



The Abyss of Representation: Marxism and the Postmodern Sublime (Post-Contemporary Interventions)

George Hartley

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From the Copernican revolution of Immanuel Kant to the cognitive mapping of Fredric Jameson to the postcolonial politics of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, representation has been posed as both indispensable and impossible. In his pathbreaking work, *The Abyss of Representation*, George Hartley traces the development of this impossible necessity from its German Idealist roots through Marxist theories of postmodernism, arguing that in this period of skepticism and globalization we are still grappling with issues brought forth during the age of romanticism and revolution. Hartley shows how the modern problem of representation—the inability of a figure to do justice to its object—still haunts today's postmodern philosophy and politics. He reveals the ways the sublime abyss that opened up in Idealist epistemology and aesthetics resurfaces in recent theories of ideology and subjectivity.

Hartley describes how modern theory from Kant through Lacan attempts to come to terms with the sublime limits of representation and how ideas developed with the Marxist tradition—such as Marx's theory of value, Althusser's theory of structural causality, or Žižek's theory of ideological enjoyment—can be seen as variants of the sublime object. Representation, he argues, is ultimately a political problem. Whether that problem be a Marxist representation of global capitalism, a deconstructive representation of subaltern women, or a Chicano self-representation opposing Anglo-American images of Mexican Americans, it is only through this grappling with the negative, Hartley explains, that a Marxist theory of postmodernism can begin to address the challenges of global capitalism and resurgent imperialism.

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