7 Visually mapping totality

Fredric Jameson’s Greimassian square

Tyson E. Lewis

Introduction

Fredric Jameson is, without a doubt, the most important Marxist theorist in the United States. Although situated within the literary field, his book Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature (1974) helped introduce the Frankfurt School to an English-speaking audience and thus paved the way for a revitalization of Marxist-inspired theory within a North American context. Later, his book Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1992) provided a conceptual framework for periodizing the postmodern as a symptom of more basic economic transformations in the composition of capitalism. Yet despite Jameson’s acclaim, he is rarely cited in critical research in educational theory. This is paradoxical as I have demonstrated Jameson’s own long-standing investment in the question of pedagogy (Lewis, 2009). In this short chapter, I want to address this oversight by turning to Jameson’s unique theoretical methodology, and in particular, his use of the Greimassian square as a tool for critical inquiry. What makes the use of the Greimassian square so important is how it visually shows Jameson’s thought process in action. In this sense, it is not only theoretically productive but also educationally revealing, throwing light on how Jameson constructs his complex and internally differentiated notion of totality.

Jameson’s project

Before turning to the square, I want to first outline Jameson’s methodological principles: name the system, always historicize, and finally, think dialectically. Drawing on a wide spectrum of Marxist literary theory, Fredric Jameson summarizes his own political problematic with the following clarion call: “We have to name the system” (1992, p. 418). Here his emphatic inflection is placed on the verb “to name” as an act of representing the totality of social relations with their multiple, internal contradictions. Of course, this totality is unnamable and always escapes representation. Yet, for Jameson there is an imperative to attempt the impossible through a process of totalization. While this might at first be seen as a failure of the dialectical imagination and thus a dead end (as
Visually mapping totality

postmodernist valorizations of the partial and the fragmentary might suggest), Jameson discovers a positive valence hidden within this failure that rests on the distinction between totalization as an indefinite process and totality as a completed and thus absolute endpoint. He summarizes,

Indeed, if the word *totality* sometimes seems to suggest that some privileged bird’s-eye view of the whole is available, which is also the Truth, then the project of totalization implies exactly the opposite and takes as its premise the impossibility for individual and biological human subjects to conceive of such a position, let alone to adopt or achieve it.

(1992, p. 332)

In this sense, totalization is always already a “partial summing up” (1992, p. 332). Such partial summing up is essential for three reasons. First, abstraction from the immediacy of fragmented and phenomenologically limited experience through totalization enables us to grasp historical trends, and thus “map” the present in relation to the past. This might be considered the epistemological use of totalization. Second, it is only against a map of the totality that the “promise of resistance” (1992, p. 400) can be rekindled. Resistance is always resistance to or against something. Without totalization, resistance will remain inevitably partial and limited, unable to zoom out to see the broader system as a whole. Third, totalization concerns the dialectical relation between the present and the past, but also includes emergent trends that arise against a background. In this sense, totalization opens itself up to the future. For Jameson, this future has a utopian dimension, which itself is more of an open-ended process of imagining forms of life beyond capitalism than it is a blueprint for the perfect society.

The second methodological imperative is “Always historicize!” (1981, p. xi). As Jameson summarizes, this slogan is “the one absolute and we may even say ‘transhistorical’ imperative of all dialectical thought” (1981, p. xi). The particular form of totalization that is at stake in historical thinking concerns the precarious status of periodization. If we want a sense of historical difference, we cannot afford to risk periodization (even if it is reductive). Periodization rests on determining large-scale shifts in cultural logic across cultural, social, and economic spheres of life. “Cultural logic” is a difficult notion in Jameson’s work and may be described as a hegemonic set of norms (acting as a kind of tractor beam or gravitational forcefield organizing a dispersed set of practices around its magnetic core) or a particular structure of feeling (that permeates or saturates an historical moment) or even an apparatus organizing knowledge/power (so that certain forms of knowing take precedence). In any case, it is the stated goal of periodization to shed light on the relationship between dominant, residual, and emergent (as Raymond Williams might say) dimensions of a cultural logic, including (and most importantly) the logic of the present.

Underlying the last two methodological principles is a more basic imperative: think dialectically. There are many ways to define dialectics, but for
Jameson, it is essentially a way to thematize the movement of contradictions. Or perhaps we could say map contradictions within a system. In this context, mapping would refer to both the space and time of contradictions. But what is a contradiction? Here we can cite Jameson’s analysis of contradictions verses antinomies. He writes,

the structuralist perspective always grasps contradiction in the form of the antinomy: that is to say, a logical impasse in which thought is paralyzed and can move neither forward nor back, in which an absolute structural limit is reached, in either thought or reality . . . it is the unmasking of antinomy as contradiction which constitutes truly dialectical thinking as such.

(2009, p. 43)

In other words, dialectical thinking is the unmasking of a fixed and static antinomy as a mobile, dynamic process that contains within it the seeds of its own transformation. Stated differently, dialectical thought takes an initial opposition that appears to be a deadlock and discovers within it a restless negativity that jumpstarts a process. This process must take into account its own conditions of possibility, and thus always involves critical self-reflection. There is no point outside the process that is stable. This is precisely why the “system” discussed previously is never complete, never fully totalizable as there is no point outside of its own internal contradictions (no perfect bird’s eye vantagepoint) from which to perfectly capture its complexity. Finally, dialectical thinking is not, for Jameson, synthesis or sublation (as in the classical Hegelian model). Instead, it is rather a mapping of permutations that emerge when one puts in motion an antinomy. Or, dialectical thinking is the internal differentiation of contradictory possibilities that rest, latent and under-developed, within any reified binary.

While Jameson is emphatic in his insistence on naming the system and, in turn, historicizing this system in terms of periodization, the very possibility of attempting this two-pronged theoretical project is in a state of crisis not because of the inadequacies of Marxism but rather because of the state of representation itself. The cultural logic of late capitalism, postmodernism, has made it increasingly difficult to represent totality, culminating in a disorienting effect and political uncertainty. Globalization – in all its immensity and sublimity – becomes an impossible object whose attending cultural logic revels in fragmentation and localization. Without an ability to name the system, political action is set at a distinct disadvantage. Jameson contends that Marxism in the postmodern era of global capitalism demands an aesthetic or cultural turn, a turn towards “cognitive mapping” as an aesthetic and cognitive solution to the problem of orientation.

Based on Kevin Lynch’s work, the cognitive map for Jameson charts relations not simply in the city but in the “global village” of late capitalism, revealing the underlying circuits that create a transnational economic system in an innovative and comprehensive narrative structure. Such a map represents the
contradictions within capitalism through aesthetic forms that do not ideologically resolve the contradictions but rather present them in relation to history as an absent yet omnipresent determinant. Jameson’s mapping strategy is in sum dynamic (in which the very narrative of the map contains a necessary temporal dimension), exploring the constantly shifting, dialectical relations between the positive and negative movements of society as a whole. In other words, cognitive mapping decisively counteracts the ludic tendencies in postmodernism by articulating heterogeneity into a dialectically mediated totality. Jameson summarizes:

An aesthetic of cognitive mapping – a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system – will necessarily have to respect this now enormously complex representation dialectic and invent radically new forms in order to do it justice.

(1992, p. 54)

Cognitive mapping is pedagogical precisely because it concerns itself with the dual function of naming the system and the cultivation of the perceptual, imaginative, and cognitive abilities necessary to place this system within a properly historical framework. The map must strive for totality (including the utopian moment poised at the very edge of the capitalist system) while simultaneously building towards a new notion of learning and interacting with the world that is at its heart revolutionary.

Greimassian square

The importance of mapping informs much of Jameson’s work, including his interest in Greimassian squares. These squares are, on my reading, a schematized heuristic for mapping out various dialectical contradictions that are residual, dominant, and emergent within a given system. They therefore are a concrete pedagogical tool for naming the system, historicizing, and thinking dialectically.

Before I turn to Jameson’s description of the square, it is important to introduce the logic informing the structure of Algirdas Julien Greimas’s square as such. In its most basic form, the square is a way of increasing the number of analytical classes stemming from a single, oppositional pair of terms. The square multiplies from two to four to eight total positions. This multiplication starts with a single opposition (A vs. B where B is the negation of A), out of which is generated a pair of contraries (not-A vs. not-B). Further combinations then ensue resulting in metaterms. Vertical metaterms include the complex term (A + B) and the neutral term (not-A + not-B, or the negation of two negations), while the horizontal metaterms include positive and negative deixes. One can think of the vertical metaterms as contradictory syntheses and the deixes as intensifying a term by affirming a certain value and negating the opposite of that term.
Given this structuralist description, it might be surprising that it is a tool used by a Marxist interested in naming the system, historicizing, and dialectical thinking. Indeed, the square seems rather fixed, stratified, and therefore seems to exclude a temporal dimension so important for Jameson’s theoretical and political projects. Yet, in Jameson’s hands, the inanimate square suddenly springs to life. Jameson summarizes his understanding of the square as follows:

I have suggested that other traditions may find this schema interesting if they entertain the hypothesis that it constitutes a virtual map of conceptual closure, or better still, of the closure of ideology itself, that is, ideology as a mechanism, which, while seeming to generate a rich variety of possible concepts and positions, remains in fact locked into some initial aporia or double-bind that it cannot transform from the inside by its own means.

(2019, p. 350)

Here, the square represents a cultural logic of a period, mapping out the permutations that are possible within a finite frame. Yet this very closure of the square-as-map also contains a utopian point of transformation, wherein the outer terms (metaterms) themselves can become fulcrums for further dialectical processes that might escape the ideological barriers illustrated by the parameters of the square.

In this sense, the square, first and foremost, functions to name the system. “A system,” writes Jameson,

in this sense is at one and the same time freedom and determination: it opens a set of creative possibilities (which are alone possible as responses
to the situation it articulates) as well as tracing ultimate limits of praxis that are also the limits of thought and imaginative projections.

(1994, pp. 129–130)

The square reveals the system’s macro tendencies by organizing a plurality of heterogeneous and seemingly disparate elements and styles. Likewise, the square can be thought of as a spatialized representation of a temporal process of dialectical thinking. In Jameson’s hands, the square unfolds in a dynamic and dialectical motion, multiplying terms from inside of an initial set of oppositions. The square is, in this sense, infused with a restless temporality. But even more importantly, the square itself ought to be read as a partial summing up of positions, terms, or signs within a given cultural logic such that historicization of a period becomes a possibility. In short, the square becomes a way of representing the unrepresentable totality of positions offered up within a cultural logic – it therefore makes a historical period (and its internal contradictions) appear.

And like cognitive mapping more generally, the Greimassian square has a “pedagogical function” in that one can

use this visual device to map out and to articulate a set of relationships that it is much more confusing, and much less economical, to convey in expository prose, and these humbler pedagogical capacities of the semiotic square may not be the least index of its importance.

(2019, p. 351)

In short, the square economically conveys dialectical complexity in an easily accessed visual graph. It therefore has pedagogical value. But I would venture to add that this value is not simply for the audience or reader of a completed work. Indeed, it has pedagogical value to the theorist him or herself. It is a research tool insofar as it is also a pedagogical tool helping one think through contradictions emanating from within a given oppositional pair.

Jameson argues as much when he describes, in some detail, his own use of the square to sharpen his dialectical thinking skills. In particular, he highlights three crucial moments in using the square. First, is the inaugural decision, not merely about the terms of the binary opposition to be expanded and articulated in the square as a whole, but also, and above all, the very order in which those terms are arranged; it makes a fundamental difference, in other words, whether the founding binary is ordered as white versus black, or as black versus white. The square is in this sense not symmetrical but temporal or positional.

(2019, p. 351)

Elsewhere, he also highlights the “difficulty in beginning in any nondogmatic way” (1994, p. 131) and suggests that one must start from a position with some
intuitive feasibility. Such feasibility must not be predetermined by the particular interests of the theorist, but rather must be faithful to the problematic of the research itself.

The second important recommendation for conducting research with the square is that the primary, internal terms “need to be conceived polysemically, each one carrying within it its own range of synonyms, and of the synonyms of its synonyms” (2019, p. 351). This rule of thumb introduces semiotic slippage into the square so that the square is never fully totalized (only a practice in totalization). At the same time, this recommendation maintains that the semantic richness of the terms not be bracketed out completely, as the key to the square and its organization might rest in the multiple meanings that are possible within the terms as they begin to alchemically interact with one another.

And finally, the last piece of methodological advice Jameson gives is to pay close attention to the final term, or neutral metaterm. For Jameson, this is the “place of novelty and of paradoxical emergence” within the square. For him, “it is always the most critical position and the one that remains open or empty for the longest time, for its identification completes the process and in that sense constitutes the most creative act of the construction” (2019, p. 352). Interestingly, he writes that it is the “place of the great leap, the great deduction, the intuition that falls from the ceiling, from heaven” (2019, p. 352). It is as if the final term in the construction of the square does not usher forth from the researcher’s subjectivity, but rather is the result of the workings of the square itself. The neutral metaterm is a point of novelty in which something reveals itself that is beyond the capacities of the researcher to conceptualize on his or her own. In short, the neutral metaterm is precisely the educational moment within the production of the square where the researcher is taught something new or different. The work of the researcher is to carefully arrange the other terms so as to open a space or a clearing within thought for the arrival of this crucial, mysterious negation of two negations to arrive and set the square in motion once again toward a utopian possibility.

This leads us to the question of accuracy. How does one assess the validity of the square? What is the “proof” that any square is preferable over any other square? Jameson offers the following advice:

A certain conviction that you are working in the right direction comes, I think, when the traits of semes of the semiotic square begin to accumulate interesting synonyms from different systems. . . . The moment in which a seme from one kind of movement begins to coincide with that of another is a kind of discovery procedure, which, far from reconfirming what we know (or think we know) already . . . leads to new interpretations.

(1994, p. 131)

In other words, we know a square is on the right track if it teaches us something that surprises or disarms us. “Proof” that a square is somehow more or less accurate comes from its capacity to produce new, unprecedented, and
unanticipated insights as the terms interact, and in particular, as the neutral term makes a shocking appearance.

As with all of Jameson’s work, the Greimassian square itself cannot escape history, but must be placed within history as both symptom of and solution to a representational crisis of postmodernism. If postmodernism is a logic that makes historicization increasingly difficult, colonizing time with space, then the Greimassian spatialization of temporality in the form of a structure or graph is a symptom. At the same time, Greimassian squares must be “true” in some sense – as they can be adequate diagnostic tools for mapping contradictions within a given cultural logic. Simply put, the spatial logic of postmodernism itself makes the spatial form of the Greimassian square pedagogically useful, or intelligible. Only by virtue of being a symptom can the square be a solution to the problem of historicization. Jameson writes, postmodernism “constitutes something like the conditions of possibility for the conceptualizing and articulation of the new theoretical system [of Greimassian semiotics]” (2019, p. 359). On this reading, the square not only shows us – the audience – the internal complexity of postmodern cultural logic, but also (and in a dialectical leap of critical self-reflexivity) the very conditions of its own possibility (the spatialization of postmodernism itself) within this cultural logic.

So, what would be an example of the use of the Greimassian square? There are many possible examples to choose from in Jameson’s work, yet they are difficult to replicate without also going into great detail concerning the narrative that accompanies them or the problematic which Jameson is addressing in a given context. Bearing these points in mind, I can nevertheless briefly summarize the square which Jameson develops to account for contemporary architecture in a chapter titled “The Constraints of Postmodernism.” In this square, Jameson is concerned with organizing a diversity of architectural styles within the postmodern period. The square is organized around certain problems that

Figure 7.2 Jameson’s use of a Greimassian Square to map postmodern architectural styles
emerge in relation to the primary opposition between totality and innovation on the one hand and replication and part on the other. The partial resolution—always incomplete and unsatisfactory—of these internal problematics can be found on the outer rim of the square in the vertical metaterms—high modernism (Le Corbusier) and critical regionalism (Michael Graves)—and horizontal metaterms—dirty realism (Rem Koolhass) and deconstructionism (Peter Eisenman).

The complex term high modernism offers the background against which postmodern styles emerge as various forms of negation, rebellion, and inversion. Because of this, the formative qualities of high modernism—including totality and innovation—are the starting points for the square. On the left, Jameson places Koolhass as a properly postmodern rethinking of “totality” as a surprising combination of the organic and the mechanical producing structures incorporating a multiplicity of heterogeneous and semi-autonomous elements that seem to lack a solid ground and yet nevertheless articulate with one another. While this might seem like a high modernist gesture, Jameson is quick to point out that it must be thought in relation to a properly postmodern theme: replication. For Koolhass, replication concerns the internalization of the chaos of the city into the design of his buildings. Even if the turbulence of the streets infiltrates Koolhass’s architectural aesthetic, his buildings do not merely topple over into the vernacular of their surroundings. Instead, this replication is mediated through a totality, producing a stylization of the city that is as distinct as it is integral to the metropolis it serves. The result is what Jameson describes as “dirty realism.” Importantly, this architectural type is, for Jameson, innovative yet also constrained by postmodernism, ultimately “consistent with the freedom of the market itself” (1994, p. 143).

On the right, we find deconstructionism as a combination of innovation and part. In terms of innovation, Jameson finds within high modernism’s formalism a slow and steady “nonstructural negation of its own system” (1994, p. 162). Here, innovation does not refer to the high modernist emphasis on unique personal style and grand, radical breaks so much as the postmodern emphasis on parts over totalities. Innovation, for Eisenman, comes about through the irrec oncilable layering of parts into a discontinuous ensemble. The unusual combination of innovation and parts leads to Jameson’s final insight: that Eisenman’s architecture produces the possibility of a new kind of postmodern historical narrative. This narrative is not a grand narrative (as with high modernism), but is a pluralization of narrative possibilities. This is a possibility through this “the present invents its own past” out of fragments (1994, p. 182). Such narrative plurality replaces any sense of history as composed of facts with a process in which history institutes a “simultaneity of multiple worlds” (1994, p. 183). Jameson thus leaves this side of the square with some ambivalences: In opposition to the cultural logic of postmodernism as a whole (which resists historicization), Eisenman’s architecture injects a seed of historical differentiation and speculation, yet it is unclear whether or not such micro-histories (so many fictions layered on of one another) enables the audience to map out a process
of totalization (or periodization) so necessary for political action to become possible.

But most importantly is the critical regionalism that emerges from within the stylistic postmodernism of Michael Graves. What happens when totality and innovation are abandoned (and thus any connection to high modernism severed)? What happens when we are left with nothing more than replication and scattered parts divorced from any transformative notion of the new? While this might seem like an architectural dead end, Jameson’s square provides a surprising twist. As the neutral term, critical regionalism is the negation of two negations. It therefore contains within itself both a negation of high modernism but also of postmodernism (as found in dirty realism and deconstructionism). For instance, along with the postmodern, critical regionalism refutes the high modernist emphasis on the avant-garde and strong utopianism of the new as well as a fear of universalizing and homogenizing processes of identity reification. At the same time, it equally is suspicious of postmodernism’s rejection of the notion of periodization (and thus historical teleology). Critical regionalism seeks a certain deeper historical logic in the past of this system [of postmodernism], if not its future: a rearguard retains overtones of a collective resistance, and not the anarchy of trans-avant-garde pluralism that characterizes many of the postmodern ideologies of Difference as such.

(1994, p. 191)

In short, Jameson finds in critical regionalism an architectural attempt to wrestle with both the historical logic of postmodernism’s past and its future. While rejecting strong utopianism, it contains within itself a weak utopianism pushing outward beyond the constraints of the postmodern toward a different kind of collective political project – a collective project that is now gravely under threat as post-Fordist corporations adapt swift strategies to invade and capitalize on regional differences. As Jameson writes, “Critical regionalism” offers up “a conceptual proposal” that is “geopolitical” in that it seeks to mobilize a pluralism of “regional” styles (a term selected, no doubt, in order to forestall the unwanted connotations of the terms national and international alike), with a view toward resisting the standardizations of a henceforth global late capitalism and corporatism, whose “vernacular” is as omnipresent as its power over local decisions.

(1994, p. 202)

To summarize, the square presents us with the architectural logic of late capitalism that contains residual elements (of modernism) and emergent, utopian elements (of critical regionalism) that constitute the internal complexity of the “system” of available architectural forms in the present. As such, the totalization of the period opens itself up to the emergence of a horizon of possibilities that a
gesture beyond the period. The “proof” or validity of the square is to be found in (1) how its terms seem to fall into place, each calling forth the others as if by some kind of internal logic that dialectically unfolds before the researchers and (2) how the resulting neutral metaterm can teach something that was not known before.

**An application of the Greimassian square for educational research**

I will conclude with my own Greimassian square. At the risk of being labeled narcissistic, I will attempt to map out the totality of my own theoretical project as it has shifted over the years. Using the square to think about my own work has been valuable in the past for shedding new light on old ideas and how these ideas articulate to form a constellation that converges and diverges around certain concerns and concepts. In this sense, the square has indeed “taught” me something surprising about my own writing that I would like to share.

To begin, the first terms in the square are learning (A) and testing (B). On my account (Lewis, 2015, 2017a), learning is a particular educational logic that can be characterized as a teleological process oriented toward and guided by a specific, predetermined end. A simple example can illustrate this point: I want to learn to play Go, and this orientation then helps organize a series of learning experiences, each of which can be evaluated along the way in relation to how well they help me reach the predetermined goal. The nature of the goal is open-ended and can include anything from learning skills to simply learning about the self (critical-self reflection). Contrary to learning, we find testing. In a certain sense, one can think of a test as an interruption of the process of learning. It is essentially a point of reification, or stilling, in which the learning process is made concrete, objectified, and rendered into a product. Combined
Visually mapping totality

into a complex metaterm, learning and testing produce two possibilities. First, there is standardized testing in schools. Although learning is process oriented, its teleological thrust makes it amenable to the reifying nature of testing, and vice versa. The two can thus complement each other, producing an incessant feedback loop between learning and testing. In this sense, we can speak of the hegemonic educational logic of late capitalism as a learning-testing regime (Backer & Lewis, 2015). Within such a regime, what is valued is precisely what can be assessed via a test, and a test becomes a measure of what can and ought to be learned. The educational self, on this view, becomes a self that is measurable, self as an output, or self as recognizable to itself through an actualization of its potentials in a certain predefined form. The other possible result of combining learning and testing outside the school is the rise of the life-long learner. This learner is an entrepreneurial self who must pull him- or herself up by the bootstraps and continually learn new skills to compete within flexible labor markets. Here the test is the labor market itself, which passes judgment over the entrepreneurial self in terms of assessing employability.

The contrary of learning is studying (not-A) and the contrary of testing is the protocol (not-B). Studying, as I have elaborated (Lewis, 2015, 2017a), is essentially a non-teleological process that is not oriented toward goals (ends) but is rather a pure means, an educational experience of potentiality as such. Phenomenologically, learning is experienced in terms of growth or development – approximating an end gives it a sense of purpose. Study, on the other hand, has an intense (if not addictive) sense of purposiveness without a purpose, and hence, is not experienced in relation to growth or development so much as stupefaction or vertigo. Because of this, study is interminable and immeasurable. Protocols (Lewis, Friedrich, & Hyland, 2018) are tests that suspend the test’s criteria for success and failure. They are, in other words, tests that do not reify products over process and as such cannot measure outputs. Instead, protocols put something at risk in such a way as to open a space of experimentation. Whereas tests arrive at the completion of an experiment, producing verifiable knowledge as to what has been learned along the way, a protocol suspends its relationship to any notion of completing an experiment, assessing development, or producing evidence. Protocols, in short, suspend, deactivate, and render impossible metrics or the tallying up of “findings.”

When combined, testing and studying produce a metaterm: education as risky exposure. Education on this model concerns the submitting of the self to a test that tests one’s freedom by betraying conventions of the self. It is a betrayal of definable subject positions within a given social and economic order in order to abandon one’s self to one’s “test-drive” (Backer & Lewis, 2015). In this sense, studying renders inoperative the reifying tendencies of testing in order to release testing from measurement according to predetermined success conditions. It reappropriates testing for real experimentation as a moment of exposure of the self to difference beyond itself. At the same time, testing gives studying a new sense of risk taking (as one must risk a betrayal in order to truly test the limits of the self).
On the opposite side of the square, we find a combination of learning and protocoling. In my past work, I have referred to this as exo-pedagogy (Lewis & Kahn, 2010). In this case, learning has a teleology oriented toward the overcoming of anthropocentrism through zoomorphic prototyping. Exo-pedagogical learning is an exodus from the constraints of the human, and is therefore oriented toward the posthuman as a utopian horizon. Zoomorphs are forms of life that do not abide by any fixed binaries separating and dividing life against itself (human vs. animal, for instance). What is learned through exo-pedagogy is a lesson in the power of the body to take flight from the predefined parameters of the human in the name of another form of life. Learning thus becomes a dynamic process of posthuman learning while protocoling takes on a teleological dimension always pushing the human beyond itself into the open that exists between humans and non-human others.

Finally, in the neutral position we find an educational logic that results from a combination of protocoling and studying: potentialism (Lewis, 2017b). Potentialism releases potentiality from any notion of measurable outputs or developmental teleologies. It is therefore not aligned with development (life-long learning), risky exposure, or posthuman overcoming. Instead, potentialism is an educational logic that recursively turns us toward an experience of our potentiality to learn. Stated differently, it concerns the experience of the very potentiality to think, act, or be without thinking, acting, or being without exhausting this potentiality in any one actualization. It is an indeterminate state of educational life best characterized as an impotential act, or an act that de-actualizes itself so that potentiality reveals itself without exhausting itself in the form of a testable assessment. There is no exposure here toward difference destabilizing the self from the outside, nor is there any overcoming of the self on the road to a posthuman future. Instead, there is an idling of such processes of exposure and overcoming so as to re-turn to a more basic and primordial question concerning the very potentiality to think, act, or be. As the negation of two negations, potentialism suspends the teleology of learning as well as the reifying notion of testing while also suspending the exposure and exodus of the central metaterms. What results is an educational logic that lets idle the identifiable features of educational life without passing beyond such life. It is a radically minimal educational experience presupposed yet unthematised by all other forms of educational life. In this sense, there is a utopianism here that is radically weak: suggesting that when the studier hits upon his or her potentiality, educational life as such can be radically rethought beyond the terms defining the square.

Conclusion

In sum, the Greimassian square, as deployed by Jameson, has helped reveal the internal system within which my own thought has been working over the last two decades. And in the process of visually mapping this totality, the square also points toward new horizons of possibility. The lesson here is thus twofold. First,
surprising and unanticipated relationships between seemingly disparate projects come to light as a result of this mapping experiment. Spatial or territorial distinctions between the domains of my thought suddenly become animated by overlapping and crisscrossing terms that speak to a temporal process of dialectical relations that move in and out of one another with a restless, internal propulsion. Second, the question of the status of the map itself remains an open question: How is the map’s educational value a symptom of and solution to the very terms that it throws into relief? In other words, how does the map itself? It would seem that the map reveals itself at the X in the center of the square, thus retaining a minimal autonomy from its content while at the same time offering up a formal potentiality that, as suggested earlier, is capable of pole vaulting the research into another educational dimension precisely because rather than in spite of its radical weaknesses. Because of the totalizing nature of the Greimassian square – including its ability to map itself – Jameson’s visualization strategy is an invaluable methodological tool for any critical project, enabling us to imagine complex permutations and relations that exist between competing power dynamics and oppositional structural logics that exceed the capacity of any given philosophical system, ideological position, or particular data set to fully capture.

References