

Interview

FREDRIC JAMESON:

MARXIST HERMENEUTICS

by Maria Luisa F. Torres

Yes, *the* Fredric Jameson was in town.

The American critic whom the distinguished British intellectual, Terry Eagleton, has referred to as one of the "major aestheticians of the century to date," and whom Jonathan Culler, noted American scholar and critic, considers "the leading Marxist critic in America" today, came to the Philippines last August in a stop-over on his way to a brief teaching stint at the People's Republic of China.

Fredric Jameson is the author of such original and provocative books as *Marxism and Form*, *The Prison-House of Language*, *The Political Unconscious*, *Sartre: The Origins of a Style* and other equally important books and articles on culture and literature that utilize and venture new insights and methods in Marxist theory and criticism. He was in Yale University for sometime — where Jacques Derrida teaches part-time — in which he is said to have posed the Marxist challenge to the Derridean theory in its apolitical form.

Jameson received his Ph.D. in French from Yale University, but he also studied in Paris, Munich and Berlin. He has worked at Harvard, University of California at San Diego, Yale and the University of California at Santa Cruz. Currently, he is Professor of Literature in Duke University. Apart from his already well-known published books, he has a two-volume *Collected Essays* and "a much smaller book" provisionally titled *On Tradition* which are both coming out "probably next year." Right now, he is working on modernism, as a sequel to "the big essay on post-modernism" that appeared in the *New Left Review* two summers ago.

In his latest book, *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Jameson seems to be conducting a dialogue with non-Marxist and Marxist thinkers and aestheticians alike, arguing "the priority of the

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political interpretation of literary texts." In his own words, the book "conceives of the political perspective not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today . . . but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation."

Towards the end of December of this year, Jameson will be back in the Philippines, this time in another stop-over on his way back to the United States, to speak in a forum which will be open to the public.

The interview that follows, conducted last August 21 at the coffeeshop of the Silahis International Hotel in Manila shortly before he left for the airport, is meant to introduce the works and the ideas of Fredric Jameson to today's Filipino audience.

Ma. Luisa F. Torres (MLFT): As a Marxist critic, how do you view the current debates between Marxism and Post-structuralism?

Fredric Jameson (FJ): To begin with, in the current debates between Marxism and what is called Post-structuralism, the key issues that have been raised by the people who are generally called Post-structuralists — essentially French thinkers today and many American intellectuals as well who draw on a whole range of recent theories of Derrida, Foucault, and so on and so forth — as far as Marxism is concerned, turned around the concept of totality, and probably also in a somewhat different way, around the notion of the individual.

Post-structuralism takes as one of its basic themes the idea that any conception of totality is somehow repressive — whether that's understood in terms of the social order, in terms of a work of art that's totally organized, or in terms of a philosophy which, in one way or another, appeals to what they call totality. The classic philosophical work of contemporary Marxism — probably, the philosophical text of Marxism since Marx himself never lived long enough to write the philosophical underpinnings of his work — the classical text is still Lukács' book, *History and Class Consciousness*, in which the word totality, or the concept of totality is the key concept. I still hold to this view, and I would like to defend it a little bit this way, particularly for academics:

The organization and development of middle-class and the bourgeois disciplines in the university system has followed a logic of fragmentation and specialization. Each new advance of thinking in science and other fields has been accompanied by, let's say, the emergence of a new sub-discipline which splits off, becomes a field in its own right — and so you have chemistry, organic chemistry and molecular chemistry, and so on and so forth. There's a logic, in other words, almost a Cartesian logic, where larger, vaguer agglomerates are broken up into smaller and smaller units which propose new but ever more specialized objects of study. Now, no one would deny the enormous richness of developments in bourgeois science and in this organization of the disciplines. But what they produce are then ever more specialized minds, ever more specialized people, and kinds of knowledge which are separated radically from each other. So that the more a given discipline develops, the less it is possible for it to make connections between its own terms, or I'd like to say, its own "code", and the code of other disciplines.

You understand that from a Marxist framework, this evolution of science and of the disciplines of knowledge, must be seen from a standpoint of the larger social order as a subform of what in the world of production, is called the division of labor. That is, this is a form of the division of labor that takes place in the mind. This said, it seems to me that the great strength of Marxism — something that depends very much on the concept of the totality

— is that it's one of the few philosophies today, if I may call it that, which upholds a concept or an ideal of a totality of knowledge, of a form of knowing the world which ultimately and ideally seeks to reconnect all of those separate forms of knowledge, and to make connections between all of those distinct and different codes, because its ontological presupposition is that social life is a whole. And therefore, although the human mind is both limited in its powers and very much hampered by our biological situation as isolated biological individuals and isolated subjects, nonetheless, a philosophy like Marxism presupposes that all of us are, in some sense, caught in a vast network which has some total logic and meaning of its own, which it is very difficult for us to see directly. So that what's criticized as being old-fashioned or as a weakness in Marxism is, on the contrary, its one great strength over all the bourgeois forms of thinking and all existing, surviving philosophies, except perhaps a much more ancient system like Theology, which also gives itself as a total thing. I don't think one should underestimate therefore, the power of Marxism as a basis for scientific research, although we don't generally insist on that side of things.

But I would like to insist much more on the role of Marxism as making connections in a world, today, in which there is a kind of post-tower Babel of the different codes and the different forms of knowledge. The dialectic, in other words, is the only philosophical position which is not linked to a specific language, but is rather able to move above distinct languages and make connections between those, make connections between codes — I would like to call that "transcoding" which, I think, is very important. How you take, for example, the very specialized materials of psychoanalysis that seem so tightly bound to their own specific, historical Freudian code, and connect those to languages of politics or history, which seem very different. Or to use another even more classical dialectic word, how you make "mediations" between these languages, between the disciplines that they spring from, and finally, between the whole realms of experience into which our own lives are broken up. Our own general world experience, in other words, as in the narrower academic world, is fragmented and broken up. So that initially, our experience is broken between private life and the public, the family, politics, then between the world of work, between various other kinds of specializations. And we're constantly, in the course of our lives, moving from one of these compartments to another, without ever being able to make connections between these things.

Marx thought that this inability to make connections between the various elements of the whole was not simply a matter of individual weakness or lack of intelligence or whatever, but was an objective fact of the structure of our social life. He said, in a famous phrase, defending the importance of science and theory, that if appearance coincided with essence, that is, if on the surface of life and our personal experience, we could actually see the logic of reality at work, then, he said, science would no longer be necessary. Science and theory, that is to say, Marxian science and the dialectic, are necessary precisely because as individuals, we are never in a position to live with a grasp of the totality of these interrelations. Now, a position like that, I think, has tremendous advantages over the very powerful local insights and perception of a whole range of contemporary bourgeois philosophies and research. It also leads us in the direction of all kinds of questions that I want to come back to, for example, in the cultural area. Obviously, one of the great connections that Marxists feel very important to make, but that bourgeois esthetes and thinkers, on the contrary, are concerned precisely not to make, is the connection between culture and cultural activity, and economic produc-

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tion and the facts of the social classes. That's one very fundamental example of this (Marxist) process in which you can see in knowledge as making the links between areas that seem, on the surface of it, remote from one to another.

But I now want to come to another issue of this where Marxism shares a little bit some of the current concerns of Post-structuralism. On this first key theme of Post-structuralism, the repudiation of the notion of the totality as repressive and somehow evil, obviously, Marxism must take the other side. The second major theme of Post-structuralism is however, theme of the decentered subject, the attack on subjectivity, on individuality, on the ego — and the terms one chooses here again depends a little bit on the codes — whether one is coming out of psychoanalysis, out of politics, out of film theory, whatever. But the basis of the terms seems the same in all these cases: a great suspicion of an aesthetic which would posit as did some of the western Modernist classics—I'm thinking of Henry James, for example — the primacy of a total consciousness which could grasp everything that is going on. And in fact, this is also a reproach obviously made even to Hegel in philosophy, that is, the notion of an Absolute Spirit. Now, I take this refusal of the centered subject or, let's say, even this ethical and political imperative to decenter the subject and our own subjectivity as on one level, a reflection on the destiny of what has been called bourgeois individualism, the bourgeois ego. And I think from that standpoint then, it becomes interesting to look at that particular problem in historical terms. We're told — it's at least one version of the historical narrative — that before capitalism, the ego in that form didn't exist, that, and I'm already now extrapolating, that the precapitalist ego is much less centered and is focused in community networks. With the arrival of capitalism, with the arrival of Protestantism as the spirit of capitalism which involves, as Max Weber showed us, a whole range of other things — a kind of psychic training, of delayed gratification, a new organization of worktime, and the very emergence of money and wage-labor — with the whole range of things like that, accompanied by a transformation of the family system, there comes into being an experience of the self as an isolated and closed but acquisitive and aggressive unit of energy. There comes into being also a whole range of political values that we certainly

wouldn't seek to deny the very great value of, namely, the notion of equality of individual subjects. But Marxism has always looked at those political values — liberty, equality, fraternity — with a certain irony, since they also spring from the capitalist work market, the labor market, in which one is equal in the sense of being equal to sell one's labor value. So that where the political and juridical value of the concept of equality is very important, nonetheless, its underpinnings stem from this radical atomization of subjectivity, from this emergence of distinct individual, atomized, isolated subjects, something which will finally give rise in historical experience to all those expressions of solitude, anxiety, anomie, that we find in the big industrial capitalist city at the end of the 19th century, with its great literature of Angst, and so forth. So that it seems plausible that one should wish, indeed, somehow to shake off this hold of the old centered isolated subject and of individualism with its acquisitive and aggressive values. And indeed, the Post-structuralists were not by any means the first to call for this, although their language, psychoanalytic and Lacanian, is somewhat different and new.

On the other hand, the historical question about that theme of Post-structuralism is this: Are we calling for the decentering of the subject now because we began to come to be aware of the crippling nature of that individualism, or are we not perhaps now calling for this because it's already taking place in our society? That is, is this so-called valorization of the decentered subject a call for something that doesn't exist, or is it not perhaps itself already simply the expression of a historical process that's taking place right now — the disappearance of the ego and the individual subject and the old bourgeois entrepreneurial ego in the era of multinational capital and its new kinds of collectivity? That would be rather my own position on this. And I think it is, at least, worthy of debate. So that, Marxism, which has always been radically anti-individualistic in that sense, has no problem with a theme of this kind.

But then, when we come to the more interesting manifestations of this . . . I think of a philosopher who, I think, is one of the most interesting of all contemporary western philosophers, Gilles Deleuze — I don't know if he's known here — with his *Anti-Oedipus* and its description of a new way of living in this society which would be radically anti-individualistic and for which he uses the slogan of "schizophrenia" to give the sense of what this atomized consciousness would be. I find that very powerful. But I would want to say, and Deleuze himself says so in the last pages of the *Anti-Oedipus*, that this is rather a recipe for living under capitalism. That is, this does not give us really a utopian anticipation of a different way of living the subject which would not be that of the old centered ego. In fact, I would like to say that there isn't really one alternative to the ego or the centered subject. There are really two of them, and they're very distinct: One way you decenter the subject is, while remaining an isolated individual, to live this frenzied and exciting and atomized schizophrenic life for which, of course, it's always ironic that the great French examples turn out to be the United States today, and California. The other way is to "return," if I may use that word but in a very new way, to recapture the structural decentering of the subject which is implicit in all communal or collective life since one is decentered as a subject also when one is a part of the group. There, the great text — very difficult and abstruse, but I think, the great contemporary statement of such a possibility — remains for me Sartre's late book, *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, where he talks about group structure in just those terms. That is, when a group really exists, there are no longer any individual subjects; to be a part of a group, one is already structurally decentered by the fact of collectivity. This was,

it seems to me, the case in precapitalist society in very distinct ways. It will be the case in future socialist societies. If we understand the decentering of the subject in that way, then, it becomes possible, I think, to make of it a very fundamental ideal of Marxism itself, which must always, it seems to me, attempt to reinvent this ideal of a new form of collective life, where we're all involved in constructing the collective project and in the process of social transformation.

MFLT: Are you saying that it is indeed possible to fuse the key themes of Marxism and Post-structuralism?

FJ: I think the language you're using may look plausible if one has before one a post-structuralist text and then someone else takes a bit of that and rewrites it in Marxist language. I don't think that's finally the right way of thinking about it. I would say, on the contrary, that we must look at the very great achievements of some of the Post-structuralist thinkers as real but sometimes distorted awarenesses of the same problems Marxists are concerned with. So, I don't think it's a matter of taking someone else's ideas and then appropriating those. I think, on the contrary, that some of these thinkers have had very profound but limited, local, contained senses of certain contemporary realities with which we are also very necessarily concerned. So, when one talks about this fusion of Marxism and Post-structuralism, I think, one is rather talking about a new effort to go back to those things that have been discovered, and to see what those are in more comprehensive terms.

My view of what I'm calling — and I don't mean this to be dismissible, pejorative, it's a descriptive term — Bourgeois philosophy, as opposed to Marxist philosophy, is that, and this follows very much Lukács' method in *History and Class Consciousness* — that these philosophies always, in some sense, have their moments of truth, that is, they see something that's really going on. But then, they have another fear, and that's the fear of making total connections because ultimately, when one makes connections, one is ultimately led to the great question of totality, namely, how one changes social life as a whole. If one is, by temperament, by ideology, by social privilege, in some way, in a structural relationship of complicity with an existing order, then, the very functioning of ideology is to warn you that you must not overstep certain bounds in your thought as well as in your practice. So that middle-class philosophy always ends up drawing lines for itself and boundaries and protecting itself by what I call certain "strategies of containment," so that it will never reach that moment when the totality becomes visible and questions of praxis, which are necessarily also political questions, emerge.

My method of dealing with other philosophies for which I have great respect is, therefore, a two-fold one: What is their moment of truth? What are the very real phenomena that they discover? And then, what are the strategies of containment, negatively, by which they've sought to turn those back into more comfortable and protective, contemplative, purely philosophical ways of describing and looking at things? So that, from that point of view, Marxism's relationship to these things is an active one, which is not only involved in extracting this or that little nugget or jewel which has been produced by, let's say, other philosophies, but in trying to reconnect those to their social origins and trying to see those as so many symptoms and also distorted ways of grasping realities with which we must all be concerned, and to reconstruct their findings on a larger and more satisfactory basis which is again, as I've just said, that of the Marxian conception of the social and historical totality.

Let me give an example, now referring to Foucault, since people are interested in that. Foucault, in the United States — and I speak only for the United States — is obviously a thinker who has

been very exciting and energizing for many American intellectuals. Foucault offers not only the brilliance of his own theory and historical researches, he also seems to offer a method. And finally, he seems to offer an intellectual stance which looks political, that is, which looks revolutionary, contestatory, aggressive, negative, in the light of other kinds of research. The great merit of the eruption, if I may say that of Foucault, on the American (academic) scene has been that in a period which was returning in many ways to various kinds of formalisms, whether linguistic ones or a certain kind of deconstruction — the work of Jacques Derrida is much more complicated than that but there is, I think, what one can say loosely also a certain Derridian formalism — or the more literary formalism, of other areas. Foucault, for many people, meant the return to history. Foucault insisted on the historical situation and therefore, had this tremendous positive merit of calling on us to go back to history without losing the richness of the theoretical analysis of these textual phenomena. And more than that, the history he asks us to go back to seems to be a history of struggle, that is, a history of domination by certain types of paradigms, a history of repression, of the silencing of ranges of groups and individuals and languages, and therefore, a vision of history which could do seemingly much more justice to the bloodiness of human history as we know it, than many of the seemingly more contemplative views of history, for example, the Heideggerian view of history as the loss of the sense of being. Foucault's history seems to involve the body, real people, suffering, torture, and so on, and seems therefore, to be aimed at some very basic political facts, of power and domination.

Now, from a Marxist standpoint, this must obviously be saluted and admired, but I think it isn't ungrateful to also have some second thoughts about the way in which Foucault's method works. When one looks at Foucault now from the standpoint of the Marxist tradition, rather than from that of the bourgeois or middle-class academic formalisms, one sees at once that Foucault's recent work is explicitly anti-Marxist and has been used in a hostile way against the dialectic and against the Marxist conceptions of political action, and that, among other things, precisely because Foucault is one of those I mentioned in the beginning for whom the attack on the conception of totality is a fundamental theme. For Foucault, power and knowledge are closely linked to totalizing conceptions of knowledge. So that for Foucault, all conceptions of totality and totalization, including the Marxist one, are then necessarily vehicles for power and domination. Well, obviously then, from that standpoint, Foucault becomes an adversary for a Marxist position, and that's what I want to say something about now.

I think that we must try to understand the way in which Foucault has reenacted one of the classic anti-Marxist moves and strategies at the end of the 19th century. My comparison is always the work of Max Weber. Weber also, like Foucault, comes into the intellectual scene at a moment when Marxism exists and is a powerful presence. Weber and Foucault are alike, nourished by Marxist thought, that is, their work is inconceivable without a certain Marxist foundation. Neither are Marxists, however, and for both, one of the key but subtle, underground intellectual ambitions, if you like, is to create a system which escapes the imperatives of historical materialism, namely, the call to praxis, and to a certain social transformation, class struggle, which is inherent in Marxism. This is done in both cases by a very strategic move that I want to insist on: It is a move which displaces the problematic or the object of study or the framework of discussion from the economic to the political, which seeks to translate issues of economic exploitation and the structure of production into the rather different issues of those of domination and oppression.

Now, obviously for Marxists, the economic language includes the political one. That's the whole point about the descriptions of economic exploitation and the labor process which ultimately include descriptions of the political superstructure, of the forms of state power necessary to secure this kind of exploitation of labor. When one displaces that discussion to a purely political one in which the question is purely that of power in general, the economic, I think, becomes repressed or lost. So that — to limit myself now to Foucault rather than to Weber — although Foucault seems to address issues of domination in vibrant ways which very much concern us in our immediate daily lives — perhaps even more, let's say, than the abstractions of capital, and Foucault really seems to be dealing with situations in which bodies are mangled by state power and in which groups of individuals are both institutionally and physically and mentally oppressed by other dominant hegemonic institutions — nonetheless, it seems to me, to use a kind of shorthand, that Foucault's problematic is no longer the Marxist one, of the transformation of the exploitative system itself into a radically new and total system of mode of production, but rather is the anarchist, cyclical notion of a constant resistance to forms of domination which always reform again and which are always with us. So that in Foucault's politics, the local resistance to various forms of oppression and domination, power, always remains that, remains local. It is a Nietzschean, rather than a Marxian vision of a perpetual struggle throughout any conceivable human history in the future. I think, therefore, that we have to be very aware of this anarchist and purely political dimension of Foucault's politics and of his vision of history to understand what's usable in Foucault for us and what isn't, and to see that if one is really aiming at political work whose project is that of the transformation of society as a whole, Foucault's conception of revolt and resistance can only be a negative, an important but a negative and a limited and a local moment within a larger kind of politics which must be somehow posited. And I would say, that the same holds, therefore, for all of Foucault's thought and all of his research and his texts. And this is, of course, very much a question of political praxis and strategy and tactics and organization, just as much as it is a question of theory and philosophy and so forth.

MLFT: Apart from the theme of totalization, it seems to me that the concept of instrumentalization has also somehow figured in the debates. Could you comment on this?

FJ: You know, the concept of instrumentalization belongs to Marxism. I mean, it is something which is already implicit in Hegel, which is certainly part of Marx's own critique of what was then utilitarianism, a certain notion of bourgeois reason. The Germans distinguished very usefully between *Verstand* and *Vernunft*. *Vernunft* is the dialectical form of reason which is at the basis of Hegel's dialectic. *Verstand* is the more limited form of instrumental reason which finally emerged in bourgeois positivism and which is at work in all of our sciences. The Frankfurt School then, and Adorno and Max Horkheimer in particular, developed much further this notion of instrumentalization in capitalist society, drawing also — and this was a very great move of theirs — drawing also on certain conceptions of Nietzsche, to see instrumentalization as a form of domination of nature. And this will very much reemerge in the contemporary ecological movement and in feminism, and in Foucault again, the whole notion of forms of knowledge as being instrumental and being forms of the conquest and domination of nature. And I would add to that, that this is also very much an insight — although it might not always be expressed that way — of the Marxian conception of im-

perialism. That is, the relationship of the capitalist world empire to precapitalist modes of production is also one of instrumentalization, and one of instrumentalizing knowledge, something which has been rediscovered in conceptions like that of Edward Said's "Orientalism," that is, the very knowledge that capitalism produces of the Third World, is itself an instrumental form of domination.

Now, I suppose, when Marxism is reproached with instrumentalization, what's meant has to do often with the countries of actually existing socialism and with the political practice of socialist states. The whole point of the concept of instrumentalization was that instrumentalization involves the distinction between means and ends as does utilitarianism . . . But finally and paradoxically on this critical view, instrumentalization does not mean making the end paramount, but rather emphasizing the *means* in such a way that ends themselves become irrational . . . so the very end or goal or telos of action, now falls outside the rationalization process, which, in instrumentalization, comes to center on the means. The great example of the Frankfurt School was that of the concentration camp of Auschwitz. That is, supreme rational organization of technology towards an abominable, inhuman and irrational end. So that I think, one must, therefore, distinguish that critique of instrumentalization from a certain notion of the ends of social practice. It seems to me that in a genuine revolutionary situation, in which people are organized around a collective project, which is in the future towards which they're working, everything that one does is then, if you like, "in the service of the revolution," to use that phrase. But I think that anyone who has even the most distant experience of such a situation understands that this is no longer instrumentalization in this older sense in which we're using it. This is not a matter certainly of the caricatures of the Stalinist's sacrifice of the individual towards a distant end. It's a total ongoing process of everyday in which in a very different way, the opposition between means and ends are sublated, in a Hegelian way, or transcended. So, I don't really recognize in the power of that older notion of instrumentalization — as a critical notion — anything that is really damaging for some genuinely Marxist conception of revolution, or of the ultimate aims of collective social praxis.

Now, in the aesthetic realm, I suppose, this issue could also pose itself for things of propaganda art. Then, one could imagine very much a situation in which a type of art is attacked because it is merely instrumental: the art being no longer existing in itself, but meant to serve some other non-aesthetic aim. And when that aim is achieved, that means, the work of art will disappear. Whereas in middle-class art, in Modernism, the work of art is supreme; to use Kant's great expression, classical expression of the bourgeois aesthetic, it is a "nonfinalizable finality." It is a means which has no end, whose end is in itself. So that the argument would run that that kind of autonomous art, which contains its own end in itself — the great classics of western Modernism — is therefore, superior to this instrumentalized art which is a propaganda art. Now, this sounds very plausible. But I think, one of the great tasks of Marxist aesthetics today is to look again at such arguments and at political art in general. We have been so intimidated by the long period of the hegemony of formalist views and art for art's sake and of views in western aesthetics and of the primacy of the autonomy of the work of art, that we have not dared to look again afresh at what is really going on in what we call political art. If one tried to do that, I think, one would see that you have to distinguish between the text of a work of political art as it sits there all by itself on the page and the whole performance and collective situation which is really a part of it. That

is to say, so-called propaganda art, agitprop, political art, is not just a set of words which is then used as a means for some end. It is an entire experience of the collectivity. Its text includes all the people who are part of this thing and in Brecht's plays and as also in certain types of agitprop theatre, the reactions of the audience to the production are part of the whole production. The audience is really a part of the performance. So that if one sees this so-called instrumentalized political art in that sense, all of a sudden, it looks very different. Then, suddenly, the form of the thing as a whole comes to approach something much closer to what Bakhtin has called the "festival," the affirmation of the collectivity and its celebration of its own ends which are both immediate and distant. From that perspective then, I think, that the critique of instrumentalism would not seem to be nearly so damaging for various kinds of political art as it may seem from the point of view of the bourgeois scholar looking at these texts in the office of a university building or whatever.

MLFT: Can we try to tie-in the discussion now to the problem of so-called escapist entertainment which is quite dominant in our society today?

FJ: Yes. I think that in our culture today, it's very important for cultural students and even students of literature to take into account the really inescapable presence among us of media culture in general. Maybe, a hundred years ago when the media were much less well-developed, it was possible to study literary and high cultural artifacts, music and paintings, in isolation. I think that today, we're all so profoundly formed and marked by mass media, so-called commercial culture, what you're calling escapism, that we cannot even study, really understand what high culture does today or can still do, if it can do anything, without understanding the mentalities that receive high culture. That is, we are not any longer, when we read the novel of Henry James, in the same position as the reader of 1880. We come to Henry James fresh from looking at the latest Hollywood movie, watching a television series, reading a comic book, and therefore, even Henry James must be somehow different for us than it was for its original public. So that I very much endorse Raymond Williams' idea that it is no longer adequate to describe our object of study as Literature with a capital L, even if we're committed to literature passionately in our own work and our own private lives. That category of study must necessarily be enlarged as it has been by history to the category of Culture with a capital C as a whole. And then when one talks about Culture, one must be talking about mass culture. So that we must attempt in our various ways somehow to do justice to that. I've myself done a fair amount of work on so-called mass culture: I've written articles on film, I'm interested in the problem of analyzing television, I had a project to look at comic books at one time although I haven't done much with that. So, irrespective of my own talent for doing anything worthwhile on this field, I would certainly endorse it as an object of study.

This said, then, I think we have to wonder whether the notion of simple escapism is the adequate one from which to approach all of these. The notion, escapism, presupposes that on the one hand, there is, as the Frankfurt School would say, degraded culture — culture which is there for diversion, which people receive passively because they're exhausted, — and on the other, a great autonomous culture, which is active and which is not a matter of diversion, but self-consciousness, and so on and so forth. There's obviously a certain existential truth to this, that is, we must necessarily be more active when we read the great classics of Modernism, and we do receive television series in various states of exhaustion — owing to the simple facts of daily life, and the

work process and so on. But I'm not sure that this gets at what's really going on in mass culture. What's related to this view also is, again, a certain critique of mass culture as instrumentalized, that is, as manipulative. Mass culture is, of course, on the whole, produced by industries, capitalist industries, Hollywood, the television networks, who do so for a certain end, in general, increasing the advertising of the spectator level and selling products, and so on and so forth. And therefore, people often think, by definition, these things must be degraded. That is, these remain cultural objects produced for commercial ends, even if, as is the case in the United States these objects are produced by people of enormous talent. They're produced, so the argument goes, by people whose talent is essentially in the service of instrumentalized ends — ends of manipulation of the mind, of ideologies, and so forth.

Well, but the notion of manipulation implies a very passive conception of the spectator. And I wonder if it's altogether adequate for us. I believe rather that a certain commercial and escapist art manipulates, that is, that it turns certain currents and sources of power, certain psychic currents and forces and desires to its own ends. But if one thinks about this, one realizes that in order to appropriate those currents and those desires, you must first in some way awaken them. So, you must first in some way address the public, tap its deepest longings and desires and feelings in a somewhat different way, which is not yet manipulatory. I would, therefore, argue that in this seemingly passive, brutalized, exhausted, exploited public which is sitting in front of the television set — above all in such a public — there exist some of the deepest forms of what I call "Utopian longing", that is, the longing to collectivity, the proto-political will to reestablish community, to reinvent a form of social life and of living in which people's possibilities are not maimed, in which people's desires can be gratified in some newer and non-alienated way. I think that if all of these desires are present in that public, therefore, we ought to be able to invent a method of analysis which can show how those TV shows, say, or films, which strike a public, are possible only by first awakening those utopian longings, and then, in a second moment, by diverting them, disguising them, manipulating them and reappropriating them to instrumental ends. So, you have two moments then in commercial art. One is a deeper, authentic moment of truth, in which these works of art, these texts, commercial texts, are still in some way infused and informed by the same kinds of longings and forces and desires and energies which are present in high culture. And then, there is the second moment which we must then demystify by our analysis in which false solutions and all kinds of false gratifications and commodified satisfactions are offered to replace the ones which capitalism cannot offer to those desires.

If one looked at mass culture in that way, one would have, I think, a much more powerful and dialectical way of analyzing the relationship of people and of the collectivity to these works of art than is present in a criticism which simply repudiates them from a standpoint which, whether it's on the left or not, is still relatively elitist and complacent about such artifacts and their experience. And this is the experience of art of the great mass of people in our time after all. This is the place where culture in our society, our late capitalist, multinational, global society has found its most specific expression. So, we must, as students of culture, come to terms with these phenomena and struggle with them. These are our basic objects of study, and we won't really understand the possibilities of some newer form, either of high culture, or I would very much argue, of the possibilities of a new political culture, unless we find out what this mass culture is as well, and how it works. ●