response to Habermas's by now well known attack against theoretical
and aesthetic postmodernity is more explicit in "Answering the Question: What is
Postmodernism?" It has already been mentioned that this essay does not do justice to its
title and the question posed there remains largely unanswered. However, it seeks to
respond to the issues raised by Habermas. Lyotard observes that Habermas

thinks that if modernity has failed, it is in allowing the totality of life to be
splintered into independent specialities which are left to the narrow
competence of experts, while the concrete individual experiences “desublimated meaning” and “destructured form,” not as a liberation but in the mode of that immense ennui which Baudelaire described over a century ago. (1984a: 72)

Lyotard argues that Habermas raises the whole issue of the relationship between modernity and postmodernity following a suggestion from Albrecht Wellmer. Habermas, he writes, considers that the fragmentation and separation of culture from life can be remedied by “changing the status of aesthetic experience” which has to be used as a tool to “explore a living historical situation.” In other words, he says, it has to be “put in relation with problems of existence.” When this is done, he continues,

this experience . . . “becomes a part of a language game which is no longer that of aesthetic criticism;” it takes part “in cognitive processes and normative expectations;” “it alters the manner in which those different moments refer to one another.” What Habermas requires from the arts and the experiences they provide is, in short, to bridge the gap between cognitive, ethical and political discourses thus opening the way to a unity of experience. (1984a: 72)

There are two new issues that Lyotard raises in the passages quoted above, in addition to those pointed out earlier, both related to aesthetic postmodernism. Lyotard objects to what he thinks is Habermas’s call for artists and writers to be related more closely to quotidian practices and experiences. This, Lyotard argues, can have only a negative effect and it will “liquidate the heritage of the avant-gardes” (1984a: 73). The other point is that it is likely that Habermas “confuses the Kantian sublime with the Freudian sublimation,”
and that the aesthetic for Habermas is still a question of beauty (1984a: 79). What Lyotard implies here is consistent with his arguments, pointed out earlier, against Habermas. He argues that aesthetic modernity/postmodernity is in the contrary and unstable nature of art forms; he understands that trends towards new representationalism and eclecticism are nothing more than a capital-inspired offensive against the experimentalism and inventiveness of the great avant-garde. “Eclecticism,” Lyotard declares, “is the degree zero of contemporary general culture” (1984a: 76). This offensive, Lyotard continues, is intended to restore belief in the unity, harmony and consensus of the otherwise conflict-ridden and splintered capitalist and socialist societies. What is regarded as Habermas’s onslaught against avant-garde art and literature Lyotard understands as part of these universalizing and totalizing efforts. The goal of all such metaprescriptives is the attainment of reconciliation and transparency. “The cause,” Lyotard says, “is good, but the argument is not,” because “[c]onsensus has become an outmoded and suspect-value” (1984a: 66).

This does, in no way, mean that Lyotard has lost belief in values of truth and justice. “Justice,” he claims, “as a value is neither outmoded nor suspect” (1984a: 66). So, it is imperative that we “arrive at an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus” (1984a: 66). In an interview Lyotard explains what this justice in non-consensual terms will be. It is, he says, “recognizing the autonomy, the specificity, of the various untranslatable and mutually interconnected language games . . . ‘let play continue . . . and let us play in peace’” (quoted in Wellmer 1991: 42). What Lyotard wants to activate here is the Wittgensteinian notion of the irreducible plurality of life-forms, of a network of local and interrelated language games and of an unceasing process by which
new linkages emerge, each distinguishing itself and establishing relation with the other without recourse to any metanarratives or on the basis of a general consensus (1984a: 10, 40-1, 64-5).

Lyotard’s alternative proposals for a cognitive and a social option, as mentioned above, are based on the principle of this heterogeneity of language games. The cognitive option Lyotard describes variously as “paralogy,” “agonistics” and “recognition of the heteromorphous nature of language games” (1984a: 60,66). The social option is defined as a “temporary contract” “supplanting permanent institutions in the professional, emotional, sexual, cultural, family, and international domains, as well as in political affairs” (1984a: 66). Lyotard offers these alternatives as authentic to the experience of postmodern societies and to the role of knowledge within it.

What this distaste of Lyotard for the concepts of “consensus” and “community” reveals is an “ultimate vision of science and knowledge” as a search for “instabilities,” as “a practice of paralognism.” The aim is “not to reach agreement but to undermine it from within the very framework in which the previous ‘normal science’ had been conducted” (Jameson 1984e: xix) . On the surface, Lyotard’s case for the heterogeneity of language games against a politics of consensus may seem to favour the “other” but, in fact, it does help only to replicate the capitalist incorporation of the marginalized with the allegedly terroristic totalization. The very exclusion of the grand narratives from a system supposed to promote all language games removes the possibility of guaranteeing the heterogeneity of cultural interests, and proves itself to be terroristic in Lyotard’s own sense. By “terror” Lyotard means “the efficiency gained by eliminating or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one shares with him” (1984a: 63). Lyotard’s repudiation of all
universal principles robs his own theory of exactly the very conditions, which might promote the free and productive agonistics of language games. Axel Honneth has this to say on the Lyotardian approach:

If recourse to universal norms is on principle blocked in the interests of a critique of ideology then a meaningful argument in support of the equal right to coexistence of all everyday cultures cannot be constructed; this excludes the possibility of formulating a rule, let alone of institutionalizing a form of law, which beyond the internal moral perspectives of language games could take responsibility for the universal recognition of the equal rights of cultures. (1991: 155)

In Lyotard’s spirited and determined defence of the local against the universal is implicit. As has already has been pointed out, the fundamental theoretical assertion that no common measures can exist among the diversity of language games. Added to this is the assumption that theory, being an essentially rationalistic activity, betrays itself to be an illegitimate attempt that violates the singular uniqueness of each language game because it aims at universalizing diversities by establishing a common vocabulary with which everything can be located, explained and evaluated. This seems to be a scandalous conclusion, since it is exactly this position which Lyotard adopts, especially in relation to scientific research in The Postmodern Condition. And, this is why Geoffrey Bennington comments that making paralogy or dissensus rather than consensus “the aim or telos of a discussion can all too easily suggest that Lyotard is himself proposing a sort of Grand Narrative leading to a dispersion or diaspora as a desired state beyond current illusions” (1988: 116).
Lyotard’s effort, throughout *The Postmodern Condition* has been to convince his readers of the irreconcilability and incommensurability of language games. The philosophy of agonistics that he aggressively advocates is claimed to yield a polytheism of values. This perspective does not leave space for criticizing the cognitive option, be it that of performativity or that of emancipation. It has to be said that Lyotard’s privileging of one practice of knowledge as a criterion over the others, is incoherent with his own theory and thus has led Seyla Benhabib to remark that

the insistence upon the incommensurability of language games in the name of polytheism may generate moral and political indifference; the call for innovation and experimentation may be completely dissociated from social reform and institutional practice and the activation of differences may not amount to a respect of the right of the other to be, but to a conservative plea to place the other outside. (1990: 121-2)

Christopher Norris also is critical of Lyotard’s conservative concept of the postmodern. He observes:

The ‘postmodern condition’--- as Lyotard interprets it--- thus seems to share the essential characteristics of all conservative ideology, from Burke to the current New Right. It rests, that is to say, on the idea that *prejudice* is so deeply built into our traditions of thought that no amount of rational criticism can hope to dislodge it. Any serious thinking about culture and society will have to acknowledge the fact that such inquiries have meaning only within the context of a certain informing tradition. (1988: 23-24)
This “political horror of consensus” is, in fact, a mistaken “dread of ‘totalization’” (Jameson 1991a: 347). No doubt, it is Lyotard’s impatience with the consensus community that turns his political sketch for liberation into a conservative treatise that fails to consider an “essential genre of political theory: identification and critique of macrostructures of inequality and justice” (Fraser and Nicholson 1988: 377).

This is least surprising because “it is rather hard to believe that assertions of incommensurability are going to do the job of liberation” (McGowan 1991: 186). And, as Steven Connor writes, “To believe that conflict is a necessary guarantee of diversity, and that dissension necessarily breeds innovation is to ignore the evidence of recent history” (1989: 39). The intolerance shown against Cuba, Palestine and Iraq, to cite just three well-known recent international examples, directly and indirectly by the major powers, helps to pose challenging questions against Lyotard’s advocacy of agonistics. Connor continues:

If the contemporary world is witnessing a continuation of the wholesale ‘culturecide’ that Lyotard abhors, then this may be the fault, not so much of tyrannous totality, as the failure to construct systems of relations which guarantee the freedom of the minority groups and cultures--- the product not of universalism but of decentred greed and hostility. (1989: 39)

Lyotard’s oversimplified and ahistorical notion of narrative legitimation and his poststructu lst distrust of metaphysical thinking in the form of masternarratives suggest the possibility of emancipation in the absolute nomadic freedom of pure difference. But he fails to understand that all great masternarratives are those that “suggest that something beyond capitalism is possible, something radically different; and they also
‘legitimate’ the praxis whereby political militants seek to bring that radically different future into being” (Jameson 1984e: xix). It is this conviction and the political commitment thereof that characterize Jameson’s critique of postmodernism. In Lyotard’s project, as Terry Eagleton points out, there is not “much hope of a political opposition to the system, as oppositional politics are part of metanarrational problem rather than the postmodernist solution” (1987: 87).

The denial of historical universals and interpretive totalities that Lyotard indulges in his account of the postmodern condition are most succinctly expressed in the words with which he closes the appendix “Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?”:

We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the concept and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience . . . let us wage war on totality: let us be witness to the unpresentable let us activate the differences and save the honour of the name. (1984a: 81-82)

As if in direct response to this nominalist call of Lyotard to “save the honour of the name” Jameson says that his whole attempt in the pages of Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism has been to experiment “whether by systematizing something that is resolutely unsystematic, and historicizing something that is resolutely ahistorical, one could outflank it and force a way at least of thinking about it. ‘We have to name the system’” (1991a: 418).

In his enthusiastic defense of a micropolitical heterogeneity Lyotard tends to identify all totalizing thought with totalitarianism and hence speaks of the reductionist and “terroristic” nature of such narratives. If we accept Douglas Kellner’s argument, there
is a distinction between masternarratives that subsume all other perspectives into one totalizing theory and those that narrate "a Big Story"—grand narratives of the foundations of knowledge, and "macro social theory that attempts to conceptualize and interpret a complex diversity of phenomena," synchronic narratives and diachronic narratives. Not only does Lyotard not make any distinction but he "tends to lump all 'grand narratives together and thus does violence to the diversity of theoretical narratives in our culture" (Kellner 1988: 253). Thus, what started as a pro-micronarrative programme ends, in effect, becoming antagonistic to the same agonistics. Thus, as Peter Osborne has observed, "the narrative of the death of metanarrative is itself grander than most of the narratives it would consign to oblivion" (Osborne 1995: 157).

Lyotard's suspicion of universals, as pointed out earlier, helps promote only an apolitical or anti-political nominalism that refuses to make connections. Thus it ends up as a refusal of social consciousness. His anti-systemic valorization of differences replicates, on one level, multinational capital's logic of differentiation and global expansion by way of the new slogan of globalization. On another level, while subsuming local and indigenous economic, developmental and cultural efforts it represses the very possibility of conceptualizing its very systemic consolidation. This, as Victor Li says, is "a politically debilitating paradox" in which Lyotard's declaration of emancipation from metanarratives and totalities "feeds into the market's decentered logic which encourages deterritorialization only in order to effect a greater penetration and colonization of the globe" (1991: 135). Thus Lyotard's attempt "to save the honor of the name," concludes Li, "ends up supporting the further consolidation of global capitalism whose complex
system is precisely that which must be named and conceptualized . . . if we are to transform it” (1991: 135).

This theory of Lyotard, it could well be said, is taken to its logical end by Baudrillard in his various essays on the postmodern. In a sense, Baudrillard’s theory leads us to nihilism. His postmodernism needs no qualifications. He is a postmodernist in the fullest sense. His theory of a new postmodern society is founded on his basic assumption that media, simulations, and what he called cyberblitz, whose ultimate aim is to perfect the instruments of social control, have constituted an entirely new realm of experience, a new stage of history, and a new type of society (Kellner 1989a: 77). There is no doubt that Baudrillard, unlike Lyotard, implies an absolute break between the contemporary postmodern period and the previous historical one. In an essay entitled “On Nihilism” he describes modernity as distinguished by expansion, differentiation, theoretical and aesthetic projects which seek to represent and interpret the real. On the contrary, implosion, de-differentiation, reproduction of models of the hyperreal and inertia distinguish postmodernity. Modernity, he writes, is “the radical destruction of appearances, the disenchantment of the world and its abandonment to the violence of interpretation and history” (quoted in Kellner 1989a: 118). Baudrillard argues that the “revolution” of modernity was a revolution of meaning grounded in the solid and safe moorings of the dialectics of history, the economy or desire. He has nothing but scorn for this universe of modernity and claims himself to be part of a “second revolution, that of the 20th century, of postmodernity, which is the immense process of the destruction of meaning, equal to the earlier destruction of appearances. Whoever lives by meaning, dies by meaning” (quoted in Kellner 1989a: 118). This new social order is characterized by the
disappearance of all the major signs of modernity such as production, reality, power, the social and the like, and, is constituted by simulations and new forms of experience, culture and technology. Baudrillard repeatedly emphasizes this point in the essay "Symbolic Exchange and Death" and rather dramatically characterizes the end of the modern era thus:

The end of labour. The end of production. The end of political economy.
The end of the dialectic signifier/signified which permitted the accumulation of knowledge and of meaning, the linear syntagm of cumulative discourse. . . . The end of the linear dimension of discourse. . . .
The end of the classic era of the sign. The end of the era of production.
(1992: 127-8)

It is very obvious that Baudrillard celebrates the end of the modern era and is very enthusiastic for the postmodern age, which he characterizes as an age of simulation.

Gone are the referentials of production, signification, affect, substance, history, i.e., the whole equation of real contents that still gave the sign weight by anchoring it with a kind of carrying capacity, of gravity---in short its form as representative equivalent. All this is surpassed by the other stage of value, that of total relativity, of generalized commutation, which is combinatorial and simulatory. This means simulation in the sense that from now on signs will exchange among themselves exclusively without interacting with the real. (1992: 125)

What is implied in this semiological view is the assumption that "reality" is constituted by codes, and modes of representation, the signs gaining their significance in relation to
other signs within the code of a "structural law of value" rather than to any external referents (Baudrillard 1992: 126). Such a shift in the primary social determinant from the "mode of production" to "a code of production" has been effected by the new technologies---the electronic media, cybernetic models and steering systems, computers, information processing, knowledge and entertainment industry---which have become the organizing principle of society (Baudrillard 1992: 132).

Douglas Kellner points out that among Baudrillard's "most provocative theses are his reflections on the role of the media in constituting the postmodern world" (Kellner 1989a: 66). In articles like "Requiem for the Media," "The Implosion of Meaning in the Media and the Implosion of the Social in the Masses," and "The Ecstasy of Communication" Baudrillard "provides paradigmatic models of the media as all-powerful and autonomous social forces which produce a wide range of effects" (Kellner 1989a: 66). In these essays Baudrillard proposes the thesis that the broadcast media are simulation machines involved in the reproduction of images, signs and codes which in their turn constitute an autonomous realm of hyperreality. They do not mirror or represent reality. On the contrary, what they constitute is a hyperreality, a 'reality' more "real then the real," real that is subordinate to representation and leading ultimately to the dissolution and obliteration of the real. Their very form, Baudrillard claims, is antimediatory and intransitive. They fabricate non-communication---this is what characterizes them, if one agrees to define communication as an exchange, as a reciprocal space of a speech and a response and thus of a responsibility (not a psychological or moral responsibility, but a personal, mutual correlation in exchange). . . they are what always prevents
response, making all processes of exchange impossible. . . . This is the real abstraction of the media. And the system of social control and power is rooted in it. (1981: 169-70)

In “The Implosion of Meaning in the Media . . .” Baudrillard describes how the media, in the postmodern society, by a proliferation of signs and information, obliterate meaning. This, he says, is done through a process of neutralization and dissolution of content whereby meaning is collapsed and the distinction between the media and reality is destroyed. “Information,” writes Baudrillard, “devours its own contents; it devours communication and the social,” it “dissolves meaning and the social into a sort of nebulous state leading not all to a surfeit of innovation but to the very contrary, to total entropy” (1983b: 100).

The notion that the mass media possess intrinsic liberating potential kept suppressed by the ruling class who control them, and the concomitant belief that the Left has to seize the control of the media so as to enable it to fulfil its potential is scorned at and dismissed by Baudrillard in “Requiem for the Media.” His argument is that to wrest control of the form of the media in order to change their content is not possible because it is the “code” that is oppressive about it, and it is this very code which the media embody in their very form. This code functions by denying the audience the chance to respond thereby rendering communication impossible. The silence of the audience is confirmed by simulating audience-response artificially by way of phone-ins, studio audiences, viewers’ polls and other such forms of bogus “interaction.” This is how non-communication is “fabricated.” Baudrillard argues that any form of subversive message can be neutralized and rendered harmless thus, since “transgression and subversion never get ‘on the air’
without being subtly negated as they are: transformed into models, neutralized into signs, they are eviscerated of their meaning” (1981: 173).

Baudrillard extends these arguments further in “The Ecstasy of Communication.” The cold seduction of the mass media, he says, freezes the individuals into terminals of media and communication networks. This transformation of the subject into an object obliterates the distinction between the subjective self and the objective world, private and public life. The proliferation of images, signs, and representations in the media and the incredible expansion of information do not merely threaten the integrity of the private world, but in fact do away with the very distinction between the private and the public. Just as the privacy of the individuals is invaded by television, so the private world is enfolded or inhabited by the public world of historical events instantly flashed across the mini screen in the living room. Thus, Baudrillard says, in the postmodern mediascape the private realm with its rules, rituals and privacy is made transparent, the public possesses the private, and the private encompasses the public. The private sphere is exteriorized and made explicit, says Baudrillard,

in a sort of obscenity where the most intimate processes of our life become the virtual feeding ground of the media. . . . Inversely the entire universe comes to unfold arbitrarily on your domestic screen . . . all this explodes the scene formerly preserved by the minimal separation of public and private, the scene that was played out in a restricted space. (1983c: 130)

What typifies this situation more than anything is an explosion of visibility brought about by television and the information revolution to a point of excess that
Baudrillard terms “obscenity.” Baudrillard writes: “We live in ecstasy and this ecstasy is obscene” (1983c: 130). He goes on to add:

Obscenity begins precisely when there is no more spectacle, no more scene, when all becomes transparence and immediate visibility when everything is exposed to the harsh and inexorable light of information and communication. . . . It is no longer the traditional obscenity of what is hidden, repressed, forbidden or obscure; on the contrary, it is the obscenity of the visible, of the all-too-visible. It is the obscenity of what no longer has any secret, of what dissolves completely in information and communication. (1983c: 130-1)

This, Baudrillard suggests, is an emotionally empty world of communication where we encounter a new form of subjectivity in which everyone is saturated with information, images, events and ecstasies. Its representative psychic state is schizophrenia which, Baudrillard reminds us, is the condition not so much of a retreat from the external world, as of the over-intense advance of that world upon the sufferer, which painfully dissolves through lack of distance; it is “the absolute proximity, the total instantaneity of things, the feeling of no defence, no retreat. It is the end of interiority and intimacy, the over-exposure and transparency of the world which traverses him without obstacles” (1983c: 133). For Baudrillard, the flat television screen is the metaphor for all these themes: the proliferation of information, the loss of interiority, absolute visibility; the schizoid subject of this “obscenity” becomes “a pure screen, a switching centre for all networks of influence” (1983c: 133). Thus, for Baudrillard, television is in and of itself a representative part of the postmodern scene of simulation, ecstasy and obscenity.
What the above theory of mass media postulated by Baudrillard expounds is a postmodern society and culture dominated by simulations, objects and discourses, which do not have any firm origin or foundation nor any referent. It is a society of signs but the signs do not have any referential position: the signified and the referent are now "abolished to the sole profit of the play of signifiers, of a generalized formalization in which the code no longer refers back to any subjective or objective 'reality' but to its own logic" (Baudrillard 1975: 127). Baudrillard claims that this breakdown of the signifying chain has been wrought by technology per se, that is to say, the responsibility lies in the formal structure of the media and the images and codes they proliferate rather than in the contents and the powers that propagate them. Jameson reminds us that technology is the apotheosis of capitalism and is "the result of the development of capital rather than some ultimately determining instance in its own right" (1991a: 35). It is precisely in this latter sense that Baudrillard considers media, and Douglas Kellner is raising this specific issue when he says that Baudrillard presents media "as mere epiphenomena of technology and semiurgy" (1989a: 74). Kellner is justified when he charges Baudrillard of "media essentialism and technological determinism." He is right in stating that for Baudrillard "it is the technology of television . . . that determines its effects . . . rather than any particular content or message" which he separates from their uses "by specific economic and political interests, individuals and groups, and the social systems within which they function" (Kellner 1989a: 74). Kellner goes on to argue that Baudrillard presents "a rather extreme variant of a negative model of the media which sees mass media and culture as simply instruments of domination, manipulation and social control and which fails to develop theories of radical media or cultural politics" (1989a: 225, n3). Baudrillard's
theory of the media does not consider some other obvious aspects that cannot be ignored. Jameson suggests that the word media conjoins three relatively distinct signals: that of an artistic mode or specific form of aesthetic production; that of a technology generally organized around a central apparatus or machine; and finally, that of a social institution (1991a: 67). Baudrillard’s concern, on the other hand, is only with the effects that he thinks are determined by the technology of the media. This justifies the charge of technological determinism against him.

From what we have seen above it is obvious that Baudrillard has not bothered to address the aesthetic function of the media in formulating his theory. Of course, there are areas of agreement between the two theorists in their consideration of the media. For instance, like Baudrillard, Jameson also suggests that the audience is rendered mute and immobilized by the television screen, which effects a sort of neutralization: “The helpless spectators of video-time are . . . immobilized and mechanically integrated and neutralized” (1991a: 73-4). But, the differences of approach of the two theorists are more important than superficial similarities like these. Unlike Baudrillard’s, Jameson’s interpretation of the media, as mentioned in the previous chapter, is content-based, and that is why he is able to make such insightful observations as these: there is a “peculiar new ideological symbiosis in the postmodern, between the media and the market;” “the very representation of the media itself manages to represent the market” (1991a: 417, 353). Discussing the nexus between the media and the market Jameson says that the very contents of the media have themselves become commodities blurring the distinction between the media and the market (1991a: 277). Referring to Guy Debord’s theory of the image as the ultimate form of commodity reification Jameson suggests that it is not the
commercial products that become images but “the very entertainment and narrative processes of commercial television” themselves which are “reified” and turned into “commodities” (1991a: 276). Ideologically also the media and the market have much in common. The two are comparable, Jameson claims, because the “market” is “as unlike its ‘concept’ (or Platonic idea) as the media is unlike its own concept.” He adds that he media “offers free programmes in whose content and assortment the consumer has no choice whatsoever but whose selection is then rebaptized ‘free choice’” (1991a: 275). It is necessary, Jameson suggests, to “generate a culture which somehow neutralizes [the] influences” of the “catastrophic effects of the market.” The “freedom of choice” that this symbiotic relationship of the market and the media celebrates, is only of consumer goods which is not the same thing as “the freedom of human beings to control their own destinies and to play an active part in shaping their collective life, that is to say, to wrest their collective future away from the blind necessities of history and its determinisms” (1996a: 33). Baudrillard has nothing to offer on the issue of the media-market nexus. It is his technological determinism that forces upon him a methodology that fails to address such crucial questions. And, as Jameson reminds us, any surrender to the “market mechanisms of the invisible hand” of capitalism is “abdication of the challenge of human freedom, rather than some admirable exercise of human powers” (1996a: 33). What distinguishes Jameson’s theory is this very willingness to address issues related to raising political resistance against the capitalist market forces.

Though Baudrillard speaks of the media’s role in the abolition of referents, and in the play of signifiers in the postmodern society, he never tries to uncover the forces behind such a disjunction, resting assured that technology is responsible for it. But, to
Jameson, as has already been pointed out, technology is the result of the development of capital, and hence the capitalist system is ultimately responsible for the breakdown in the signifying chain. Jameson’s thesis is that the “sign” itself “came into being because of the corrosive dissolution of older forms of magical language by a force... of reification, whose logic is one of ruthless separation and disjunction” (1991a: 96). This force of reification, Jameson asserts, is the very logic of capitalism itself. He explains the process thus:

[R]eification penetrates the sign itself and disjoins the signifier from the signified. Now reference and reality disappear altogether, and even meaning---the signified---is problematized. We are left with that pure and random play of signifiers that we call postmodernism. (1991a: 96)

But this does not mean that the media can serve only reificatory purposes. It is in indicating this and in pointing out the subversive potential of the media that Jameson’s theory becomes part of progressive politics. At least, he says, “[T]hat the media... has a benign restraining influence on world torture and civic law enforcement and police repression cannot be doubted” (1991a: 353-4). Contrary to Baudrillard’s view that the chance of the media becoming subversive and oppositional is far from possible, Jameson claims that it has long since been “one of the rare weapons available to powerless minorities or subgroups screened out and censored” (1991a: 354). This doesn’t, of course, mean that the media has fulfilled its potential. Conversely, Jameson says, “it did not... become identical with its own ‘concept’” and therefore can be “counted among the innumerable ‘unfinished projects’ of the modern and postmodern” (1991a: 354). Television is capable of providing its audience a “collective (and media
communicational) experience,” “a prodigious new display of synchronicity and a communicational situation” (1991a: 355). It is true that the nexus between the media and the market has been able to blunt the subversive edge of the media’s potential, and it is for this reason that Jameson says that “the small screen longs for yet another chance at rebirth by way of an unexpected violence” whereby it will be able to break loose of this debilitating alliance and get identified with its concept (1991a: 355). It is, once again, this utopian vision for a better future that markedly distinguishes Jameson from the somewhat fatalistic attitude of Baudrillard.

Baudrillard’s concepts of simulacra, simulation, hyperreality and implosion are important elements in his theory of the postmodern society. Steven Connor says that it is Baudrillard, the theorist of the regime of the ‘simulacrum’ who has been most influential in the postmodern debate (1989: 55). By “simulacra” Baudrillard means reproductions of objects or events which emerge when the sure and referential signs of objects and events are separated from their reality or meaning in a purely structural system. In “The Orders of Simulacra” Baudrillard claims that successive historical stages have led to differing orders of simulacra, each having a law, and dominant form of its own and displaying their own semiotic features. This historical sketch of the orders of simulacra, Kellner points out, has been very much influenced by Michel Foucault’s archaeologies of knowledge in The Order of Things (1989a: 78). During the pre-modern era of feudalism there was a fixed hierarchy of signs and social status when the former was apparently clear and transparent and obligatory. The modern age broke with this hierarchy and introduced an artificial and democratized world of signs that gave precedence to artifice over natural
signs. So, during the pre-modern period the sign was the reflection of a basic reality and a "natural law of value" dominated this stage (Baudrillard 1983a: 83-92).

It was during the period of the Industrial Revolution, the period of infinite reproducibility that the 'second order' of simulacra appeared in society. Now production was mechanized, exact replicas of an object were produced and reproduced infinitely, and an industrial simulacrum or series was introduced. Thus, with the mechanical reproduction of objects, and even of art, the extermination of reference made possible the replication of serial signs, iconic simulacra of one another, governed by the commercial law of value (Baudrillard 1983a: 92-100). Kellner's interpretation of this order of simulacra is very pertinent: "In this order of simulacra," he writes, "there is no longer nostalgia for a natural order: nature becomes an object of domination, and reproduction itself becomes a dominant social principle governed by the laws of the market" (1989a: 79).

Today, Baudrillard writes, "we are in the third-order simulacra; no longer that of the counterfeit of an original as in the first order, nor that of the pure series as in the second" (1983a: 100-1). In this stage mechanical reproduction gives way to a universal semiotic, and the sign masks "the absence of a basic reality"(1983a: 102). This is the stage, Baudrillard says, of "simulation proper" when simulation models constitute the world and finally "devour" representation. Now, continues Baudrillard, "the structural law of values" governs, models get the better of things, and "serial production yields to generation by means of models. . . . Digitality is its metaphysical principle . . . and DNA its prophet"(1983a: 103-4). In another essay, "Simulacra and Simulations" Baudrillard
writes that "the age of simulation . . . begins with a liquidation of all referentials" (1983a: 167).

To these three orders of simulacra, Baudrillard adds a fourth one, in another essay, "After the Orgy." The first of these stages, he says, had "a natural referent and value developed on the natural use of the world." The second order was based on "a general equivalence and value developed by reference to a logic of the commodity." The third order "is governed by a code and value develops here by reference to a set of models." The fourth, he says, is "a new particle" in the "microphysics of simulacra" (1993: 5). He elaborates this "fractal stage" thus:

[A]fter the natural, commodity, and structural stages of value, comes the fractal stage. . . . At the fourth, the fractal (or viral, or radiant) stage of value, there is no point of reference at all and radiates in all directions, occupying all interstices, without reference to anything whatsoever, by virtue of pure contiguity. At the fractal stage there is no longer any equivalence, whether natural or general. Properly speaking, there is no law of value, merely a sort of epidemic of value, a . . . general metastasis of value, a haphazard proliferation and dispersal of value. (1993: 5)

In this stage the earlier laws of value are substituted by a cancerous proliferation which is beyond the control of the agency of any code. This is the stage which Baudrillard specified in an interview as one where "value has been completely fractalized and can no longer be located" (quoted in Genosko 1994: 52). This is the stage, in other words, in which the sign bears no relation whatsoever to any reality; it is its own simulacrum.
So, this synopsis of the "historical" sketch of the various stages of society shows its progress "from a capitalist-productivist society to a neocapitalist cybernetic order that aims now at total control" (Baudrillard 1993a: 111). This history of the "progress" of society is narrated in a different language by Jameson as the "myth" of the sign. It reads thus:

Once upon a time at the dawn of capitalism and middle-class society, there emerged something called the sign, which seemed to entertain unproblematical relations with its referent. This initial heyday of the sign... came into being because of the corrosive dissolution of older forms of magical language by a force... of reification, a force whose logic is one of ruthless separation and disjunction, of specialization and rationalization, of a Taylorizing division of labour in all realms. (1991a: 95-6) Jameson uses the word "reification" to mean "essentially social and psychic fragmentation— that of specialization, of the division of labour, of the labour process itself," a process which is accompanied by the destruction of communal space... and the destruction of the older forms of collective life" (1982c: 87). This force, being the very logic of capital, continued unremittingly with the growth of capitalism and transformed human relations into an appearance of relations between things thereby rendering society opaque. The "corrosive force" of reification enters the realm of language and disjoins the sign from the referent. But such a disjunction was initially not powerful enough to abolish the referent completely. "But its great distance from the sign now allows the latter to entertain a moment of autonomy, of a relatively free-floating Utopian existence, as over against its former objects," writes Jameson (1991a: 96). He describes this moment of
history as the moment when culture enjoyed autonomy, the period when language was semi-autonomous. This, he says, was the moment of modernism, and of the aesthetic realm which "redoubled the world without being altogether of it." During this period art had not only "a certain negative or critical power, but also a certain otherworldly futility."

The forces of reification continued to penetrate further and with more power as capitalism extended its influence over the hitherto unaffected areas. The sign itself was affected by its corrosive force and the signifier was disjoined from the signified. Reference and reality disappeared and meaning itself was "problematised." Jameson continues his account thus:

We are left with that pure and random play of signifiers that we call postmodernism, which no longer produces monumental works of the modernist type but ceaselessly reshuffles the fragments of pre-existent texts, the building blocks of older cultural, and social production, in some new and heightened bricolage: metabooks which cannibalize other books, metatexts which collate bits of other texts--- such is the logic of postmodernism in general, which finds one of its strongest and most original, authentic forms in the new art of experimental video. (1991a: 96)

The various stages in the evolution of culture, which Jameson describes here, correspond to the key stages in the odyssey of the disintegration of the bourgeois subjectivity discussed earlier.

These two narratives of the history of the sign imply two distinctly separate stories. The former, that of Baudrillard, using analogies between language, genetics and social organization, struggles to present a truly historical picture of the sign, and gets
rather confused when it comes to the third and fourth stages. Gary Genosko comments that Baudrillard’s idea of ‘stages’ “is rather crude” (1994: 41). This happens because he chooses to divide the modern world into three periods— the first from Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution; the second, the Industrial era; and the third, the so-called post-industrial era—and “subsequently adds a fourth order to a poorly differentiated third order.” This is done, continues Genosko, “without designating that the fourth order might be postmodern as opposed to the modern, or a mature postmodernity (post-historical or transhistorical) as opposed to an earlier postmodernity.” Thus, concludes Genosko, the model is “only vaguely historical” (1994: 41).

Jameson’s story of the “myth” of the sign is more historical and hence more comprehensive. It tells us how the forces of reification, during the three stages in the development of capitalism continued what Jameson calls the “ruthless separation and disjunction” of the sign from the referent. The cultural logic of the three stages of capitalism, Jameson’s story implies, expresses itself as realism, modernism and postmodernism respectively. The progressive disjunction of the signifier and the signified by the forces of reification, the story also implies, is accompanied by the progressive fragmentation of the individual subject. The subject of the cultural logic of postmodernism is neither the central ego of realism nor the alienated subject of the various modernisms but the decentred and utterly fragmented subject much celebrated in poststructuralist discourses. Jameson’s historical account reveals the paradox that at the same time that the aesthetic is finally integrated into the commercial system, it achieves a kind of genuine autonomy in the form of the materiality of the signifier. In other words, the concept of the autonomy of culture “allows us to witness with greater precision its
historical dissolution, and at the same time to register the paradox of a thing that disappears by becoming universal, rather than by extinction” (1992a: 202). It is because of this historical approach that Lawrence Grossberg comments that Jameson makes postmodern texts “the sign of history” (1988a: 74).

Baudrillard presents postmodern society as a society of simulations and points out Disneyland as the “perfect model of all the entangled orders of simulation” (1992: 171). “Disneyland is presented,” writes Baudrillard, “as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when, in fact, all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation” (1992: 172). The hyperreal, on the basis of the ‘reality’ of Disneyland, is not the unreal but the more real than the real. What the imaginary space of Disneyland conceals is the fact that “it is the ‘real’ country, all of ‘real’ America which is Disneyland (just as prisons are there to conceal the fact that it is the social in its entirety, in its banal omnipresence which is carceral)” (1992: 172). The Disneyland reality compels Baudrillard to redefine the “real” as “that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction” and the hyperreal as “that which is always already reproduced” (1983a: 146). The hyperreal is, thus, that which perfectly instantiates its model: “The real is produced from miniaturized units, from matrices, memory banks and command models--- and with these it can be reproduced an infinite number of times” (1992: 167).

Baudrillard contends that everyday life, in the advanced western societies, has become more and more hyperreal, and more and more areas of social life have become mere reproductions of models: “Today it is quotidian reality in its entirety--- political, social, historical and economic--- that from now on incorporates the simulatory
dimension of hyperrealism" (1983a: 147). The postmodern society that Baudrillard describes here is a sort of system that is at once energized by the consciousness of apathy, passivity, inertia and indifference, and emptied of its energy by the ruthless domination of the code of simulation. In such a society all boundaries implode into one another, and render all the binary constructions of a meaningful reality useless, ineffective and inoperative. Implosion effects the collapse of all social phenomena into one another so that all traditional distinctions between appearance and reality, meaning and representation, high and low, classes and masses, forces and relations of production, right and wrong, and so on, disappear. The impact of the implosion on society is that it produces "a floating causality where positivity and negativity engender and overlap each other; this produces a situation of inoperable inertia in which nothing can challenge or upset the system of interchangeable simulacra" (1983b: 67). The law that governs this society, writes Baudrillard, is "the law of confusion of categories. Everything is sexual. Everything is political. Everything is aesthetic. All at once" (1993: 9).

This analysis is in keeping with what he states in an earlier text, The Mirror of Production (1975). There Baudrillard argues that Marx's productivist metaphor is inadequate to comprehend and evaluate the status of commodities in the postmodern era in which the classical distinctions between the economic realm and the realm of culture have imploded. Now, we live in a situation where not only cultural products but even psychic structures have become part of the realm of the economic. (1975: 119-21) This immediately brings to mind Jameson's suggestion that in the postmodern era there has been a
prodigious expansion of culture throughout the social realm, to a point at which everything in our social life—from economic value and state power to practices and to the very structures of the psyche itself—can be said to have become "cultural" in some original and as yet untheorized sense. (1991a: 48).

But there is a profound difference between the approaches of the two theorists: while Baudrillard dismisses the Marxian model condemning it as subordinating cultural production to economic activity, or to a mode of production, Jameson, as has already been pointed out, uses an extended version of the Marxian model adopted from Ernest Mandel. Steven Connor is right when he suggests that both Baudrillard and Jameson are indebted to the Situationists, especially to Guy Debord, and share a common source in their work. He points out that these radical social critics writing during the 1960s "were the first to diagnose in contemporary life a 'society of the spectacle' in which the most developed form of the commodity was the image rather than the concrete material product" (1989: 51). Jameson himself has acknowledged the debt (1991a: 18, 276, 399).

But contrary to Baudrillard's thesis that Marxism is inadequate to analyze the postmodern socioeconomic realities it is Jameson's contention that the effacement of the boundaries between the earlier autonomous realms of the economic and the cultural and their de-differentiation in the postmodern is the moment when "a Marxism that had established its credentials as an analysis of political economy finally earned its right to new ones in the analysis of superstructures, of culture and ideology" (1998a: 85).

In Baudrillard's theory of the postmodern, not only are the traditional theories inadequate and obsolete, the proliferation of information and media has rendered the
masses inert, apathetic and passive. Information produces even more mass instead of transforming mass into energy. Information neutralizes the social field and creates an inert mass impermeable to the classical institutions of the social and to the very contents of information. (1983b: 25) Baudrillard describes the masses thus neutralized by information as “inertia,” “silence,” “figure of implosion,” “social void,” and “spongy referent.” They are “an opaque nebula whose growing density absorbs all the surrounding energy and light rays, to collapse finally under its own weight.” They are “a black hole which engulfs the social” (1983b: 1-4). These silent majorities, argues Baudrillard, refuse to participate in social and political events (1983b: 19). Silence, opacity, imperviousness, inertia, indifference, hyperconformity, apathy and passivity are the qualities that Baudrillard attributes to the masses and it compels him to declare, fairly confidently, that “the social” no longer exists: “Our society,” he says, “is perhaps in the process of putting an end to the social, of burying the social beneath a simulation of the social” (1983b: 67).

Having lost its “specificity,” Baudrillard says, the “energy of the social is reversed,” its “historical quality and its ideality” disappear, “the political becomes volatilized” and “the social itself no longer has any name” (1983b: 18-9). In contemporary society, Baudrillard feels, the social does no longer exist because it is wholly the simulated effect of the frantic desire to produce representations of the masses, to give them a definite identity, and to attribute opinions and desires to them (1983b: 67).

Baudrillard’s thesis of “the end of the social” is strong enough to convince many. He says that we have now reached a stage in the development of information and technology that it is no longer possible for us “to separate reality from its statistical, simulative projection in the media.” This, he says, has placed “reality” on slippery
grounds. Consequently, there is uncertainty regarding the whole question of “reality,” “a completely new species of uncertainty, which results not from the lack of information but . . . from an excess of information” and, hence, “unlike the traditional uncertainty which could always be resolved, is irreparable” (1992: 210). Individuals are forced into “the undivided coherency of statistics” and absorbed into “the transparency of computers” (1992: 210). The result is, writes Baudrillard:

The social becomes obsessed with itself; through this auto-information, this permanent auto-intoxication, it becomes its own vice, its own perversion . . . [it] loses its own scene. It no longer enacts itself; it has no more time to enact itself; it no longer occupies a particular space, public or political; it becomes confused with its own control screen. Overinformed, it develops ingrowing obesity. For everything which loses its scene (like the obese body) becomes for that very reason obscene. (1992: 210-11)

Douglas Kellner has pointed out that Baudrillard declares not only the end of the social, but the end of history as well. In his Cool Memories, Baudrillard states that history never really existed, and what we have understood as history may always have been a simulation. Today, we face a “futureless future in which no decisive event can await us because all is finished, perfected and doomed to infinite repetition.” It is Baudrillard’s suggestion that our frantic efforts to collect and disseminate information as well as to record historical events are “simply symptomatic of a desperate awareness that we are frozen in a glacial present in which time is annihilated” (Kellner 1989a: 209).

This projection of the theory of the end of the social and the end of history, it has to be mentioned, has been manipulated by writers from the orthodox right such as Francis
Fukuyama who declared the end of history in a different way in his much publicized *The End of History and Last Man* (1992) written after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the essay, "End of Art' or 'End of History'," Jameson writes in response to this new proclamation of the 'end of history' that it is not about the end of Time but rather about the end of Space that Fukuyama is speaking. Fukuyama's ideas express "the feeling of the constriction of space in the new world system; they bespeak the closing of another and more fundamental frontier in the new world market of globalization and transnational corporations" (Jameson 1998a: 90). Fukuyama’s proclamation of “the impossibility to imagine a future” is not the “result of the end of the Cold War or of the failure of socialism” but of “the entrance of capitalism into a new third stage and its consequent penetration of as yet uncommodified parts of the world which make it difficult to imagine any further enlargement of the system.” Thus, it is, he emphasizes, “the result of new and more fundamental spatial limits” (1998a: 90).

This notion of the “end of history,” Jameson explains, “also expresses a blockage of the historical imagination”:

[I]t is the end of a Promethean conception of production . . . in the way in which it makes it difficult for people today to continue to imagine development as a conquest of nature. At the moment when the market suffuses the world, in other words, and penetrates the hitherto uncommodified zones of former colonies, further development becomes unthinkable on account of a general . . . turn away from the older heroic forms of productivity and extraction. At the moment, in other words, when
the limits of the globe are reached, notions of intensive development become impossible to contemplate. (1998a: 91)

In another sense also, Jameson continues, this idea blocks our imagination of the future. As a result of “the cybernetic and informational revolutions” and the immense possibilities they have opened up for marketing and finance “the entire world is suddenly sewn up into a total system from which no one can secede” (1998a: 91). Jameson concludes that this impossibility of imagining any further development and industrialization, and “the impossibility of imagining a secession from the new world system and a political and social, as well as economic, delinking from it” are “spatial dilemmas” that “immobilize our imaginative picture of global space today” (1998a: 91-92). It is to overcome these spatial dilemmas that Jameson proposes “cognitive mapping” the details of which will be discussed later.

The political upshot of this concept of the postmodern society as the site of the end of the social and the end of history is that it rules out the possibility of any oppositional political efforts to subvert the forces of simulation. Though there are incisive observations regarding the manipulation of the “public” and “power,” Baudrillard’s theory neglects the fact that it is the forces of capital that have been instrumental in the creation of models and simulations. Baudrillard’s claim that in this cybernetized, mediatized, and rationalized world resistance is mirage and social transformation is illusion will serve only the very same forces. Baudrillard’s thesis of aestheticization of everything in the postmodern reminds one of Benjamin’s warning that “the logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into politics” (1982: 241). This aestheticization of politics, Thomas Dumm writes, “as the hidden triumph of fascism in
contemporary life” can be seen “operating through consumptive practices” (1988: 219). In such a situation his proposal for “withdrawing into the private” as the most appropriate form of resistance, as a “form of actively resisting political manipulation” is, in fact, the refusal of any political action (1983b: 39). That is why Steven Best says that Baudrillard’s upholding of “aleatory schemes and the death of meaning, the social and reality itself” will forestall “any possibility of collective praxis” (1989: 338). This disapproval of any collective action, on the pretext of “a direct defiance of the political,” Alex Callinicos says, is nothing more than “a facile attempt to trump the Foucauldian concept of resistance” (1989: 86).

Baudrillard’s failure to develop a convincing theory of political resistance is justified by Arthur Kroker on the grounds that “the language of resistance is recuperative of the logic of the simulacra that feed parasitically on ‘challenge and resistance’” and that “the rhetoric of resistance falls silent in the face of cynical history, cynical sex and cynical power” (Kroker 1987: 183). Such a blind defence of a conservative approach is made possible by the rather naïve acceptance of the indifference, apathy, and passivity of the masses as “an explicit and positive counter-strategy— the task of absorbing and annihilating culture, knowledge, power, the social” (Baudrillard 1983b: 11). What is objectionable in this theory of Baudrillard’s is the classical conservative way in which he considers society as nothing but a conjunction of “masses” and “crowds.” Baudrillard does so because he believes that the individual subject has, in the postmodern times, been seduced by objects, and hence, “the position of the subject has become simply untenable” (quoted in Kellner 1989a: 165-6). In this new destructured and dehistoricized telematic society the very distinction between the subject and the object has been abolished, and
under the circumstances, the older conception of the subjective self holding mastery and possession of the objective world and transforming it according to its will, is no longer tenable. Mark Poster has pointed out that Baudrillard is mistaken in assuming that “because the old models are gone, none will replace them” and his “totalizing position forecloses the possibility of new movements.” Such “sweeping gloomy pronouncements” are, continues Poster, “a depressing hyperbole of the hyperreal” and they “transgress the line of critical discourse” (Poster 1990: 66).

Steven Connor joins issue with these apocalyptic pronouncements of Baudrillard and says that they are clear evidences of his hatred for any kind of social movement, either centralized or united. Connor writes:

When Baudrillard breezily dismisses concepts like state, class and power as empty mystifications, it is in the service of that well-nigh-official mystification of our time, the nullification of collective life in any form and its ruthless processing into fiction. Baudrillard ends up a conspirator in something like the double process he describes, in which the idea of the social is fabricated at the same time as the experience of the social is discredited. (1989: 60)

Douglas Kellner is also in agreement with such a view. He considers Baudrillard’s theory conservative and reactionary. In political terms, Kellner remarks, Baudrillard’s statements on the end of the social imply “a capitulation to the hegemony of the Right and secret complicity with aristocratic conservatism.” They form “a questionable and arguably reactionary attempt to demolish theory, political economy and radical politics altogether” (Kellner 1989a: 215).
This kind of a capitulation on the part of Baudrillard seems rather strange when we realize that he was one who set out to formulate a revolutionary social theory declaring that the theories of Marx and Freud were mere mirrors of production and desire and therefore inadequate to build resistance against the system. What he comes to now is a sort of “resigned celebration” (Callinicos 1989: 86). This is the same resignation and apathy he attributes to the “silent majority” of the postmodern scene under whose “shadow” he seems to take shelter, claiming that such a refusal to participate ought to disturb a power structure that requires some form of response or participation to keep it going. Real power, Baudrillard maintains, is dead. We have only illusions of power, mere signs of power behind which there are only other signs.* One of the responses to such a “wholesale anti-realist doctrine,” as Christopher Norris calls it, could be the flat rejoinder that there are real and present facts of experience——inequality, deprivation, urban squalour, unemployment, massive and increasing differentials of wealth and power——which make nonsense of Baudrillard’s sophistical case that nothing exists outside the endless circulation of ungrounded arbitrary signs. (1990: 188)

There is no doubt that whoever takes cognizance of these stark, solid realities would agree with Douglas Kellner that it is now, more than ever that the world needs “critical, reconstructive intervention into the field of radical social theory and politics” (Kellner 1989a: 214). Given the fact that we live in a new era in which “previous boundaries in our theories and social worlds no longer hold, we need new maps of the social world, and

* Baudrillard discusses the power structure in Forget Foucault. The idea presented here is based on Kellner’s discussion of it in his Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond: 131-43.
new political strategies to produce a better world” (Kellner 1989a: 215). This is precisely what Jameson is attempting to do in his critique of postmodernism, and specifically in his concept of “cognitive mapping.”

Given Baudrillard’s by now familiar end-of-the-ideology rhetoric, it is not surprising that he claims art to have lost its critical edge. In an interview “Game with Vestiges,” he says: “[A]rt can no longer operate as radical critique or destructive metaphor. So art at the moment is adrift in a kind of weightlessness.” He adds that art is “losing its specificity. . . . It cannot do anything more than operate out of a combinatory mode” (quoted in Kellner 1989a: 116). Again, in the essay “After the Orgy,” he writes:

Instead of being subsumed in a transcendent reality art has been dissolved within a general aesthetization of everyday life, giving way to a pure circulation of images, a transaesthetics of banality. . . . [T]he crucial moment for art was undoubtedly that of Dada and Duchamp, that moment when art, renouncing its own aesthetic rules of the game, debouched into the transaesthetic banality of the image. (1993: 11)

Baudrillard doesn’t seem to be too much enthusiastic about pop art, and in keeping with his theoretical position, considers it to be the simulation of models which follows the logic of consumption and eliminates representation as a privileged vehicle of meaning: “Pop signifies the end of perspective and the end of evocation, the end of testimony, the end of the active creator and by no means least of all, the end of subverting the world and of iconoclastic art” (quoted in Best and Kellner 1991: 109). In the essay from which the above quotation has been cited, Baudrillard claims that “all art up to Pop was based on a vision of the world ‘in depth’” (Kellner 1989a: 109). Thus he accords a
historical significance to pop art with which art becomes merely a reproduction of the various signs of the consumer society which itself, according to Baudrillard, is a system governed by the logic of signs. So pop art is a sign of the logic of the consumer society. Postmodern painting (for instance, the paintings of Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol), argues Baudrillard, is emblematic of a culture of signs, in which culture is reduced to a system regulated by signs within which ‘art’ enjoys a privileged role thereby being subjected to the very rules and system of signification like any other commodity. Thus, commodified art is evaluated on the basis of market regulations (1981: 108-10). This is how it has lost its contestatory edge: “One must surrender to the evidence,” Baudrillard says; “art no longer contests anything, if it ever did. Revolt is isolated, the malediction ‘consumed’” (1981: 110).

This denial of the oppositional function of art, this call for “surrender to the evidence” is nothing less than meek submission to those very same forces which control the market regulations and to the hegemonic forces that govern contemporary society. Baudrillard, of course, points his finger at capitalism as being responsible for such a state of affairs. He doesn’t deny the fact that this postmodern world of the hyperreality of images is a historical product of the technical changes brought about by the development of capitalism, and, in the essay “Symbolic Exchange and Death” he describes the postmodern society as “the brothel of capital” (1992: 128). Baudrillard’s reference to the role of capital in the repressive effects of the code has already been mentioned. Again, in “Simulacra and Simulations” this is what he has to say about capital:

[I]t was capital which was the first to feed throughout its history on the destruction of every referential of every human goal, which shattered every
distinction between true and false, good and evil, in order to establish a radical law of equivalence and exchange, the iron law of its power. It was the first to practice deterrence, abstraction, disconnection, deterritorialization etc., and if it was capital which fostered reality, the reality principle, it was also the first to liquidate it in the extermination of every use value, of every equivalence, of production and wealth in the very sensation we have of the unreality of the stakes and the omnipotence of manipulation. (1992: 179-80)

But the problem with this kind of pronouncements is that they are too general, and, as Douglas Kellner says, in them Baudrillard never specifies “what types of capital are the major players; nor does he discuss any specific strategies of capital realization thus severing ‘capital’ from the mode of production and political economy” (1989a: 62).

There are, of course, those who defend Baudrillard, his theory of the postmodern and his political project of considered resignation, arguing that his proposal of “the more radical alternative of ‘resistance as object’ [is] the line of political resistance most appropriate to the simulacrum.” Kroker and Cook, who are the proponents of this defence, continue: To a system which “represents great convergence of power and seduction” and which de-valorizes meaning cynically “the relevant and perhaps only political response is that of ironic detachment” (1988: 177).

Baudrillard’s whole theory and the above-mentioned defense of it are self-reflexive in that they submit to the very hegemonic powers of the semiotic-cybernetic system they describe. Lawrence Grossberg calls this “an embracing of nihilism without empowerment, since there is no real possibility of struggle” (Grossberg 1988a: 175). But
Baudrillard has his own justification for adopting such a stance: Nihilistic “theoretical violence . . . is the only resource which remains for us,” he says, the only way to challenge “the other nihilism” of this hegemonic system (quoted in Genosko 1994: 73). In the essay “On Nihilism” we see Baudrillard reiterating this nihilism: “If being nihilist is to take, to the unendurable limit of the hegemonic systems, this radical act of derision and violence . . . then I am a terrorist and a nihilist in theory,” he writes. In opposition to “this nihilism of radicality,” he adds, “is the system’s own, the nihilism of neutralization” (quoted in Kellner 1989a: 118). But this nihilism of Baudrillard, far from being radical, as he claims, is “without joy, without energy, and without hope for a better future,” and as Kellner says, it “privileges the scene of nihilism over the phantasy of meaning” (Kellner 1989a: 118).

The crucial question one is forced to ask at the end of it all is how oppositional is Baudrillard’s theory of the postmodern in the face of the hypersimulative activity and the hyperconformity of the masses he has articulated therein. From the evidence of what we have seen above there is not much that we can point out by way of an answer in the affirmative. There is no mention in Baudrillard of any form of oppositional practice to counter the neutralizing forces of simulation, nor is there any attempt on his part to establish any political discourse relevant to counterhegemonic praxis. Instead, he wallows in the revolutionary diversions of a negative politics. We find in Baudrillard one most willing to celebrate the inertia, indifference, silence, and above all, the nihilism that he describes. The fact that the postmodern society, as Baudrillard describes it, is one of illusion and disinformation doesn’t necessarily mean that we abandon all questions of reality and truth and the desire for a better future. His rejection of the classical categories
and classical modes of representation that aim at mirroring the “real” betrays a poststructuralist position which Baudrillard seems to use to dissolve even the concept of radical politics. His theory of simulations, as described above, has much in common with the poststructuralist critique of referentials in that in the Baudrillardian scenario referentials have vanished altogether and there is nothing outside the frame of simulations, no ‘real’ in which theory can be located so as to construct a radical politics.

This is where Jameson’s critique of postmodernism is radically different. For him truth is not a fictive or imaginary construct and therefore theory cannot be considered a discredited exercise. His attempt to theorize the specific logic of postmodernism is part of the political struggle to build resistance against the forces of reification. This he does by historically situating postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism. His theorization of postmodernism “attempts to map the cultural and political implications of capitalism’s universalizing logic” (Homer 1998: 2). It is intended to expose the forces of exploitation so that an effective counterhegemonic praxis can be formulated (Jameson 1991a: 400). Baudrillard’s general thesis on the historical shift--- “the passage from a metallurgic into a semiurgic society”--- is very much in line with Lyotard’s fundamental argument about postmodernism--- the collapse of all certainty, the dissolution of the metanarrative of truth--- which follows an anti-Enlightenment perspective” (Baudrillard 1981: 185). The primary lesson to be drawn from such an argument, as Christopher Norris points out, is that “any politics which goes along with the current postmodern drift will end up by effectively endorsing and promoting the work of ideological mystification” (1990: 191).
Thus, neither Lyotard nor Baudrillard has any committed stance for oppositional politics and, in their theories of the postmodern, political resistance against the existing hegemonic powers is reduced to the conscious consumption of cultural products. Theirs is what Alex Callinicos calls "an aesthetic pose" which is "based on the refusal to seek either to comprehend or to transform existing social reality" (1989: 170). Both theorists fail to engage, or, they ignore, the question of a whole new category of personnel involved in what David Harvey calls "the image production industry" (Harvey 1989: 290). Responsible for the production of the popular materials for the wider mass culture audience this whole industry, says Harvey, "specializes in the acceleration of turnover time through the production and marketing of images [and information]" (Harvey 1989: 290). It is also significant that there is nothing of the kind of socioeconomic analysis in either theorist but some casual references such as the one that Lyotard makes about the emergence of a new postindustrial society. They cannot do so because they do not offer any historical analysis of the newly emerging social condition and theirs is a kind of dehistoricized postmodernism that focuses on a functionalist system of production and exchange of images and information. Jameson’s observation, in this context, gains an added significance:

The thematics of science and knowledge in its social form . . . raises issues of social class--- is the technocracy produced by such a primacy of knowledge a bureaucracy or a whole new class?--- and of socioeconomic analysis--- is this moment of advanced industrial society a structural variant of classical capitalism or a mutation and the dawning of a wholly new social structure . . . in which it is now science, knowledge,
technological research rather than industrial production and extraction of surplus value that is the "ultimately determining instance"? (1984e: xiii)

Jameson's critique of postmodernism, it has already been illustrated, attempts to answer these socially and politically relevant questions that he himself poses. And, it is by providing concrete answers to these systemic questions that Jameson attempts to cartograph a counterhegemonic praxis. Jameson himself has admitted that it is imperative that "political people . . . still committed to radical social change" endorse "a 'problematic' that asks such systemic questions" (1984e: xv). The theories of Lyotard and Baudrillard are valuable contributions to this general problematic though they are not apparently committed to any social or political revolution (Jameson 1984e: xv). It is precisely to this sociopolitical revolution that Jameson is committed and his theory of the postmodern is a historical analysis of the contemporary society which will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which late capitalism functions and expands its penetrative powers to nullify any efforts at resistance. His critique attempts to awaken political consciousness necessary to build resistance against the reifying powers of capitalism. The full value of Jameson's critique can be realized only when his views on the sociopolitical changes that the global expansion of capital has brought about are considered in detail.