It is widely agreed that Fredric Jameson is the major Marxist theoretician in the English-speaking world today and also a key figure in the massive intellectual constellation dubbed ‘postmodern’. How is it, then, that the impact of an œuvre characterised by a commentator of Perry Anderson’s stringency as the ‘culmination’ of the Western-Marxist tradition,¹ has hitherto remained marginal in Continental Europe and utterly negligible in France? No doubt the answer is to be sought in the formulation of the question itself. Jameson’s dual claim to fame in the English-speaking world, and especially the United States (his identification with Marxism as a reference and the postmodern as an object) is precisely what explains his lack of success in Continental Europe. In fact, Jameson established himself as a protagonist in intellectual debate on an international scale in the 1980s, at the point when Marxism was collapsing in its heartlands of Latin Europe and when, particularly in France, a violently anti-Marxist, revanchist neoliberalism was rife. As for the topic of postmodernism, which propelled Jameson towards a considerably

wider public than the audience for Marxism, while the French dimension is essential (notably Lyotard and his *La Condition postmoderne*, published in 1979), it remained a predominantly anglophone and, more specifically, American debate.

In reality, the emergence of the ‘Jameson phenomenon’, whose break with the Occidento-centrism of earlier Marxism is not the least of its specificities,\(^2\) represents one of the symptoms of the shift that Anderson signalled in the early 1980s as a reversal in the basic coordinates of the geopolitics of the theoretical field:

> the traditionally most backward zones of the capitalist world, in Marxist culture, have suddenly become in many ways the most advanced.\(^3\)

So it as if the discrepancy of the past had been cancelled, with the most advanced zone of the capitalist world – especially the United States – coinciding for the first time in history with the appointed terrain of an ‘emergent Marxism’, in the academy at least.

Such a reversal, which obviously coincides with the reassertion of American economic and military hegemony across the planet, could not have occurred without a decisive impact on the configuration and, in a sense, the very texture of the Marxism in question – especially in its relationship to political practice and its ‘exterior’ in theory. Simplifying to the extreme, it may be said that, confirming a version of the law of uneven and combined development in theory, the preservation of an intransigent radicalism and professed continuity with the ‘great tradition’ of classical Marxism has been paid for by a fairly radical recasting of the lines of demarcation within the contemporary theoretical Kampfplatz. Far from being limited exclusively to Jameson, these tendencies nevertheless assert themselves with especial clarity in his work.

Indeed, it is difficult to hide the fact that this *œuvre* takes the form of a paradox – at least, we may wager that it might appear thus to non-anglophone readers, who are used to certain types of intellectual specialisation and division. Rather than the exposition of a doctrine or system, what we are dealing with in Jameson’s case is the operation of a major interpretative

---

\(^2\) See Anderson 1998, pp. 74–5. China and South-East Asia form a strategic part of Jameson’s project, both as subject of study and as a site of reception of his work. See Hardt and Weeks 2000, p. 6.