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A universe in pieces, abandoned, without hope, an image of the real
... Everything has taken on the miraculous tint of time.

Louis Aragon

Two fundamental assumptions underlie, and vitiate, most of the writing
about 'modernity' in recent debates about historical periodization
and cultural change. One is that the term can be used unproblematically
to refer to some chronologically distinct span of historical time,
marked out by epochal changes in the structure of European societies
- whatever the precise limits of such a time-span are taken to be. The
other is that the question of the forms of time-consciousness produced
within European societies during this period can be separated off from
the question of the temporality of periodization itself. 'Modernity'
is routinely assumed to be an empirical category of historical sociology,
used to register certain inaugural breaks or ruptures in the develop­
ment of societies, at a number of different levels - from political,
economic and legal forms, through religious and cultural organization,
to the structure of the family, the relations between sexes, and the
psychological constitution of the individual - within the underlying
unity of a 'period'.¹ The forms of temporality with which these various
domains are associated are rarely connected to the temporality implicit
in, or proper to, the use of modernity as a periodizing category. Indeed,
the idea of modernization, through which the sociological concept of
modernity was extended beyond its original reference to European
and North American societies, in the context of the processes of post­
war decolonization, notoriously presumes a homogeneous continuum
of historical time across which comparative judgements about social
development may be made in abstraction from all qualitative temporal
differences.

These assumptions served sociology well for the best part of a
century, insofar as they allowed it to constitute its object as a discipline
('modern' societies) in a way which simultaneously distinguished it from history and anthropology, on the one hand, and journalism, on the other, while nonetheless retaining its links to the concerns of all three ('the past', "other" societies' and 'the present day', respectively), in the spirit of an empirical objectivity. However, the problematic character of these assumptions comes into view as soon as the issue of change within the present is raised otherwise than as an extrapolation of developmental tendencies built into the relationship between pre-given structural social types ('modernity' and 'tradition'); that is to say, as soon as the present is viewed, however briefly, from the practical perspective of the radical openness of the historical process. This challenge to the sociological concept of modernity has taken two main forms: first, during the period of the formation of sociology as a discipline, from the theoretical and political alternative of Marxism; and second, more recently, through the more theoretically and politically diffuse, but no less strident, claims that have been made on behalf of the idea of postmodernity. Each disrupts the complacency of the sociological category of modernity in a different way.2

Marxism contests the bifurcation of history into 'traditional' and 'modern' societies through a periodization based on the idea of modes of production: historically distinct combinations of social relations and material forces of production that are understood to condition 'the general process of social, political and intellectual life'.3 And it locates itself, practically, within this history through its identification with those social forces internal to the capitalist mode of production which it takes to represent the principle of a new system of production, in which the contradictory class dynamics of hitherto existing societies will be abolished through the abolition of economically based social classes (communism). From this perspective, the idea of modernity may be understood in two very different ways. Either it is short-hand for the most 'advanced' social forms at any particular historical moment (the forms of 'today'), judged by the criterion of their contribution to the development of the productive forces on a world-historical scale; or, in its sociological sense, it is an ideological term which masks significant differences between societies by attending only to certain superficial features they have in common.

In the first case, the term acquires a new social content by being situated within the developmental perspective of historical materialism. Marx himself often used 'modern' in this way, to refer to particular features of industrial capitalism: 'modern manufacture', for example, and 'modern industry'.4 In the latter instance, it is more profoundly problematized. However, a crucial question remains. This is whether
the relocation of the sociological concept of modernity within the
developmental perspective of historical materialism affects its temporal
structure as a category of historical periodization, or whether it just
gives it a new, changing historical content. Is there a new conception
of historical time implicit in the developmental perspective of a
materialist conception of history? Or does it, like the sociology of
modernity, take the homogeneous character of historical time for
granted by the manner in which it makes comparative judgements
between modes of production? The first position is shared by Benjamin,
Sartre and Althusser; the latter is taken by Kracauer, who insists that
Marx, like Comte, ‘unquestioningly confide[s] in the magic of chron-
ology’. However, the difference is smaller than one might think, since
all of the former agree both that the new materialist conception lacks
self-consciousness, and that the Marxist tradition has tended to regress
behind it in the most prevalent forms of its practical consciousness
(stemming from the period of the Second International). As Sartre put
it: ‘Marxism caught a glimpse of true temporality when it criticised
and destroyed the bourgeois notion of “progress” . . . But – without
ever having said so – . . . renounced these studies and preferred to make
use of “progress” again for its own benefit.’ Furthermore, when each
of them came to develop their own version of the ‘true temporality’ of
history, implicit in Marx’s work, they turned out to be very different
indeed.

The situation regarding the idea of postmodernity is rather different.
It problematizes the category of modernity, neither by giving it a new
content (by locating it within a different theory of history), nor by
questioning its ideological function, but rather by proposing that cer-
tain societies have experienced (and are experiencing) transformations
of a sufficiently radical kind to distinguish them from those social forms
hitherto taken to define what is modern, to the extent of justifying their
description as ‘postmodern’. This would seem to offer far less of a
challenge to the sociological concept of modernity than Marxism, since
it not only fails to contest its terms, theoretically, but actually accepts
them, insofar as it defines itself through its relation to the periodizing
concept of modernity, by simple temporal negation (the logic of the
'post'). Indeed, after a brief initial period in which the idea of the post-
modern looked like a further, if not final, threat to a disintegrating
discipline (sociology), it has since proved to be excellent cover for a
return to classical sociological theorizing in a new, terminologically
transformed and less empirically oriented guise. Once the 'modern'
becomes 'tradition', the 'postmodern' can play the modern, and the
temporal structure of the orthodox sociological concept of modernity
can be redeployed across the new field. At the same time, simple slippages between usages can generate exciting new paradoxes. Thus, 'postmodernity' can appear as the product of both 'de-traditionalization' and 're-traditionalization' simultaneously, without the glimmer of a dialectic, if the reference of 'tradition' is allowed to oscillate between different uses of 'the modern'.

On closer examination, however, the idea of postmodernity turns out to have rather more subversive potential, once we set aside its relations to the content of the sociological concept of modernity, and reflect upon the way in which the term 'modernity' is dependent for its meaning on identification with some specific present. For if the primary, root sense of 'modernity', prior to its theoretical elaboration or the attribution to it of any particular historical content, is 'the quality or character of being modern'; and if the modern, in its primary sense, is simply that 'pertaining to the present and recent times', or 'originating in the current age or period', then, paradoxically, 'postmodernity' must be the name for a new modernity. Once we reflect upon this theoretically, however (as opposed to simply accepting it, and adjusting our terminology accordingly), the conceptual dynamics of both terms, in their orthodox sociological usage, are thrown into crisis.

There is a tension between the use of modernity as an empirical category of historical sociology and its inherent self-referentiality, whereby it necessarily denotes the time of its utterance, whenever the question of change within the present is at issue. The idea of postmodernity is constituted at the point of this tension. In this sense, it is undoubtedly part of the problematic of the modern. But this should not be taken to suggest that the new term is redundant or that, as Marshall Berman has suggested, movements which call themselves postmodern can 'only re-enact, rather than overcome, modernism's deepest troubles and impasses'. For if current uses of 'postmodern' and its cognates paradoxically remain within the framework of 'modernity', they do more than just repeat its existing forms. Rather, via their paradoxical character, they both draw attention to, and further develop, its contradictory structure, which is concealed by the nominalism and empiricism of its everyday sociological construal. Examination of claims on behalf of the postmodern demand a reflexivity about the temporal structure of modernity that has hitherto been lacking. They prompt a new version of the question already raised by our brief discussion of Marxism: namely, what form of temporality is at stake in the use of 'modernity' as a category of historical periodization such that the paradox of the postmodern
could arise? Or, more directly, what kind of time does 'modernity' inscribe?

In addressing this question, I take as my starting point and thematic perspective Perry Anderson's critique of Marshall Berman's recovery and celebration of a phenomenological concept of modernity in his groundbreaking text *All That is Solid Melts into Air.* Berman's book is, I believe, still the most immediately appealing general account of 'modernity' available, whilst Anderson's critique strikes at, but only partially hits, what I take to be both the main difficulty with the concept and the source of its enduring strength: namely, its homogenization through abstraction of a form of historical consciousness associated with a variety of socially, politically and culturally heterogeneous processes of change. Berman's book has the virtue of dealing with modernity as at once a phenomenological and a sociological category. Anderson's critique has the advantage of raising the question of whether the category is not a merely ideological one (a form of misrepresentation), in the context of a discussion of the conception of historical time required by a materialist conception of history.

This chapter focuses on three distinct but connected approaches to the concept of modernity: modernity as a category of historical periodization, a quality of social experience, and an (incomplete) project. Underlying and unifying its account is a concern, derived in large part from the writings of Benjamin and Koselleck, with modernity as a distinct but paradoxical form of historical temporality. Each of the three approaches discussed isolates a different temporal dimension of this underlying conception: its inscription of the past, the present, and the future, respectively. The key to their comprehension will thus be seen to lie in their relations to each other; that is to say, in the dialectics of a certain temporalization of 'history'.

**Modernity as experience and misrecognition: Berman and Anderson**

Berman's account of modernity as the experience of a dynamic and inherently contradictory process of constant change, a 'maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal' that opens up and closes down avenues of human possibility in more or less equal portions, is well known. I shall not expound it here, except to draw attention to those two of its features which bear most directly on our current concerns. One is the disjunction between the centrality to it of Berman's account of Marx (registered in the title of the book, adopted from the
Communist Manifesto) and the distance it takes from Marx's specifically political analyses. The other is its almost total disregard for the complexities of 'modernity' as a periodizing category. Marx is not merely celebrated as a theoretician of modernity, uncoverer of the contradictory dynamics and broader social consequences of the process of capital accumulation; he is hailed as the herald of 'a paradigmatically modernist faith'. His writings are seen to combine analytic insight into the destructive side of the process of capitalist modernization, with an affirmation of its emancipatory potential comparable in scope to the tragic sweep of Goethe's Faust. Indeed, in many respects, they are read as a response to the challenge of Faust. But for all Berman's appreciation of the dialectical structure of this picture, a crucial part of Marx's own version of it is painted over as outmoded: the formation of a particular class subject. However, contrary to the logic of Western Marxism, Berman refuses to let this undermine his affirmative stance to the processes in question. If anything, it bolsters it, replacing the fallibility of a specific historical projection with the apparently unlimited possibilities of a radically open future. Yet a major part of the intellectual justification for this affirmative stance has been discarded.

This cavalier approach to the elements of an integrated analysis is mirrored in Berman's neglect of questions of periodization. Despite its historical intent (the book aims to renew our sense of modernity by giving us back 'a sense of our own modern roots'), no attempt is made to trace that sense of the modern as a 'coherent whole' which is Berman's object, back to the use of the term as a periodizing category. What is taken to be the first phase of modernity, 'from the start of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth', is allotted a mere six lines in a book of nearly four hundred pages. The periodization of modernity is taken for granted, and its first phase is ignored. The reason appears to be that during this period there was no popular vocabulary for the articulation of the emergent experience of change; something that was not remedied until the revolutionary wave of the 1790s. This is important to Berman because he is concerned with a situation – his present – in which more or less all societies, worldwide, are allegedly undergoing similar experiences of change to a greater or lesser extent. His account thus concentrates on those forms of cultural self-consciousness about such change (modernism) that might inform contemporary experience. Yet as Anderson shows, this self-imposed restriction has significant theoretical effects.

Anderson's objections to Berman's account derive more or less exclusively from his reading of Marx. They are fourfold. In the first place, Berman is seen to have produced an egregiously one-sided
version of Marx's account of capitalist modernization, which falls prey to an uncritical, because undifferentiated, concept of historical time. This is reflected, secondly, in an abstract and 'perennial' concept of modernism, which fails to register the historical specificity of aesthetic modernism as a portmanteau concept for what is in fact a set of distinct, if conjuncturally related, movements, which are in any case now definitively over. Thirdly, his modernist ontology of unlimited self-development, although apparently derived from Marx, is actually based in an idealist form of radical liberalism which, from a materialist standpoint at least, is self-contradictory. Finally, his account of modernity as permanent revolution strips the concept of revolution of all temporal and political determinacy, robbing it, in particular, of its temporal specificity as a punctual event. 'The vocation of a socialist revolution,' Anderson concludes with a characteristic flourish, 'would be neither to prolong nor to fulfil modernity, but to abolish it.'

The most striking thing about this critique is the way in which it oscillates between two different uses of 'modernity'. On the one hand, it is treated as a flawed and misleading category for the identification and analysis of historical processes which are better understood in quite different terms. On the other, it appears as the legitimate designation for an historical phenomenon, the theoretical comprehension, but not the identification, of which is contested. The difference is difficult, but crucial. Anderson equivocates. He seems, in general, to adopt the first sense: he offers a Marxist critique of the discourse of modernity. Yet his conclusion emphatically presumes the second: modernity is an historical reality, capable of 'prolongation', 'fulfilment' and 'abolition'. The connection resides in the reflexivity of historical experience itself: 'modernity' has a reality as a form of cultural self-consciousness, a lived experience of historical time, which cannot be denied, however one-sided it might be as a category of historical understanding. It is the texture of this historical experience of cultural form that Berman sets out to recreate in the name of its admittedly contradictory emancipatory potential. For Berman, in other words, modernity is in some quite basic sense an historical given, as a form of experience. For Anderson, on the other hand, whilst it might be given as an ideological form (a mode of experience produced and reproduced by the rhythm of the capitalist market), it is given in this specific, restricted and ultimately pejorative sense only. It is a misrepresentation, a form of misrecognition. In its place we are offered an alternative, Marxist account of historical development based on a periodization of modes of production, the rise and decline of classes, and the claims of 'a complex and differential temporality, in which episodes or eras
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[are] discontinuous with each other, and heterogeneous within themselves'. Alongside this stands the aspiration to a society that would no longer systematically generate such an illusory form of social consciousness.

The increased specificity promised by such a model of differential time gives it considerable appeal, but there are problems with its opposition to the idea of modernity. For it remains unclear what the relationship is between this model of differential temporality and the ceaseless process of temporal differentiation associated with the idea of modernity itself. In particular, it is unclear what relations there might be between the kind of discontinuity established by what Marx called 'social revolutions' and the use of modernity as an epochal category. The suspicion thus arises that Anderson has seized on a deficiency in Berman's presentation of the concept of modernity (its reduction to a celebratory 'dialectic of modernisation and modernism'), rather than, as he supposes, a fundamental problem with the category itself, which he wants to replace, or at all events decode, with conjunctural analyses of the cultural consequences of capitalist development – conjunctural analyses which, in their privileging of the moment of the present, would appear to be nothing but a modification of the temporal problematic of 'modernity' itself. This uncertainty derives from the absence in both Berman's and Anderson's accounts of an independent treatment of the logic of modernity as a category of historical periodization.

Berman periodizes modernity into three fairly conventional phases – 1500-1789, 1789-1900 and 1900 onwards – of which the middle one is privileged by him as the golden age to be recovered. But there is no consideration of the way in which the idea of modernity itself marks a new way of periodizing history; no consideration of the relation between the kind of historical time occupied by modernity as an epochal category and that which is internal to modernity itself and registered by Berman in terms of the temporal logic of modernism, that 'amazing variety of visions and ideas that aim to make men and women the subjects as well as the objects of modernisation'. To this extent, Berman remains within the tradition of an unreflexive sociology of modernity, wherein the attempt to establish what is new about 'modern' societies fails to reflect upon the temporal co-ordinates and conceptual implications of this form of investigation itself. For there is something decidedly new about modernity as a category of historical periodization: namely, that unlike other forms of epochal periodization (mythic, Christian or dynastic, for example), it is defined solely in terms of temporal determinants, and temporal
determinants of a very specific kind. As Adorno put it: ‘Modernity is a qualitative, not a chronological, category.’ The failure to recognize the logic of these determinants underlies naive concepts of ‘post-modernity’ as a new historical epoch which succeeds modernity in historical time in the same way that modernity itself might be thought to have succeeded the ‘Middle’ Ages.

In order to get a grasp of this particular temporal logic, it is useful to refer to Koselleck’s reconstruction of the semantic prehistory of Neuzeit (literally, ‘new time’), a German term for modernity which is found in its composite form only after 1870. Consideration of this history will help us to grasp the relative independence of modernity as a category of historical periodization from both the problematic of modernization, to which it is effectively assimilated by Anderson, and the idea of modernism, through which it is celebrated by Berman with such an apparent lack of social and political specificity.

From Neue Zeit to Neuzeit: Koselleck’s historical semantics

The distinctive characteristic of Neuzeit as an epochal term is that like der Moderne, les temps modernes, or ‘the modern age’, which register the presentness of an epoch to the time of its classification, but even more explicitly, it ‘refers only to time, characterising it as new, without, however, providing any indication of the historical content of this time or even its nature as a period’. The conditions for such an abstract sense of the historical meaning of the present appear to have developed in five main stages.

1. The word modernus, meaning ‘of today’ as opposed to ‘of yesterday’ – what is over, finished, or historically surpassed – first came into use in the course of the fifth century AD at the time of the collapse of the Roman Empire, when the cyclical opposition of ‘old and new’ characteristic of pagan antiquity was replaced by the sense of an irreversible break with the past. (It derived from modo, meaning ‘recently’.) Generational conflicts about the prestige of ancient writers had appeared in Antiquity (in Horace and Ovid, for example), but as Le Goff points out, ‘they did not have a word for “modern”, since they did not contrast novus with antiquus.’ The sense of the present as new which emerges at this time became the basis for the conflicts between Ancients and Moderns that punctuated the Middle Ages, from the second half of the twelfth century to the beginning of the Renaissance.

2. The first major semantic shift took place with the consciousness
of a new age which developed in Europe in the course of the fifteenth century. This was initially registered in three ways: by the emergence of the terms ‘Renaissance’ and ‘Reformation’ for ideas denoting the threshold of a new (unnamed) period; by the designation of the preceding epoch, now taken to be definitively over, as the Middle Ages; and by the fixing of the term ‘Antiquity’ to denote the pagan culture of ancient Greece and Rome. In the process, a new relationship between the antique or ancient and the modern was established at the expense of the Middle Ages, since the Renaissance gave precedence to the ancient over all other cultures. Here, modern is opposed to medieval rather than to ancient, and the modern has a right to preference only insofar as it imitates the ancient.

3. In the third stage, which roughly runs from the sixteenth century to the end of the seventeenth, the threshold concepts of Renaissance and Reformation through which consciousness of a new age was initially registered, were transformed into ideas descriptive of now completed historical periods. This called for a term denoting the new period as a whole which followed the Middle Ages. It is at this point that the phrase *neue Zeit* comes into use – although only in a neutral, chronological sense at first – signifying that the times are ‘new’ by contrast with the Middle Ages or *mittlere Zeiten*. There is no specification of a criterion of newness here. *Neue Zeit* is thus not, at this stage, a category of historical periodization in any substantive sense. Rather, it stands in for the absence of one, along with the continuing use of *modernus*. The connotations of *neue* are, however, sharper than *modernus*, since it had acquired what Le Goff describes as ‘an almost sacred baptismal character’ in the context of medieval Christianity, for which novelty unconnected to the primordial values of the origin was sacrilegious. As Berman has recently reminded us, for the Bible it is God alone who ‘makes all things new’. This is, of course, also the period of the famous Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, or the ‘Battle of the Books’ as it came to be known. If the Renaissance is to be characterized by the replacement of the authority of the Church by that of the Ancients, it was this latter form of authority which now, in turn, became the object of attack.

4. It was only during the fourth phase, the Enlightenment, that the initially neutral phrase *neue Zeit* came to acquire the sense of a qualitative claim about the newness of the times, in the sense of their being ‘completely other, even better than what has gone before’. The condition for this transformation of the sense of the relationship of the present (and its immediate past) to the more distant past – from being a simple addition in a linear sequence of chronological time, to
a qualitative transcendence of the past of an epochal type which is more than the mere rebirth of a more ancient spirit – was a reorientation towards the future. This reorientation could only take place once Christian eschatology had shed its constant expectation of the imminent arrival of doomsday, and once the advance of the sciences and the growing consciousness of the ‘New World’ and its peoples had opened up new horizons of expectation. Only at this point was a conceptual space available for an abstract temporality of qualitative newness which could be of epochal significance, because it could now be extrapolated into an otherwise empty future, without end, and hence without limit. The distinctive structure of the temporality of modernity may thus be seen to derive from a combination of the Christian conception of time as irreversible with criticism of its corresponding concept of eternity.30 ‘Modernity’, in the subsequently consolidated sense of Neuzeit, may in this respect be understood as the term for an historical sublime – a point of some interest in relation to recent purportedly ‘postmodern’ attempts to reappropriate the concept of the sublime. It gives rise to a new, distinctively historical version of the age-old problem of legitimacy. As Blumenberg puts it: ‘Modernity (Neuzeit) was the first and only age that understood itself as an epoch and, in so doing, simultaneously created the other epochs.’ The problem of legitimacy is latent in its ‘claim to carry out a radical break with tradition, and in the incongruity between this claim and the reality of history, which can never begin entirely anew’.31 It is this problem of legitimacy that underlies the recent attraction of the term ‘postmodern’.

These developments culminate at the end of the eighteenth century in the context of the acceleration of historical experience precipitated by the Industrial and French Revolutions, in the consolidation of the emergent semantic potential of neue Zeit in the coinage neueste Zeit: a phrase which definitively separates the qualitative dimension of the idea from its continuing, more ‘neutral’ usage. ‘What could not be achieved in the concept of neue Zeit [because of the ambiguity produced by its continued neutral usage – PO] was effected by neueste Zeit. It became a concept for the contemporary epoch opening up a new period [which] did not simply retrospectively register a past epoch.’ Similarly, in the decades around 1800, ‘revolution’, ‘progress’, ‘development’, ‘crisis’, ‘Zeitgeist’, ‘epoch’ and ‘history’ itself all acquire temporal determinations never present before:

Time is no longer the medium in which all histories take place; it gains an historical quality ... history no longer occurs in, but through, time. Time becomes a dynamic and historical force in its own right. Presupposed by this formulation of experience is a concept of history which is
likewise new: the collective singular form of Geschichte, which since around 1780 can be conceived as history in and for itself in the absence of an associated subject or object.\textsuperscript{32}

Because of the qualitative transformation in the temporal matrix of historical terms which occurs at this time, ‘modernity’ in the full sense of the term is generally taken to begin here. The modern is no longer simply opposed either to the ancient or to the medieval, but to ‘tradition’ in general.

5. It is this full sense of a ‘newest time’ (neueste Zeiten), opening up a new period by virtue of the quality of the temporality it involves, which was condensed and generalized in the second half of the nineteenth century into the ideas of Neuzeit and modernité, therewith coming to be understood as constitutive of the temporality of modernity as such. It is this, the temporality of Baudelaire’s and Flaubert’s, Simmel’s and Benjamin’s late nineteenth-century modernity, the historical force of the fundamental objects of which ‘lies solely in the fact that they are new’,\textsuperscript{33} which has been the focus of recent attention to modernity as an aesthetic concept, and more broadly, as a form of social experience. The logic of the new, fashion, and aesthetic modernism as a ‘rebellion against the modernity of the philistine’ which nonetheless works within the same temporal structure,\textsuperscript{34} may thus be understood as the result of an aestheticization of ‘modernity’ as a form of historical consciousness and its transformation into a general model of social experience. In the course of this generalization of an epochal form of historical consciousness into the temporal form of experience itself the dialectical character of the new as the ‘ever-same’, articulated philosophically in Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal recurrence, and deciphered economically in Marx’s analysis of the logic of commodity production, is revealed for the first time.

Finally, and more tentatively, to take us up to the present, we might complete this account by adding a sixth stage, in which the peculiar and paradoxical abstractness of the temporality of the new is at once problematized and affirmed. This is the stage after the Second World War during which, as Raymond Williams has put it, “modern” shifts its reference from “now” to “just now” or even “then”, and for some time has been a designation always going into the past with which [in English] “contemporary” may be contrasted for its presentness.\textsuperscript{35} ‘Modernity’, now fixed as a discrete historical period within its own temporal scheme, as the golden age of its cultural self-consciousness, hardens into a mere name and is left stranded in the past. The Quarrel Between the Ancients and the Moderns is replaced by a Quarrel between
the Moderns and the Contemporaries. However, to become post-modern, in this sense at least, is simply to remain modern, to keep in step, a companion of the times, to be con-temporary. 'What, then, is the postmodern?', Lyotard asks: 'undoubtedly part of the modern. A work can only be modern if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism... is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant.'

It is in the irreducible doubling of a reflexive concept of modernity as something which has happened, yet continues to happen – ever new but always, in its newness, the same – that the identity and difference of the 'modern' and the 'postmodern' plays itself out at the most abstract level of the formal determinations of time.

Koselleck's semantic prehistory of Neuzeit shows us the lived time-consciousness of late nineteenth-century European metropolitan modernity – that 'transitoriness' which lies at the core of the 'fugitive' and the 'contingent' – as an intensified social embodiment of a form of historiographic consciousness which had been developing in Europe for some considerable time. On reflection, this is not so surprising, since each seems likely to have its origin in a common source: the temporalities of capital accumulation and its social and political consequences in the formation of capitalist societies. (The latter, it should be noted, can in no way be reduced to the former.) Nonetheless, an awareness of this fact can help us to distance ourselves from the apparent immediacy of the form as an all-engulfing structure of social consciousness, in order to examine it in its own right, freed from the polemical inflections it acquires in its more familiar affirmative cultural manifestations (modernism). Once we do this, it becomes possible to see Anderson's alternative analytical frame of a 'complex and differential temporality', leading to strictly 'conjunctural' analyses – derived from Althusser's 'Outline for a Concept of Historical Time' – as a variation on the very temporal paradigm it sets out to oppose. At same time, the extent to which modernity is a Western concept, inextricably linked to the history of European colonialism, and as such bound up with the politics of a shifting set of spatial relations, becomes clear. History, in Michelet's famous phrase, 'is first of all geography'.

The quality of modernity: homogenization, differentiation and abstraction

'Modernity', we have seen, plays a peculiar dual role as a category of historical periodization: it designates the contemporaneity of an epoch
to the time of its classification; yet it registers this contemporaneity in terms of a qualitatively new, self-transcending temporality which has the simultaneous effect of distancing the present from even that most recent past with which it is thus identified. It is this paradoxical doubling, or inherently dialectical quality, which makes modernity both so irresistible and so problematic a category. It is achieved through the abstraction of the logical structure of the process of change from its concrete historical determinants – an abstraction which parallels that at work in the development of money as a store of value (abstract labour-time). The temporal matrix which is thus produced has three main characteristics:

1. Exclusive valorization of the historical (as opposed to the merely chronological) present over the past, as its negation and transcendence, and as the standpoint from which to periodize and understand history as a whole. History, as Koselleck puts it, is ‘temporalized’. It becomes possible for an event to change its identity according to its shifting status in the advance of history as a whole.

2. Openness towards an indeterminate future characterized only by its prospective transcendence of the historical present and its relegation of this present to a future past.

3. A tendential elimination of the historical present itself, as the vanishing point of a perpetual transition between a constantly changing past and an as yet indeterminate future; or, to put it another way, the present as the identity of duration and eternity: that ‘now’ which is not so much a gap ‘in’ time as a gap ‘of’ time. The dialectic of the new, Adorno argues, represses duration insofar as ‘the new is an invariant: the desire for the new.’ Modernity is permanent transition.

‘Modernity’, then, has no fixed, objective referent. ‘It has only a subject, of which it is full.’ It is the product, in the instance of each utterance, of an act of historical self-definition through differentiation, identification and projection, which transcends the order of chronology in the construction of a meaningful present. As Meschonnic puts it: ‘Each time, the subject projects the values that constitute it onto an object . . . the object varies when the subject changes.’ At the same time, however, contra Meschonnic, the object itself is not composed by projection alone. In any particular case, it is also a possible object of historical inquiry (a real, objective referent) which constrains the subject in turn, in an ongoing dialectic of the constitution of historical identities and knowledges.

Anderson’s objections to Berman’s affirmation of this structure of experience centre on its abstract, homogenizing tendencies and, in particular, the ‘fundamentally planar’ conception of development as
modernization to which it can, on occasion, give rise: ‘a continuous-flow process in which there is no real differentiation of one conjuncture or epoch from another save in terms of the mere chronological succession of old and new, earlier and later, categories themselves subject to unceasing permutations of positions in one direction, as time goes by and the later becomes earlier, the newer older’. Anderson is right, I think, to worry about homogenizing tendencies; right, too, to be sceptical about the political potential attributed by Berman to modernism for establishing new forms of collectivity out of the common structure of experiences of disintegration and renewal – although he probably underestimates its significance in this regard. But he is wrong to reduce the idea of modernity to the homogenization of historical time; an error which is compounded when he goes on to identify this homogenization with ‘the mere chronological succession of old and new’.

There are a whole series of problems here. The first concerns the differential temporality introduced into the category of ‘modernity’ by virtue of the distinction it involves between modern and earlier ‘times’; and its negation by the idea of modernization. Secondly, there is the differential character of the temporality internal to modernity itself, which is established by its qualitative distinction between chronological and historical time. (The ‘next’ is not necessarily the ‘new’; or, at least, the ‘next as new’ is never simply the chronologically next: by what scale – seconds, hours, days, months, years?) Third, associated with this, is the problem of the abstractness of the new, the way it is dealt with by empirical theories of modernity, and the consequent idea of modernity as a project. Finally, there is the question of the form of temporality at work in conjunctural analyses and the hope held out by Anderson of thereby escaping the temporal structure of modernity. The problem posed by an insufficiently differentiated concept of modernization, it will be argued, cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between ‘homogeneous’ and ‘differential’ historical times. Rather, it concerns the possibilities and pitfalls built into the dialectics of homogenization and differentiation constitutive of the temporality of modernity, and the way in which these are bound up, inextricably, with the politics of a particular set of spatial relations.

It has become commonplace to assume that whilst modernity is about new forms of experience of time, ‘postmodernity’ marks a revolution in spatial relations. But this is too simple. The two dimensions are inextricably bound together. Changes in the experience of space always also involve changes in the experience of time and vice versa. Spatial relations have tended to be neglected in discourses on
modernity and are now increasingly the object of investigation; but that is a different matter. In fact, as Benjamin points out, the shift from a Christian eschatological concept of historical time to a modern one ‘secularised time into space’. It is in the repressed spatial premises of the concept of modernity that its political logic is to be found. As Sakai puts it: ‘The condition for the possibility of conceiving of history as a linear and evolutionary series of incidents lay in its ... relation to other histories, other [spatially] coexisting temporalities.’ Modernity is a Western idea. Whether it can any longer be thought of as an exclusively Western concept, as Paz claims, however, is doubtful. For ‘there is no inherent reason why the West/non-West opposition should determine the geographic perspective of modernity except for the fact that it definitely serves to establish the unity of the West, a nebulous but commanding positivity whose existence we have tended to take for granted for so long.’ On the other hand, if ‘the West’ is not so much a geographical category as a geopolitical one, through which the historical predicate of modernity is translated into a geographical one, and vice versa, then we must accept that as the spatial relationship of the West to the non-West is transformed, through migration, tourism, communications technology, and changes in the international division of labour, new configurations of ‘modernity’ will emerge in both Western and non-Western places as new social subjects redefine the sites of the enunciation of the ‘modern’. The prospect is opened up of a proliferation of competing modernities: ‘postcolonial contra-modernities’ and black ‘counter-cultures of modernity’, among others, bearing both the promise and the threat of new historicities.

Insofar as ‘modernity’ is understood as a periodizing category in the full sense of registering a break not only from one chronologically defined period to another, but in the quality of historical time itself, it sets up a differential between the character of its own time and that which precedes it. This differential formed the basis for the transformation in the late eighteenth century in the meaning of the concepts of ‘progress’ and ‘development’, which makes them the precursors of later, twentieth-century concepts of modernization. For the idea of the non-contemporaneousness of geographically diverse, but chronologically simultaneous, times which thus develops, in the context of colonial experience, is the foundation for ‘universal histories with a cosmopolitan intent’. Once the practice of such comparisons was established in anthropology, colonial discourse par excellence, it was easily transferable to the relations between particular social spheres and practices within different European countries themselves,
and thereafter, once again, globally, in an expanding dialectic of differentiation and homogenization.57

Such histories are modernizing in the sense that the results of synchronic comparisons are ordered diachronically to produce a scale of development which defines ‘progress’ in terms of the projection of certain people’s presents as other people’s futures, at the level of the development of history as a whole. As such, they are indeed homogenizing. But this homogenization is premised upon a differentiation which must first be recognized in order to be negated. Furthermore, in order for this negation to occur and homogenization to be achieved, some specific criterion must be introduced to set up a further differential, within the newly homogenized time, so as to provide a content for the concept of ‘progress’. Thus, when Anderson argues that the temporality of modernity knows no internal principle of variation, he is only partly right. He is right to the extent that the concept of modernity, in its basic theoretical form, itself furnishes no such principle. He is wrong, however, insofar as it must find one elsewhere, if there is to be any way of identifying the historically, as opposed to the merely chronologically, ‘new’. This is the role of so-called ‘theories of modernity’ (as distinct from the more general theorization of modernity of the kind sketched here): to provide a content to fill the form of the modern, to give it something more than an abstract temporal determinacy.

At this point, historically, the geopolitical dimension of the concept comes into its own, providing, via the discourses of colonialism, a series of criteria of progress initially derived from the history of European nation-states, and later, in modernization theory proper, from America.58 The failure of modernization as the paradigm of ‘development’ provides the starting point for that understanding of postmodernism which centres upon the construction, and deconstruction, of the idea of colonial discourse. Thus Young, for example, argues contra Jameson that it is ‘not just the cultural effects of a new stage of “late” capitalism’ which the concept of postmodernism is best thought to mark, but ‘European culture’s awareness that it is no longer the unquestioned and dominant centre of the world’.59 Hence the crisis of anthropology (Lévi-Strauss’s ‘daughter of violence’), the disciplinary crucible for the evolutionary time-consciousness of modernization.

It was the function of anthropology to establish historical differences between different types of society within the present. Its basic temporal strategies were thus what Fabian has described as ‘distancing’ and the ‘denial of coevalness’.60 More recently, critical anthropology
has attempted to set out from the recognition of coevalness. It has thus transformed the problem of representation from a narrowly epistemological one ('relativism'), into the more directly political form of a questioning of the social functions of the representational practices at stake; but it has not thereby solved it. Indeed, it would be more accurate to say that it has thus charted the ground of its insolubility, as the space of an ongoing negotiation and struggle. However, to call such anthropologies (let alone the societies about which they write) 'postmodern', in order to differentiate their activities from the colonial past, is to neglect the continuity of the basic temporal structure of historical self-definition and projection which underlies the increasing contestation of the position of enunciator of 'modernity'. It is also to court the danger of failing to differentiate their specific forms in a bland uniformity of 'difference'. Such a monolithic difference threatens to reproduce the structure of temporal distancing of the anthropological problematic in a newly prospective, rather than retrospective, mode. Non-Western societies become representatives of the future (a pure 'hybridity') within the present, just as 'primitive' ones were taken to be the representatives of the past. Postmodern ethnology is in danger of becoming anthropology in reverse.

According to Young, the value of poststructuralism as a theoretical approach to this problem is that, unlike the idea of postmodernism, 'it does not offer a critique by positioning itself outside "the West", but rather uses its own alterity and duplicity in order to effect its deconstruction.' My own approach, in line with the logic of Sakai's argument, accepts the necessity for such immanence, with one important modification: namely, that since the idea of 'the West' can no longer be understood simply geographically – even, or especially, in its intrusion as a structuring element into its 'non-Western' other – but embraces new forms found only within certain non-Western others (e.g. Japan), reflection upon it need not restrict itself to the pure, 'post-critical' negativity of deconstructive techniques, but may also serve as the occasion for the development of new forms of dialectical thought, grounded in the immanent development of the time-consciousness of modernity itself. In this respect, the debate about postmodernism does not just provide the occasion for a 're-reading' of modernity; such a re-reading is the essential content of the debate.61

Parallel to the way in which the spatial relations of modernity intrinsic to the colonial character of its Western origins produce definite political effects of their own, is the question of the gendering of modernity as a form of historical time. Kristeva has argued that 'for time, female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that
essentially retains repetition and eternity from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilisations', in opposition to the linear temporality of a history from which women have been both symbolically and materially excluded.\(^\text{62}\) She then points out that different generations within feminism have challenged this opposition in various ways, whilst another has affirmed it. Despite her desire to recover the differences beneath ‘the apparent coherence which the term “woman” assumes in contemporary ideology’, however, she nonetheless continues to use the term in such a way as to sustain its traditional symbolic unity. The problem with this strategy is that it is unable to register the disruptive symbolic significance of her ‘first generation’ feminism’s demands for access to the ‘men’s time’ of modernity (history). The success of such demands can thus only be thought in terms of the ‘parallel existence’ or ‘interweaving’ of different, already established times within women’s experience; rather than as a genuinely transformative moment which would leave neither women’s time nor historical time, neither ‘women’ nor ‘history’, unchanged. In opposing women’s time to historical time, Kristeva explicitly associates the former with space. She thereby not only restricts the notion of historical time to a single highly specific form (linear or chronological time), but uncritically reproduces the simple opposition of historical time to space noted above. This is not to suggest that the temporality of modernity is ungendered, but only that Kristeva’s pioneering essay remains both too schematic and too closely tied to traditional symbolic forms of gender representation to advance beyond identification of the issue.

Anderson’s reading contains analogous problems, which can be illustrated with reference to his complaint that the temporality of modernity cannot accommodate the idea of decline.\(^\text{63}\) Nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, one might say that in its perpetual anxiety to transcend the present, modernity is everywhere haunted by the idea of decline. Anderson’s account suppresses this increasingly palpable anxiety, because it identifies the self-transcending temporality of modernity with the blank homogeneity of chronology, on the basis of their common abstraction of purely temporal indices of periodization. But whilst the two are thus connected, they cannot, in principle, be thought of as the same. Chronology alone could never be the measure of historical progress. Modernization theory, notoriously, finds its content in a combination of quasi-spatial (geopolitical) and economic criteria. But the idea of decline is no less applicable to the system as a whole. Just as the homogeneity of modernization theory’s measures of progress/decline depends upon differentials which it then
reduces to differences within a single scale, so the possibility of an 'absolute' decline derives from modernity's continual projection of a differential into the future, which would not, in this case, be redeemed. ('Absolute' decline, in other words, is temporally relative.) The temporal structure of the concept of modernity dictates that any particular modernity must constantly re-establish itself in relation to an ever expanding past. That the concept of modernity itself, in its most general form as a kind of historical time, involves only an abstract sense of what such a re-establishment involves (the 'new'), is no reason to deny its reality. Rather, it is the conceptual shape to which all 'modern' theories of decline must conform, like the theories of progress they mirror.64

The central problem faced by all theories of modernity, in any substantive socio-historical sense, is not that they cannot think decline, but, rather, the reverse: the fact that modernity/modernities grow old. It is to deal with this problem that, in strict accordance with the temporal logic of modernity, the idea of the 'postmodern' has appeared, along with (at least in its more sophisticated versions) its own distinctive temporal paradoxes. Proponents of the idea of the postmodern as a 'perpetual present', for example, claim to have registered the ultimately self-defeating character of modern time-consciousness (the new is 'an invariant' and thus the 'ever-same'), while nonetheless using this recognition to extract one final novelty from its seemingly exhausted repertoire (post-modernity).65 Yet this only works if we accept the familiar idealist premise that epochs may be periodized by their structures of recognition alone. If we reject this premise, 'postmodernity' once again regresses to being the sign for a self-consciousness of the contradictory structure of the concept of modernity. Naive concepts of postmodernity, one might say, register an affirmative self-consciousness of the paradoxes and aporia of 'modernity', but fail to recognize that this is so – a truly Nietzschean form of historical knowledge based on a wilful, active forgetting. Fully reflexive concepts of postmodernity, on the other hand, take us back into the paradoxes and aporia of 'modernity' at a higher conceptual level. The 'post-' confirms the self-transcending quality of all modernities anew, in a particular historical situation; but it cannot substitute for a concrete historical analysis of the character of the changes. Alternatively, substantive theories of modernity can hold their ground, set themselves against the erosion of their historical premises, and turn themselves into projects.66
Modernity as project: Habermas, Foucault, Enlightenment

It was noted above that it was through the temporalization of the founding geopolitical difference of colonialism that the concept of modernity first came to be universalized, and thereby, thereafter, to subordinate the differential between itself and other 'times' to differences within a single temporal scheme of 'progress', 'modernization' and 'development'. This process was accompanied at a theoretical level by the appearance of a new kind of universalizing discourse about the present: what Habermas has called the 'philosophical discourse of modernity'. If it has been the function of regional theories of modernity (economic, political, religious, aesthetic, sociological, etc.) to totalize spatially across their respective domains, on the basis of specific, geopolitically determined but empirically derived criteria of the modern, it has fallen to the philosophical discourse of modernity to unify and legitimate these inquiries within the scope of a single practical definition. The question thus arises as to how this discourse has fared in the face of the inevitable but paradoxical ageing of all substantive concepts of modernity. The debate hinges on the fate of the concept of Enlightenment, or, more specifically, the Enlightenment concept of an autonomous reason. For it is through this idea that modernity first came to be conceived philosophically, not just as a new historical period or a new form of historical time, but, more substantively, as a world-historical project. Yet there is considerable space within the temporal structure of modernity for alternative conceptions of this project. This may be illustrated by the differences between Habermas and Foucault over the heritage of Kant's 1784 essay, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?'.

Habermas and Foucault are agreed on three main points about Kant's essay. First, it inaugurates a philosophical discourse on modernity — a discourse which for the first time takes the character of the present in its 'present-ness' as the specific object of philosophical thought, within the horizons of a conception of history that is free from both backward-looking comparisons with the ancients and forward-looking expectations about doomsday. Second, it constitutes a philosophical discourse of modernity, insofar as the conception of the autonomy of reason that it involves is internal to the time-consciousness of a self-transcending present which cuts itself off, in principle, from the determinations of the past. Reason, for Kant, must be able to validate its own laws to itself, within the present, without reference to history or tradition. As Habermas puts it, modernity 'has to create its normativity out of itself', through reflection. Hence
Kant's famous motto of Enlightenment – 'Sapere Aude! Have courage to use your own understanding' – and his definition of Enlightenment as 'humanity's emergence from its self-imposed immaturity', where immaturity is understood as 'the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another'. Modernity is, in this respect, an infinite task. Finally, the practical history of 'Enlightenment' in the actions of European nation-states has involved forms of domination, as well as freedom, which, furthermore, cannot be dissociated from the internal contradictions of the original Enlightenment formulation of the concept of autonomous reason. Foucault refers to the areas of scientific and technical rationality, the fate of revolutions, and colonialism. Habermas is concerned with the social application of instrumental and functionalist forms of reason, but has yet to address himself to the problems of colonial and post-colonial forms of domination. The only thing that appears as 'colonized' in his writings is the 'lifeworld' of contemporary European societies.

Where Habermas and Foucault differ, quite radically, is in their respective analyses of the character and depth of the problem posed for the idea of Enlightenment by these phenomena, and its relationship to the historical present. This difference may be summed up by saying that whilst Habermas wants to 'complete' the concept of Enlightenment, by reworking its universalistic doctrine of autonomous rational individuality and free public reason so as to avoid its repressive implications (by replacing a subject-centred with an intersubjective or communicative concept of reason), Foucault remains wedded to it only in the much broader sense of what he calls its 'philosophical ethos': namely, the attitude of 'a permanent critique of our historical era'. Such an attitude, Foucault argues, demands a critique of the Enlightenment as historical event which transcends the original Enlightenment model of critique: 'Two centuries later, the Enlightenment returns: but now not at all as a way for the West to take cognisance of its present possibilities and of the liberties to which it can accede, but as a way of interrogating it on its limits and the powers which it has abused. Reason as despotic Enlightenment.' Those 'who wish us to preserve alive and intact the heritage of Aufklärung', Foucault insists, engage in 'the most touching of treasons'. For they suppress the very question of 'the historicity of the thought of the universal'. By hanging on to Enlightenment in this way, we might say, they betray its modernity. The very existence of the post-Nietzschean challenge to Enlightenment reason undermines the latter's claim to modernity. Yet Habermas's charge against Foucault is identical. For if the temporality of modernity as a self-transcending
break with other times ties it, logically, to the ideal of rational autonomy, and Foucault's historical challenge is a challenge to this idea, then surely it is Foucault who is the 'traitor' — purveyor of an 'irrational' anti-Enlightenment in the name of Enlightenment itself. Either way, it would seem, 'anachronism becomes the refuge of modernity.'

Clearly, the issue cannot be settled at this level of analysis. The maintenance of a reflexive normativity can no more be reduced to the recovery of the 'good' side of Enlightenment reason from its alienated other than their dialectical entanglement can be used to justify its wholesale rejection. Rather, what the dispute would seem to demonstrate (against both Habermas and Berman) is that modernity is not, as such, a project, but merely its form. It is a form of historical consciousness, an abstract temporal structure which, in totalizing history from the standpoint of an ever-vanishing, ever-present present, embraces a conflicting plurality of projects, of possible futures, provided they conform to its basic logical structure. Which of these projects will turn out to have been most truly 'modern' only time will tell.

Differential time and conjunctural analysis: Althusser and the *Annales*

Anderson's error was to over-state the continuity of modern time-consciousness, to reduce historical to chronological time, and (following Berman) to confuse the idea of modernity as a structure of historical time with the logic of modernism as its affirmative cultural self-consciousness. What we have yet to determine is the relationship of 'modernity' to the differential temporality of conjunctural analysis which Anderson recommends as an alternative conception. It is here that the limits of 'modernity', and thus the scope of its legitimate application, come most clearly into view. At this point, it is useful to return to Althusser to examine Anderson's notion of conjunctural analysis at its source.

Althusser's self-proclaimed goal was to determine the specificity of Marx's concept of history by differentiating it from both the 'everyday' (empiricist) notion and the historical logic of Hegelianism. His method was to 'construct the Marxist concept of historical time on the basis of the Marxist conception of the social totality'. Different conceptions of the social whole, he argued, contain 'the secret of the conception of history in which the “development” of this social whole
is thought'. He thus came to contrast the 'homogeneous continuity' and 'contemporaneity' of Hegelian time with the differential temporality of a Marxist conception of historical time, on the basis of the difference between Hegel's 'expressive totality' and his own distinctive interpretation of the Marxist whole as a 'complex structural unity', the level or instances of which are 'articulated with one another according to specific determinations, fixed in the last instance by the level or instance of the economy.' What is of particular interest in this analysis is its critique of the category of the historical present as a critique of 'contemporaneity', and the costs it involves for thinking history as a whole.

According to Althusser, the problem with the category of the historical present is that in it, 'the structure of historical existence is such that all the elements of the whole co-exist in one and the same time, one and the same present, and are therefore contemporaneous with one another in one and the same present.' In the unity of Althusser's conception of the conjuncture, on the other hand, each level or instance of the whole has its own peculiar time, 'relatively autonomous and hence relatively independent, even in its dependence, of the “times” of the other levels'. Each of these peculiar histories is 'punctuated with peculiar rhythms and can only be known on condition that we have defined the concept of the specificity of its historical temporality and its punctuations'. It is not enough, however, simply to think these various histories in their differences: 'we must also think these differences in rhythm and punctuation in their foundation, in the type of articulation, displacement and torsion which harmonises these different times with one another' in the unity of the whole. It is at this point that things begin to get tricky. For since there is no essential unity to the Althusserian totality, there is no common time within which to think the articulated co-existence of its various constitutive temporalities. Taking an 'essential section' through the complex totality at any particular moment is illicit, because it reintroduces precisely that contemporaneity of a 'continuous-homogeneous time' which it was the point of the idea of differential historical times to abolish.

All we can do, it seems, is think the whole from the standpoint of a variety of different localized presents, such that the times of other levels appear within such analyses only relationally, in the form of a series of absences. The problem with this, however, is that while it may allow us to move towards a conjunctural analysis of the whole through the aggregation of the series of disjunctive analyses of its parts, each of which contains its own 'decentred' (negative) totalization from
the standpoint of its specific locality, what it rules out in principle is any conception of the development of the whole as a whole, whether at the level of the social formation, mode of production or history itself. The cost of Althusser’s conjunctural form of differential temporality is thus the impossibility of thinking the transition from one mode of production to another – precisely that object which it is the ultimate rationale of historical materialism to think – since, in the end, such transitions can be thought only as breaks or ruptures between different articulated sets of times. They have no time of their own. Althusser’s difficulty here may be illuminated by comparing his conception of time with those contained in the two very different sources out of which it was fashioned: the historiography of the Annales School and the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss’s anthropology.

Althusser acknowledges that ‘a few historians’ (he refers to Fevre, Labrousse and Braudel) have begun to pose questions about the specific structure of historical time, ‘and often in a very remarkable way’. But he has two major reservations about their work. In the first place,

they simply observe that there are different times in history, varieties of time, long times, medium times and short times, and they are content to note their interferences as so many products of their intersection; they do not . . . relate these varieties as so many variations to the structure of the whole although the latter directly governs the production of those variations . . .

Second, they are consequently ‘tempted to relate these varieties, as so many variants measurable by their duration, to ordinary time itself, to the ideological continuum’. Their questions are thus judged to be ‘generally related not to the fundamental question of the concept of history, but to the ideological conception of time’. Althusser, on the other hand, wants to reduce the play of temporal variations to their determination by the structure of the whole. All other attempts at an integral analysis of multiple times are associated with regression to a common-sense Hegelianism.

Now, it is certainly true that the Annales approach is empirically open in its treatment of multiple times, and that in its classic statement, Braudel’s ‘History and the Social Sciences: The Longue Durée’ (1958), interactions between different temporal structures are treated as ‘things which can be recorded only in relation to the uniform time of historians, which can stand as a general measure of all these phenomena, and not in relation to the multiform time of social reality, which can stand only as the individual measure of each of these
phenomena separately'. But could things really be otherwise? Ironically, it is Anderson who has produced the most cogent critique of Althusser on the two issues of explanatory closure and the ideological status of chronological time. It is tied up, once again, with the question of space:

Claiming that ‘it is only possible to give a content to the concept of historical time by defining historical times as the specific form of existence of the social totality under consideration’, Althusser characteristically assumes that the ‘social totality’ in question is equivalent to a ‘social formation’, in other words that national ensembles form the natural boundaries of historical investigations. But in fact historical materialism above all insists on the international character of modes of production, and the need to integrate the times of each particular social formation into the much more complex general history of the mode of production dominant in them.

Indeed, for Marx (as for the Annales School), these histories of modes of production must themselves be combined into an ongoing ‘total’ history. For Braudel, for example, ‘history is the total of all possible histories’. Furthermore, the dependence of historical investigation on problems defined by the present means that the openness characteristic of the present is carried over into historiography. All explanatory closures are relative to the problem at hand, not to the real object of the investigation, which remains open. Chronological time provides a measure for relations between different times within this ongoing history. It does not constitute this time qua historical time. Althusser conflates the two levels. As Anderson puts it:

Althusser’s fustigation of a ‘single continuous reference time’ is in truth ‘thoroughly misleading’, because it fails to make any clear distinction between the indisputable (indeed indispensable – think of dating) existence of such time, as the medium of all history, and its lack of pertinence as a common organizing principle of the diverse scansion of historical development. The relevant time in which all regional histories should be convened is not an empty grid of dates, but the full movement of the social formation as a whole. At a minimum.

Yet in his critique of Berman, Anderson makes precisely the same mistake himself, in failing to understand modernity as a historical category. Furthermore, he takes over the Althusserian, rather than the Annales, concept of conjuncture, in which Lenin joins hands with Lévi-Strauss to take the present outside of history altogether.
Althusser's closure of the inherent openness of empirical historical inquiry by the idea of the determination of temporal variety by the 'structure of the social whole' would seem to place him closer to Lévi-Strauss than to the \textit{Annales} School. Yet he is as critical of the structuralist model of synchrony/diachrony as he is of the \textit{Annales}, and oddly, for the same reason: namely, that the distinction between synchrony and diachrony is based on a conception of historical time as 'continuous and homogeneous and contemporaneous with itself':

The synchronic is contemporaneity itself, the co-presence of the essence of its determinations, the present being readable as a structure in an 'essential section' because the present is the very existence of the essential structure. The synchronic therefore presupposes the ideological conception of a continuous-homogeneous time. It follows that the diachronic is merely the development of this present in the sequence of a temporal continuity in which the 'events' to which 'history' in the strict sense can be reduced (cf. Lévi-Strauss) are merely successive contingent presents in the time continuum. Like the synchronic, which is the primary concept, the diachronic therefore presupposes both of the very two characteristics I have isolated in the Hegelian conception of time: an ideological conception of time.\textsuperscript{88}

This critique is fundamentally misplaced. For it confuses synchrony with the instant. In fact, synchrony corresponds much more closely to the 'no-time' of Althusser's own structural analysis. The critique of structuralism which balances the critique of the \textit{Annales} School in Althusser's account of historical time is in this respect a mirage.

Indeed, the true critique of structuralist temporality is also a critique of Althusser. It has been summed up most succinctly by Fabian in the course of his critique of the 'allochronism' of anthropology:

Ever since de Saussure canonised the opposition between synchrony and diachrony, it served not as a distinction of temporal relations (as one might expect from the presence of the component \textit{chrony} in both terms), but a distinction \textit{against} Time. The possibility of identifying and analysing semiological systems is unequivocally said to rest on the elimination of Time and, by implication, of such notions as process, genesis, emergence, production, and other concepts bound up with 'history'. Diachrony does not refer to a temporal mode of existence but to the mere succession of semiological systems one upon another. Succession, strictly speaking, presupposes Time only in the sense of an extraneous condition affecting neither their synchronic nor their diachronic constitution.\textsuperscript{89}

Synchrony is not con-temporality, but a-temporality: a purely analytical space in which the temporality immanent to the objects of inquiry is
repressed. Diachrony orders synchronic relations one 'after' the other, but it does not establish what Althusser calls temporal continuity because its sequence is not a sequence of presents at all, but only of a-temporal states. Structuralism explicitly excludes the actively constitutive phenomenological present, the durational 'now', from its framework. So too does Althusser. As a result, he is left without a temporal standpoint from which to unify his multiple social times. The concept of the conjuncture stands in for such a standpoint, but it does not, and cannot, provide one.

In the tradition of the *Annales,* the term 'conjuncture' is used to denote a level of temporality in its own right: specifically, that which comes between the relative immobility of the *longue durée* and the hectic narrative of 'events'. More precisely, in Labrousse's pioneering analyses, it refers to the periodicity of various kinds of cycle, painstakingly established by statistical correlations. In Althusser, on the other hand, it is generalized to refer to the unity of all social times in the 'mode of existence of the social formation' at any particular moment. It is 'the real historical present', and as such the time of politics. According to the Glossary appended to the English translation of *Reading Capital,* it is: 'The central concept of the Marxist science of politics (cf. Lenin's 'current moment'); it denotes the exact balance of forces, state of overdetermination of the contradictions at any given moment to which political tactics must be applied.' But what is the temporality of this 'moment'? For Althusser, it cannot be chronologically specifiable, since this would return it to the measure of the continuum. It can only be constructed relationally, as a 'co-existence' of different times; yet such abstractly relational co-existence takes it out of time altogether into the purely analytical space of the synchrony it denies. Crucially, what Althusser lacks is the concept of the *coeval,* through which Fabian registers the co-existence of different temporalities, without either reducing them to a con-temporaneous present or removing them from time altogether. Times which are coeval co-exist chronologically in a way which is determined by the social dimension of their spatial relations, and is productive of further complex temporalities.

For all its faults, Althusser's analysis is instructive in two main ways. In the first place, it points to the limits of modernity as a category of historical totalization, insofar as all such totalizations abstract from the concrete multiplicity of differential times co-existing in the global 'now' a single differential (however internally complex) through which to mark the time of the present. This is an inevitable effect of all forms of totalization, the cost of thinking history as a whole: that very
concept which, ironically, at the conclusion of his search for the specificity of Marx's concept of history, Althusser was unable to think at all. This is the second lesson of Althusser's work on historical time: the generalization of the notion of conjuncture to encompass the 'articulation, displacement and torsion' of all temporalities remains, for all its criticisms of synchrony, outside of historical time altogether. In its reduction of the idea of a totalizing present to the idea of the 'essential section', it exchanges the difficulties and possibilities of the (always spatially determined) 'now' for the no-time of a disembodied 'theory'. As such, it requires the restitution of a totalizing conception of historical time within which to move, to give it practical significance.

It is just such a restitution that the category of modernity provides. Born, like capitalism, out of European colonialism and the world market, as a structure of historical consciousness 'modernity' predates the development of capitalism proper. It operates at a different level of analysis from the concepts of Marxist political economy, yet it is integrally connected to them, and its shape changes with time. (Think, for example, of the way in which recent developments in communications technology have simultaneously radically reduced the 'time of circulation' for certain goods, and intensified the time-consciousness of historical change.) In fact, modernity is our primary secular category of historical totalization. But what justifies this totalization of history, theoretically, if such an operation of necessity homogenizes and represses, reduces or forgets, certain forms of difference? And if we are to totalize history, how are we to do it in such a way as to preserve a sense of what is lost in the process? More fundamentally, what is historical time?