

Troping History: Modernist Residue in Jameson's Pastiche and Hutcheon's Parody

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History is unquestionably one of the most contentious areas of debate among those concerned with postmodernism. I would like to take up Fredric Jameson's and Linda Hutcheon's competing accounts of the relation between postmodernism and history not because their differences stand as a recognized debate (such as that of Jürgen Habermas and Jean-François Lyotard), but rather because their accounts of postmodern fiction seem to leave little room for compromise.¹ For Jameson, postmodern narrative is ahistorical (and hence politically dangerous), playing only with pastiched images and aesthetic forms that produce a degraded historicism; for Hutcheon, postmodern fiction remains historical, precisely because it problematizes history through parody, and thus retains its potential for cultural critique. Despite the apparent polarization of these two views, I wish to negotiate a position that acknowledges both Jameson and Hutcheon because at certain turns I find both perspectives useful—depending on the cultural texts that they scrutinize. Such a negotiation is not as daunting once one realizes that what they mean by postmodernism is not the same thing: Jameson's postmodernism focuses on the consumer, while Hutcheon's originates with the artist as producer. As a result of this different focus, Jameson and Hutcheon in many instances are speaking past each other, describing different cultural phenomena.² At the same time, for all their interest in defining the postmodern, both Jameson's and Hutcheon's thinking owes much to modernism, albeit differing strands: Jameson's to the Adornian tradition and Hutcheon's to the tradition of the avant garde.

Jameson—Postmodernism or Postmodernity?

Jameson makes a series of distinctions between modernization, modernism, and modernity that provide a productive insight into his work on postmodernism:

if modernization is something that happens to the base, and modernism the form the superstructure takes in reaction to that ambivalent development, then perhaps modernity characterizes the attempt to make something coherent out of their relationship. Modernity would then in that case describe the way “modern” people feel about themselves. (*Postmodernism* 310)

The response of art and literature to the alienating effect of modernization, as is well known, was often hostile. To invoke “modernism” as a category is to think in the terrain of oppositional aesthetics and poetics. But because Jameson is so interested in mapping the affect of the contemporary moment, the way “postmodern” people feel about themselves, when he speaks of postmodernism or the postmodern, what he means might more accurately be called—to borrow David Harvey’s title—the condition of postmodernity. Hutcheon notes the confusion that results from Jameson’s use of “the word *postmodernism* for both socio-economic periodization and the cultural designation,” a move that deliberately collapses the distinction between postmodernism and postmodernity (*Politics* 25). Hutcheon’s postmodernism, which focuses on the intentions of artists to comment critically on their contemporary moment through their interventions in aesthetics and poetics, is more clearly linked than Jameson’s to what he himself means by modernism; in other words, Hutcheon’s postmodernism, like Jameson’s modernism, represents the arts’ response to the material conditions created by modernization. Jameson’s postmodernism shows his debt to both reader-response criticism and the work of Jean Baudrillard, who as early as *Consumer Society* (1970) was attempting to shift attention away from a traditional Marxist category—the means of production—and toward a new one—the means of consumption.

In *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson provides a postmortem on modernist aesthetics, for he clearly sees modernism’s protopolitical projects of defamiliarization, “with their familiar stress on the vocation of art to restimulate perception, to reconquer a freshness of experience back from the habituate and reified numbness of everyday life in a fallen world,” as no longer viable (121). Jameson groups a range of theoretical formations into this defamiliarizing aesthetic—from Ezra Pound to the Surrealists, from the Russian Formalists to phenomenology. Jameson claims that “this remarkable aesthetic is today meaningless and must be admired as one of the most intense historical achievements of the

cultural past (along with the Renaissance or the Greeks or the Tang dynasty).” When Jameson speaks of modernism, he retains a notion of the aesthetic formulations of its producers. Jameson’s shift to the axis of consumption is signaled in his characterization of himself as a “relatively enthusiastic consumer of postmodernism” (298). Despite this characterization, his sympathies clearly lie with a lost modernist project because of its relation to Utopian thinking.

The Utopian imagination has been an important part of Jameson’s thinking since *The Political Unconscious*. The “collective struggle to wrest a realm of Freedom from a realm of Necessity” (*Political* 19) signals his commitment to the political value of Utopianism as a form of praxis. Indeed, the conclusion of *The Political Unconscious*, titled “The Dialectic of Ideology and Utopia,” outlines a program for cultural analysis that goes beyond the negative hermeneutic of ideological demystification vis-à-vis texts in order simultaneously to decipher “the Utopian impulses of these same still ideological cultural texts” (296). Jameson remains committed to the Marxist narrative of liberation—the end of class—even if, with Louis Althusser, he does not see the end of class as the end of ideology.

In *Postmodernism*, Jameson writes a cultural history in which the potentially political urge of postmodernism is co-opted in much the same way that the protopolitical urge of modernism is diffused and eventually institutionalized. This lost moment of postmodernism, which for Jameson is the 1960s, functions as the break that helps mark the difference between modernism and postmodernism. Jameson’s sixties represent a time when the institutionalization of previously unacceptable modernism occurred. His nostalgia for the sixties emerges vividly in the figures he uses to characterize postmodernism—primarily drug use and pollution. Postmodernism is “the bad trip” of the sixties Utopian project and “the sixties gone toxic” (117). For Jameson, the sixties represent a time when an element of modernist aesthetics, fresh perception, was still possible.³ The contradiction in Jameson’s description, then, seems to be that the very moment that signals the end to modernism’s position as the cultural dominant reinscribes the modernist aesthetic of fresh perception. Jameson early in *Postmodernism* states what he sees at stake: “Utopian representations knew an extraordinary revival in the 1960s; if postmodernism is the substitute for the sixties and the compensation for their political failure, the question of Utopia would seem to be a crucial test of what is left of our capacity to imagine change at all” (xvi). And it is precisely change that, for Jameson, can no longer

be imagined in postmodernism, since aesthetic production has been subsumed by commodity production, thus emptying the modernist aesthetic of affect and hence of political effect. As Jameson puts it:

In the wholly built and constructed universe of late capitalism, from which nature has at last been effectively abolished and in which human praxis—in the degraded forms of information, manipulation, and reification—has penetrated the older autonomous sphere of culture and even the Unconscious, the Utopia of a renewal of perception has no place to go. (121–22)

As Philip Goldstein has rightly pointed out, Jameson's reading of postmodernism, however much he denies it, reproduces in particular ways Georg Lukács's moralizing reading of modernism, since Jameson repeatedly chastises postmodernism's tendency to integrate culture into commodity production (158).

In marking the line between modernism and postmodernism, Jameson sets out a series of oppositions. Fueled by the demands of capital constantly to make it newer, both modernism and postmodernism attempt to respond to the processes of modernization—new technologies that modify the mode of production. Jameson characterizes the difference as follows: modernism is incomplete modernization, while postmodernism is the result of complete modernization. In incomplete modernization, one could experience the New within culture somewhat organically; in effect, the New was still new. But in the contemporary moment, the complete modernization of postmodernity, our relation to the New is more formal; now, *the New is no longer new* (310). A simple example of what Jameson means by a new relationship to the New can be found in the telephone. When the telephone first entered domestic space, its newness continually called attention to itself as an intrusion of technology. Now, of course, the phone is familiar, yet each month, it seems, we are offered a half-dozen new services, from increasingly more sophisticated ways of screening calls to giving each member of the family a different ring pattern. But these new possibilities register simply as more of the same, namely, a range of consumer choices.

Another periodizing feature for Jameson is the end of the great modernist individual styles that have been replaced by postmodernist codes. The result is that postmodernism is no longer capable of achieving the critical distance necessary for parody and ends up recombining previously articulated styles. The result is pastiche. Pastiche itself is the effect of the transformation from a society with a

historical sensibility to one that can only play with a degraded historicism. “Historicism” is the name Jameson assigns to what he sees as an aestheticization of historical styles devoid of the political contradictions that those styles embodied at their particular moment. Disney’s unrealized plan to construct their version of America near the site of Civil War battlefields in Virginia exemplifies the historicism Jameson deplors. Disney hoped to produce extensive simulations of American iconography—“a circle of tepees here and a quaint New England factory there; a Civil War fort looming over a peaceful Midwestern farmstead; replicas of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island facing a 1930s state fair (complete with Ferris wheel and ball-park) and a World War II airfield” (Silberman 26). Historian Neil Asher Silberman’s embrace of Disney’s America—Jameson’s degraded historicism writ large—fittingly summarizes the mood of recent Republican Congresses: since all public history is mythologizing and commercialized anyway, why not privatize, have Disney do it instead of the National Parks Service? As Silberman concludes, “the depiction of history should be completely market-oriented and consumer-driven” (28). But from Jameson’s perspective, such an emphasis on the consumer denudes history of its political content and creates an aestheticized space of image consumption.

For Jameson, intimately linked to this degraded historicism has been postmodernity’s reshaping of subjectivity. Working from Ernest Mandel’s sense of late capitalism, Jameson links the shifts from market to monopoly to multinational capital with their corresponding aesthetics—realism, modernism, and postmodernism. In the realism of the last century, novels may have told confident narratives of the individual, but in the twentieth century, the middle-class monad or unified subject has fallen away. If alienation defines and is the dominant affect of the modernist subject, recording its ruptures and tensions, then schizophrenia is Jameson’s figure for what he sees as the vastly increased tendency toward the dissolution of the subject in postmodernism.

Drawing upon Jacques Lacan’s description of schizophrenia, Jameson concludes that “personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with one’s present” and “that such active temporal unification is itself a function of language [. . .] as it moves along its hermeneutic circle through time” (*Political* 26–27). For Jameson, our contemporary moment, with its material production of pastiche images, erases history and thus encourages a breakdown of the temporality necessary to focus the subject and “make it a space of praxis” (*Postmodernism* 27). Jameson

insists that the schizophrenic subject is a historically specific phenomenon, a move that distinguishes his sense of the death of the subject from that of deconstruction, which would maintain that the subject was always already an “ideological mirage” (15).

These features that distinguish postmodernity from modernity—our relation to the New, the shift from individual styles to codes, and the transition from the alienated to the schizo subject—all register the determining last instance of the movement from monopoly to multinational capital.

But if the modernist aesthetic, predicated on fresh perception, has come to the end of the road, what is to take its place? In *Postmodernism*, Jameson retools his theory of allegorical reading from *The Political Unconscious*, now speaking of cognitive mapping. His figure derives from his study of postmodern architecture (a field equally important to Hutcheon), and his discussions of postmodern space demonstrate the extent to which his conception of the postmodern derives from his description of the visceral response contemporary productions have on the individual as consumer.⁴ Describing the elevators and escalators in the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles as a key example, Jameson speaks of us as a generation quite literally lost in space:

Here the narrative stroll has been underscored, symbolized, reified, and replaced by a transportation machine which becomes the allegorical signifier of that older promenade we are no longer allowed to conduct on our own: and this is a dialectical intensification of the autoreferentiality of all modern culture, which tends to turn upon itself and designate its own cultural production as its content. [. . .] The descent is dramatic enough, plummeting back down through the roof to splash down in the lake. What happens when you get there is something else, which can only be described as milling confusion, something like the vengeance this space takes on those who still try to walk through it. Given the absolute symmetry of the four towers, it is quite impossible to get your bearings in this lobby. (42–43)

If we are literally lost in a physical space that disorients us, the “sharper dilemma,” as Jameson puts it, “is the incapacity of our minds [. . .] to map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects” (44). Jameson’s cognitive mapping is a call to artists

and theorists to provide a sense of historical orientation vis-à-vis social structures and their development—to recover a meaningful history from postmodernism’s degraded historicity.

One of the great ironies of Jameson’s *Postmodernism* is that even as he announces the death of modernism, and hence of its critical distance and emancipatory hopes, he reinscribes those same modernist hopes in his own writing practice. In a simple sense, Jameson’s assertion of the death of the great modernist styles is undercut by his own distinctive style, which resists pastiche by its very density and difficulty; Madison Avenue will never borrow his prose for ad copy.⁵ But more tellingly, his cognitive mapping remains yet another version of the modernist desire for the renewal of perception.

Jameson’s maps, however, are not accessible to your typical member of AAA in part because of his own preference for the high-culture artifact rather than the textuality of a broader cultural formation. His chapter on video, for example, rather than examining the impact of MTV, focuses instead on a 1979 art school video that Jameson admits few of his readers will ever see. His intelligent close reading of this video, however, places his analysis back in the realm of the modernist valorization of the work, a problem of which he is not unaware (*Postmodernism* 79).⁶ Jameson’s own maps inadequately distinguish the main highways from the secondary roads in his own intellectual journey. Only in a response to a collection of essays on his work does Jameson acknowledge that cognitive mapping is “in reality nothing but a code word for ‘class consciousness’” (“Afterword” 387). This coded meaning of cognitive mapping reminds us again of Jameson’s debt to Lukács, for whom class consciousness rests on an understanding of “society as a concrete totality, the system of production at a given moment in history and the resulting division of society into classes” (*Postmodernism* 50).⁷ As Jameson has noted elsewhere, “The project of cognitive mapping obviously stands or falls with the conception of some (unrepresentable, imaginary) global social totality that needs mapping” (“Cognitive” 356).

Jameson, then, works from an “assumption that the Marxist theory of history [as a record of class struggle] and society is unproblematically correct” (Best 363), and he remains a committed reader of postmodernism and contemporary theory. But cognitive mapping seems a problematic figure. Cognitive space knows no bounds, since cultural-aesthetic production creates more space to map. And if such production has been commodified in the fashion Jameson believes, then the power of multinational capital via advertising to colonize

new cognitive space far outruns the ability of a small band of intellectuals to chart clearly where the borders of freedom and necessity lie. Jameson's totalizing and enervating sense of postmodernism must be questioned to avoid participating in his despair over the present. "If [. . .] we have lost the modernist faith in becoming," as Harvey seems implicitly to ask Jameson, "is there any way out except through the reactionary politics of an aestheticized spatiality? [. . . And] if aesthetic production has now been so thoroughly commodified and thereby become really subsumed within a political economy of cultural production, how can we possibly stop that circle closing onto a produced, and hence all too easily manipulated, aestheticization of a globally mediatized politics?" (305). These questions recall Jameson's response to a similar question asked after a lecture he gave in 1983: "I don't understand how the politics I am proposing is repressive, since I don't think I have yet even proposed a politics, any more that I have really proposed an aesthetics" ("Cognitive" 360). In *Postmodernism*, Jameson articulates an aesthetics of schizoreception but does not articulate a politics that responds to the cultural malaise he so elegantly diagnoses. Linda Hutcheon does not shy away from articulating a postmodern politics, but her political claims for postmodernism do not always easily reconcile with her postmodern poetics.

Hutcheon—Limiting Historiographic Metafiction

Hutcheon's arguments in both *The Poetics of Postmodernism* and *The Politics of Postmodernism* are often developed in direct response to Jameson, who favors modernism over postmodernism; as a result her discussion at times sounds like a polemic against modernism. Even in distancing herself from what she sees as strawman oppositions between modernism and postmodernism, Hutcheon inadvertently produces the opposition yet again. Criticizing Ihab Hassan for "creating parallel columns that place characteristics of the one next to the opposite characteristics in the other," Hutcheon decries this "'either/or' thinking" for attempting to resolve "the unresolvable contradictions within postmodernism" (*Poetics* 49). Instead of opposing modernist purpose with postmodernist play, as Hassan does, Hutcheon sees postmodernism "as a case of play with purpose. The same is true of all [Hassan's] oppositions: postmodernism is the *process* of making the *product*; it is *absence* within *presence*, it is *dispersal* that needs *centering* in order to *be* dispersal [. . .]." In other

words, for Hutcheon, the postmodern partakes of a logic of “both/and,” not one of “either/or.” While this move problematizes the postmodern half of Hassan’s formulation, it leaves all the negatively marked terms of his left column intact. Modernism remains the essentializing foil of a more fluid postmodernism. So while seeming to transcend a binary model for thinking the difference between modernism and postmodernism, Hutcheon perhaps only adds another opposition to Hassan’s list: modernism’s “either-or” versus postmodernism’s “both-and.”⁸ By saying this, I do not wish to discount Hutcheon’s view of postmodernism but merely to recall that the attempt to mark difference between modernism and postmodernism necessarily involves value judgments and is never merely descriptive. From the perspective of Andreas Huyssen, Hutcheon accepts too readily the conservative New Critical/Eliotic paradigm of modernism, characterized by the terrible t’s—telos, tradition, and transcendence. Like Jameson, Hutcheon equates poststructuralism with postmodernism, but as Huyssen points out, poststructuralism, “rather than offering a *theory of postmodernity*” instead provides “an *archeology of modernity*, a theory of modernism at the stage of its exhaustion” (*After* 209). The poststructuralist version is not “the modernism of the closed and finished work of art. Rather, it is a modernism of playful transgression, of an unlimited weaving of textuality, a modernism all confident in its rejection of representation and reality, in its denial of the subject, of history and of the subject of history [. . .].” For Huyssen, what makes poststructuralism simultaneously postmodern is its recognition of modernism’s failed political aspirations, most notably its inability “to mount an effective critique of bourgeois modernity and modernization.”

For Hutcheon, postmodernism remains historical and political precisely through its parodic historical reference; through such parodic reference, “postmodernist forms want to work toward a public discourse that would eschew modernist aestheticism and hermeticism and its attendant political self-marginalization” (*Poetics* 23). As a result of this claim, Hutcheon’s postmodernism is more limited than Jameson’s in the range of cultural productions that she deems postmodern. There is no poetry in her poetics (and it is difficult to imagine what her poetics could tell us about the Language poets); in fact, there is but a limited range of narratives and images that she designates as postmodern. She argues “that the term postmodernism in fiction be reserved to describe the more paradoxical and historically complex form” she calls “historiographic metafiction” (40). The terms “postmodern fiction” and “historiographic metafiction”

therefore exist in a relationship of identity and describe the same set of objects: only historiographic metafiction is postmodern fiction; all postmodern fiction is historiographic metafiction. What this seems to mean then, is that, on Hutcheon's view, there is a great deal of narrative in our postmodernity that is not postmodern; in application, however, Hutcheon casts her net rather widely and is able to contain a number of apparently incommensurable narratives within her term. Historiographic metafiction blends the self-reflexivity of metafiction with an ironized sense of history; this mix foregrounds the distinction "between brute *events* of the past and the historical *facts* we construct out of them" (*Politics* 57). In doing so, such fiction draws one's attention to the problematic status of historical representation. As a vehicle for cultural critique, historiographic metafiction plays a paradoxical role because it "depends upon and draws its power from that which it contests" (*Poetics* 120). A form of cultural critique may proceed, but it is always aware of its own implication.

Although Hutcheon asserts that historiographic metafiction foregrounds the discursively constructed nature of reality "by stressing the contexts in which the fiction is being produced—by both writer and reader" (*Poetics* 40), her focus is primarily on the artist as producer. Chastising the enemies of postmodernism for claiming that its relation to history is reactionary, Hutcheon claims this position "ignore[s] the actual historical forms to which artists return" (39). Hutcheon's attention to the producer's intention reveals itself most clearly in her discussion of postmodern architecture, the area of aesthetic production that she posits as the model for postmodern fiction.

Postmodern architecture provides Hutcheon her point of entry for redefining older notions of parody to one of "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity" (*Poetics* 26). For Hutcheon, "the dialogue of past and present, of old and new, is what gives formal expression to a belief in change within continuity. The obscurity and hermeticism of modernism are abandoned for a direct engagement of the viewer in the processes of signification through re-contextualized social and historical references" (32). But even here, though she appears to consider the viewer of postmodern architecture, her concern is for the architect, though this is somewhat hidden by the passive construction; it is the architect who abandons modernism, so that Hutcheon's focus still is on the producers' desire for their productions. Because of her focus on the producer, even when Hutcheon appears to engage Jameson's notion of pastiche, the confrontation turns out to be not as direct as it might initially appear:

But the looking to both the aesthetic and the historical past in postmodernist architecture is anything but what Jameson describes as pastiche, that is “the random cannibalization of all the styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion.” There is absolutely nothing random or “without principle” in the parodic recall and re-examination of the past by architects like Charles Moore or Ricardo Bofill. To include irony and play is *never* necessarily to exclude seriousness of purpose in postmodernist art. To misunderstand this is to misunderstand the nature of much contemporary aesthetic production—even if it does make for neater theorizing. (*Poetics* 26–27)

Here is a clear instance of the way in which Jameson and Hutcheon, although covering similar terrain, speak past each other because of their different orientation. Once we acknowledge, however, that Jameson is concerned more with aesthetic consumption in postmodernity and Hutcheon with its production, their disagreement, while not exactly disappearing, at least reveals how they might both—from within their own terms—be correct. Something else seems obvious, namely, that postmodern architects can intend their work to be a critique of the failures of the International Style, while at the same time the product of their critique—the actual buildings they design—can still be a nightmare for the users of this new postmodern space, many of whom, one supposes, do not receive the producer’s intent (a critique of modernist architecture) through the mediation of the building. (Even consumers who comprehend the intended critique might find the critique inconsequential if personally inconvenienced by this new space).

A problem for Hutcheon, then, is attempting to discover a model for postmodern fiction in postmodern architecture. Postmodern architecture necessarily is implicated more fully in capitalism than postmodern literature because, while a new building might cost \$25,000,000 to construct, a literary magazine costs closer to \$2500 to produce. More than literature, architecture has always necessarily been more in tune with the desires of the ruling class. The desire of the aristocrat, the bourgeoisie, or the corporation to signify their hierarchical superiority almost inevitably forces architecture into an identification with high culture. This situation leads to a problem of reference: “By its doubly parodic, double coding (that is, as parodic of both modernism and something else), postmodernist architecture also allows for that which was rejected as uncontrollable and deceitful by both modernism’s *Gesamtkunstler* and ‘life conditioner’: that is,

ambiguity and irony” (30). The characterization of modernism as rejecting ambiguity and irony—the defining terms of New Criticism’s version of modernist literature—would be perverse if Hutcheon were not limiting her discussion here to modernist architecture.⁹ But of course she *is* referring to postmodern architecture, and her point reminds us of just how little irony and parody figured in theorizing modernist architecture. Architectural historian and critic Charles Jencks, upon whose notion of double coding Hutcheon draws, acknowledges that irony and ambiguity were “key concepts in Modern literature and Post-Modernists have continued using these tropes and methods while extending them to painting and architecture” (Jencks 329). Still, the punning that Hutcheon celebrates in postmodern architecture hardly seems startling to someone who has read Joyce or Faulkner.¹⁰ What I wish to underscore here is the difficulty of mapping modernism in architecture onto modernism in literature. By analogy, I think the same difficulties attend a modeling of postmodern literature on postmodern architecture. The double coding Hutcheon notes, of course, is done by the architect, but what if the viewer is not a double decoder and what qualifies one to be a decoding observer? The case of postmodern architecture seems to make problematic Hutcheon’s broader claim about postmodernism when she speaks of postmodern fiction: “Postmodernism is both academic and popular, élitist and accessible” (*Poetics* 44). The vast majority of the public are not attuned to the history of architecture, its terms and traditions.¹¹

This issue of reference speaks directly to the problem I see in Hutcheon’s modeling historiographic metafiction on postmodern architecture. What postmodernism in architecture gestures to, appropriates, and parodies largely is limited to the prior tradition of architecture. There can be no border crossings into discursive (and but few into other material) mediations of the historical. What is so postmodern here? Hutcheon’s claim for postmodern architecture is that “the self-reflexive parodic introversion suggested by a turning to the *aesthetic* past is itself what makes possible an ideological and social intervention” (33; emphasis added). What is key here (and what will differ at times in her account of postmodern fiction) is the notion of reference limited to the aesthetic past. The hermetically closed text has been substituted for an equally closed tradition (the history of architecture), a move that in part could be accounted for by T. S. Eliot’s conservative formulation of the relation among canonical works in “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” In other words, from the perspective of literary modernism, what goes by the name of

postmodernism in architecture is only now learning how to be modernist. In fact, to the extent that Hutcheon is willing to identify as postmodern those narratives that limit their parodic reference to the aesthetic past, she conflates postmodernism with a technique of avant-garde modernism. Despite this contradiction in her attempt to equate postmodernism in architecture with postmodernism in fiction, I do not want to throw the baby out with the bath water, since Hutcheon's characterization of historiographic metafiction may not need to be modeled on architectural postmodernism and carries a suggestiveness about the possibilities of contemporary narratives that escapes Jameson's totalizing view of postmodernity. But these possibilities only emerge by limiting the definition of "historiographic metafiction," so that it refers not to the aesthetic past but simply to the past and the fabrication of history. This is certainly a direction in which Hutcheon wishes to move on a number of occasions:

Works like [Robert] Coover's *The Public Burning* or [E. L.] Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* do not rewrite, refashion, or expropriate history merely to satisfy either some game-playing or some totalizing impulse; instead, they juxtapose what we think we know of the past (from official archival sources and personal memory) with an alternate representation that foregrounds the postmodern epistemological question of the nature of historical knowledge. Which "facts" make it into history? And *whose* facts? (*Politics* 71)

This formulation describes a trend in contemporary narrative, namely, the way a number of narratives turn one's attention away from the aesthetic past (such as literary history) and toward a more broadly conceived sense of history as textually mediated and constructed. But because Hutcheon models historiographic metafiction on architectural postmodernism, she often applies this valorizing term to narratives that—like the directed intertextuality of postmodern architecture—allude exclusively to the tradition of a particular genre. The very moment in *The Poetics of Postmodernism* that she introduces her characterization of postmodern narrative as historiographic metafiction illustrates the contradiction. She names Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* as an example of the kind of narrative that she will examine: "The postmodern ironic rethinking of history is here textualized in the many general *parodic references to other movies*" (5; emphasis added). Hutcheon goes on to list a number of such references, including the Odessa Steps sequence from Sergei Eisenstein's

Battleship Potemkin, where Gilliam's film substitutes a floor cleaner for the baby carriage in the original. However, I would deny the designation "historiographic metafiction" to any narrative in which the text's range of references or directed intertexts remain exclusively within its genre, be it literary or filmic history. And my reason would be close to Jameson's reason—how are such parodic moments experienced and who gets the reference? I recall seeing *Brazil* in graduate school with a group of bright law students. I alone marked the Eisenstein reference, and only because I happened to be taking a film course that semester. I am simply not sure how much faith one can place in such parodic allusions to disrupt the order of things.

Pastiche, Parody, and the Problem of Semiotic Regression

Jameson, however, is even more critical of Hutcheon's project; he denies efficacy to even those contemporary historical novels that attempt to engage the past in a way that might reactivate political awareness. His reading of Doctorow's *Ragtime* serves as a repudiation of Hutcheon's historiographic metafiction; he calls the novel

the most peculiar and stunning monument to the aesthetic situation engendered by the disappearance of the historical referent. This historical novel can no longer set out to represent the historical past; it can only "represent" our ideas and stereotypes about that past (which thereby at once becomes "pop history"). [. . .] If there is any realism left here, it is a "realism" that is meant to derive from the shock of grasping that confinement and of slowly becoming aware of a new and original historical situation in which we are condemned to seek History by way of our own pop images and simulacra of that history, which itself remains forever out of reach. (*Postmodernism* 25)

This passage reflects both Jameson's Baudrillardian sense of the orders of simulacra and his Marxist belief in a scientific History.¹² But it also looks strange from so engaged a reader of poststructuralism as Jameson. Does he mean to suggest that there was a time (a mythologized moment of primitive communism?) when history was in reach, when one grasped history in some unmediated fashion? Even if Sir Walter Scott believed he was representing the historical past, the work of New Historicism revealed the illusory nature of such belief through the following inescapable logic: the past is always textually mediated and texts are always historical.

Still, Jameson's attempt to refute historiographic metafiction via *Ragtime* deserves closer scrutiny, if only because it underscores the difference between his and Hutcheon's orientation. Jameson asserts that Doctorow's novel has transparent political meaning, which he grants "has been expertly articulated by Lynda [sic] Hutcheon" (*Post-modernism* 22). The problem for Jameson is that Hutcheon's delineation of the class conflict and the recurring pattern of the working class's relation to aesthetic production creates "an admirable thematic coherence few readers can have experienced in parsing the lines of a verbal object held too close to the eyes to fall into these perspectives." Speaking from the axis of consumption, Jameson trivializes Hutcheon by making her just another formalist performing a mandarin close reading. On the one hand Jameson faults Hutcheon for belaboring the obvious—namely, that *Ragtime* has political content; on the other hand, he attacks her for attempting to articulate systematically what that political content is. In short, she is guilty simultaneously of seeing what anyone can see and of seeing coherence no normal reader would experience.

Jameson's critique of Hutcheon here, however, turns with a vengeance upon his own ideological reading. Apparently unaware of the contradiction, Jameson, after reducing Doctorow's novel to just another moment of postmodern Disneylike holographic simulation, then touts the novel as a formal experiment in style that defamiliarizes language in a fashion worthy of high modernism:

It is, for example, well known that the source of many of the characteristic effects of Camus's novel *The Stranger* can be traced back to that author's willful decision to substitute, throughout, the French tense of the *passé composé* for the other past tenses more normally employed in narration in that language. I suggest that it is as if something of that sort were at work here: *as though* Doctorow had set out systematically to produce the effect or the equivalent, in his language, of a verbal past tense we do not possess in English, namely, the French preterite (or *passé simple*), whose "perfective" movement [. . .] serves to separate events from the present of enunciation and to transform the stream of time and action into so many finished, complete, and isolated punctual event objects which find themselves sundered from any present situation (even that of the act of story telling or enunciation). (24)

Even if Jameson is correct in his contention that the average reader does not immediately discover the thematic coherence of Hutcheon's

reading, one rather suspects even fewer readers have experienced *Ragtime* as Jameson casts it. But this kind of description is necessary if he is to maintain that Doctorow's work creates "no solid historiographic formation on the reader's part." It is difficult to imagine what could ever ensure a reader's historiographic formation that Jameson requires before he will grant any political vocation to the contemporary historical novel; nevertheless, contemporary fiction that turns to history (rather than simply the aesthetic past) as its intertext opens a site wherein historical thinking becomes a *possibility*.

But only a possibility and perhaps not always the possibility Hutcheon hopes for in her understanding of the poetics and the politics of postmodernism. It is possible to raise a question about her linkage of politics and poetics through a counterexample: how from Hutcheon's perspective does one think about a novel such as John Updike's *Memories of the Ford Administration*? This novel's blurring of the boundary between history and fiction occurs through the self-conscious academic voice of a history professor, Alfred Clayton. The fictive premise is that Clayton is responding to a request from a history journal, *Retrospect*, that he provide impressions of Gerald Ford's administration. Clayton instead comments on his adulterous personal life during the Ford years, layering in his unpublished research on the administration of President James Buchanan. This premise would seem to make Updike's novel a paradigmatic example of historiographic metafiction. *Memories of the Ford Administration*, according to Hutcheon's poetics of postmodernism (the formal features that define postmodern fiction), can only be historiographic metafiction. But according to Hutcheon's politics of postmodernism (her claims regarding the cultural work of postmodern fiction), Updike's novel could never be termed historiographic metafiction. This contradiction arises because Updike's politics are conservative, while Hutcheon insists that historiographic metafiction is always politically left of center. Rather than use historiographic metafiction to dedoxify the order of things, Updike wishes to lead readers to a different orthodoxy, his version of Christian faith. What the example of Updike reveals is that to see in historiographic metafiction a politics, however compromised, is highly problematic. Despite Hutcheon's ability in *The Politics of Postmodernism* to identify a significant number of contemporary narratives that exhibit a left-leaning politics, linking any poetics to left politics may only serve as an expression of utopian desire. Whatever politics of contemporary fiction might emerge, it does not reside as an essence

within the fiction but rather in the multiple possibilities of readers' engagements.

Such engagements are so complex and various, however, that even an apparently simple cultural text, the cover of a recent catalogue from a mail-order clothier (fig. 1.1), points to the difficulty of reading postmodernism exclusively through the lens of either parody or pastiche. At the same time, the catalogue cover underscores the difficulty in arguing for a politicized postmodernism on the basis of a text's parodic relation to the aesthetic past. The illustration shows how even Pop's cannibalization of consumer and media culture itself is available for appropriation. The illustration directs the knowing viewer, of course, to Roy Lichtenstein, who in the 1960s, through the medium of oil paint, pointed our attention to the formal conventions of the comic-strip panel.¹³ But what is interesting here is how the image might work simultaneously for a variety of consumers who do or do not get the references to the multiple previous representations that the cover plays off. Lichtenstein's work has been reproduced on postcards. These postcards themselves have been the site of parody.

Lichtenstein frequently places a female figure in jeopardy; this figure's thoughts represented in the cartoon bubble are clichéd and stereotypical (fig. 1.2). In the 1980s, a series of parodic feminist postcards employed Lichtenstein-like images of the distressed female but replaced his bathetic words in the cartoon bubble with words that directly confront gender stereotypes and assumptions; thus, the distressed female image was represented saying things such as "My boyfriend just ran off with my best friend. . . . God, I'm going to miss her!" or "Oh my God! I think I'm becoming the man I wanted to marry!" The catalogue cover, then, interacts with all of these prior representations and can confirm the identity of a variety of consumers regardless how much or how little of the intertextual puzzle any particular viewer understands.

The image stands ready to produce pleasure—to reward the viewer for connecting with any piece of the previous system of representations upon which it depends. As a result, the image works equally well for either the middle-class housewife who enjoys the reference to newspaper comic strips or the hip academic who appreciates the bubble's shift from a Lichtensteinian bathos ("I've nothing to live for!") to the ironic ("I've nothing to wear!"). And in either case the catalogue's image might be a portion of the reason that the consumer would reach for a credit card and place an order. Certainly even for the knowing consumer of the cover's image, the parody seems more complicitous with than critical of the economic order.¹⁴

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March 1995

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TO WEAR!**



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Figure 1.1 *Nothing to Wear* cover; illustration for Lands' End Catalog by Lou Brooks. Courtesy of Lou Brooks.