

POSTMODERNISM AND GLOBALIZATION

Omar Lizardo and Michael Strand¹

Abstract

Interest in postmodernity that has stagnated over the past decade has come to be replaced by a concern with globalization. While the two terms are often considered to be divergent there is a continuity as theoretical discourse transfers from one to the other. In what follows, we first distill the heuristic models employed by various knowledge-geographical traditions of social thought in conceptualizing postmodernism. We then transpose these models into recent debates on globalization. Globalization theory has become the provence of British and American theorists because of a contiguity that extends back to a propitious model employed to understand postmodernism. Globalization theory in France and Germany are largely non-existent or tangential for similar reasons that find opposite tendencies. The spatial and temporal aspect inherent to both the modern and postmodern indicates that both already present a stance on globalization. Among the key factors predicting the fortunes of heuristic models is the continuation of classical theoretical concerns in the present situation of globalization. Post-classical tendencies in heuristic models indicate that more cloistered postmodern concerns do not transfer well to globalization. Those heuristic models that conceive of a postmodernist break are those whose application to present instantiations of globalization is subsequently limited.

1 Introduction

Recent writings on the relevance of postmodernism for contemporary inquiry in social theory appear to have largely converged in reaching the conclusion of the increasing waning of concern with the modern/postmodern problematic and its gradual replacement by the notion of globalization (Albrow 1997; Tomlinson 1999). This shift in theoretical focus could be interpreted as a signal that the key issues associated with the emergence of interest in postmodernism in the Anglophone academy—increasing skepticism regarding the main goals of the enlightenment project, the problem of epistemic and ethical relativism, the relation between traditional forms of culturally authoritative knowledge and

1 Authors' names appear in alphabetical order. Both authors contributed equally to this article. Direct correspondence to Omar Lizardo, Department of Sociology, University of Notre Dame, 810 Flanner, South Bend, IN, 46556.

other subaltern ways of engaging the world—are no longer a concern. Thus, rather than signaling the impending “crisis” that many thought was portended by these cultural shifts, the contemporary world has adapted to this decline in secular faith on the grand cultural projects of Western modernity (Bauman 1988, 1992). Postmodernism has thus been tamed and safely integrated into the current social order.

If we follow this lead, we would be justified in concluding that the postmodern no longer signals a threat but has become the mainstream (Zizek 2003). Under this interpretation, (market-driven) globalization represents the institutional and material embodiment of what was initially perceived to simply be an intellectual and cultural current. Thus, concern with globalization—and a recovery of those classical figures (such as the Marx of the “Communist Manifesto”) who saw globalization and modernity as inherently intertwined (Berman 2002[1988])—replaces concern with postmodernism in the very same way that concern with the institutional infrastructure replaces a concern with disembodied cultural forms in the sociology of knowledge. It is important to note however, that this renewed interest in the *social fact* of globalization has occurred even as the “substantive hunch” that something important *has already taken place* (e.g. some sort of transition or shift to a new epoch or temporality), a hunch that animated postmodernist theorizing, continues to linger.

This reading of recent theoretical developments regarding the status of postmodernism already signals a particular way of conceptualizing it. This should not be surprising, as it quickly becomes clear that any judgment regarding the continuing relevance (or lack of such relevance) of postmodernism for contemporary social inquiry (and its relationship to such large-scale social processes as globalization) requires that we uncover the underlying *cultural models* that different epistemic communities deploy to understand it (Strauss and Quinn 1997). Surprisingly, while much has been written on the topic of postmodernity and globalization, and even as much of this literature is self-consciously reflexive and rooted in a concern with uncovering the underlying structures that generate sociological (and other forms of) knowledge, very little has been done to examine the institutional, knowledge-political and “political-geographical” (Pels 2001) roots of contemporary thinking on globalization and postmodernity. This has given the false impression that contemporary conceptualizations of postmodernity are largely homogeneous (or that they agree on fundamental points) or, even when heterogeneity and disagreement are explicitly acknowledged, that they are partially independent from the institutional structure,

and theoretical traditions, in which intellectual communities that produce this knowledge are rooted.

In this paper we take an explicit position on the social generation, institution-ization and intergenerational transmission of underlying “heuristic models” of socio-cultural phenomena. We argue that the postmodern problematic has been generally conceived using a surprisingly small set of underlying models of spatiality and temporality (Collins 1998; Wacquant 1985). These models appear to be rooted in political and national traditions of social thought (Levine 1995; Pels 2001). We show that differences in underlying conceptualizations of key elements (temporal change, phenomenology, space) between these models explains different ways in which the problematic of postmodernity has been understood and theorized as well as the inferences that are generated about what postmodernity means both as an experience structure and indicator of a macrohistorical trajectory (for instance regarding whether postmodernity is a stable “institutionalizable” state or an unstable detente characterized by crisis and uncertainty).

The shifting hegemony of this conceptualization of schemes also explains why different ways of conceptualizing (post)modernity have been *transposed* and transmuted to the understanding of globalization. In what follows we distinguish between four main politico-geographic conceptual traditions of the postmodern: (1) A French tradition that inaugurates the debate and sets the terms of discourse, (2) a German tradition which reacts against the initial French incursion (3) a British tradition that attempts to integrate elements from the German and French traditions and (4) a largely autochthonous American tradition that both provides the initial terminological resources and that has of late shifted the language of the debate towards culture and the aesthetic, thus essentially transforming the “postmodern” problematic into one dominated by a concern with “globalization and culture.”

2 The French Tradition

The French tradition of postmodern social theory inaugurates the concern with postmodernism as an explicit theoretical problematic. The signal event is the publication of Jean-Francois Lyotard’s “Report on Knowledge” *The Postmodern Condition* (1984). Lyotard’s initial treatment was pitched as a large-scale epistemological critique of various intellectual movements associated with the “En-

lightenment project.” One of the reasons why Lyotard’s initial salvo received so much attention had to do with the fact that his broadside included highly esteemed targets occupying the full-range of the knowledge-political spectrum, from emancipatory Marxism, to classical liberalism and scientific positivism. All large-scale intellectual projects that fashioned themselves (and grounded their cultural legitimacy) as “metanarratives” were swept off of their pedestal.

Lyotard’s knowledge-political weapons were a blend of post-Wittgenstenian and post-Nitzschean constructivist epistemology (in which authoritative thought systems were deconstructed as so many language games without an ability to ground their authority on transcendental timeless principles), post-positivist critical philosophy of science—in which issues of non-linearity, complexity and undecidability were thought to have replaced deterministic models based on universal laws—and post-1968 “situationalist” politics emphasizing the thorough decentering of authority and an unabashed concern with a radical democratic (and quasi-populist) micro-politics—Lyotard was a former member of the autonomist Marxist group *Socialisme ou Barbarisme*—in which a multiplicity of local discourses is privileged over the hegemonic force of a single macro-discourse.

2.1 *The “Social” as the Site of the Postmodern*

The *social* is the primary site of the knowledge-geographical inflections produced by the French heuristic model (Pels 2001). The social represents a kind of “third imperialism” (relative to the British “Economic” and the German “Political”) as it similarly encapsulates the approaches of economy and polity as expressions of an underlying social totality. In this sense, modern individualism itself is the expression of a specific form of social structuration and not a reflection of either the individualizing effects of the capitalist economy or of liberal democracy and the extension of citizenship (Durkheim 1969). Furthermore, the “autonomy of social facts” refers to moral reality that is synonymous with the social totality (Durkheim 1982). It was indeed as a critique of the “materialist” sacred in the French Third Republic that Durkheim introduced the question of the survival of the sacred in the modern world only if it would be reconfigured along sociological lines (in his version of intermediary corporatist bodies).

French postmodernism marks a continuation of this concern with the social-sacred, though now formulated as a question of how (and whether) it can be

postulated as an expression of social order. In this regard, we might well see Lyotard's argument for the end of metanarratives as a challenge to the political expression of the sacred coupled to the modern nation-state or mass political party (representative particularly of Marxism), and the argument for the reintroduction of a more *tribal* form of social structuration to reconfigure the sacred as somewhat like Durkheim prescribed, a theme that is developed most clearly in the work of Maffesoli (1996). However, it is Baudrillard that presents the most serious challenge to the modern view of the social and its coupling to sacred experience.

2.2 *Postmodernism as the End of the Social*

The work of Baudrillard serves as the primary example of how a concern with "the social" (its potential viability as the source of emancipation or its likely end as an 'imploded mass') as both the source and the site of the postmodern is critical for the heuristic model that emanates from the French tradition. For Baudrillard the Enlightenment mythology of the rational mass, and any view of historical teleology rooted in their collective activity, is "exploded" in the political mobilization demonstrated not for "productive" activities like assuming control of the state or violently contesting the ownership structure of capitalism, but rather for the spectacle and the revelry evident in, for instance, support for a World Cup match (Baudrillard 1983: 12).

The (apathetic) masses "lack definition" only if sociology continues to think that they mobilize over violations to the contract that—as traditional sociology (particularly Marx) argues—underpins the utilitarian social exchange of use-value and thus the social order. Baudrillard finds parallels between the "silent majority" mobilization for the mass culture spectacle and the agonistic potlatch of Native North Americans (that Bataille championed) because both indicate the sacred character affixed to activities of wastefulness (i.e. "the accursed share"). That social scientists are surprised by this indicates precisely the truncated form of social relations that is intrinsic to the modern productivist paradigm of social structuration and "mirrored" by modern (Marxian) sociological conceptions which expel those (in particular, the dead) from the cycle of social exchange who do not possess use-value.

Thus, while other politico-geographic traditions see the postmodern as residing within economic exchanges located at the level of civil society (in particular in the British tradition as we will see below), in the French tradition it is the

more general (non-economic) basis of social exchange (going back to Mauss' sociology of the gift) that is degraded under postmodern conditions, and which also constitutes the only hope for its transcendence. Baudrillard thus identifies radicalized forms of (non-economic, non-instrumental) exchange as the expression of a postmodern social, which he says are evident in those contemporary mobilizations for wasteful (or "ludic") activities among the silent majorities, which destroy wealth instead of accumulating it and thus extend the cycle of social exchange to activities of "symbolic exchange" like seduction (instead of orgasm). Political terrorism can be analyzed in the same manner, as it stands as a symbolic return to exchanges by the state and neutralizes its authority by negating its ability to prevent the extension of a counter-gift. Hence, "Terrorism is an act that restores an irreducible particularity in the middle of a generalized exchange system. All particularities (species, individuals, cultures) which today challenge the establishment of global circulation directed by one single power take their revenge with their death through this terrorist transformation of the situation" (Baudrillard 2001: 135).

The "end of the social" is thereby read as the "end of the modern social" (Baudrillard 1983). This is particularly true as Baudrillard repudiates traditional sociology as possessing the authoritative view of the social—it stands rather "in the shadow of the silent majorities"—citing deviations from what modern intellectuals legislated to the masses but still only dismiss as "mystification." He remains focused on the question of the sacred as an expression of the social (as defined by exchange), but radicalizes the basis of the modern social by radicalizing aspects of Durkheimian sociology (in particular, and following Bataille, the "left sacred" [Riley 2005]) to refute a predominately Marxian conception, and thereby extend the location of the sacred. As we show below, this connection between the sacred and the social remains a problem for much French thinking on the postmodern, even if expressed as epistemological concerns over the socially homogenizing effects of dominant knowledge.

3 The German Tradition

The German politico-geographic tradition of conceiving the postmodern is one whose inflections rest squarely on the question of the *political*. The British and the German traditions share a concern with particular binaries located at the level of the social insofar as the discursive structure of both operates accord-

ing to a state vs. economy dichotomy. But whereas Britain inflects its theoretical products through the lens of the *economy*, it is the *state* which is primary in the Germanic tradition. Specifically, the “ethical” state claims a “double priority” over the individual and over economic action, as it is individuals who are viewed as “constituted by and [thus] subordinated to the statal community,” from the German point of view (Pels 2001: 45).

There are key points of divergence between this view of the postmodern and the French heuristic model reviewed above. While the French tradition focuses on a postmodern *epistemology* (as conceived in the traditional Kantian manner as impersonal presuppositions for valid knowledge), the German tradition focuses on providing an account of the *experiential* (and thus subjective) basis of modernity. While the French tradition sees the postmodern as a decomposition and implosion located at the level of the social and “the masses” and conceives of an anti-modern stance as not discontinuous with the emancipatory projects of the radical left (and thus derives either positive [or negative in the case of Baudrillard] political programs from that basis) the German tradition conceives of all stances vis-a-vis modernity, (even those not explicitly political such as those based on epistemology or aesthetics) as concealing (and implying) a specifically political project—even those who explicitly renounce a political project can be “unmasked” as in fact proposing one in disguise.

The German tradition, in contrast to the French, rejects the notion that postmodernism is a radical epochal shift completely heterogeneous in relation to modernity; it is also distinctive in rejecting the notion that modernity’s grand narratives are necessarily politically retrogressive. Finally, German thinkers do not abide by the radical epistemological relativism of their French counterparts (which as we saw above is an inevitable consequence of transposing the Durkheim-Mauss sociology of knowledge model—by way of Foucault—to the issue of historical changes in epistemological styles). But the key characteristic that makes the German take on postmodernism distinct from the original French incursion into the subject concerns the initial theoretical move: German theorists—Habermas being the classic example—begin by conceptualizing modernity (and derivatively postmodernity) as a specific “frame of mind” or “*subjective stance*” towards the social and natural worlds.

These are the reasons why French postmodernism is interpreted by German theorists as harboring an elective affinity with a “neo-conservative” political project (Habermas 1987). It is clear that what gets read as “neo-conservative” from within the German tradition is the radical *anti-statism* of French post-

modernism. The German tradition, in its focus on politics, sees modernity as inherently tied to the future of the state, and thus anti-modernism is immediately perceived as just another form of regressive anti-statism. Thus, where the French view sees repression, and (latent) totalitarianism (the grand narratives of the modern project as institutionalized and embodied in a “state project” [Meyer et al 1997]), the German tradition sees the (sometimes repressed, delayed and partially subverted but still viable) seeds of emancipation and liberation *through* (not by completely abandoning) the political. Thus, Habermas (1987) is clear in noting (a position heavily criticized by French intellectuals such as Descombes) that Hegel is the first intellectual to explicitly articulate a modern “consciousness” in his explicit views of the historical process. Modernity and postmodernity are thus, in addition to being specific cultural and socio-structural realities, rooted in a specific “frame of mind.” No account of modernity therefore is complete without describing what this specific subjective orientation consists of and how it is sustained within those institutions characteristic of the modern order.

3.1 (Post)modernism as a Political Factor

But if we return to the question of the political as it relates to this matter, the questions that arise about the subsequent German discussion of postmodernism begin to come into focus. Weber’s “advice” on how to achieve a meaningful existence in modern society—as laid out in his classic lectures “Science as a Vocation” and “Politics as a Vocation”—indicates that he does not resort to the kind of “total critique of modernity” (Antonio 2000) that aims for the realization of a complete dissolution and transcendence of contemporary institutions. His recommendation of values to be realized among *specific* value-spheres indicates a kind of romantic-liberal accomodationism (Koch 2001). But it was also the resurrection of charisma that he found among the possibilities emerging from the present circumstances of German modernity, and indeed, something like that tendency was realized in January 1933 and the culmination of the rise to power of Nazism. It seems crucial, in this regard, that when Weber wrote specifically about charisma, he wrote about it as a form of *authority*. It was the *political* that marked the most powerful expression of meaningful action and social creativity, and indeed, the most likely outcome of a convulsive reaction against the modern inability (particularly after World War I) ‘to measure up to workaday existence’ (Weber 1946: 149).

The key issue in this respect is that the political represents a form of institutional objectification in modernity that is *not* alienating (as opposed to the market or science which were conceived as having an inherent objectifying logic). For the trajectory of German thinking about postmodernity, Germany, from this perspective, had a “postmodern moment,” and it happened with the resurrection of political charisma between 1933 and 1945. While fascism itself is not a necessary outcome of modernity, its place as a charismatic expression of the political is of interest here. For the tradition of right Hegelianism in Germany, the state must be preserved against the functional imperatives of civil society (Avineri 1972). While Marx would critique this position as a form of reification and misplaced constraint (i.e. the “actual” was not “rational”), the right Hegelians found the Prussian state to be the real expression of “substantive” ethical totality and an “absolute unmoved end in itself” (Hegel in Avineri 1972: 181). Any attempt to subordinate the state to imperatives (i.e. egalitarianism) that emerge from civil society dissolves its ethical implications by handing them over to the forces of instrumentality and its pluralistic interests.

For Carl Schmitt and the “conservative revolutionaries” critical of Weimar Germany, it was precisely this potentiality of the state that was to be harnessed in violent reaction against modernity, even as they vehemently denied such an exercise to be the “rational” expression of a historically unfolding process (hence Schmitt’s statement: on January 30, 1933 “one can say that Hegel died” [Schmitt in Wolin 1992: 424]). In Schmitt’s oft-cited phrase: the “Sovereign is he who decides over the state of exception” (1985: 5). In this capacity for decision and the ability to institute an “exception” the political alone is able to break through bourgeois normality—and its “crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition”—and allow the “power of real life” to seep through (Schmitt 1985: 15). If Schmitt’s critique of modern Germany centers on the political, it also reflects the influence of a similar kind of Nietzschean vitalism that impacted Weber and Simmel’s perspectives on the alienation of modern subjectivity. Modern bourgeois institutions fail in their ability to command a sense of meaning and purpose for those whose action creates and sustains them. Insofar as they homogenize the population to fit anonymous roles like worker, father and citizen, they militate against the “intoxicating” sense of purpose found only in the experience of confrontation between “friend and enemy.” If, for Schmitt, modernity meant social homogeneity, economic instrumentality and, above all, the lost “dignity of the state” (Wolin 1992: 441), then a renewed expression of political charisma was the only solution for realizing a new *postmodern* era.

For Habermas, such a goal is misguided insofar as it reflects an extreme form of right Hegelianism in which individual is valued only as a member of the “dignified” state (1987). While the problems of modernity extend well-beyond the expression of the political—in particular, to concern the individual subject as a philosophical starting point—it is indeed with the political that Habermas’ critique of modernity ultimately rests. He critiques the perspective of “praxis philosophy” derived from Marx and attempts to reorient critical theory on the basis of a form of reason that is not instrumental. He finds this alternative form of reason in the communicative competence intrinsic to intersubjective social relations. Like Marx, Habermas inverts the Hegelian perspective by focusing on the *production* of ethical totality, not simply the recognition of its present embodiment. However, his communicative replacement of the instrumentality he locates in Marx leads him to introduce the notion of the ‘public sphere’ in place of civil society (economy) as the embodiment of the modern equality of subjects. And it is here that he renews the critical perspective, founded now on the “discursive” potential of democracy that emerges when the universal capacities possessed equally by subjects are redefined in terms of “communicative action.”

3.2 *Modernity as an Unfinished Project*

It naturally follows that the solution to the problems of modernity is that there has not been *enough* modernity: modernity is an “unfinished project” and the task of progressive politics is to finally bring it to consummation (Habermas 1981). Weber’s “grand” conclusions about societal rationalization—as stated with great Pathos in the famous concluding paragraphs of *The Protestant Ethic*, and as developed by the critique of the “one-dimensional” society and instrumental reason in the Frankfurt school—blunts the “highly ambivalent content of social and cultural modernity” (Habermas 1987: 338). From Habermas’ perspective, the problems of modernity might well relate to an estrangement between institutions and individuals (the famous differentiation of system from lifeworld), but this is not a reflection of the institutions themselves. Rather, it is a matter of the *interchange* between those societal and cultural forms and the communicative infrastructure of everyday life.

Among the achievements of modernity is the fact that the lifeworld can actively mold those institutions to fit its own image. This especially applies to the “collective action” potential represented by a state directed by the impera-

tives of an “intersubjectively self-constituted knowledge of society” (Habermas 1987: 360). The distance that societal rationalization (i.e. objective culture) might well have realized reflects only the absent contribution of communicative reason from their further development, which suggests the “colonization” of the lifeworld by the imperatives of the system that inhibit their extension into effective form, and not flaws intrinsic to the system itself. This is true with regard to the instrumental reason and money and “privatism” extended from the capitalist economy; but Habermas particularly finds the extension of the imperatives of power as the inhibiting factor for the expression of the critical self-reflection of the lifeworld as an expression of postmodernity, both as it relates to “de-differentiation” between public and private and the extension of administrative power. Habermas is thus not ambivalent in his assessment of postmodernity: it is indeed the *memory* of an overextended polity, and its violent exercise of power in resistance to modernization, that finds his primary association with the meaning of the term.

It follows that what Habermas notices most about the “Young Conservative” camp of postmodernists appearing in France in the late 1970s and early 1980s is their careless use of the notion of power and their reliance on power as the single, “manichean” alternative to the dominance of modern capitalism and instrumental reason (Habermas 1981: 13). In the case of Foucault in particular, we can appreciate the impossibility of justifying the “arbitrary partisanship of criticism,” which extends from a seemingly naive view of the exercise of power, as the most defective aspect of the “genealogical” approach to knowledge (Habermas 1987: 276). Such approaches are postmodernist because they appear as mere reflections, in *theory*, of a notion of the political that was realized in *practice* by the Nazi regime of the 1930s and 1940s. This criticism of the postmodern is reserved for those views that fit a category Habermas has inherited from German political history.

The contemporary German new right largely marks a continuation of the Schmittian view of the political, only now inflected more by Heidegger than Hegel, and with a more accommodationist stance on the question of capitalism (Antonio 2000: 58–59; Dahl 1996). For Habermas and those who adopt his more left Hegelian view of the political, it is cosmopolitan law and the expansion of a “transnational public sphere” that is of primary concern in a world of globalization (Fraser 2007). In this regard, it seems that *modernity has returned* to contemporary Germany, though it is in recognition of a *prior post-modernity* that theorizing continues: either in (at least partial) affirmation of what emerged as a solution for the ills of modernity that have only intensified,

or as the continuation of the modern project in greater cognizance of preventing the return to what a postmodern era once meant and could mean again.

From both left and right perspectives, the German view of postmodernism is one that is inflected through the “knowledge-geographical” lens (Pels 2001) of the political. While this reflects a long heritage of politico-centric thinking in Germany (Levine 1995), the 20th-century political history of Germany presents the native theory with a token case of *postmodernity in action*. No other knowledge-geographical tradition can say the same about their own thinking on the postmodern, which may indeed be why those on the German left and right seem less ambiguous in their assessment of what postmodernism represents.

4 The British Tradition

The British tradition is qualitatively distinct from both the (ideal-typical) French and German traditions that we have discussed above. Its temporality (in spite of some flirtations with French “epochalism”) is closer in style and sensibility to the “gradualist” camp. Most British theories reject the radical claim made by the French postmodernists that we have entered an era so radically heterogeneous from what came before that the (modernist) classics cannot be used as a conceptual resource (Giddens 1990). Instead, British theorists acknowledge that while there is a lot that is new in (post)modernity, a lot of it is also constituted by intensifications and radicalizations of trends that can be found in previous historical periods. This serves as a historical platform from which to criticize radical epochalist claims (Savage 2009; Giddens 1991). In addition, British theorists have reacted to the initial incursion of writings on postmodernity from France—and not as did Habermas by attempting to provide a political-phenomenological genealogy of the postmodern (and thus rescue what is politically progressive within it)—by attempting to locate the cultural currents identified by postmodern theorists within the context of recent changes in the socio-structural organization of the economy, with Lash and Urry’s *The End of Organized Capitalism* (1987) serving as a canonical model in this respect.

This means that contra-Lyotard, postmodernity cannot be conceptualized as some sort of “sudden” condition or even unstable state of crisis. In fact, British theorists reject the French privileging of epistemological considerations over

traditional “institutional analysis” as a strategy with which to theorize the issue of postmodernity (Giddens 1990: 1–3). As Kellner writes, “[t]he ‘post’ in postmodern also signifies, however, a dependence on and continuity with that which it follows, leading some to conceptualize the postmodern as mere an intensification of the moder, as a hypermodernity ... or a new ‘face of modernity’ (1991: 258). Instead, postmodernity becomes “normalized” as the “appropriate” cultural and structural condition characteristic of (hyper)modern societies (Bauman 1992). This opens up conceptual space to actually develop a bona fide (and epistemologically “moderate”) *sociology of the postmodern* which breaks with the radical skeptical claims (centered on its obsessions with the breakdown of epistemological orders) of the French tradition regarding the viability of this venture. In developing this sociology of the (post)modern, the British continue the British tradition of theorizing ‘through the economy’ (Pels 2001; Levine 1995). As we will see, the central concepts and metaphors employed by the British view of the trajectory of modernity are drawn largely from an economic basis.

4.1 *Reflexivity and Choice*

The British focus on gradualism and continuity frames concepts in binary terms (i.e. tradition/modernity or modernity/second, late, liquid, or reflexive modernity) to demonstrate the emergence of something new in the difference evident between how a characteristic of society used to be and how it is now. For example, action in traditional societies was marked by self-evidence and certainty; in modern and, in particular, late modern societies it is marked by reflexivity and choice. As Giddens writes: “The reflexivity of modern social life consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character” (Giddens 1990: 38). Modern actors constantly monitor their action in terms of probabilities, alternatives and consequences. Action cannot be justified implicitly by tradition—reasons have to be given in taking a course of action (and not to justify breaking tradition).

Additionally, with the waning of tradition comes the consciousness of choice. “On the level of the self, a fundamental component of day-to-day activity is simply that of choice ... in conditions of high modernity, we all not only follow lifestyles, but in an important sense we are forced to do so—we have no choice but to choose” (Giddens 1991: 80–81). From this perspective, tradition existed

mainly as a framework that “made the choices for us.” As the hold of tradition weakens in post-traditional societies, lines of action which were not previously constituted as choices come to be framed (and experienced) as such. Who to marry, what to wear, what to eat, what profession to take up, etc. become a routine source of anxiety and uncertainty for the post-traditional subject. While in traditional societies there exist a set of (mostly religious) experts and authorities that eliminate doubt and uncertainty in terms of providing explicit guidelines when it comes to making these life decisions, the post-traditional standpoint “involves a breakdown of stable and unitary collective orders ... of methodical doubting of all knowledge and authorities,” and implies a “turn to the individual—rather than collective orders—as necessarily the only agency responsible for itself” (Slater 2005: 179). With this comes a rejection of tradition and a different stance toward the flow of time, whereby looking toward the past is devalued in favor of a constant stance of anticipation towards an ever-changing future.

As Beck (1992) shows, reflexivity and choice are not only characteristic of action by post-traditional subjects, it also applies to (post)industrial society as a whole. For Beck, reflexivity on this scale appears as an aspect of what he refers to as “the return of uncertainty” (1992: 215). While industrialization provided the model for modern societal organization, the emergent “risk society” is characterized by uncertainty over that model in growing recognition of its collateral damages and ultimate *unsustainability*. This provokes a general loss of confidence in the future and reflexivity in the sense of “society suddenly becoming a theme and a problem for itself” (Beck 1994: 8). Beck gives a sense for this in the following passage:

Perceiving and understanding the situation and the development has been essentially distorted because the external and the internal, the arranged and actual role-playing, *systematically* diverge. In many areas, we are still acting out the play according to the script of industrial society, although we can no longer play the roles it prescribes in the actual conditions under which we live, and we act them out for ourselves and others although we know that everything actually runs quite differently (1992: 232–233).

What Beck presents here is a glimpse of a (newly reflexive) society undergoing something like a large-scale *hysteresis effect*. The industrial model has been rendered obsolete and dangerous by its prior enactment, yet we face the paradoxical position that, even knowing the danger, we continue to implement it. Most of all, we do this because of the inexorable and constitutive weight the industrial model exercises on our present (and resultant ‘trained incapacity’

to imagine an alternative). The gradualist conception of social change he applies here is not dissimilar to the one evolutionary theorists employ to understand the extinction of species whose past adaptation to *prior* environments (i.e. industrialization) works against them in surviving present environmental changes. As Bauman observes, "The most poignant yet the least answerable question of our times of liquid modernity is not 'What is to be done?' ... but 'Who is going to do it?'" (2000: 133). Consider, in this regard, Giddens' observation that the family and the nation-state are now 'shell institutions' because they '*have become inadequate* to the tasks they are called upon to perform' (2003: 37; emphasis added). Both statements speak of the consequences of late modern reflexivity, much as Beck suggests of risk society. They all imply the gradualist emergence of reflexivity as the result of an accumulation of changes contributing to a growing divergence between an entity and its environment.

4.2 Modernity apropos *Economy*

In the British view, risk is a concept tightly intertwined with the trajectory of modernity. But the argument is not that life has become intrinsically any more risky under modernity than in traditional societies. The difference comes either in growing *consciousness* of risk (Giddens 1990) or social structuration that increasingly focuses on the management of risk (Beck 1992). There is nothing analogous to the modern sense of chance and probability in traditional societies, whose worldview remains coherent and self-evident. In late modernity, risk replaces the notion of *fortuna*, or the predetermined order established by traditionalist cosmologies. Therefore with reflexivity, risk appears as a central category in modern societies, or those caught between the (reflexive) horns of an obsession with knowledge but an 'absence of self-confidence' (Bauman 2000).

In reflexive societies there is a strong affinity between 'risk and responsibility' (Giddens 1999). Reflexivity fosters the recognition that effects can indeed come back to *affect* their causes, i.e. industrialization produces environmental degradation that derails future industrialization. With the motor of society perceived to be the actor themselves, responsibility is thereby placed on the actor to make the right choices. Risk enters from the recognition that we can choose wrongly, that there is nothing ordered about the future other than what we put there through a sequence of choices. Reflexive consciousness, demonstrated by the recognition of the consequences of both collective and individual action (i.e.

smoking and cancer, highway travel and deadly accidents, industrialization and environmental destruction, economic recessions and job losses), presents the problem of reordering society to manage risk (Beck 1992). In other words, with responsibility comes a future-orientation, and action in the present is reflexively ordered in cognizance of what is likely to happen in the future, as this is revealed by abstract systems of knowledge.

Giddens (1990: 92) argues that the perception of risk is fueled by the need for 'ontological security' that is only produced through trust in the continuity of self-identity and the constancy of our social and material surroundings. This is what is *at stake* in our consciousness of risk, and to make a choice that is not justified as adequate to preserving ontological security is an admission of loss, even before the consequences. Here we see that in the central notions of risk and choice the British tradition draws on a basic idiom transposed from the economy. The management of risk as action ordered in recognition of the likelihood of future consequences finds its most obvious manifestation in the proliferation (and resurrection) of market instruments dedicated to 'hedging' against risk—from insurance to futures contracts. Furthermore, markets are probably the best example of collective action produced by individual choice. Indeed, markets are often defined (and championed) on the basis of the view that they represent order *without* structure, or order that arises naturally from the operation of the same mechanisms that Giddens and Beck identify: risk, responsibility, future-orientation and reflexivity.

Meanwhile, for the notion of reflexivity—focused as it is on the reproduction of the integrity of a self-organization (like the self) through reflexive monitoring—the economy is also the most obvious application. Giddens draws from Popper to reach the conclusion that uncertainty is tied closely to reflexivity (1990: 39). Popper, in turn, arrived at this notion by applying economic metaphors to science. For instance, conclusions in science should be reached in the same way as prices form in a market: through the exercise of mutual doubt. Reflexivity is demonstrated nowhere better than in the first instinct of doubt and the subsequent need for justification. Here too the appeal is framed as natural order opposed to arbitrary structure. As Popper understood, the economy reveals this process most clearly, and so, like Giddens to an understanding of modernity, he transposed it to offer a prescription for the practice of science (Bryant 2002).

Of course, it might be that the historical undercurrent to the story of late modernity is the *literal* expansion of markets in everyday life, and not necessarily the accuracy of (originally) economic metaphors. Nevertheless in Bauman

(2000) we find ‘liquidity’ extended as a generalized metaphor, used to explain everything from the ‘texture’ of everyday life to the ‘motility and lightness’ of the economy. The general metaphor pits “heavy” versus “liquid” modernity, or the difference between the stage of the modern project that dissolved feudal structures but reembedded society in rational structures, and the stage of modernity that in turn *liquefies* those rational structures but without a subsequent reembedding. In liquid modernity, the most desirable (and rational) practices are those that match the state of general liquidity, i.e. those without integrity in the sense of solidifying into a form that persists. In this stage, it is the instant and instantaneity that are the appropriate form of engagement, but only so that further movement isn’t hindered by a persistence (say, deposited in space) that results from a past engagement which is now forced beyond the moment.

In this case, ‘liquidity’ refers to market “liquidity,” or the immediately convertible asset that is valued for the ability to flow between (and make) markets. Bauman finds the principal contradiction of liquid modernity to be the “yawning gap between the right of self-assertion and the capacity to control the social settings which render such self-assertion feasible or unrealistic” (2000: 38). In this unforeseen *dependency* lies the contradiction of both liquid persons and liquid assets. It is the fate of liquids to be both immaterial and yet materializable (in the sense of making a market, making a purchase, making a decision or making a choice) in the same breath. The immaterial is thereby fetishized by misrecognizing its underlying material objectifications. If the duty of sociology is to reveal those dependencies as they pertain to persons, this is not so indifferent to the performance of financial rating agencies, whose task is similarly to de-fetishize the financial unit and locate its dependencies. Even while Bauman (2000: 74) admits that liquid modernity marks the diffusion of shopping as the ‘praxeomorphic’ understanding of action, his economic metaphor extends well-beyond this (literal) observation.

4.3 *Moralizing ... Gradually*

As noted above, what we witness among the British is a gradualist, not “epochal,” model of social change. This model evokes evolutionary biology where, similarly, the central problematic revolves around the question of *survival*. The goal is more to explain presence or existence of something in a current form than it is to locate the cause of some specific instance of change. The model identifies change but, unlike the French, does not find it redolent of a ‘break.’

Furthermore, even as it focuses on agency (and responsibility), the British view of a new (architectonic) emergence from modernity implies an inevitability (i.e. Giddens' poignant phrase: 'modernity is a juggernaut'). Like the Germans, the British reserve a critical grounding for modernity, but unlike the Germans that critique is directed at what new possibilities lie open for the present (thereby admitting modernity's inevitability, or that modernity is more than a state of mind). But the British break with the Marxists concerning how that critical capacity is to be realized—certainly not in consummating a long-awaited (modernist) goal in the (post)modern, like class revolution or the 'project of modernity.' Rather, the British moralize the change, drawing on a tendency etched deeply in the history of British social thought (Kumar 2001: 44).

More than any other politico-geographic tradition, the British attempt to furnish not only an understanding of the nature of the changes under way, but practical (not nihilistic) ways to adapt to those changes and solutions for controlling them. Think of Beck's "cosmopolitan" polity and defense of 'subpolitics,' Bauman's moral sociology and focus on social diagnosis (de-fetishizing), and finally Giddens' varied and extended political and public engagements—surely the token case. Certainly this reflects the British conception of sociology as a tool of reflexivity. It might also be derivative of the economic model and the critical capacity exercised (from this perspective) by informing choices.

5 The American Tradition

To examine the history of (post)modernism in the United States reveals the unique situation in which the modernist aesthetic was established as the "institutional art" (Huyssen 1984). It was supported by the political establishment and championed by cultural conservatives, and thus the antithesis to the avantgardism that closely accompanied modernism's diffusion in Europe. In this sense, the *post*-modern movement was regarded as the American version of the avantgarde when it began to take shape in the 1960s. The postmodern suggested "new directions and new vistas" to young artists and critics facing modernism's 'reactionary cultural politic' (Foster 1993: 3), and this is precisely why surrealists like Duchamp and earlier continental avantgardes like Dada were championed as artistic forerunners to the new movement, favored over more recent innovations emerging from the native high modernism.

Accordingly, the American movement would become the first distinctly postmodern artistic movement to emerge on either side of the Atlantic. As the institutionalized form of art in America was the avantgarde elsewhere, it was outside the dichotomies of the modern that the postmodern would realize its recalcitrant impulse: for instance, in the collapse of high and low cultural forms, avantgarde and kitsch, abstraction vs. representation, present vs. past, etc. (Huyssen 1984: 48). Hence, the national situation in the US meant that the postmodern would emerge as an aesthetic movement whose character indicated that the terminology it produced—"postmodern"—would retain the sense of *iconoclasm* that reflected this initial situation, even when it was transposed to places where it wasn't immediately clear what the postmodern could be "iconoclastic" against. Indeed, Jameson writes from a perspective that is sympathetic to the various premonitions that things are (radically) changing, but he nevertheless offers a poetic glimpse of what an "act of nomination" like the emergence of a compelling neologism like "postmodernism" actually does:

For the name itself—postmodernism—has crystallized a host of hitherto independent developments which, thus named, prove to have contained the thing itself in embryo and now step forward richly to document its multiple genealogies. It thus turns out that it is not only in love, cratology and botany that the supreme act of nomination wields a material impact and, like lightning striking from the superstructure back to the base, fuses its unlikely materials into a gleaming lump or lava surface. The appeal to experience, otherwise so doubtful and untrustworthy ... now recovers a certain authority as what, in retrospect, the new name allowed you to think you felt, because you now have something to call it that other people seem to acknowledge by themselves using the word (1991: xiii).

Thus, while strong intellectual ties have historically existed between Britain and the United States, and remain deep in disciplines like philosophy and economics, and while "French theory" exerts a strong effect on the humanities and German thinking remains foundational to political science and sociology, we argue that it is not the economic, the social, nor the political that prevails in American discourse on the postmodern; rather, it is the *aesthetic*.

5.1 *Looking through an Aesthetic Glass, Sharply*

In Jameson's seminal application of the term (1991[1984]), it is the economy that is peered at through an aesthetic lens. Not to say that the economy is

“aestheticized” in Jameson’s view—though the diffusion of culture, to the economy, the state and beyond, is certainly an aspect of postmodernization according to Jameson—but rather that trends in the economy are understood by transposing categories used initially to characterize trends in the arts. Thus, we find associations drawn between the aesthetic and the economic in the form of what Jameson designates aesthetic “symptoms” that express a particular stage of capitalism which is now manifested as those artistic objects whose characteristics reflect the responsibility placed on them to “cognitively map” mutations in social space that exceed our power of comprehension (1991[1984]: 37).

In perhaps the most compelling example, Jameson (2000[1997]) uses Arrihgi’s analysis of *The Long Twentieth Century* (1994) to outline parallel trends in capitalist political economy and the history of aesthetics: industrial-imperial-financial is to realism-modernism-postmodernism. Just as mimesis is lost and the fragment becomes more expressive in cultural objects, so too has capitalism realized a “de-territorialization” in location and process with the financial unit now the primary engine of profit. For Jameson, the aesthetic defines the terms of the historical process, and those terms are subsequently introduced alongside the history of capitalism to penetrate the core of similar trends there that otherwise remain inconspicuous.

Thus, it is the triumph of the commodity-form in the imperialist stage of capitalism that is understood *as if* it were “colour and form [freeing] themselves from their former vehicles and [coming] to live independent existences as fields of perception and as artistic raw materials” (Jameson 2000[1997]: 266). We can understand the global hyperspace of late capitalism *as if* it were the Bonaventure Hotel and we were naive tourists (Jameson 1991[1984]: 38–45). The difference between industrial and financial modes of production can be understood *as if* it were the distinction between van Gogh and Warhol, or between the modernist connotations of work and material transformation and the postmodernist connotations of play and idleness that artistic signifiers, in these two periods, tend to assume (Jameson 1991[1984]: 10).

Most importantly, in a transposition that evokes the “iconoclastic” origins of the American postmodern, we face the “imperative to grow new organs and expand our sensorium and our body to new yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions” when attempting to come to grips with the constant revolutions of globalized financial capitalism. Indeed, it is *as if* we were confronting the ruptured dimensions of postmodern architecture and the challenge they present to “our perceptual habits formed in that older kind of space ... the space of high modernism” (Jameson 1991[1984]: 38–39). In all

of these cases, the economic tenors assume a meaning derivative of the relations present in the aesthetic realm which are then transposed, as vehicles, to fuse this material together to demonstrate a parallel meaningful form. Thus, for those postmodern avatars found in the late capitalist economy, it is their iconoclasm that is the most apparent. Jameson uses the aesthetic in precisely the way he says it should be used: to enhance our understanding of the trajectory of capitalism.

If Jameson relies on a one-to-one relationship between the economy and the aesthetic, Harvey (1990) triangulates and introduces a third term into this relationship, arguing that it is our perception of time and space—specifically, “time-space compression”—that mediates between postmodern culture and a post-Fordist regime of flexible accumulation in capitalism. The crisis of representation at the foundation of postmodern culture is not unprecedented in the history of art. Two other periods have witnessed similar crises: first, surrounding the revolutions of 1848—which gave rise to modernism—and second, at the turn of the 20th century—which resulted in a “surge” in modernism characterized by an emphasis on multiple perspectives and a “search for new myths” (Harvey 1990: 28–31).

While significant shifts in the accumulation process of capitalism are common to all three periods, they also stand as successive “waves of time-space compression generated by the pressures of capital accumulation with its perpetual search to annihilate space through time and reduce turnover time” (Harvey 1990: 306–307). In this sense, the “flexible” capitalist economy annihilates space through time via the abstraction of money to basic units, the expansion of communications technology and the tearing down of barriers that gave national borders a legal presence. Moreover, the production/consumption turnover rate is sped up with the application of a “fashion” aesthetic to more commodities. The commodification of services expands the number and kind of commodities, and computerized trading and investment technology reduces turnover time and annihilates spatial distinctions.

The result of these transformations, on the experiential level, is the accentuation of volatility, the growing importance of image and an increased attachment to local place that results in social fragmentation (Harvey 1990). We are able to discern this because similar characteristics punctuate contemporary art objects. For instance, Harvey knows that time-space compression and flexible accumulation results in growing reliance on image (particularly for self-identity) because he can read this in Rauschenberg’s *Persimmon*, especially when compared with Rueben’s *Venus at her toilet*. He knows that attachment

to local place (omitting responsibility for surrounding areas) is growing because the bucolic atrium of the IBM building on Madison Avenue so visibly contrasts with the polluted, built-up city on the outside; or with Baltimore's Harbor Place: a leisure palace set in the midst of modernist attempts at urban renewal. Indeed, the power of the aesthetic extends even further when Harvey notices that most of the postmodernist aesthetic innovations occurred *before* the transformation of the economy. What does this suggest? Marx has the answer: We erect our structure in imagination before we erect it in reality; or, "While crises in the experience of space and time, in the financial system, or in the economy at large, may form a necessary condition for cultural and political change, the sufficient conditions lie more deeply embedded in the internalized dialectics of thought and knowledge production" (Harvey 1990: 345). For Harvey, the postmodern aesthetic *anticipates* the economic, political and experiential changes to come and makes its own "intervention" into this new architectonic emergence (1990: 15).

Thus, if Jameson transposes the aesthetic to the economy *as if* the economy were the aesthetic, Harvey argues that the aesthetic *is the economy*, and the economy is the perception of time and space. There is no attempt to understand the one by understanding the other as all three are closely imbricated. By understanding the aesthetic, you can understand them all. For both accounts of the postmodern, the focus rests with the aesthetic, and while they remain skeptical of its critical possibilities, they insist that the postmodern is, like modernism, but a different kind of realism (Jameson 1991[1984]: 49; Harvey 1990: 114–115). To forget this is to forget its placement in history, and also to forget the critical intervention it can make by developing a representation of present capitalism that recovers the sense of collective action that is lost when representations fail and confusion persists about social structure. The important point is that modernism has outlived its political utility when the kind of capitalism it could represent has vanished. Postmodernism does, in this sense, represent the possibility of "new vistas and new directions" in cultural politics—it needs only to be educated of the task.

5.2 *Diremptions of the Aesthetic-Sacred: Pomo as further Nihilism*

It is natural that iconoclasm finds both supporters and detractors. And if Harvey and Jameson appear as critical affirmativists of the postmodern aesthetic, it is Daniel Bell (1996[1976]) who represents the conservative opponent. Bell

makes clear early on that if he is conservative in anything, it is only culture—he remains a liberal in politics and a socialist in economics (1996[1976]: xi-xii). But his conservatism is often found to have implications beyond culture as Bell argues that while the postmodern is an aesthetic phenomenon, it is indicative of a historical migration from art to life. *Thus what is methodological in Jameson and Harvey becomes historical in Bell.* Postmodernism emerged in the 1960s as a kind of “farical” reversion to the ideals of a narrow cadre of modernist artists in the 1920s, only now attempting to achieve in lifestyle what before remained characteristic only of art (1996[1976]: 79). The postmodern aesthetic does not have to be transposed by the analyst to understand patterns and trends in other domains; the aesthetic has already migrated there to shape them in its own image.

For Bell, postmodernism is iconoclastic but only in the sense that, in field after field, it turns “what began as a serious endeavor ... [into] kitsch” (1996[1976]: 300). Thus, Philip Johnson kitsches the modernist style he once championed through the Chippendale style with which he ornaments the broken pediment of the AT&T Building. Lyotard kitsches the Marxism of *Socialisme ou Barbarisme* by denying the presence of grand-narratives and making the most critical contests those of language-games. In both instances, the seriousness of the initial endeavor is ridiculed when the different postmodernisms caricature that seriousness by daring their former modernist compatriots to take *this* seriously.

But the postmodern challenge to modern seriousness is merely an extension of the desacralizing tendencies inherent to modernism itself: postmodernism is the “exhaustion of modernism and the exhaustion of culture” (Bell 1996[1976]: 314). Bell is conservative in a pre-modernist sort of way in that his fundamental model of culture remains religion (1996[1976]: xxix). It is the transgressive-ness of modernism and capitalism that Bell argues ultimately adds up to the contemporary impasse in which the modernist culture we have “contradicts” with our workaday existence of increasingly rationalized (and transgressive) capitalism. But this contradiction does not mean critical capacity, only further nihilism without recourse to the sacred beyond the “tedium of the unrestrained self.” We have indeed reached a breaking point with postmodernism, which manages to profane even the boundaries that gave modernism a modicum of seriousness. For Bell (and the conservative wing of the ‘Culture Wars’ as a whole) the postmodern thus marks a kind of supercharged modernist desacralization in which the perils of modernism become only more foreboding.

6 Postmodernism(s) in America

By this account, America inflects its knowledge of (postmodern) change through recourse to the aesthetic, whose situation—institutionalized modernism—in the 1960s meant that the “postmodern” should subsequently connote a kind of iconoclasm. The question that remains concerns only how to identify what that iconoclasm could mean. As Huyssen argues, postmodernism as an artistic movement began in the United States and was only subsequently taken up elsewhere (1984: 18–19). Its initial association with the avant-garde means that it met a largely positive reception in America, precisely because it indicated the kind of “new vistas and new directions” that those seeking resistance to institutions aspire to.

If the postmodern made itself felt most anywhere in America it was in the academy, which in the 1960s was institutionalized in disciplinary practice and structure, and confronting enormous changes to the demographic and political texture of the university itself. The postmodern thus assumed signal importance for implying the sort of iconoclasm and avantgardism that the generations entering this changing context were looking for. Indeed, this was particularly true for those entering the humanities where the view emerged that “writers like Barthes, Foucault, Kristeva and Derrida were really late modernist artists who had taken to philosophy rather than sculpture or the novel” (Eagleton 2003: 67). In this manner, a postmodernized humanities created cultural studies in the United States (Gramsci did elsewhere) in the 1970s.

Perhaps this framework even explains the differential diffusion of the postmodern between American sociology and anthropology. When postmodernism came back to the States translated and “socialized” in French form, the former had less of an institutionalized core than did the latter; thus the conditions were ripe for postmodern iconoclasm to be widely-received in anthropology while remaining peripheral to sociology (D’Andrade 2000). Compare, for instance, the disparity in disciplinary influence of such entrepreneurs of the postmodern as the relatively marginal Steven Seidman in sociology (1991) and the wildly successful Marcus and Clifford in anthropology (1986). In all these cases, it is the aesthetic meaning of the “postmodern” that is transposed to different spheres. The differential reception appears to reflect the obviousness (and quality) of its opponent. While the American postmodern is associated largely with a canon of post-structuralist texts imported as ‘French theory,’ their iconoclasm is still derivative of the original American (aesthetic) context,

if now translated back in terms that social scientists and literary theorists can recognize.

The American postmodern takes shape as a transposable (and not inherently political, which distinguishes it from the German) frame for a social movement that finds opponents assuming homologous positions wherever it is applied. It coagulates diffuse anti-institutional tendencies—and thus we witness the profusion of postmodernisms (Foster 1993; Wilterdink 2002; Mirchandani 2005). Importantly, the postmodern is thereby conceived as a kind of *introduction* of difference on top of what is presupposed to be a largely contiguous or identical empirical pattern. If there is a ‘postmodern break,’ it is *created* and not inevitable. And thus we find, for different reasons, a tendency to think in temporally continuous terms which parallels the British tradition. As we will see, for these reasons both traditions find it more propitious than either the Germans or the French to transfer their concerns over postmodernity to globalization.

6.1 *Enter the Global: wither Postmodernity?*

The Social, the Political, The Economic and the Aesthetic; if these are the four registers within the which the “postmodern wager” has been worked out by intellectual strata (and according to some analyst brought itself into—predictable—exhaustion) located in four distinct (but also actively interactive and mutually commingling) politico-geographical traditions of social theory, it becomes clear that as the social theoretical lens has shifted towards the issue of “globalization” these lenses are not abandoned. Instead, there is a *schematic transposition* (Bourdieu 1990) of the heuristic schemes associated with these ways of tackling the modern/postmodern transition as a way to conceptualize the nature of the globalization process. We argue that this yields the four dimensions that various theorists of one stripe or another have attempted to raise as the most fundamental aspects of globalization as a contemporary phenomenon. The relative differential in hegemony of some dimensions over others in the contemporary intellectual scene emerges from the fact, that not all of these lenses are equally useful in providing adequate conceptualizations of the globalization process.

Thus, we can think of globalization as an issue having to do mostly with the development of a *global community* (the “social” as the site of globalization) and the challenges and prospects that lie therein. In this respect, Durkheim reemerges as a neglected but increasingly relevant theorist of globalization (In-

glis and Robertson 2008). We can also think of globalization as a process that is primarily concerned with the issue of the changing role of the state and the emergence possibility of forms of governance that finally challenge the Westphalian framework that emerged from the European interstate system: this is issue of *political globalization* (the “political” as the site of globalization). Issues of global citizenship, the emergence of claims-making aimed at global institutions thus acquire renewed urgency. Alternatively, we can conceive of the globalization process as primarily an economic phenomenon, having to do mainly with the issue of increasingly complex webs of economic interdependence across nations whose borders become permeable to flows of goods, persons (in the form of manual and “knowledge” workers), and financial flows and transactions (Sassen 1998); this is the problematic of *economic globalization* (or the “economy” as the site of globalization). Finally, we can think of globalization as having mainly to do with the increasing flows of images and cultural goods, and the emergence of cultural industries of global scale (first Hollywood, and now “Bollywood,” Hong Kong action films and Nigerian Film along with Mexican, Brazillian and Venezuelan “Telenovelas”). But not only “mass culture” becomes global, but also those symbolic goods that receive institutional recognition as consecrated “art” acquire a global scale (Crane 2002). This is scheme which conceives of *cultural globalization* as the main problematic and which thus sees *the aesthetic* (which in typical postmodern fashion now encompasses both “art” and “mass culture”) as the site of the global (Hannerz 1996; Appadurai 1990).

We thus join those who believe that it no longer makes sense to distinguish between postmodernism and globalization as *separate* dynamics or “domains” in social theory; the now dominant models that have become institutionalized and are routinely used by social scientists in order to conceive of those trends previously classified under “postmodernism” do so by way of conceptualizing globalization as the institutional embodiment of the cultural currents that were first isolated under the banner of postmodernity. But as a cursory inspection of the globalization literature reveals (a literature dominated by concerns with culture and economy), this represents a significant—but seldom noticed—intellectual shift in recent social theory: the triumph of both the British and American politico-geographic models as ways of mapping the current problematic as one related to “globalization”, over the older French (Baudrillardian and Lyotardian) and German (Habermasian) conceptualizations (with whatever that is salvageable in these accounts having been incorporated into the now triumphant “economic” and “aesthetic” conceptualizations) that saw the

shifts as associated either with philosophy or broad conceptual systems or as a matter for political theory.

We believe this explains the relative paucity of contributions coming from France and feeding into the current globalization debate. We also adduce that this is the reason why globalization is primarily conceptualized as an *economic* and *cultural* (read aesthetic) phenomenon (and in most treatments the cultural is seen as inherently tied to the economic). This also accounts for why theories of political globalization and theories of “societal globalization” have either yet to be fully developed or lag behind in general appeal (unless political globalization becomes an issue tied to politics of capitalism of course). Nothing exemplifies this dynamic better than the French intellectual response to the issue of globalization, which is notable for being so parochial (Franco-centric anxiety vis-a-vis American hegemony) and so relatively feeble at a conceptual level (e.g. globalization as *mondialisation*) especially if we contrast it with the term-setting early contributions of the French theorists of postmodernity. In our view, this is tied to the fact that the French model’s choice of the “social” as the site of the most relevant underling processes, mesh very well with those features of the globalization problematic that appears most relevant for the contemporary situation. Thus, while it is possible to easily rattle-off the (now institutionalized in social theory textbooks) French “theorists of postmodernity” the category of (influential or even innovative) “French theorists of globalization” remains largely empty. The same can be said in regards to the (rather languid) German response, which appears to be (predictably) concerned mostly with the *political consequences* of globalization (issues of “cosmopolitanism” and “global citizenship”).

Instead, globalization *theory* has become the province of the British and American thinkers of radical or late-modernity, Marxian analysts of the dynamics and vicissitudes of multinational capitalist culture as well as anthropological, international relations and cultural theorists who were never really enamored of the Eurocentrism (and navel-gazing quality) of the postmodernist requiem for Western modes of knowing in the first place (e.g. Hannerz 1996; Robertson 2001; Friedman 1994). In addition to this more nuanced anthropological sensibility, the main sociological themes of the more recent line of British theory on “liquid” or “radical” modernity (focused on the social and institutional consequences of the transition to complete market mediation in the context of the decline of traditional moorings) have proven to be easily (perhaps too much so) transferable (without much modification) to the problematic of the encounter of “traditional” societies outside of the European

West with Western cultural forms and norms as they attempt to integrate themselves into neo-liberal market regimes. Thus, while the theme of globalization as dealing with how the “cultures” of the world come to be “threatened” by Western products and influences is of essentially anthropological origin, the drama of detraditionalization, choice and reflexivity—but this time replayed outside of Western spaces—consists of an incorporation of classical sociological themes. In addition, the *political* theorization of globalization brings back a host of issues (capitalism, commodification, class consciousness, space and territoriality, ethnic identity, and religion) which were thought to have been swept into the dustbins of history or become part of the “simulated hypereality” of the Global North (Robertson 1992).

The shift towards the problematic opened up by the global has also brought into question a key tenet of the French wave of postmodernist theory: the alleged lack of relevance of the “modernist” classics of social theory. Instead, as globalization has come to replace postmodernism as the main problematic the classics—in particular Marx, Weber, Durkheim and Simmel—have come back with a vengeance (e.g. Berman 2002[1988]; Robertson 1992, 2001; Hannerz 1996; Inglis and Robertson 2008; Frisby and Featherstone 1997; Postone 1998). There is a simple reason for this: the problematics opened up by the classics continue to be relevant (and acquire renewed relevance), not only because the main problems and issues confronting societies of the Global North can still be usefully viewed using traditional postmodernist lenses, but also because the modernism (and dare we say “modernization”) drama continues to be replayed (in historically and contextually specific variants) across the Global Ecumene with striking regularity (Hannerz 1996; Robertson 1992). Thus, the Marxian concern with the commodification of labor, the Weberian concern with the political bases of power, authority and the increasingly tenuous hold on “the monopoly of violence” exercised by the state, and the Durkheimian issue of the basis of solidarity within difference acquire renewed urgency within a global interactional scale. It is thus the postmodern theorists of nihilism, incommensurability and simulation that seem decreasingly relevant from a practical and theoretical standpoint under the “global condition.”

In this respect, a return of (very traditional) Marxist politics centered on class and production is distinctive of this new wave of globalization theory (Sassen 1998; Jameson 2000). The “Forces of Labor” (Silver 2003) remain alive and well (and are possibly resurgent) in a globalizing world. From this perspective postmodernist theorists were seduced into reading as inexorable trends (e.g. the decomposition of class analysis and class struggle) into what were simply

troughs when viewed from longer time-scale or when transposed into more geographically expansive contexts. Thus, as globalization takes over the very same empirical and political turf previously occupied by postmodernism, nihilism and a relativist micro-politics of incommensurable language games takes a back seat.

As a concern with globalization gradually acquires the prestige and draws the attention previously monopolized by the now (apparently exhausted) Nietzschean-Schmittian turn towards (the always contradictory notion of) a “postmodern politics.” As recent summary considerations of the globalization problematic show (e.g. Tomlinson 1999; Robertson 1992, 2001; Ritzer 2003), the basic intellectual referents of the globalization debate—globalization as conceived as primarily a “cultural” (read aesthetic) or economic phenomenon or more accurately, as a hybrid economic *and* cultural phenomenon (Jameson 1998; Robertson 2001)—favor the conceptual coordinates that have been developed in England and the United States within the context of the post-modernism debate in the last three decades.

This meant that intellectual producers within the Anglosaxon social theory production field where strategically placed—and their German and French brethren disadvantageously positioned—when the winds of changed dropped globalization on their laps. This allowed Anglosaxon theorists of the aesthetics-economy nexus to easily reconvert the theoretical capital that had been previously honed in the battle to understand postmodernism into sophisticated entries into the globalization problematic. Given that Anglosaxon social theory has been characterized a knowledge production system marked by the chronic importation and domestication of French and German ideas (at least since structuralism and post-structuralism swept the academy during the 1960s and 1970s), this triumph of the British and American responses and reworkings of postmodern social theory over their early intellectual predecessors (and the lack of a continental response at the same level of sophistication and ambitious) may mark a significant (but seldom acknowledged) transformation in the relative standing of the various politico-geographically situated knowledge-production fields.

When it comes to the vexing issue of “epistemology” and “temporality” (or periodization) that inaugurated the postmodern problematic, it has thus become increasingly clear that the original temporal models that expressed the divide between modernity and postmodernity as a radical break—favored in the initial French incursion—were as reliant on spatial conceptualizations of the Global North as somehow radically distinct from the global South as the

original conceptualizations of modernity as a radical break from the “traditional” European (or medieval) past were excessively reliant on knowledge-geographical partitions that separated Europe from colonial and non-Western spaces. In order to conceptualize the modern (and the postmodern) consciousness, the spatial heterogeneity that separated Europe from the rest (and within Europe: the metropolis from the rural hinterland) was transposed as form of temporal consciousness applied to conceive of modernity as signifying an epoch both distinctive from what came before and serving as the prelude to a future history.

This suggests that the globalization problematic was never really separate from the postmodern problematic since “postmodernism” as an epochal shift (in the temporal order) is grounded in the spatial heterogeneity produced by “uneven” development for its conceptualization (Harvey 1990). As a self-conscious concern with theorizing the origins and impact of globalization has developed in social theory, there has thus developed a healthy skepticism of the (historical and cultural) “exceptionalism” of the postmodern condition. Globalization theorists for instance, claim that Postmodernisms (and postmodernist ways of thinking) can now be found in cultures outside of the West, and in historical periods outside of modernity. From the globalist perspective postmodernist relativity *itself becomes relativized* as just another extreme possibility within the heterogeneous identity space opened up by global capitalism (Friedman 1994). Furthermore, the problematic of postmodernity is revealed as never really separate from that “older” problematic of “modernization”; there had to be an “after” to modernity especially in the wake of the “catching up” to the West that was evident in the so-called developing world during the post-war period (Robertson 1992).

That the issue of postmodernity was never really separable from the issue of globalization, and the attendant subjective and cultural consequences that go with the “compression” and “time-space distantiation” experienced in a globalizing ecuneme, is best exemplified by considering the structure of the debate surrounding one of the most galvanizing issue of the postmodernity problematic: Lyotard’s (1984) claim that the signal (definitional) characteristic of “postmodernity” was the end of (plausibility of and naive faith in) “grand narratives.” As Robertson (1992: 179) has argued, this vacuous epistemological claim (in its unqualified form), can be given some substance by looking at the compression of space that results from globalization as exerting an inherent *relativizing effect*. In Peter Berger’s (1968) terms, globalization leads to the undermining of the “plausibility structure” that protects ethnocentric or

monocultural “grand narratives” through the simple mechanism of exposure to other (equally deserving of the title of “grand”) narratives: “[i]f one of the major features of globalization is the compression of the world, one of its main consequences is an exacerbation of collisions between civilizational, society and communal narratives” (Robertson 1992: 149).

It is in this respect important to recall that one of Baudrillard’s (1983) key objections to the “productivist” paradigm represented by Marxist theory and liberal economics alike was precisely its ethnocentric (and Eurocentric) “universalization” of something that could best be understood as a specifically Western philosophical anthropology (a point that has been recently developed and echoed by the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins). Thus, it is clear that a key component of the “postmodern consciousness” resides in the (initially shocking) confrontation of large-scale Western cultural orders with alternative ways of conceiving of the nature of man and society (a predictable outcome of the globalization process); whether this encounter is historical or “anthropological” is less important. We hasten to add however, that the apparent “replacement” of postmodernism by globalization, and the attendant rise in hegemony of Anglo-saxon conceptualizations over continental ones, signals not a decline in the contemporary relevance or importance of the set of issues initially opened up by postmodernist social theory (these remain alive and well, and still far from being satisfactorily resolved), but instead *the decline in hegemony of one particular (and once dominant) mode of conceiving the process of postmodernization.*

The original “French” model, which popularized the initial (and now taken-for-granted) terminology, time consciousness, philosophical acuity and periodizing ambitions of the modernity-postmodernity debate in the social sciences (but also set a specific way of conceiving of the macro-temporality of postmodernity as a radical, discontinuous transformation), has been challenged on various fronts by a series alternative conceptualizations more firmly rooted in classical and postclassical social theory, especially those originating from the more institutionally robust wing of post-Weberian and post-Marxian theory. The Anglo-American models essentially “domesticate” the unwieldy postmodernism produced within the French tradition and pave the way for an incorporation of most of the key concerns of these theorists through the conduit of the globalization debate. An institutional concern with the social fact of globalization challenges traditional postmodern theory by removing the spatial bases of the contrast that undergirded the modernity/tradition binary. Homogeneity at the spatial level produces an inability to conceive of contemporaneity as a radical break from the past, which explains why there is reticence to conceive

of the postmodern as signifying as radical a break from the modern as the latter was conceived from “tradition” in classical theory, and why Marxian analysis of postmodernity as the cultural logic of (global) capitalism can zero-in on the lack of an explicit temporal consciousness (and in fact a celebration of pastiche and nostalgia [Jameson 1991[1984]]) in the postmodern sensibility.

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