Understanding crisis means understanding capitalism, not superficially, but in its totality, as a historically specific social formation, hell-bent on the reproduction of surplus value. That at least would be the wager of Marxism in the present era of global financial crisis. Yet many critics of late-capitalism — Fredric Jameson one of the foremost among them — have also noted how the increasing sophistication and expansion of capitalism’s exploitative logic, through globalization and financialization, now adds to the challenges of representing its totality today. If we think of this representational challenge as being an aesthetic one as well as a political one — as indeed Jameson has long encouraged us to view it — it may be important to ask what role art can also play in helping us cognize totality.

In the 1930s, Marxist literary critic and philosopher Georg Lukács famously defended realism against the new modernist aesthetic practices being espoused by Ernst Bloch, and later Theodor W. Adorno, as the more historically sensitive aesthetic and the most capable of representing totality. These realism/modernism debates between Lukács and his colleagues, however, were later eclipsed by the emergence of that new “cultural dominant,” postmodernism, which, as Jameson noted, posed threats to realism and modernism alike.1 While some continue to debate the merits of modernist aesthetics in a postmodern world, the political, let alone aesthetic, viability of realism would seem to have become irretrievably a thing of the past.

Jameson, however, not only reopens the discussion on realism in The Antinomies
of Realism, but also argues that realism’s dissolution has been an impediment to our sense of history and our ability to “think” totality. He nonetheless draws the conclusion that, although realism has atrophied, what had been its unique historical sensitivity — particularly in the earlier form of the historical novel — now survives in Science Fiction, which is still grounded in the representation of both totality and history, albeit from a future-oriented perspective.

For followers of Jameson’s work, this is not an entirely new argument. What is new, however, is the role that Jameson now gives affect in his theory of realism’s formation and dissolution, an argumentative move that is clearly meant as his own intervention in what has been termed the “affective turn” in the humanities and social sciences. But, by locating and historicizing “the codification of affect” in the nineteenth-century realist novel, Jameson’s argument leaves curiously bracketed the significance of this “affective turn” in the present situation, theorizing instead the socio-cultural origins of our fascination with affective experience, rather than the current conditions of its new theoretical moment. With an eye to connecting aesthetic and theoretical preoccupations with affect, I conclude this essay with a sublation — cancellation, preservation, and transcendence — of Jameson’s conclusions about the ultimate ahistoricity of affect, emphasizing instead the specificity of affect’s “codification” to the realist novel in the period of nineteenth-century capitalism in order to better historicize and understand affect’s return in our own period of global financial crisis, as a new theoretical school and conceptual language making claims on the political imaginary. With the imminent publication of Allegory and Ideology (his latest installment of The Poetics of Social Forms), it seems especially worthwhile to reconsider and reevaluate the stakes of Antimonies of Realism before turning to this new volume.

Postmodernism and the Problematization of Referentiality

In Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Jameson famously argues that the essential difference between modernism and postmodernism is the loss of the semiautonomous sphere of cultural production, which, for Adorno, had endowed art with its critical, negative potential. “Art and reality can only converge if art crystallizes out its own formal laws, not by passively accepting objects as they come”: it is only thus, Adorno says, that the contradiction between the world mediated in the work of art and the world as it actually exists “confers on the work of art a vantage point from which it can criticize actuality” and makes “[a]rt the negative knowledge of the actual world.” For Jameson, the problem with such a claim is not a theoretical one, but a historical one: “in postmodern culture,” he says, “culture’ has become a product in its own right” and “modernism was still minimally and tangentially the critique of the commodity and the effort to make it transcend itself.” Whereas: “Postmodernism is the consumption of sheer commodification as a process.”

But if the commodification of culture under late capitalism made autonomy
and negativity equally impossible to attribute to “the work of art” (itself a now outmoded modernist concept), postmodernism now also problematized in more overt and lasting ways the very notion of referentiality and therefore the aesthetic and political legitimacy of realism as well. As Rachel Bowlby observes, “Nowhere is this [contemporary skepticism] clearer than in the regular scorn [we now see] for realism’s crudely ‘linear’ narratives, its naively ‘omniscient’ narrators, and — worst crime of all — its facile assumptions of linguistic ‘transparency.’”

However, rather than lament the passing of realism both as a literary genre and privileged vehicle for cognitive content, Jameson willingly assigns its validity — at least in the form with which we are most familiar — to the cultural past and seeks its cognitive potential in new formal discoveries. As Jameson notes in his most sustained theorization of the realism-modernism-postmodernism sequence, “any theory of realism... must also explicitly designate and account for situations to which realism no longer exists, is no longer historically or formally possible; or on the other hand takes on unexpected new and transgressive forms.”

Jameson’s emphasis on the latter — the “unexpected new and transgressive forms” that “realism” might take in some future environment — thus allows him, contra Lukács, to make formal inventiveness part and parcel with realism’s search for totality, such that “realism” no longer necessarily becomes the privileged name or even form of that which can be said to orient itself towards a representation of the social totality.

This is most evident in Jameson’s development of the notion of “cognitive mapping” in Postmodernism — a process which, he says, “enable[s] a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society’s structures as a whole.” For Jameson, cognitive mapping is neither purely mimetic nor wholly “ideological” (in the commonplace sense of being false or incorrect): for although it does not offer an exact (i.e., mimetic) replica of reality and in that sense is false, it nonetheless “involves the practical reconquest of a sense of place” that helps us navigate the now “unrepresentable totality” of global capitalism. He thus compares cognitive mapping to “the great Althusserian (and Lacanian) redefinition of ideology as ‘the representation of the subject’s Imaginary relationship to his or her Real conditions of existence.’”

For Jameson, the notion of cognitive mapping “becomes extraordinarily suggestive when projected outward onto ... larger national and global spaces,” “in terms of the way in which we all necessarily also cognitively map our individual social relationship to local, national, and international class realities.”

**Realism and the Invention of the “Referent”**

By separating the cognitive possibilities of aesthetic practice from the category of realism, Jameson is thus able to attribute a much more particular vocation to realism as a historical phenomenon, which is none other than “cultural revolution” — the overturning of the older magical narratives of feudalism and antiquity and, through
that, the invention/discovery of a new secular reality to be represented. As early as *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, Jameson begins to theorize “realistic representation ... as the systematic undermining and demystification, the secular ‘decoding,’ of those preexisting inherited traditional or sacred narrative paradigms,” to which, he says,

must be ... added the task of producing as though for the first time that very life world, that very “referent” — the newly quantifiable space of extension and market equivalence, the new rhythms of measurable time, the new secular and “disenchanted” object world of the commodity system, with its post-traditional daily life and its bewilderingly empirical, “meaningless,” and contingent *Umwelt* — of which this narrative discourse will then claim to be the “realistic” reflection.¹²

What is particularly interesting then about Jameson’s return to the question of realism in *Antinomies* is the centrality he now gives affect in this desacralizing process by which the raw data of “post-traditional daily life” is gradually introduced into the literary geography of the realist novel. However, in *Antinomies* this process, as I will show, is now also associated via affect with the incursion of an eternal, existential present into the novel that will gradually undermine realism’s ability to make History appear and thus lead to its own dissolution. In my conclusion to this essay, I will attempt a strident re-historicization of these supposedly ahistorical affects, situating their early “codification” firmly in the context of developing nineteenth-century capitalism and their return – as a whole theoretical school and language – within our own moment of global financial crisis.

**Affect and the Dissolution of Realism**

*Antinomies* opens with a casual observation, which will turn out to be the book’s central claim and argument about realism. “I have observed,” writes Jameson,

a curious development which always seems to set in when we attempt to hold the phenomenon of realism firmly in our mind’s eye. It is as though the object of our meditation began to wobble, and attention to it to slip insensibly away from it in two opposite directions, so that at length we find we are thinking, not about realism, but about its emergence; not about the thing itself, but about its dissolution. (2)

Since the phenomenon, realism, is itself always forming and dissolving before our very eyes, literary critics have felt the need to pin it down, says Jameson, by way of comparing it to something that it is not. The problem is that any number of not-realisms readily appear as valid and tend to force their authors into “a passionate
taking of sides,” in which realism is either “elevated to the status of an ideal” or else “denounced” in favor of its opposite number, which is variously identified as romance, epic, melodrama, idealism, naturalism, critical or socialist realism (as opposed to bourgeois realism), or, for the more diachronically minded — simply modernism (3). The accumulative effect of such oppositional approaches to defining realism has not been more clarity, but more confusion. Rather than seeking to stabilize realism by opposing it to something which it is not, Jameson chooses to treat it as an inherently unstable category with its own internal contradictions, which always threaten to undo its coherence as a subject itself and as an object for critical analysis:

My experiment here claims to come at realism dialectically, not only by taking as its object of study the very antinomies themselves into which every constitution of this or that realism seems to resolve: but above all by grasping realism as a historical and even evolutionary process in which the negative and the positive are inextricably combined, and whose emergence and development at one and the same time constitute its own inevitable undoing, its own decay and dissolution. (6)

Jameson goes on to identify the twin sources of realism’s composition and simultaneous dissolution as “the narrative impulse,” or, in French, the récit, and “the scenic impulse,” which he associates with “Affect, or, the Body’s Present.” For Jameson, “the narrative impulse” is the persistence within realism of the older genre of the tale and the temporal dimension of storytelling itself, which, taken at its most rudimentary, constitutes the “tripartite temporal system of the past-present-future” (10). This tripartite system can be further refined, he says, to “the before and after,” since, for the tale’s beginning, middle, and end to be narratable, we must always be dealing anyway with a future-past (10): “The time of the récit is then a time of the preterite, of events completed, over and done with, events that have entered history once and for all” (18).

What realism combines with the “narrative impulse” of the tale — and indeed what begins to distinguish it from the tale — is a new “scenic impulse,” in which narrative is momentarily suspended in the elaboration of a scene, those innumerable banal details of realist description, which test our patience and, as Roland Barthes once argued, give off a certain “reality effect” (signifiers, not so much of reality per se, but of our encounter with a reality being simulated in the text by the presence of just such mundane details). It is always, then, when narrative progression is at its slowest and description at its richest, that we can be most confident that what we are reading is realism, as if the text’s very provocation to exhaust the reader, to bore her with such innumerable details, were also somehow a guarantor of its authenticity. This latter “scenic impulse” Jameson associates in a surprising turn of argument with the “realm of affect,” which he defines via Alexander Kluge as the “insurrection of the
present against the other temporalities” (10). Thus, Jameson claims, “we now have in our grasp the two chronological end points of realism: its genealogy in story telling and the tale, its future dissolution in the literary representation of affect” (10).

But what exactly does Jameson mean by “affect”? Indeed many have been thrown off by Jameson’s sudden focus on the voguish concept-word and taken it to mean — as some thought it meant when all of a sudden the famous Marxist started to write about Postmodernism — that he has changed uniform and started batting for another team. However, the strength of Jameson’s dialectical approach has always been its ability to subsume concepts from other theoretical schools, sometimes hostile to Marxism, and assign them their own moment of truth in his philosophical Darstellung before he then historicizes them and dramatizes their own conceptual limitations. Thus, anticipating a certain hermeneutic anxiety on his reader’s behalf, he introduces the term “affect” as

a technical term which has been strongly associated with a number of recent theories which alternately appeal to Freud or to Deleuze and which, like the theory of postmodernity, also take this phenomenon as evidence for a new turn in human relations and forms of subjectivity (including politics). I do not here mean to appropriate it for a different theory of all these things, nor do I mean to endorse or to correct the philosophies of which it currently constitutes a kind of signal or badge of group identity. Indeed, I want to specify a very local and restricted, practical use of the term “affect” here by incorporating it into a binary opposition which historicizes it and limits its import to questions of representation and indeed of literary history. (29)

What Jameson retains, though, from the so-called affect theorists — especially Gilles Deleuze — is the notion of affect’s resistance to language, to its being named (31). Jameson, for purposes of clarification, thus distinguishes between what he calls “named emotions” — “love, hatred, anger, fear, disgust, pleasure, and so forth” — and “unnamed emotions,” or simply “affect,” which, he says, “eludes language and its naming of things (and feelings)” (29). This distinction, he then reminds us, is an essentially Kantian one in which “affects” are treated as “bodily feelings, whereas emotions (or passions, to use their other name) are conscious states” (32). Realism’s “discovery” and, as I will discuss in a moment, its “codification of affect,” will thus mark the insertion into literature of a whole new bodily sensorium, particular to — and indeed inseparable from — modern, secular experience:

if the positive characteristic of the emotion is to be named, the positive content of an affect is to activate the body. ... And therefore, alongside a crisis of language, in which the old systems of emotions [for example,
the passions] come to be felt as a traditional rhetoric, and an outmoded one at that, there is also a new history of the body to be written, the “bourgeois body” as we may now call it, as it emerges from the outmoded classifications of the feudal era. (32)

This “new history of the body,” then, is one that is coextensive with all those new sites of modern experience that enter into literature for the first time: the sights and delights of the urban capital being the most infamous and obvious. In fact, it is precisely such secular “affects” that Jameson will argue are being codified in those long and seemingly unnecessary descriptions of the city, which can keep an author of Charles Dickens’s or Émile Zola’s caliber occupied for pages (the latter’s descriptions serve as Jameson’s privileged example of just such a “codification of affect”). For, as Jameson will point out, if one of the peculiar characteristics of affect is its resistance to being named, its representation “must somehow achieve independence from the conventional body itself” if its expression is to be codified by something other than a system of names (38). This representational challenge thus propels realism, against the “narrative impulse” of the récit, to search for an ever-refined language capable of expressing the various modifications of bodily sensations that make up the “modern experience,” or what Jameson calls, “the sliding scale of the incremental, in which each infinitesimal moment differentiates itself from the last by a modification of tone and an increase or diminution of intensity” (42). It is in this sense, then, that we are to understand the “scenic impulse” — those descriptions, for example, of the city as a barrage of various sights, sounds, and smells — as just such a codification of affect, which, for Jameson, “becomes the very chromaticism of the body itself” and marks “the coming into being of bourgeois daily life” (42, 5).

Realism’s “discovery” of affect and its development of the “scenic impulse,” however, threatens to dissolve the temporal “linearity” of the tale, or récit, into the ever-expanding, existential present of free-floating sensations and intensities, which now remain forever variable. Narrative increasingly becomes less an end goal in itself and more the “motivation of the device,” whereby more and more existential data is accumulated for the codification of affect (something that Jameson explores more fully in a chapter on “distraction” in Leo Tolstoy). The “scenic impulse” in realism thus wages as subtle, and molecular, war against the structures of plot, particularly, Jameson argues, against the novel’s “protagonicity,” such that increasingly it no longer makes sense to speak of heroes or, for that matter, villainy, since now, in the existential present of the affective realm, all are allowed to dwell equally in their anxiety and bad faith on the possibility that they are their own worst enemies. Pérez Galdós and George Eliot serve here as Jameson’s respective examples of this dual tendency: the waning of protagonicity and therefore also villainy.

What, importantly, is at stake in this historical narrative and dialectical understanding of realism’s own internal dissolution, then, is not only the
disappearance of plot in the new modernist novel, which now becomes realism’s logical heir, but also, with the ever-widening realm of affect, the gradual eclipse of History itself, for example, in the new modernist novels of a single day such as Ulysses and Mrs. Dalloway, which appear briefly in Antinomies to illustrate this point. It is here that Jameson’s argument starts to reconnect with his now familiar argument about Postmodernism and “the end of temporality,” a question to which Jameson returns in Antinomies in the book’s final chapter, provocatively titled, “The Historical Novel Today, or, Is it Still Possible?”

**History, In and Out of the Novel**

The relation between the historical novel and realism is a difficult one to map given their apparent similarities, but which Jameson explains — by way of Lukács — as the disappearance of the masses, world-historical leaders, and revolutionary Events from the social geography of the novel. In the tumultuous years of the so-called bourgeois revolutions, popular consciousness was gripped by the sudden appearance of two secular agents of history on the world stage: the masses and their leaders. The historical novel, for Lukács, is the expression of this particular “structure of feeling,” in which a third party observer — or common hero — mediates the representation of the world-historical protagonist and the masses united by a single revolutionary Event. The historical novel, for Lukács and Jameson, is thus a novel about social change and transformation, often told, however, from the conservative perspective of one whose way of life is at stake in a struggle that they did not chose to undertake themselves. The lesson of the historical novel — essentially that people make their own history, but not under conditions of their own choosing — is one that Jameson argues was so successful that the past was no longer necessary for the representation of History. The present, as was the case with Balzac, could now be treated historically without the stimulants of world-historical characters, the masses, or even revolutionary Events.

Balzac, though, is a transitional author, for Jameson, coming between the historical novel and realism proper. Balzac’s rhetorical mode, he claims, is still ultimately one of allegory, not affect, in which descriptive details can always be allegorically rewritten as signifiers of civilizational decline, the passing of the ancien regime and the emergence of what was for Balzac a new and more vulgar bourgeois era. But as the “scenic impulse” gradual strips away the allegorical register of Balzacian-style description and replaces it with the affective realm of new free-floating intensities and diminutions, the sense of the present as history slips away too and the historical novel, in Jameson’s language, “hardens over” into the stuff of harlequin romance and Hollywood costume dramas, in which historical periods are grasped as so many styles and settings (307), or else, as Jameson showed us in Postmodernism, it becomes the stuff of “fantastic historiographies,” the so-called magic realisms of writers like Salman Rushdie or Gabriel García Márquez, in which history is marked by its sur-reality and its de-facto resistance to truth-claims, which now can always be re-written from
different perspective anyway. This, for Jameson, leads us to the present conjuncture where “what seems to survive at best [from the historical record] are a host of names and an endless warehouse of images.” Thus, he asks, “What kind of History can the contemporary novel then be expected to ‘make appear’?” (263).

A New Shape of Time: History as Science Fiction

For Jameson the only remedy we have against such a disappearance of History is that of imagining the possibility of a different future, that is, of historicizing by looking forward, instead of back. This at least is the final claim of Antinomies: “the historical novel of the future (which is to say our present) will necessarily be Science-Fictional inasmuch as it will have to include questions about the fate of our social system, which has become a second nature” (298). Given postmodernism’s deconstruction of so-called “linear-history,” and the consummate failure of the various alternative temporalities — cyclical, simultaneous, or repetitive — to replace it, Jameson argues, that “what is needed is not so much a new theory or system, as precisely a new image [or “shape”] of time, a one-time ad-hoc invention which can be discarded after productive use” (301).

Jameson finds just that in Christopher Nolan’s 2010, film Inception:

The shape Inception provides us with is that of its massive central elevator, which rises and falls to the levels of its various worlds, its portals opening on past or future indifferently, and on the weathers of the globe’s named spaces and the interiors — modern or antique, glass or dark wood — of its innumerable yet distinct and disjoined situations. (301)

For Jameson, this elevator ride through the various space-times of world-history provides us with an image capable of bringing together, albeit in this piecemeal fashion, elements of a historical record now too complicated and large for any one person to grasp, or “cognitively map,” by the older methods of representation that realism and so-called “linear history” once offered. It is with such an image in mind that, he says, we may now re-theorize the vocation, or even the possibility of the historical novel in our own time: “For historicity today... demands a temporal span far exceeding the biological limits of the individual human organism: so that the life of a single character — world-historical or not — can scarcely accommodate it; nor even the meager variety of our own chronological experiences of a limited national time and place” (301-02). For Jameson, David Mitchell’s Cloud Atlas is just such an exemplary novel. Although it too grasps historical periods as so many available styles and settings, the way in which it shuffles through them — moving disjointedly from one story and period-style of narration to another, in roughly chronologically order, until it reaches two dystopian futures — gives it the advantage of impelling “us to invent as many connections and cross-references as we can think of in an ongoing process” (303). As a consequence, we may at least begin to “think” history too as just
such an ongoing process in the present. Moreover by including as its two dystopian futures an image of totalitarian world-dictatorship and another of a civilizational decline into barbarism, it would seem to exhaust, at least symbolically, not only the available repertoire of historical costumes and settings, but also our two most cliché fears about the future: “1984 and Road Warrior, states and nomads” (308). The merit of such a Science-Fictional retelling of history is that it makes us wonder, as we no longer do when we read our historical fictions of yesteryear, “what comes next” and thus reminds us of our own historicity. For, as Jameson concludes at the end of Antinomies, only our imaginary futures are adequate to do justice to our present, whose once buried pasts have all vanished into our presentism. “Our philosophies” want to absorb all these foreign totalities as identical with us and flesh of our flesh; Science Fiction wants desperately to affirm them a different and as alien, in its quest for imaginary futures. In an ideal world, perhaps, they would be different and identical all at once at one and the same time: at any rate, for better or for worse, our history, our historical past and our historical novels, must now also include our historical futures as well. (313)

Capitalism and Affect: Always Waning, Never Waning?

For readers familiar with Jameson’s work, the conclusion — that we must think historically and at the same time imagine a future lest we become locked in an eternal capitalist present — is unsurprising. What is surprising, as I’ve already noted, is the new centrality that Jameson gives affect. This is not by any means the first time Jameson has discussed affect, but formerly its centrality appeared to be at odds with Jameson’s hermeneutical project and practice of “totalization” first laid out in The Political Unconscious. It will be important then to reconstruct the context in which Jameson first began to articulate his thoughts on affect so as to clarify and dispel some misconceptions about how Antinomies might reconnect with the larger arc of Jameson’s critical project, particularly his comments on postmodernism.

In his groundbreaking essay, “Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism” published in 1984 and in the book of the same title published seven years later, Jameson infamously declared that under late capitalism there was – in its cultural products and new theoretical discourses – a noticeable “waning of affect” part and parcel with what poststructuralism had began touting as “the death of the subject.” These claims about postmodernism present a certain challenge to readers of Antinomies hoping to unite these different arguments into a single narrative thread. Are the affects discovered in the literary genre of realism, which will also lead to its dissolution, the same affects that are on the wane in postmodernism? The answer, in my opinion, has to be no.
The confusion stems from the fact that in 1984, when Jameson first theorized the “waning of affect,” there was not yet a whole theoretical discourse associated with the word, which for many of its proponents turns on a terminological distinction between the emotions (Jameson’s “named emotions”) and affects proper, now understood as unnamable, pre-cognitive bodily “intensities.” Jameson’s “waning of affect” is more precisely then the waning of what we should now call emotions and their various systems of meaning, the latter of which can be subject to historicist interpretation or “totalization.”

In *Antinomies*, as I have shown, it is the system of feudal passions that erodes with the discovery and codification of a whole new sensorium of bodily highs and lows particular to urban, bourgeois experience. The passions are then replaced by a totally different set of “named emotions” in modernism, particular to imperialism or the monopoly stage of capitalism: namely, anxiety and alienation. For Jameson, any system of named emotions is unthinkable without the “concept of expression” — “a whole metaphysics of the inside and outside” — which becomes in modernism that “of the wordless pain within the monad and the moment in which, often cathartically, that ‘emotion’ is then projected out and externalized, as gesture or cry, as desperate communication and the outward dramatization of inward feeling.” It is this inward feeling, for Jameson, that links the subject, still centered in modernism, to its lived environment, which now presses in on it, freighting the emotion, as it were, with sociological content.

In an interview with Anderson Stephanson, the extended version of which was first published in *Social Text* in 1987, Jameson clarifies his position on the transition from modern to postmodern experience. “Symptomatic” of this transition, he says, is the changeover from anxiety — the dominant feeling or affect in modernism — to a different system to which schizophrenic or drug language gives the key notion. I am referring to what the French have started to call intensities of highs and lows. These have nothing to do with “feelings” that offer clues to meaning in the way anxiety did. Anxiety is a hermeneutic emotion, expressing an underlying nightmare state of the world; whereas highs and lows really don’t imply anything about the world because you can feel them on whatever occasion. They are no longer cognitive.

This is a perfectly clear argument, then: deep, interiorizing feelings, freighted with sociological content, are replaced by free-floating “intensities” in the transition from modernism to postmodernism, now understood as the “cultural logics” particular to the monopoly stage of capitalism and “late capitalism,” by which Jameson always means, globalized multinational capitalism. The “waning of affect” is thus the replacement of deep feelings with new random intensities caused by the “schizophrenic” culture.
of late-capitalist consumer society – Guy Debord’s “society of the spectacle.”

Jameson’s argument, however, has become complicated by a certain ossification of terminological language that now accompanies the turn to affect in the humanities, when, for example, one of its foremost proponents Brian Massumi equates “intensity,” in the new theoretical sense of the word, with that which Jameson had formerly opposed it: affect. In light of this hardening over of theoretical language in which affect now acquires technical detail and specificity as unnamable “intensity,” one can (and probably should) rewrite Jameson’s “waning of affect” as the unleashing of affect, without — it should be noted — changing in any way the substance of his argument. Alas, such often is the history of a word.

What is interesting, then, from the perspective of Antinomies is that Jameson now lays the preconditions for the “waning of affect” (now understood to mean the unleashing of affect) in the nineteenth century and the development of realism – and not, as was previously the case, in postmodernism. Antinomies would thus seem to attribute characteristics of the longue durée to affect’s molecular war against the structures of plot and the “thinkability” of History itself, in which the timeless ahistoricity of affect and the assimilating and naming powers of plot can now be rewritten as antinomies, whose warring encompasses all of western modernity, starting (at least) as early as the seventeenth century (the time of Robert Burton’s Anatomy of Melancholy) and extending to our own present postmodernism.

**Affect as Ideology, or, How To Historicize Affects**

But it is here that Jameson’s argument also starts to brush up against its uncanny double — ahistoricism — in Antinomies’ refusal to provide us in the end with something like a Marxist unmasking of the ideology of affect, which would show that a preoccupation with affect and its codification is yet another “strategy of containment” in which the possibility of grasping history and totality is foreclosed upon in advance. That Jameson believes the latter is surely the case; but, counter to our expectations, he reaches that conclusion by agreeing with, and insisting upon, the Deleuzian definition of affect as something like an ultimate, or final, surface which cannot be made to represent, or stand in for, anything else. This, then, is a much different method of critique than the symptomatic reading made famous in The Political Unconscious, which relied on a surface-depth model of analysis, and is bound to frustrate familiar readers looking for a more classic Jamesonian approach as well as self-identified affect theorists, particularly those following Deleuze, for whom the non-representational and de-subjectivizing force of affect makes it available for a politicized disengagement from the status quo. Clearly, as a Marxist who still espouses the class struggle and tends to speak of History with a capital H, Jameson is not particularly interested in the politicization of affect on these terms. And indeed one senses that Jameson’s almost perverse insistence on affect as a kind of ultimate surface is meant to dramatize — on the very terms such theorists would use — that affect is not subsumable to a larger
political project, but is rather a historical “discovery” of something that was always there from the start, like so many dinosaur bones, the assimilation of which has reshaped the way we think about ourselves, our temporality, and the way we encode those concerns in our fictions.

However, it is hard to not glimpse in his numerous descriptions and examples of “the codification of affect,” its circulating intensities and diminutions, something else altogether – namely the mediation of the various flows of capital as they were then beginning to assert themselves in the nineteenth-century literary imagination. In this light, it perhaps important to emphasize that, insofar as affects “must somehow achieve independence from the conventional body itself” (38), their representation already implies a second-degree removal from bodily immediacy and therefore also a process of mediation. Thus, while Jameson’s unnameable affects look at first an awful lot like Deleuze and Massumi’s unnameable intensities, the process of codification actually detaches affect from its “virtual” immediacy in the body and begins to associate its increase and diminution with something other than itself, which mediates it.

Jameson explores this more fully in his chapter on Zola, which turns largely on a reading of *Le Ventre de Paris*. Here, he argues the narrator’s incessant cataloguing of the sights, sounds, and smells of the urban market, Les Halles, has the effect of autonomizing or liberating affect from the body. As the narrator’s lists accrue more and more details, naming and cataloguing the many goods on display, the narrative takes on the quality of a detached camera eye, which has left the human body behind, and, in a kind of panning shot, starts to take in all Les Halles has to offer. Here, “the realm of the visual begins to separate from that of the verbal and conceptual and to float away in a new kind of autonomy.” It is “[p]recisely this autonomy [that] will create the space for affect” (55). As Jameson observes, the goods of the market — particularly the seafood and, in one scene especially, the cheeses — conjure up for the reader not just the sights of the marketplace, but also the smells, which now, because of the roving camera-eye quality of the narrative, become weirdly detached from any identifiable smelling subject or body. Thus, even as the many different names of seafood and cheeses are being rattled off by the narrator, there is a secondary effect, or rather *affect*, which escapes the specificity of any of these names and creates, alongside this on-going inventory of wares, a subterranean current of rising and diminishing affective intensities without a name: “a tremendous fermenting and bubbling pullulation in which the simplicity of words and names is unsettled to the point of an ecstatic dizziness by the visual multiplicity of the things themselves and the sensations that they press on the unforewarned observer” (54).

For Jameson, the “codification of affect” always requires it to detach from the body as a site of circumscribed meaning and reattach to something outside the body, which will become its representational vehicle: “the registration of affect,” he says, “must become allegorical of itself, and designate its own detached and floating structure
within itself” (65). It is in this sense that he compares it to “the invisible materiality of light”:

a transparency capable at certain moments of thickening into an object in its own right, with its own kind of visibility, as with certain hours of the day in Los Angeles or Jerusalem, where light can be perceived in and for itself, and where the surfaces of the buildings are best observed as sheets whose pores and rugosities capture the new element and hold it for a moment. (68)

Light, as Jameson observes here, can only take on a kind substantiality for the human eye when it is reflected off something other than itself, particularly a shiny surface of some kind, whose shininess is itself a secondary effect of the light mirrored in it. For Jameson, it is this kind of “autonomization” that empties affect of any representational content beyond its own self-reflection, associating it, for him, with Deleuze’s and Massumi’s unnameable intensity.

It is undeniable that these affects that circulate in Zola’s novel are unnamed and perhaps even eternally unnameable. Whatever the affect that the naming of cheeses produces, it certainly isn’t so clearly identifiable as would be Jameson’s “named” emotions. However, I remain skeptical that such nameless affective intensities remain without content, reflective of nothing other than themselves. In fact, they seem rather precisely indexed to “the piles and well-nigh infinite variety of commodities” (61) that circulate in the urban marketplace and therefore symptomatic also of that very particular capitalist infrastructure created to facilitate consumption – the shopping mall! And even if the commodities themselves remain on the shelf as the disembodied camera eye swoops by to catalogue them, the circulation of that narratorial eye, as well as the free-floating circulating affective intensities it generates, seem to conjure that other disembodied “real abstraction” that circulates in the marketplace: “exchange-value,” which, as Marx says, resides in neither the commodity nor the money that represents its value, but in their ceaseless exchange, a “change of form” that then “becomes an end in itself” — in short, autonomized.

In other words, I cannot help wanting to put Jameson’s argument back within the coordinates of an older Jamesonian methodology that would then, in its final gesture, present affect to us repackaged as the cultural logic of nineteenth-century capitalism, which has returned to us, via Deleuze and others, as a theoretical language and diagnostic now that the metaphorical flows of affective intensity, which once mediated the more concrete flows of commodities and hard cash in the realist novel, have become even realer “real abstractions” under late-capitalist globalization, financialization, and the ensuing crisis. As Audrey Jaffe argues in a study that attempts to link affect to both Victorian and present-day representation of financial crisis, the boom-and-bust cycles of financial capital have always seemed to represent something
of the “affective life of the average man,” making us want to allegorize the peaks and valleys of the stock market graph into a representation of our collective heartbeat: a kind of thermometer for the inner soul of the collective.19 But the economy, even when it requires us to invest in it libidinally as well as financially, doesn’t run on affects alone. To escape the representational crisis that a narrow focus on affect brings about, we must resituate “the codification of affect” within its broader historical context.

Thus, where Jameson would now seem to want to outdo and, in so doing, overturn the affect theorists in his determined commitment to the Deleuzian position that affects can never represent, or stand in for, anything else, I would want to outdo and, in so doing, overturn Jameson, by insisting in an older Jamesonian fashion that anything can be made to stand in for something else; that mediation, in other words, is both inescapable and necessary, and that realism’s “codification of affect” — “in which each infinitesimal moment differentiates itself from the last by a modification of tone and an increase or diminution of intensity” — is already an unconscious attempt to grapple, albeit by way of another category, with the circuitous self-differentiations (exchange value) that capital utilizes for its increase. The “codification of affect” in nineteenth-century realism is thus actually a trans-codification of affect and totality, a feeling-for-totality that persists even as History seems to disappear, and a compensation, in fact, for that very disappearance. What “affect” means for contemporary theory is a question that Jameson leaves curiously bracketed in Antinomies. But already his strong correlation between the birth of European capitalism and the “codification of affect” in the realist novel points the way for a new and rigorous historicization of those supposedly ahistorical affects. Thus, to return to Antinomies’ final point – that we must return to historical thinking by means of whatever stimulant available, be it future-oriented and Science-Fictional or otherwise — Jameson remains, as irony would have it, eternally correct.
Notes


4. It is perhaps important to note here, as Jameson does elsewhere, that “it is a paradoxical feature of the concept of autonomy that it almost always turns out really to mean semi-autonomy (in the Althusserian sense): that is to say, the independence and self-sufficient internal coherence of the object or field in question is generally understood dialectically to be relative to some greater totality (in relation to which alone it makes sense to assert that it is autonomous in the first place).” *Signatures of the Visible* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 276.


7. As Jameson observes, the former “semiautonomy of the cultural sphere” enjoyed by modernist artists “has been destroyed by the logic of late capitalism... [C]ulture is today no longer endowed with the relative autonomy it once enjoyed as one level among others in earlier moments of capitalism”; and again, later in the same text, “This autonomy of culture, this semiautonomy of language, is the moment of modernism, and of a realm of the aesthetic which redoubles the world without being altogether of it, thereby winning a certain negative or critical power, but also a certain otherworldly futility.” But: “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, which no longer produces monumental works of the modernist type.” *Postmodernism* 48 and 96. However, for an attempt to complicate some of these claims about the disappearance of artistic semiautonomy under late capitalism, see Nicholas Brown, *Autonomy: The Social Ontology of Art Under Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019).


15. Postmodernism 11-12.