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CRITICALLY MODERN
Critically Modern

An Introduction

Bruce M. Knauf

What is entailed by the process of being or becoming modern? This question has been important for Western societies since the late eighteenth century, if not before. But it takes on new dimensions in a contemporary world. Modernity has become global in new ways. Or has it? What does it mean to be or to resist being modern in world areas and locales that have different cultural histories? In recent years, these questions have generated vigorous debate across the social sciences and humanities. Especially among anthropologists and critical theorists, standards of social advancement and progress are seen to differ depending on cultural and historical conditions. The process of becoming modern is contested and mediated through alter-native guises. It has been increasingly suggested that modernity is importantly regional, multiple, vernacular, or "other" in character.

Despite its highly equivocal and uneven outcomes, economic and social development has often been associated with aspirations for a better style of life, including a hope that living standards will eventually approximate those of Western countries. In the process, it has often been suggested, customary practices are relinquished or transformed; social relations are dislodged, disrupted, or disembedded by market forces and by new institutions and aspirations. But what new social formations arise? What forms of subjectivity and subordination are incited? What new diversities are generated, and how do these draw on local history as well as on regional connections or international influences?

Anthropologists have often questioned the homogeneity of so-called global developments. On one hand, our strong appreciation of cultural
diversity of the peoples to a single global culture. On the other hand, anthropologists' concerns with power and domination—how and why some people become disenfranchised and disempowered relative to others—make us skeptical about claims of global progress and collective improvement. Along with other critical theorists, then, anthropologists have questioned the attempt to view modernity as a singular or coherent development. Indeed, the divergent responses of the world's peoples arguably maintain or increase their cultural diversity at the same time that they become more deeply entwined with capitalist influences, institutions, and impositions. Hence the paradox that people in different world areas increasingly share aspirations, material standards, and social institutions at the same time that their local definition of and engagement with these initiatives fuels cultural distinctiveness.

In contemporary cultural anthropology, this view of modern diversity has, in various permutations, become important and influential. Amid this growing interest, however, the question of how modernity becomes “different”—and how we should conceptualize this process—bears further scrutiny. Is the current interest in modernity and its alterities sufficiently clear? Do recent approaches unwittingly adopt the biases of earlier modernization theories and of eurocentric assumptions that we hope to have left behind? Or does an emphasis on being modern and its implications lever fields such as anthropology to important new insights concerning culture and power in a contemporary world? At issue is whether our understandings of modernity and its alternatives are critically flawed, or if instead they are critically important to anthropology and to the people we study with. It is time to take stock of these issues.

The goal of the present book is to gain critical purchase on the central problematic of modernity and its multiples through a strongly presented range of anthropological perspectives. Constituent chapters combine ethnographic and theoretical interventions authored by established and developing anthropological scholars. Rather than being pinned to a single viewpoint, contributors adopt complementary perspectives on a shared problematic. These perspectives draw variously on theories of capitalism and political economy, history, subjectivity, and aesthetics. The contributors' empirical engagements articulate in important ways with the contemporary study of gender, language use, labor, commodification, public culture, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), political upheaval, imperial ideology, and governmentality. World area perspectives range from Africa and Oceania to the Caribbean, Euro-America, and interareal connections more generally.

Instead of presenting a single dogma, the chapters of this book pur-
generalizations for which previous master narratives of modernity have been critiqued? Reciprocally, in what ways do recent conceptualizations of modernity neglect key dimensions of political economy on one hand, or local culture on the other? Yet more fundamentally, how do we tease apart the issues in this debate without devolving into old-fashioned relativism or global reductionism? Addressing these questions is crucial for confronting one of anthropology’s central current challenges—namely, to critically understand the ways in which people engage images of progress and institutions of development at the same time that they become more culturally diverse, unequal, and disempowered.

Inflections of Modernity: A Genealogy

A critical understanding of being or becoming modern can hardly be developed without an historical perspective. As part of this history, we need to consider how modernity has emerged as a problem in Western thought and connect this problem to trajectories of sociocultural change or transformation. Besides adding historical perspective, tracing the problematic of modernity provides a vantage point from which current views can be more clearly analyzed and reformulated. The goal is not to promote a hegemony of Western thought. It is rather to provide grounds for critical scrutiny and alternative lines of intervention.

In one respect, modern life is associated with the appreciative search for new meaning in the daily features of a differentiated social world. This conceptualization of “modernity” as can be dated at least as far back as Charles Baudelaire’s essay “The Painter of Modern Life,” written in 1859–1860 and published in 1863 in Le Figaro (Baudelaire 1964). Baudelaire emphasized the rendering and seeking of artistic significance in daily experience, epitomized by the mannered explorations of the man-about-town and the impressionistic drawings of Constantin Guys, a “passionate lover of crowds and incognitos” (164:5). As Trouillot (this volume) notes, Baudelaire’s experience was also profoundly affected by his travels to the Indian Ocean and by his long-term liaison with a Caribbean mulatto woman—though the impact of these experiences on his work has often been neglected by literary scholars. Quotidian sensibilities were also explored during the last half of the nineteenth century in the novels of Flaubert and in French impressionist painting. These portrayed the daily images and perspectives of unadorned contemporary life in France at the time. Such developments were complemented by the increasing growth of travel literature, memoirs, and experiential accounts of life in non-Western areas.

In a deeper and more general sense, modern notions of selfhood have
often been associated with an affirmation of ordinary life, a secular or instrumentalist orientation, and a heightened sense of autonomous individuality, self-fashioning, and inwardness (see Taylor 1989). In Europe and other areas, these aspects of modern identity often went hand in hand with increasing desire for personal or collective progress based on new ways of daily living—and frequently at the expense of previous ways of life. These trends drew fundamentally on mercantile and incipient capitalist exploitation of non-Western areas. During the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, these trends intensified and melded with the powerful growth of industrial capitalism, technological innovation, and increasing desires for manufactured commodities. In both developments, much of Western economic success ultimately derived from the exploitation of non-Western areas. In ideational and ideological terms, correspondingly, non-Western areas typically served as the primitive Other against which European Enlightenment and colonialism were elevated and justified. This rank ordering of humanity informed the "civilizing mission" of Western intrusion and exploitation of non-Western peoples.

During much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, desire for progress had a pronounced political side—including the groundswell to create new forms of government that superseded monarchies, aristocracies, and eventually colonial regimes in the hope of creating better and more equitable national societies. These features were highlighted in the watershed transformation of the French Revolution, which is often seen—from a Western political perspective—to inaugurate the beginning of the modern era at the end of the eighteenth century. As Benedict Anderson (1991) has noted, however, the modern nation as a collectively imagined community also arose in the Americas during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including in Latin America as well as in the United States.

New modes of temporality also appear to have developed during the late eighteenth century. Reinhart Koselleck (1985:279, 285) suggests that a growing disjunction between future expectations and present experiences developed in Europe during this period. Among the results was a burgeoning belief in progress. Economically and politically, this "progress" was related to the growth of industrial capitalism at home and the global intensification of Western colonial exploitation. In the midst of these developments, the civilizing mission of Europe was complemented by struggles among creole populations for recognition and status against escalating standards of European superiority. Both in Europe and its colonies, the growing discrepancy between aspirations

and realities increased a sense that the passage of time should expectably be marked by progress and improvement vis-à-vis the past. As Foucault (1984:39) notes, "Modernity is often characterized in terms of consciousness of the discontinuity of time: a break with tradition." These assumptions appear so ubiquitous today that it is important to realize how distinctive and even unusual they are in the context of alternative cultural orientations and earlier phases of Western history. These often emphasized allegiance to the beliefs and orientations of the past rather than plans for a newly different and hopefully better future. The increasing Western emphasis on progress was complemented by the notion that "history" was not so much an index of authenticity or propriety as it was an undeveloped past against which the march of progress should be asserted.

As discussed by Foucault (1984:32 ff.; cf. 1970), notions of Enlightenment changed correspondingly during the latter half of the eighteenth century—as illustrated in the work of Immanuel Kant. These developments reflected the increasing desire for self-conscious improvement through new forms of knowledge, action, and understanding. More darkly, Foucault exposed how the modern will to knowledge incited new forms of classification and power during the nineteenth century. National states used new types of knowledge and forms of knowing to stigmatize, discipline, and punish their subjects—in the name of improving society. This same process informed the subjugation, racialization, and stigmatization of colonial subjects abroad (Stoler 1995). More generally, the enumeration, classification, and codification of subjects into social categories inculcated new forms of moral onus while making persons more "legible" to authorities and hence more controllable by the state (Scott 1998). Correspondingly, modern institutions of legal, penal, medical, and educational imposition made the process of becoming a subject problematic in new ways. The incitement to search for value in daily life—to heroize the present while avoiding the stigma of being backward or depraved—was paralleled by a mandate to reinvent oneself as a newly ascetic and disciplined modern subject (Foucault 1984:41–42; cf. Weber 1958). 1

Though these trends have usually been attributed to European and colonial life since the late eighteenth century, they had important precursors before this time. Max Weber (1958) suggested that the motivational spirit of capitalism developed from an ethic of this-worldly asceticism associated with Calvinism and related branches of puritanical Christianity during and after the Protestant Reformation. Further, as Trouillot (this volume) emphasizes, Anglo and Germanic views of West-
ern history tend to neglect the earlier relationship of Spain and Portugal to the projective geography of modern imagination and domination, as reflected in the Iberian exploitation of the Caribbean, Latin America, and other areas during the sixteenth century (cf. Dussel 1993).

Even apart from the reciprocal impact of non-Western areas back on the development of European modernity, an emphasis on advancement through inventive self-fashioning had earlier permutations in the European Renaissance and, much earlier, in ancient Greece. Fredric Jameson (n.d.:11) suggests that the concept of being modern—per the Latin word modernus—was used as far back as the fifth century A.D. to distinguish the contemporary from the ancient or antique. In a yet deeper historical perspective, Jonathan Friedman (this volume; cf. 1994:39) suggests that civilization as an empire have often been characterized by a period of modernism when they have been at the height of their political centralization and cultural hegemony.

Building on these earlier strains and precedents, however, the various strands of Western and colonial modernity braided together in powerful new ways during the late eighteenth and especially the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was during this period that industrial capitalism most dramatically transformed life in European towns and cities—while displacing and disrupting local communities of peasants, artisans, landowners, and clergy. These processes were recursively linked to several developments: the increasing activities of Europeans overseas; the exploitation of non-Western areas in a global network of exploitation and commodity production; disruption and movement of non-Western peoples; the growing development of creole populations, including in Europe; and the hybridization of Western values, sensibilities, and institutions among subaltern populations.

These developments are not unique to the modern Western world, as Jonathan Friedman (this volume) suggests. Permutations of them can be found in expansionist development of other civilizational systems, including ancient Roman and Chinese empires and the Old World prior to European hegemony (Abu-Lughod 1989; see Held et al. 1999). But the scale and intensity of global connections after 1500 was unprecedented. By the late nineteenth century, these worldwide connections were firmly linked to Western forms of industrial commodity production on one hand, and to globally intense forms of Western colonialism on the other. These two developments—capitalism and colonialism—became increasingly connected to each other. In the process, the threatened influence of non-Western areas rebounded back on Europe. This counterforce intensified the needs of the Europeans to construct them-
selves as superior to and different from non-Westerners and from subal-
tern groups within Europe itself. In this sense, the ideological as well as social disruptions that Europe visited on the New World and elsewhere came home to roost in a newly modern key.

Classic Social Theory

In the latter part of the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, the destructive and yet potentiating developments of "modern society" in the West became a central problematic for thinkers such as Marx, Durkheim, Simmel, and Weber—figures who have since become classic or foundational for social and cultural theory. These scholars were deeply concerned by the advent of full-blown capitalism, the spread of wage labor, the uprooting of people from European communities, and the bustling growth and great risks of life in modern Western cities and towns. Their perspectives were strongly influenced by a desire for progress based on critical inquiry. Bequeathed from the Enlightenment, their approaches employed documentation and reason to understand social developments and, optimally, enable their improvement. As such, classic social theorists critically analyzed the present of their day against the possibilities of the future and the lost benefits of the past. In the process, they drew heavily from Enlightenment notions of improvement through critique. In the formulations of Marx, Durkheim, Simmel, Weber, and others, modern Western society was viewed—depending on the theorist—as an engine of economic inequity and oppression, a specialized division of labor threatened by alienation, an arena for monetary dehumanization, or an iron cage of bureaucracy and rationalization. At the same time, these views also accorded modern society powerful potentials for more efficient organization, technological progress, and moral or humanistic improvement.

The insights of classic social theorists continue to provide important perspective for understanding more recent developments—including those that have taken place during the last half of the twentieth century. Before the 1960s, however, classic social theory was infrequently used to consider or analyze patterns of exploitation in non-Western areas. This is a huge shortcoming that has been addressed, with varying degrees of critical success, in more recent decades.

It is perhaps significant that while the problems and potentials of modern society were central to classic social theorists, the term "modern" was typically used in their works as a casual modifier rather than as a central concept. Correspondingly, the notion of "modernity" ap-
pears only rarely in their writings. It has only been much more recently—since the mid-1980s—that "modernity" has emerged explicitly as a core problematic in the human sciences. A quick example illustrates this trend. Emory University's ample but by no means exhaustive research library includes a whopping 545 books published between 1991 and 2000 that have the word "modernity" in the title. A full 145 of these volumes were published during 1999 or 2000 alone. By contrast, only a handful of volumes that used "modernity" as a title concept were published before the mid- and early 1980s.

This semantic shift reflects deeper issues. Classic social theory—including the work of Marx, Durkheim, Weber, and Simmel—emphasized a close and interactive relation between the subjective features of what we now generally refer to as culture and the more ostensibly objective features of politics and economy. These theorists, along with others, were strongly committed to a combined analysis of mental and material factors—a critical consideration of how economic and political features were reciprocally or dialectically related to values, beliefs, and subjective experiences. During the succeeding decades of the twentieth century, however, the disciplinary interests of the social sciences and humanities became increasingly specialized and atomized. In the process, they have been prone to a widening split between models of social change based on economic or political determinism on one hand, those that stress beliefs and cultural values on the other.

Against the backdrop of this academic history, the more recent emphasis on "modernity" reflects an attempt to bring together the two sides of this issue back together in the study of contemporary social and cultural change. Whereas empiricist social scientists often stress the economic or political determinism of modernization and globalization, a range of critical theorists, broad-based intellectuals, and social scientists now emphasize the interactive importance of cultural and material influences in the development of alternative modernities. As the Canadian philosopher and cultural activist Charles Taylor (1989, 1992, 1999) has suggested, the moral values and beliefs that attend modernity are not reducible to dominant assumptions of economic determinism and its ostensibly relation to social and political "progress." At the same time, the analysis of modernity does not reject material forces or economic or political factors. Rather, studies of alternative modernities provide a productive middle ground for analyzing these features in relation to cultural and subjective orientations. As such, they connect the social and material emphases of sociology and political science with the evocative but often unsystematic presentations of representational analysis, literary criticism, and cultural studies.

From POMO Back to MO

From the perspective of the 1970s and 1980s, the split between the social sciences and humanities was galvanized by a newly contentious, influential, and transdisciplinary movement: postmodernism. Since the postmodern impetus has, with some irony, informed and provoked the mushrooming recent interest in modernity, it is worthwhile to consider postmodernism as a predisposing context. As Harvey (1989) suggests, the radical questions posed by postmodernism dovetailed with the economic stagnation and institutional rigidity that plagued Western capitalism during the 1970s. Skeptical of uniform standards of truth and knowledge, postmodern sensibilities rejected rational modernism and all that it implied. This radicalism was important to question the conservative assumptions and ideologies associated with Western reason and progress (which could certainly not be legitimately imparted to all of humanity). Third-wave feminism, subaltern studies, cultural studies, black cultural criticism, and other initiatives drew on postmodern sensibilities to trouble Western assumptions across a wide variety of gendered, sexual, racial, ethnic, and national fronts. That European modernity had disrupted, impoverished, and killed so many people—producing two world wars, racism, crushing colonization, violent decolonization, and then neo-colonial domination through postcolonial capitalism that undercut subsistence production and made people in diverse world areas dependent on the strictures of a market economy—made Western modernity highly suspect as a model for general improvement and world progress.

During the 1980s, postmodern perspectives drew variously on French deconstruction, poststructuralism, surrealism, the literary and artistic avant-garde, and pop culture to deconstruct master narratives of understanding and grand theories of development and progress. Full of pastiche, playfulness, hybridity, and experimental forms of expression, postmodern sensibilities made problematic not only the canons of Western description, reason, and explanation but also the means and styles by which these were pursued and expressed. Beyond an intellectual enterprise, postmodern perspectives claimed to ride an emergent wave of contemporary and popular culture—a public world of discordant images and mass-mediated idioms that accelerated in dizzying patterns of possibility and parody. They also foregrounded what Foucault (1980) called subjugated knowledges and helped energize queer theory, postmodern feminism, critical cultural studies, and postcolonial studies, among other initiatives. Many of these perspectives privileged evocation and
impression—a cutting edge of irony, insinuation, and protest—as opposed to systematic demonstration by means of detailed documentation, empirical analysis, or logical explanation.

If postmodern sensibilities refused standards of declarative logic and universal truth, they were effective in criticizing assumptions of Western thought, the structures of its social and political economy, and its understanding of historical and contemporary “progress.” By the late 1980s, the “post” in postmodernity became an exclamation point of rupture, refusal, and disconnection from rational or historical understanding. Though full-blown postmodernists were few in number, they were highly provocative. Postmodern sensibilities had great transdisciplinary influence during the late 1980s, including through the loosening of assumptions and the responses they provoked—not to mention the defenses they engendered among scholars who felt threatened.

From the beginning, postmodern sensibilities were critiqued as thickly as they were asserted or expressed. Many if not most of the interlocutors with postmodernism—including Jean Baudrillard, Fredric Jameson, Gayatri Spivak, Judith Butler, Douglas Kellner, Mike Featherstone, and the early Lyotard—had themselves been strongly influenced by Marxism. The same was true of the greatest defender of Western reason against the poststructural and postmodern critique: the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas.

A characterization of Habermas’s large opus is beyond our present concerns. But his treatment of modernity is relevant. In 1987, Habermas published his voluminous Theory of Communicative Action (translated in 1984). Committed to maintaining reason and rational discourse in contemporary society, Habermas reanalyzed the use of reason in the works of Weber, Lukács, Adorno, Mead, Durkheim, and Parsons. In the process, he developed a theoretical model of communicative action that critiqued functionalist reason and promoted rational discourse. Through this discourse, Habermas suggested, communicative action could integrate different aspects of the modern experience or “life-world.” For Habermas, analyzing and understanding proper communication allows us to appreciate the accomplishments and cultivate the unrealized potentials of Western modernity. He thus maintains that rational communicative action can be developed for the good and proper progress of society through a public sphere of reasoned understanding (Habermas 1987; cf. Calhoun 1992).

Habermas is often considered to be the arch philosophical champion of contemporary Western modernity. In his perspective, modernity is the positive fruit of rational discourse bequeathed from the European Enlightenment. By the mid-1980s, however, the poststructural and postmodern critique of Western reason was near its height. In the context of these critiques, Habermas’s ideas were considered outdated by many; he seemed to be adopting an antiquated model of Western rational superiority. In 1985, Habermas counterattacked with the twelve lectures of his Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. These launched a frontal assault on figures such as Bataille, Foucault, Derrida, and Castoriadis—while asserting Habermas’s own stance that modernity continued, and should continue, as a preeminent project of rational communication based on general truth derived from universal reason. This perspective was alternately ignored and responded to with critiques that further undermined pretensions to rational progress. The writings of Foucault—who emphasized how Western regimes of truth operated as instruments of domination and oppression—were especially important in this respect (Foucault 1980, 1984; see in Kelly 1994). It was out of these debates—and their deeper historical precursors—that contemporary concerns about modernity and its multiples have since emerged. In the process, the legacy of the Foucault–Habermas debate has expanded to consider how people in different world areas have been impelled to engage the progressivist project of Western modernity—and how they resist or countermand it. Subaltern and postcolonial studies have been especially important in this regard.

During the early 1990s, the radical impetus of postmodernism began to burn itself out. Indeed, the explicit influence of postmodernism subsided almost as quickly as its initial rush had been intense. As early as 1992, the question became, as Michael Rosenthal put it in Socialist Review, “What Was Postmodernism?” But if the claims of postmodern sensibility were inflated, they highlighted key problems in the perspectives they had attacked—including the Western project of progress through rational development. Though Habermas has continued to be influential—and prolific—he is increasingly seen by many scholars, and even by some of his acolytes, as a classic or anachronistic apologist for master narratives of rational reason in a world that is rife with competing standards of truth and rationality. In the mix, however, the assertion of postmodernity has paved the way for a complementary question: If the asserted break with modernity has been overblown, what new understandings of modern life now become necessary to comprehend the intense trajectories of contemporary change? In what ways have postmodern sensibilities themselves been a symptom of late modern cultural disjunctions? If the “post” in postmodernity was excessive, what is a better way to understand “modernity” to begin with? During the 1990s, then, the excursus of postmodernism led many scholars back in a significantly new key to the study of “modernity.”
From Philosophy to Social Theory:  
The Reemergence of Modernity as a Social  
and Cultural Problematic

For reconsidering the relation between modernity and postmodernity, 
the work of David Harvey during the late 1980s has been particularly 
urban geography, political economy, and culture, Harvey brings a distinc-
tively Marxist and historical perspective to the question of what dynam-
ics of modernity—economic, political, and cultural—were disrupted 
and thrown into crisis during the 1970s and 1980s to produce the cul-
tural symptoms associated with postmodernity. In Harvey’s view, high 
industrial capitalism—earlier termed “Fordism” by Antonio Gramsci—
was brought into global crisis during the early 1970s due to corporate 
rigidity, difficulties of further expansion, and falling profit margins. 
The capitalist response to this crisis, according to Harvey, was in-
creased reliance on “flexible accumulation.” Flexible accumulation goes 
hand in hand with the speeding up and decentralization of transactions 
and profit-seeking across time and space, including through electronic 
transmission of ideas, information, and financial transactions. These 
patterns drew on new electronic technologies while compressing social 
and cultural experience across time and space. For Harvey, time–space 
compression is diagnostic of the social and cultural fragmentation of 
“the condition of postmodernity.”

From an anthropological perspective, Harvey’s work has major short-
comings that echo those of Habermas and also Foucault. Among other 
things, all of these approaches sideline the economic and political histo-
ries of non-Western peoples—including their engagements with and re-
sistances against capitalism. Harvey’s perspective further downplays 
the motivating force of cultural values, idioms, and ideologies in their own 
right; they become, on balance, a reflection of economic and political 
forces. Since the so-called electronic age arguably makes the dissemina-
tion of ideas and information one of its prime arenas of production, 
profit making, and consumption, it needs to be seriously considered if 
the old Marxist infrastructure and superstructure now have a trans-
formed causal relationship. There is ample evidence that cultural and 
subjective orientations have been dynamic forces in Western develop-
ment, including—as Max Weber (1958) emphasized—in the Protestant 
asceticism that helped spawn a capitalist ethos to begin with. In a con-
temporary world, subjective orientations exert an obviously huge im-
pact. The events of 11 September 2001 and the aftermath of U.S. bomb-
ing that began the following 7 October have sadly underscored that cul-
tural diversity in the developing world system is, if anything, more im-
portant than ever to understand. All this runs against the singular 
weight that Harvey affords to “time–space compression” as a relatively 
undifferentiated and implicitly globalizing condition. Harvey’s charac-
terization of contemporary time and space ultimately draws more from 
hoary assumptions and categories of Western intellectualism than it does 
from evidence concerning how time and space are in fact experi-
enced and constructed in different parts of the world (cf. Greenhouse 
1996; Miller 1994; Bhattacharjee 1999).

This said, Harvey’s argument has, within its restricted Western 
frame, been highly important as well as influential. First, his work is 
rich in detail, critical in Western cultural perspective, and breathtaking 
in economic and historical scope. As such, it has provided an impor-
tant example of how critical scholarship need not sacrifice evidential 
rigor or strength of argument to be evocative and important.13 Sec-
ond, Harvey’s put our understanding of contemporary cultural develop-
ments squarely back in play with economic and political factors. Even if 
culture emerges as something of an infrastructural reflection in his 
analysis, he opens the door for more dynamic articulations between cul-
tural sensibilities and trajectories of political economy, including in 
world areas he does not consider. Third, Harvey appreciates the distinc-
tive nature of urban Western developments while also contextualizing 
them with larger historical processes. His deep appreciation of Marxist 
thought (see Harvey 1982) gives his analysis an important critical edge 
even as he also strives to understand the dynamics of Western cultural 
experience.

Alongside other works and critical reassessments, Harvey’s analysis 
foreshadowed an increasingly explicit consideration of modernity dur-
ing the early and mid-1990s.14 Among others, Anthony Giddens’s books 
The Consequences of Modernity (1990) and Modernity and Self-Identity 
(1991) have been particularly influential. Giddens amalgamated and 
expanded on classic social theorists such as Ferdinand Tönnies (1957) 
to contrast “traditional” social relations—based on customary regulari-
ties within relatively stable communities—with modern ones fraught 
with disjunction and decontextualization across social contexts (cf. Appadurai 1991). Drawing on this basic contrast, Giddens describes modern-
ity as emerging historically through four related features: capitalism, 
industrialism, surveillance (especially political control by the nation-
state), and the growing organization of military power. For Giddens,
these four features link directly to modernity’s global spread and have corresponding results in the world capitalist economy, the international division of labor, the nation-state system, and the world military order.

On Giddens’s analysis, changes wrought by modernity have a distinct impact on human social relations. People are increasingly uprooted, displaced, engaged in wage labor, and enmeshed in an ever more complex and differentiated social world. According to his argument, stable individual identity based on affiliation with a physical place has transformed into variable identities across space. Modernity as such disconnects space from place. In the process, social relations become increasingly disembedded; they are differentiated and lifted out of traditional contexts. Interactions based on symbolic tokens, such as money (à la Simmel), become more impersonal. According to Giddens, this both requires and makes problematic new patterns of trust in social relations. As social actors grapple with and reflect on their relation to a complicated social world, their identities become more fragmented, individuated, and inward. Individuation and reflexivity come to permeate the social disembeddedness of a modern world. According to Giddens, these patterns have been evident for well over a century but have now intensified and spread with the globalization of modernity throughout the world. For Giddens, then, the modern epoch has been foundational—and becoming hegemonic—since the mid-nineteenth century. Conversely, the contemporary features associated by some with postmodern distinctiveness and rupture are in his analysis a continuation and extension of long-standing trends.

Giddens’s notion of modernity is certainly diffuse; it combines features of economy, politics, social organization, and personal identity in a generalized, schematic, and abstract model. Modernity is here a pervasive but largely undifferentiated process that is global in scope even as it contrasts diametrically to traditional patterns that are historical in the West and presumably cultural in the lingering pockets of a nonmodernized world.

As might be expected, Giddens’s view of modernity has been subject to critique while also being influential by virtue of its scope, generality, and the ability of researchers to isolate, refine, and transform particular components of his model. Like Harvey, but even more than him, Giddens is open to charges that he neglects the importance of cultural and symbolic influences. These include the values that attend mass consumer, electronic, and infomatic influences on social life in advanced capitalist countries and also in the rest of the world (cf. Miller 1994, 1995; Breckenridge 1995; Freeman 1999; Mankekar 1999; Spitulnik, in press).

Further, Giddens’s model creates a rigid historical and cultural divide that admits little articulation between features of non-Western modernity—economic, political, social, and cultural—and those ascribed as global by virtue of their ostensible origin in the West. In this sense, Giddens and related theorists who champion a homogenous view of modernity reproduce the self-justified excesses of modernization theories that burgeoned during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s—that is, the idea that developments in the modern Western world are destined for unaltered export to other areas. Views of an undifferentiated modernity no longer seem tenable amid the complexities, differentiations, and resistances of a contemporary world.

Modernities as Contemporary Problems and Critique

Against a homogeneous notion of modernity, a range of social theorists and anthropologists have developed approaches that are both more critical and more differentiated during the 1990s. These include an increasing critique of modernity itself as a concept. These treatments problematize and diversify modernity across alternative ranges of time, space, and identity. Against the modern as hegemonic, these views emphasize how different world areas reflect the trends of so-called modernity in ways that do not exemplify either Western modernity or non-Western traditions. This perspective pries open our assumptions about how modernity has operated and spread in different contexts and world areas. As part of this mix, increasing emphasis is placed on the subjective and cultural dimensions of modernity—the alternatively modern is not just a reflex of infrastructural forces but a force of distinctive identification and subject making.

The interactive nature of modern subjectivity and modern social life was critically emphasized by Marshall Berman in his early work, All that Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity (1982). Written as a Marxist interpretation of modern urban experience and Western literary expression, this work has become quite influential. Emphasizing the modern dialectic between destructive creation and creative destruction, Berman described modernity as an orientation of hoped-for progress and renewal through identification with the ostensible triumphs of Western-style economics, politics, material culture, science, and aesthetics (1992:33). Berman’s notion of modernity is particularly useful for our present purposes because it incorporates a strong cultural and ideological dimension. It foregrounds powerful aspirations that may nonetheless be inflected quite differently from alternative cultural van-
tage points and under different socioeconomic and political conditions. In this perspective, the subjective orientations of modernity articulate integrally with economic forces and sociopolitical institutions without becoming their reflex or residuum.

Put more simply for purposes of the present book, modernity can be defined as the images and institutions associated with Western-style progress and development in a contemporary world. The images of “progress” and institutions of “development” in this formulation do not have to be Western in a direct sense, but they do resonate with Western-style notions of economic and material progress and link these with images of social and cultural development—in whatever way these are locally or nationally defined (cf. Anderson 1991). Reciprocally, modernity in a contemporary world is often associated with either the incitement or the threat of individual desire to improve social life by subordinating or superseding what is locally configured as backward, undeveloped, or superstitious (Berman 1994:3). To paraphrase Trouillot (this volume), modernity is a geography of imagination that creates progress through the projection and management of alterity.

Conceptual Plurality and Threats of Demise

Since the mid-1990s, the issues surrounding modernity have become more complex, both in academic conception and in the objective complexities of a contemporary world. Works such as Arjun Appadurai’s Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (1996) pursued an increasingly globalized and culturalized view of modernity. However, Appadurai and most of those influenced by his work have been quick to emphasize the paradoxical nature of this ostensible modernizing globalization, which is based on experiences of disjunction, difference, and dislocation. Cultural and subjective orientations can become increasingly diverse, differentiated, and fractal through the intensification of cultural modernity, as Appadurai stresses.

It has been only a short step from these sensibilities to the outright pluralization of modernity. The eurocentrism of resurgent interest in modernity was quickly exposed from a Latin American perspective by Enrique Dussel (1993) and pursued from a number of postcolonial perspectives (e.g., Chakrabarty 1992, 2001; Alonso 1998; Canclini 1995). Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1993) provoked fresh interest in postcolonial ritual and power in Africa through the lens of “modernity and its malcontents.” During the mid-1990s, authors such as Allan Pred (1995) were arguing that Europe itself had been subject to diverse capitalist modernities for well over a century (cf. Pred and Watts 1992). By

the late 1990s, the pluralization of modernity became something of an academic industry. Contributions included Partha Chatterjee’s Our Modernity (1997), Gyan Prakash’s “A Different Modernity” (1998), Klaus Lichtblau’s “Differentiations of Modernity” (1999), and ethnographic interventions such as Brian Larkin’s (1997) consideration of “parallel modernities”—based on the Nigerian penchant for Indian films—and Lisa Rofel’s book Other Modernities (1999), which plumbed the generational vicissitudes of gendered yearning among female factory workers in China. Casual usages of the plural modern became increasingly common. Fernando Coronil’s The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela examined “the formation of the Venezuelan state within the context of the historic production of . . . subaltern modernity” (1997:16–17). In Marxist Modern, Donald Donham (1999) exquisitely analyzed the Ethiopian revolution in the mid-1970s and suggested that “vernacular modernities” are attempts “to reorder local society by . . . strategies that have produced wealth, power, or knowledge elsewhere in the world” (1999:xviii). Charles Piot’s Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa (1999) argues that the seeming traditions of the Kabre of northern Togo have in fact been modern for at least three hundred years. The book’s conclusion asserts,

I prefer to see the village as a site—and also, in many ways, an effect—of the modern, one that is as privileged as any other, one that has shaped the modern as much as it has been shaped by it, and one that brings the modern—that always uneven, often discordant, ever refracting, forever incomplete cultural/political project—its own vernacular modernity. (1999:178)

Complementing individual case studies of the alternatively modern have been collectively orchestrated treatments, including conferences, university programs, and issues of major academic journals. Though some of the contributions to these projects have but a tangential relation to the explicit problematic of modernity, the theme of the multiply modern has certainly been strong in the recent academic wind.

For all this attention, major problems quickly arise. The critique of modernity follows close on the heels of its multiple assertions. In a much-discussed article, Englund and Leach (2000) hold forth, from a rather Strathernian point of view, against what they see as the new metanarratives of modernity. Charles Piot (2001) considers the Comarroffs’ revealing and revolutionary two volumes and critiques the ease and slipperiness of “modernity” as a facets concept. Bernard Yack, in his Fetishism of Modernities (1997), considers the epochal self-consciousness of contemporary social thought and asks more generally, “Why is it that
contemporary intellectuals cannot uncover a new or hidden development without declaring the coming of a new epoch in human experience?" (1997:138). Plagued by a continuation of what he calls "modernity envy," intellectuals now talk, according to Yack, as if developments do not deserve our attention unless they are as epoch-making and pervasive as the ideas and practices of modernity itself.

Though disavowed on the surface, the assumption that modernity is globally hegemonic easily enforces its terminological prevalence. Large swathes of classic social theory are now read through the lens of that thing called modernity, even though the term and its conceptualization are hardly prominent in the works of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, and others (Swingewood 1998; contrast Baudelaire 1964). Modernity is sometimes used as a catchphrase for anything that is contemporary in the loosest sense of the term. 19

The view of modernity as globally diffuse can be troubling for our attempts to comprehend contemporary cultural and subjective diversity. Concern over this problem has become widespread among critical theorists. Indeed, worries over this issue were a prime motive for relativizing our notions of modernity to begin with. More reflexively, as concepts of modernity differentiate and multiply, we may be tempted to agree more than ever with Latour’s (1993) assertion, from a structuralist point of view, that we ourselves have never been modern, at least in the ways we might have thought.

Scales of Modern Variation

Amid the burgeoning of modernity and its plurals, we may recognize a continuum of conflicting or what Rofel (this volume) calls "disreputable modernities." At one end of the continuum are more structurally robust assessments that highlight the disjunctions and displacement of modernity at large (Harvey 1989; Giddens 1990, 1991; cf. Appadurai 1996). These perspectives are most open to the relativizing critique that Englund and Leach (2000) have pursued. At the other end of the spectrum are the micromodernities that are so locally and culturally situated that they become practically a synonym for current custom or personal performance. This is modernity written very small. An example is Louisa Schein’s (1999) article on "Performing Modernity," in which artful personal enactments among the Chinese Miao minority simultaneously encode, comment on, and ironize a local notion of modernity even as they reinforce it (cf. Schein 2000). This heightened localization increases the ethnographic purchase of modernity while also raising the possibility of neocultural relativism. This is exemplified, for instance,

in Marshall Sahlins’s (2001:7) assertion that indigenous versions of modernity are basically self-conscious recapitations and extensions of indigenous culture. In reaction against this general point of view, Arif Dirlik (1999) slams quite hard at what he calls the new culturalism, which he characterizes as the attempt to relativize modernity while downplaying if not ignoring the power and pragmatics of Euro-American capitalism—the larger structures of economic, political, and social as well as cultural power that have under lain it.

Sandwiched between these global and local extremes are analyses that emphasize how modernity is shaped at the national or regional level. The state-based dimension of alternative modernity is prominent in Coronil’s (1997) account of oil-glutting Venezuela. Prakash’s (1998) depiction of a different Indian modernity is also centered around the state, tied to Nehru’s tropes of the historical nation. This path is also pursued more philosophically in Partha Chatterjee’s (1997; cf. 1993) Our Modernity and made more historically reflexive in the direction Chakraborty has taken Subaltern Studies (cf. Chakraborty 2001). In Lisa Rofel’s book (1999), other modernities are inflected through the state but are locally situated and, of particular import, strongly inflected by gendered and generational differences. 20 Donald Donham’s work on the Ethiopian revolution (1999) is perhaps the best so far to articulate the chain of modernities’ historical connections, appropriations, and counterreactions all the way up and down the international, state, and local hierarchy. A similar perspective is pursued at a more detailed local level by Edward LiPuma concerning the Maring of Papua New Guinea in his book Encompassing Others: The Magic of Modernity in Melanesia (2000)21 and by Charles Plot in Remotely Global (1999), mentioned above.

As these examples and many others suggest, modernity as a concept is being relativized. For some, including Jonathan Friedman (this volume), the proclaiming of alternative modernities has become so loose as to encompass almost any development that is not bound within a bell jar of traditional culture. However, the current state of interest in alternative modernities—like most new developments in anthropology when viewed historically—is yielding significant insights even as it also contains excesses, vague assertions, and tangential arguments. One of the empirical realities that gives most of these analyses significant purchase is the fact that desires to become modern are not simply an academic projection. Images and institutions of so-called progress and development are extremely powerful forces in the world today. This is true internationally, regionally and at the level of the nation-state, and in the construction of local subjectivities. Yet how can we investigate and analyze this impact while avoiding the problems discussed further above?
The Present Volume in Contemporary Context

Is the critical understanding of modernity and its inflections a productive project? How can the critiques of modernity extend our awareness of political economy and subjective experience—and the key articulations between them in a contemporary world? The chapters of this book take these questions as their central focus.

All of our contributors agree on two key points. First, modernity as a problematic—regardless of what one thinks of it—has had a major impact on contemporary thought, including in fields such as cultural anthropology. Second, modernity as a concept is fraught with difficulties, especially in the singular. Not only are configurations of modernity slippery and prone to selective guises, they easily reify either as sublime or, I might add, as villainous. The fundamental question that emerges is not whether it is better to singularize or relativize our understanding of modernity. Rather, it is whether relativized notions of modernity go far enough and in the right directions.

For some of this volume’s authors—those in part 1, including Robert Foster, Ivan Karp, Holly Wardlaw, and me—inflections of modernity can be critically analyzed to reveal the construction and contestation of contemporary subjects in an unequal world. These understandings take the modern as a means of confronting one of the main challenges to contemporary anthropology—that is, how it is that people in the world now share much in common at the same time that they are as differentiated, diverse, and even more unequal than they were before. Modernity in this sense is integrally related to local understandings of what it means to be traditional or progressive. More generally, these contributions explore the “alternativeness” of becoming modern—the ways modernity refracts through different cultural and contextual guises. It is noteworthy that the chapters in this section are concretely ethnographic in focus. As such, they illustrate how research on the process of becoming alternatively modern can put us intimately in touch with the lives and experiences of people in diverse world areas.

The contributors to part 2, Lisa Rofel, Debra Spitulnik, and Michel-Rolph Trouillot, agree with this point of view to a certain extent. But they trouble our views of the modern more deeply. In particular, they suggest that our understandings will be inadequate if we fail to consider non-Western alterity in more fundamental terms. In the process, their expositions contribute to our understanding of matters as diverse as language use, gendered alterity, the groundedness of material relations, and the Western formulation of modernity itself. In this last regard, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s contribution poignantly suggests, the drive to be modern has always already presumed the alterity of Others as the fulcrum point of Western self-elevation. In this sense, modernity has been plural from the start, even if our awareness of its ideological work has not. As such, we have to query more deeply, to critically revisit Kant, how the West configured the exodus of humanity from its own state of guilty immaturity through the construction and projection of Others.

Yet more strongly critical of modernity and its inflections are the chapters comprising part 3 of this volume. At the extreme, as suggested by John Kelly, this raises the possibility of a different kind of anthropology altogether. Donald Donham, for his part, is critical of the way that modernity and its alternatives have often been used in academic discourse. He suggests that we restrict our use of “modernity” until we specify more clearly what we mean. Jonathan Friedman critically reviews a range of the chapters in the present volume and uses them as a foil for sharpening his own contrastive perspective. Whereas other contributors question or critique a generalized notion of modernity, Friedman expands the notion of modernity and then internally differentiates it. Kelly carries the critique a step further and suggests that discussions about modernity are not only not a new debate, but the wrong debate to be having at all. These assessments are important in bringing us to the limit point of our problematic. On one hand (from Donham and from Friedman), this limit point comes from a perspective that stresses political economy and the deeper history of capitalism. On the other (from Kelly), it comes from an aesthetic that questions the modernizing tropes and sensibilities that underlie our analysis of modernity to begin with. For Kelly, our assumptions about the modern tend toward the sublime and neglect what is most sublime and grotesque: the power of the United States since World War II. For Donham, our analyses too easily subsume disparate articulations of capitalism and local history to a single model. And for Friedman, the notion of alternative modernities mixes together disparate features that should be distinguished and then encompassed within a larger structural model. More generally, these contributions push against current assumptions in the understanding of modernity and its alternative inflections.

The element that unites the contributions of this volume is a willingness to engage in focused debate—based on concrete evidence and scholarly analysis—concerning one of the key issues that has emerged in cultural anthropology toward the end of the 1990s. The problematic of modernity and its inflections provides a sharpening stone for the volume’s contributors, each of whom reaches important new insights even
as she or he adopts or opposes a different stance. Indeed, it is striking to me as the editor that the chapters make contributions in the very areas in which each author finds the conceptualization of modernity to be weakest.

For instance, several of the critiques illuminate larger structures of power in the history of capitalism. The chapters by Michel-Rolph Trouillot in part 2 and Donald Donham and Jonathan Friedman in part 3 are particularly strong in this respect. Other chapters articulate aspects of modernity with fine-grained intricacies of local subjectivity and disposition. This is especially true of the contributions based on Melanesian ethnography—those by Foster, Wardlow, and me—plus Spithulnik’s account of modern turns of speech in the town Bemba discourse of urban Zambia.

In larger terms, the present volume links the critique of modernity to greater understanding of how images of progress and institutions of development operate historically and intensify in a contemporary world. Though the contributions may be grouped for heuristic purposes into those that are more appreciative of an alternatively modern perspective, those that stress the deeper significance of alterity, and those that emphasize other anthropological perspectives, their insights crosscut this simple alignment. All the contributors challenge us to consider the problem of modernity and its multiples in new ways. The present volume thus exemplifies a debate between points of view that are stimulating rather than compromising of rigorous ethnographic and theoretical analysis. Against talk that cultural anthropology has become anthropology lite, it is gratifying here to see important issues at the heart of the field contended so richly through acute evidence and critical theorization.

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**Alternatively Modern: A Critical Appreciation**

Our introductory understanding can be rounded off by summarizing the key contributions of an alternatively modern perspective. From the present vantage point, becoming modern entails a core articulation between regional or global forces of so-called progress and the specifics of local sensibility and response. The alternatively modern engages the global with the local and the impact of political economy with cultural orientations and subjective dispositions. A focus on alternative modernities directs our attention to these complementary processes and forces us to analyze them in the direct context of each other. This perspective is highly appropriate for a contemporary anthropology that strives to connect larger features of political economy and regional history with the appreciation of local cultural diversity. More specifically, it encourages us to consider in a new and more concrete way what methods and means of knowing are most appropriate for contemporary anthropology. What modes of inquiry, and what kinds of response, do we take as evidence of social or cultural identities in complex contemporary conditions? How do we combine information gathered from direct observation, discursive revelation, or enacted presentation with the study of regional, historical, and even global dimensions of political economy? Grappling with these questions is facilitated by a distinctively anthropological perspective on the process of modern differentiation in different world areas.

In certain respects, relativized notions of modernity harbor a theory of how modern powers and agents extend their influence. In particular, they suggest that modern images and institutions become forceful through the very opposition and reciprocal definition of progress or development vis-à-vis notions of tradition or national neotradition. These competing tropes and meanings of what indicates authenticity and what indicates development and progress are locally and regionally mediated. They are highlighted as actors negotiate their desire for economic success or development vis-à-vis their sense of value and commitment to longer-standing beliefs and practices. These articulations develop through schism and discontinuity—for instance, as disjunction between images of economic and material development and those of cultural or historical identification. The alternatively modern thus harbors a dialectical notion of how becoming locally or nationally “developed” occurs through selective appropriation, opposition, and redefinition of authenticity in relation to market forces and aspirations for economic and political improvement. This recursive pattern has been evident since the exploitative expansion of Western political economies during the sixteenth century. But it has intensified under capitalism and more recently during the latter part of the twentieth century.

Focusing on this key relationship, the alternatively modern may be said to address the figure-ground relationship between modernity and tradition as these are locally or nationally perceived and configured. Though these features are often viewed as antithetical to one another, they are in fact intricately and importantly intertwined. We may here paraphrase Donham (this volume) in a slightly different way to say that the alternatively modern is the social and discursive space in which the relationship between modernity and tradition is configured. This configuration is forged in a crucible of cultural beliefs and orientations on one hand, and politicoeconomic constraints and opportunities on
the other. In short, the alternatively modern is the articulatory space through which notions of modernity and tradition are co-constructed as progress and history in the context of culture and political economy (see figure 1.1).

The process of becoming alternatively modern juxtaposes and articulates dominant and subaltern notions of propriety and development. As such, it does not divorce our awareness from concrete contestations of belief and practice; to the contrary, it places us squarely in touch with them. This provides an ethnographically concrete rather than an abstract way to consider the continuing development of capitalism, the local workings of so-called global culture, shared traditions of belief and cosmology, and customary patterns of production and exchange. An emphasis on the alternatively modern is more processual than classificatory, more concerned with specific disempowerments and cultural engagements than with typological differences. It also moves us close to ethnographic and historical specifics, which are often if not typically our best defense against the imposition of Western assumptions and oppositions.

Does this conceptualization still borrow too much from the Western notion of modernity that it attempts to relativize? In practical terms, I think there is a simple way to address this issue. (Practicality is important here, lest we launch into spirals of hermeneutic absorption or reflexive doubt.) The simple reply is to consider if notions of being alternatively modern make sense of specific ethnographic and larger dy-
reports, he shows how ideologies of development are quite influential in inciting emergent dimensions of personhood. At the same time, development discourse fosters a remarkably similar notion of stigmatized personhood across diverse settings. It is hence not simply a rhetorical imposition but a key means by which a much deeper history of colonial and international domination insinuates itself into national and local subjectivity.

At issue here is the classification of persons into ranked categories by the bleached authority of an ostensibly objective scale of social and moral development. Now as before under colonialism, the local subject is viewed as inert material to be transformed through new forms of discipline. But now, this objective is soft-pedaled under the guise of “social training”—and then effaced from awareness by overwhelming emphasis on technocratic assessments of material advancement. As Karp insightfully shows, the ideological power of development discourse stems from its ability to treat subjects, in alternative moments, as shared participants on a universal path of progress and yet as “exceptions” who require outside intervention and imposition. His larger point is central for the present volume: even as tropes of development and becoming modern are in danger of being reified by us as academics, they are reified with great cultural, political, and economic power as ideologies of value in a plethora of real-world places. These draw on and perpetuate deep legacies of capitalist and colonial exploitation. As Karp reminds us, “development ideology is one of the constituting features of a global system that is heir to colonial and imperial domination.”

My own ethnographic chapter in this volume illustrates how local desires to be modern spiral with the subordinated re-presentations of what it means to be traditional. The Gebusi of south lowland Papua New Guinea were not exposed to colonial influence until the 1960s, and they retained many of their indigenous customs and beliefs into the 1980s. By 1998, however, many Gebusi had relocated next to the government station and oriented their lives around Christian churches, the community school, market, sports leagues, aid post, and government administration. These changes are striking because Gebusi have not been subject to significant land alienation, forced labor, taxation, colonial violence, outmigration, or economic development. This underscores the degree to which the process of becoming alternatively modern is one of subjective and cultural incitement (Knauf 2002).

Among Gebusi, local modernity is marked by the redefinition and reperformance of traditional customs as well as by participation in contemporary institutions and by adopting fundamentalist Christian beliefs. On national Independence Day, indigenous practices are enacted

by Gebusi in farcical and buffoonish fashion for a large interethnic crowd. This dynamic reveals how becoming alternatively modern is simultaneously a process of reconstructing tradition through new forms of public culture. For Gebusi, this entails a new sense of historicity and identification with beliefs and practices associated with a more “developed” and “progressive” style of life. In remote areas, the desire to be modern easily becomes acute or “oxymodern” through the redefinition of indigenous practices and beliefs. Reciprocally, the continual threat of backsliding into tradition intensifies aspirations for modern development in the absence of realistic opportunities for economic or political progress. This renders people such as Gebusi receptive to ideologies of material and moral development that subordinate them to externally introduced institutions—including those associated with fundamentalist Christianity. Reciprocally, this dynamic fuels a continued sense of feeling locally “backward.” The larger implication is that ideologies of local progress can be stood on their heads to reveal how alternative modernities incite subordination and disempowerment even when political coercion and economic development are only implicit. This underscores the degree to which the subaltern modern is a cultural and subjective as well as a political and economic entailment.

Focusing on a very different Melanesian society, Holly Wardlaw exposes the cultural problems raised by modern commodities in a cultural context that accorded high value to prowess in physical labor. In contrast to Gebusi, Huli are a populous and thickly settled people with a history of aggressive expansion against their neighbors, a longer history of colonial contact, and a stronger sense of indigenous cultural propriety. Wardlaw shows how the Huli process of becoming modern is radically gendered. The burgeoning growth of criminal theft by “rascals” is strongly associated with men. More generally, the acquisition and public display of commodities and Western clothes are lauded for Huli men but disparaged for Huli women—who are enjoined to occupy a moral place of tradition. One is reminded here of Carol Smith's (1995) work on gendered Mayan economy, in which male capitalization is complemented by the traditionalization of Mayan women. Analogous cases can found in central Asia, as described in Wynne Maggi's (2001) book on Kalasha women of northwestern Pakistan. Of course, women are not universally associated with historical tradition—and such an association may not preclude them from so-called modern pursuits in any event. The feminization of wage labor in Latin America and Southeast and east Asia reminds us of Donald Donham’s insistence that the larger capital field is fundamental for understanding the relation between labor and the process of becoming alternatively modern. But how sensibilities of
progress and development are locally gendered is distinctively important as part of this mix, as Lisa Rofel emphasizes in her book, *Other Modernities* (1999) and in chapter 5 of the present volume.

Against this background, a gendered perspective troubles any notion of multiple modernity that would assume alternative coherences within a community or society. Gendered issues are not limited to the domestic sphere—not to ideologies of womanhood or motherhood as they refract at a regional or national level. Rather, gendered relations themselves configure the larger structure of social and political change (Freeman 2001; see Marchand and Runyan 2000; Massey 1994, pt. 3; Felski 1995; Knauf 1997). Wardlow’s chapter brings this awareness from a large-scale assertion to a detailed analysis of how Huli gender informs commodity acquisition through labor on one hand, and theft on the other. This vantage point sheds an importantly new light on the contemporary tensions of sociality and exchange in Melanesia. In all, Wardlow’s chapter is a model example of how the theoretical analysis and the ethnographic critique of modernity can drive each other to new levels of sophistication in our understanding of contemporary cultural and socio-economic change.

Lisa Rofel’s chapter provides a large-scale theoretical and structural complement to Wardlow’s nuanced portrayal of alternatively gendered modernity. In a revealing critique, Rofel exposes the masculinist assumptions that inform our general theories of modernity. These assumptions are ingrained in even the most ostensibly cutting-edge Marxist global analyses. Rofel takes as a detailed case in point Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s much-discussed recent book, *Empire* (2000). Billed as a Communist manifesto for the twenty-first century, Rofel shows how this important book is in fact flawed to the core not just by its global reification of modern sovereignty but by its inexcusable neglect of subaltern populations, women, and those who are most disempowered. These people are effaced by Hardt and Negri in favor of a more philosophical assessment of Western thought that finds its social complement in the undifferentiated mass of the growing “multitude.” As Rofel documents, this undifferentiated multitude is portrayed by Hardt and Negri in unsparingly masculinist and occidentalist terms. As the events of 11 September 2001 have so dramatically shown, opposition to the American-led system of world sovereignty can be powerfully non-Western and poignantly gendered in its own masculinizing terms. It will hardly do to leave these factors as an afterthought; they are obviously central to both the potentials and the perils of globalizing opposition.

In a bitingly playful twist, Rofel reveals how Hardt and Negri’s master narrative—of radical Leftists fighting against the system—is itself a

very Western masculine account that parallels quite closely the sexist and racist assumptions of George Lucas’s *Star Wars* movies. In both cases, the evil and diffusely hegemonic Force is overthrown by a cadre of masculine oppressors who fight against all odds to heroically vanquish the Empire for the blessed good of all. One recalls here, if in a less searing key, the arguments of Catherine Lutz (1995) on “The Gender of Theory”: the grander the edifice of theoretical assertion, the more likely its symbolic capital derives from masculinist assumptions. To counter this trend, Rofel encourages alternative narrative strategies that highlight a range of subaltern and postcolonial perspectives. These put us more fully in touch with the gendered, sexualized, racialized, and other stigmatizing ways that the imperial workings of contemporary modernity are actualized in fact—and by means of which they may also be resisted. This can be done without resorting to the crude reactionary violence of masculinist terrorism. Rofel follows a more nuanced track in her monograph on gendered yearnings in postsocialist China (1999). In this sense, she evokes sensibilities that are well-tuned to recuperative work across widely differing contexts. In the present volume, this brings us back to the nuanced insights of Holly Wardlow concerning the gendering of modernity in the southern Highlands of Papua New Guinea, discussed further above. Such perspectives, which consider gender in the context of modern tension, are crucial to our understanding of current developments—global as well as local.

Debra Spitzulnik’s chapter directs our attention to the specific words and discursive usages that evoke modernity in urban Zambia. Spitzulnik shows in detail how vernacular discourse concerning things modern is often cast in the former colonial language (English) and historically informed by the structures and ideologies of colonial rule. Zambian preoccupations with being modern now include usages that gloss as “modern times,” “being enlightened,” “being European,” and “being in a style of affluence.” As Spitzulnik suggests, these linguistic usages link directly to the Western metanarrative of modernization. She views these specifics in larger linguistic and cultural terms to refine our methodological as well as theoretical sense of how modernities can be concretely studied in ethnographic practice. In the process, she underscores how important it is for anthropologists not to neglect the specifics of local linguistic use amid their desire to reach larger and more sweeping generalizations in the study of contemporary cultural and social change.

Pushing her analysis further, Spitzulnik critically questions whether Zambian terms and usages can be easily lumped under the singular banner of “modernity.” The postcolonial inflections of so-called modernity take multiple guises in Zambia. Some Zambian usages evoke continuous
or quick action. Others emphasize newness or novelty. Still others convey a sense of progress; a concern with consumption, prosperity, and affluence; or conversance with outside forms of knowledge and goods. Some of these usages operate in a referential sense—as social attributions or designations—while others signify that the speaker is him- or herself claiming a modern identity. In short, though images of being or becoming modern constitute an extremely important nexus of cultural reference and identification in contemporary Zambia, they do not cohere easily within a single or simple notion of modernity—as might be analytically or theoretically attributed on a priori grounds. Spitalnik thus asks pointedly, “What is obscured in the cluster of conceptual distinctions and/or ethnographic realities that are grouped together under the shade of the modernity umbrella?” Ultimately, she adopt a notion of modernity that has heuristic value not as a definitional category but as a stimulus for revealing the distinctively Zambian linguistic practices that bear, in various ways, on the conflicted dynamics of postcolonial aspiration and future-seeking styles of life.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s chapter steps back to question the larger assumptions about alterity that are both smuggled in and effaced in most conceptualizations of the modern. As he suggests, the ideological as well as the political and economic force of modernity is exposed by raw colonial exploitation that projected Others as backward and undeveloped. This is not a new phenomenon but is evident in the precapitalist mercantile exploitation of the Caribbean and Latin America by Spain and Portugal in the sixteenth century. As Trouillot also reminds us, non-Western alterity is close to the heart of modernity in the formulations of Baudelaire, whose mid-nineteenth-century conceptualization is often taken as the touchstone of this concept in Western thought. A relational notion of modernity that exposes the subaltern as Alter or Other is key to comprehending not just the polarization of the world into ostensibly central and peripheral regions but how this relational subordination is ideologically foregrounded and effaced. The projection of Otherness is both at the root of the modern and erased from the history of modern awareness. As Trouillot himself puts it, “modernity always required an Other and an Elsewhere.”

If modernity is an ideology of value as well as a social condition, this very fact underscores its power and importance. Even as tropes of progress and being modern are in danger of being reified by us as academics, they are also and separately reified with great cultural, political, and economic power as ideologies of value in a multitude of alternative places and times. Ideologies of the modern are not simply our own; they are important propositions whose reality is symbolically and socially instituted in many parts of the contemporary world. The people described in the various chapters of this volume underscore the force of the modern as an ideology of aspiration and differential power. We find this among Ethiopian revolutionaries (per Donham’s chapter); Zambian speakers of urbanity (per Spitalnik); rural New Guinea highlanders (per Wardlow and Foster); Caribbean slave women dedicated to fashionable clothing (per Trouillot); Christian fundamentalists from remote places (per my own chapter); and urbans subjects of the modern world system, who, as Rofel underscores, are more differentiated and less masculine than Hardt and Negri (2000) realize.

The critiques of modernity that conclude this volume highlight the need to rebraid our understanding of capitalist exploitation amid ideological constructions of “progress” and “development.” John Kelly exposes the aesthetic tropes and sublime assumptions that are reproduced in our modernist thoughts and concepts. These include our general tendency to neglect the most power-laden and pernicious aspects of modern developments while being dazzled by glossy visions of a globalizing world. Donald Donham’s contribution pulls us back to a more concrete understanding of capitalist economy and history. In particular, he critiques the Comaroffs’ voluminous opus (1991, 1997) as well as parts of his own previous work to reach a more nuanced understanding of how capitalism and modernity have interacted in alternative parts of Africa—specifically, Ethiopia and South Africa. In the process, he illustrates how modernity emerges as the discursive space within which notions of what it means to be traditional or modern are contested and negotiated. In complementary fashion, Jonathan Friedman stresses the need for a wider historical purview and puts our understanding of modernity into a much larger civilizational and structuralist framework. This framework highlights the different strands that can inflect variously as traditionalist, primitivist, modern, or postmodern—all within the larger identity space of modernity.

Through their specifics, these critiques of modernity give us new perspectives for understanding the desires, motivations, and incitements to action that inform the lives of diverse people in a complex world. Certainly the ideologies of new value that impact these sensibilities may be sublime or grotesque, hardened by capital structures or softened by global flows. But sandwiched between a nagging continuation of cultural and subjective relativism on one hand, and capital superordination on the other, anthropologists can document and analyze exactly how and why people engage images of progress so forcefully, and how and why they associate these so consistently with manufactured commodities and special kinds of economic and institutional development. As I am re-
Repeatedly finding in my own ethnographic work among Gebusi, the motivations that attend these developments are often quite cultural and quite home grown—not just a reflex of an external modern, but an active crucible of local imagination amid contemporary incitement and subservience. The inflections of modernity are not just our own contestation, but that of others, in the rest of the world.

Alternative Problematics

As Gilles Deleuze suggested, a “concept” connects disparate ideas at infinite speed. Accordingly, an important concept is really a theory writ small. In this sense, it can be useful to compare the alternatives in modern with two of its conceptual complements in recent theorization. One of these is the long-standing importance of capitalism, which is undoubtedly crucial to understanding modernity. In the present book, the import of capitalism is foregrounded in Donham’s and Friedman’s chapters and is highly important in those of Trouillot and to some extent Kelly as well. A corollary concept of similar order is globalization or globalism. As reflected in current journal issues, conferences, and a host of new books, the idea of globalization is now taking its minutes of maximal attention in the academic sun. In the present volume, the spread, threat, and refractive impact of globalization emerges in almost all the chapters.

Stepping back, it may be said that this triumvirate—modernity, capitalism, and globalization—inflects many new developments in cultural anthropology. More generally, cultural anthropology seems to be at a distinctive moment. Having shied away from theory building in a larger sense, our central concepts now assume the role of mini theories, tacit and often inexplicit, but quick and powerful in the breach. Elaborate theories we seem to have given up, but pregnant and sweeping concepts we seem to like. Masterful tropes unmaster our narratives. In this sense, the assertions of capitalism on one hand, or globalization on the other, are perhaps equivalent to the conceptualization of modernity in scale, suggestiveness, and—one might add—lack of precision.

Within this general context, we can ask how an intimated notion of modernity stacks up against its main competitors in the current conceptual market—how it compares to a dominant emphasis on capitalism on one hand, or globalization on the other. My own view is that each of these megatrope evokes a distinct sensibility—a particular structure of feeling that has distinctive insights and oversights. Refractions of modernity usefully engage the discordant alternatives that galvanize culture and identity in a contemporary world. They articulate local features with global ones and dynamics that are cultural with those that are political and economic. Notions of progress provoke paradoxes and creative struggles that highlight the power of imagination in the face of violent interactions, deferments, and disillusionments.

Attending to these discords puts large structural forces directly in play with subaltern subjectivities. Tropes and tensions of progress—what it means to be locally modern in a contemporary world—serve as a pivot between the entailments of global capitalism and national or local constrictions of subjectivity, meaning, and agency. From this vantage point, it is a bit disingenuous to make of modernity something of an omnibus notion and then critique its conceptualization for being too encompassing or reified. Few would make the same requirement or impose the same limits on our notions of capitalism or globalization, or even, for that matter, on the concept of the sublime, the grotesque, the discourse of development, or the savage slot, to name a few concepts—all quite valuable and important—that are developed in this book’s chapters.

Conceptual Slide

At present, our attempt to refine key concepts and articulate them with each other runs up against the sociology of our own knowledge. As Robert Foster mentions in his chapter, the key concept typically emerges in our intellectual discourse first as a singular noun—a reified entity that has capital pretensions even if it is not actually capitalized. Think of classic anthropological notions: Culture, Civilization, or Structure. All of these used to have the stature and weight of singular reference. Anthropologists used to seriously discuss how to draw firm boundaries between one culture, civilization, or structure and another. There were arguments about typologies and borders, categorical skirmishes and counterassertions. The ethnographic map seemed to be a terrain of limited good, fought over as turf for theoretical advance and control by alternative means of conceptual colonization.

During the late 1970s and 1980s, these older nouns were replaced with new ones in anthropology, including concepts of practice and hegemony, then reflexivity and postmodernism. By contrast, the older terms of favor were not so much dropped but weakened—first by making them more radically plural, and then by turning them into adjectives. The culture concept became a web of plural cultures and was then demoted to being “cultural.” As least in anthropology, we rarely refer to “culture” as a bounded empirical referent with defined borders. But we are still perfectly comfortable talking and thinking about cultural this, cultural that, “cultural anthropology.” This “adjectival softening” has
been evident in other theoretical moves as well. "Structure" became "structures" and then "structural." "Hegemony" slid into "hegemonies" and then became "hegemonic." Bourdieu’s *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) became a flood of practices (see Knauff 1996, chap. 4).

In genealogical perspective, as Donald Donham’s chapter clearly signals, "modernity" has now embarked down this same slippery slope—yesterday a singular noun, today a pluralized phenomenon, tomorrow perhaps a mere adjective: modern this, modern that. The modern thus becomes a modifier of other things; it has diminished analytic and theoretical heft.

Given general trends, however, the jump to nominate other singularities—be they capitalism, globalization, or even the sublime or the grotesque, per John Kelly’s chapter—is to quickly beg for them the same fate. Capitalism and globalization are certainly ripe for pluralization if they have any pretense to avoid the same eurocentrism that has historically bedeviled the concept of modernity. We move quickly from capitalism writ large to regional or local or historically periodized capitalisms—Confucian capitalism; Latin capitalism; early, high, or late capitalism; electronic capitalism; virtual capitalism; and so on (cf. Blim 2000). In similar fashion, globalization in the singular is quickly dispensed with—especially by anthropologists—in favor of specific avenues or streams of global flow and transaction. This is also true of the ostensibly global dimensions of culture. We quickly devolve from global cultural to a horizontal series of global subject positions. There has been heightened interest in identity forms that are international in scope but segmented in applicability, including a range of recent work on cosmopolitanism, flexible citizenship, and other types of transnational identity (e.g., Cheah and Robbins 1998; Ong 1999; Appadurai 2000; Anderson 1998). As these subsidiary domains are themselves exposed as imprecise and unstable in reference, we can expect them to slide into adjectives: capital this, capital that, transnational this, cosmopolitan that, global whatever, and so on.

In short, the problem of pluralization and adjectival softening is common to our intellectual time. In the present case, that the ills of modernity as a concept cannot be easily cured by simply replacing it with another conceptual eminence, such as "capitalism" or "globalization." This tendency is nonetheless encouraged by the quickening speed at which new ideas are generated; they emerge for a few months of critical attention and then become debris at the feet of another new angel of backward-looking academic history. This problem is what I call the decreasing half-life of ideas in cultural anthropology. This is the tendency to efface our concepts in the very process of their formulation and pre-

sentation. Like physicists, we seem to work harder and harder to create newer and newer elements that disappear faster and faster—surviving only long enough to trace their names before vanishing. Ultimately, however, this disappearance is of our own choosing. So before we drive our concepts down the slide, it is worth considering how hard we want to push them and how fast we want them to fall.

**Capitalism**

Critical analysis of capitalism, for its part, is particularly good for considering the historical development and profound implications of wage labor, especially in the mechanized production of commodities and the implications of these for capital surplus and world historical inequality. For all its limitations, capitalism harkens us back to the inexhaustible insights of Marx. Expanding on this legacy,Trouillot’s chapter in this volume (complemented by the work of Andre Gunder Frank) suggests how capitalism has been historically linked to forced labor and the expropriation of material resources in non-Western areas for several centuries. These implications can be productively pursued in the present—that is, to see how current flows of goods and information enconce new forms of exploitation that are either hidden from view or smoothed over by modern ideologies of a global free market. In a late modern capitalist world, the global study of flexible *accumulation*, à la David Harvey, needs now to be complemented by local study of flexible *exploitation*. “Exploitation,” as such, is particularly ripe for ethnographic study in non-Western areas. So, too, conversely, we can consider the flexible and sometimes quite reactionary or violent means used to combat or oppose exploitation.

What about politics? Though capitalism does not link in and of itself to dynamics of state and multistate power, it does beg for and articulate easily with such analysis—as Marx illustrated so brilliantly in “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” (Marx 1977). In a contemporary world, capitalism and state politics go hand in hand.

Capitalist analysis is far weaker, however, when it comes to engaging the cultural meaning, motivations, and significations of action, both in the metropole and, even more, in the reticulated periphery. Without an understanding of cultural engagements with and resistances to domination—the focus of modernity’s alternatives and alterities—capitalist analysis rings culturally flat. This criticism now applies to the latest Marxist work, including Hardt and Negri’s *Empire* (2000), which, as Rofel demonstrates, provides an only ostensibly cutting-edge Marxism for the coming century. It seems woefully inadequate to emphasize
the Euro-American foundation or global spread of capitalism as a way to circumvent this problem. This reemphasis on the global West merely siphons its Alter into residual categories; they become new varieties of the savage slot.

The Frankfurt School attempted to bridge the gap between capitalism and cultural possibility, of course. But the aestheticized results of these attempts—the legacy of Horkheimer, Adorno, and even Benjamin if one reads him critically—are not always useful for understanding what meanings, motivations, and actions are in fact informing the lives of common people in so many parts of the contemporary world. Lamentably, the same has become increasingly true, I think, of contemporary cultural studies, notwithstanding its scintillating earlier strains from Raymond Williams and E. P. Thompson. We sorely need but presently lack an understanding of what Lisa Rofel describes in her chapter as the cultural production of contemporary capitalism in alternative world areas.

Globalization

What about globality as a contemporary condition? Though of course evident in Marx, globalization has recently—until 11 September—swelled with academic interest. In this sense, it echoed the economic boom and Internet hopes of the 1990s. Globalism has given us lots of coverage, of course, and lots of flow—flows of commodities, flows of people, flows of imagination, flows of transnational discourse. In the process, it also foregrounds consumption. By contrast, capitalism as a trope centers on production. This production is ultimately grounded in labor and the expropriation of landed resources, as Coronil (2000) makes clear. Capitalism stresses differential appropriation of surplus by some people and places. If the profit of exploitation is almost always made elsewhere through movement (and increasingly so in the present), capitalism stresses how the fruits of profit are more importantly brought back home to roost. The ultimate nail of exploitation under capitalism is the hard-rootedness of possession. Profits are not shared globally but are decidedly unequal in distribution and deployment.

Though intertwined, globalization as a trope runs in a different direction. Globalization supplies lateral axes of circulation and distribution. It proffers the prospect of equalization. And it sacrifices historical depth for what is distinctly and globally new in the present. Where images of capitalism stress economic possessiveness and territoriality, globalism stresses a newly deterritorialized space of possibilities. But because the global is so big and unwieldy by itself, its conceptualization quickly
open to capitalist analysis but ultimately cannot be understood by privileging economic or political determinism over subjective orientations. The latter keep our understanding in touch with local and regional specifics of cultural engagement, including the process of subject making and the collective imagination of communities, ethnic groups, and nations. Through their articulation with economic and political dynamics, these illuminate axes of difference and domination that emerge with respect to gender, sex, and generation, as well as those of class, ethnicity, and nationality.

The alternatively modern is concrete because ideologies and institutions of so-called progress and development are increasingly influential and increasingly differentiated across a contemporary world. These ideologies and institutions are deeply enthroned with the momentous and continuing changes of capitalism even as they are not fully reducible to them. The same can be said of their articulation with development plans and programs associated with the nation-state and with international or multinational organizations. It is the connection and yet the local indeterminacy of these articulations—between ideologies of progress versus history on one hand, and between culture and political economy on the other—that gives the study of the alternatively modern both ethnographic purchase and theoretical value.

Modern alterity focuses our attention on a nexus of articulations rather than specifying a predetermined outcome or content. It suggests analytic and theoretical connections for an engaged anthropology but does not provide a recipe of outcomes or results. Its analytic does not restrict results or structure them in an empirical or categorical grid. Relatedly, an alternatively modern perspective does not ensure that the resulting analysis will be insightful; as in all ethnography and theory, this depends on the ethnographic rigor and intellectual skill with which the tools of analysis are applied. It is telling, however, that many of the most productive and insightful studies by cultural anthropologists in recent years—both ethnographic and theoretical—have resonated with if not been centrally concerned with the tensions of being or becoming alternatively modern. The present book attempts to draw on this critical trend, to critique and to clarify it, and to suggest how it may be extended and improved on in the future.

Beyond the Academic

If our conceptualizations of modernity have exploded during the last twenty years, the impact and ideology of becoming progressive or developed in different world areas has also burgeoned over this same period.

In the wake of two world wars, theories of modernization were accompanied by master plans to "lift up" and improve the lives of people in non-Western areas. Economic development projects, the green revolution, regimes of political intervention, and financial loans from wealthy nations were all designed to modernize social life and institutions in so-called developing countries. It is now widely agreed, of course, that many if not most of these plans went greatly awry, had unanticipated and unfortunate consequences, and often intensified the problems they were ostensibly designed to resolve (e.g., Escobar 1995; Scott 1998; Gupta 1998; Ferguson 1999; cf. Worsley 1984). Nevertheless, the peoples of the world become increasingly capitalized by the march of wage labor, the massively unequal profits of flexible exploitation and accumulation, and stratification based on unequal access to money in general and to goods, information, education, technology, and decent standards of living in particular.

If the decade of the 1990s was one of comparatively conspicuous growth and opulence among the Western and transnational elite—and if it spawned rosy theories of global connection in its wake—the problems bequeathed to the increasing proportion of the world who see themselves as marginal, disempowered, and peripheralized by these developments are intensified by the relentlessly increasing exposure to and internalization of ideologies of "progress" and "development." Becoming "modern" is all the more problematic as standards of progress intensify along with their impossibility of being satisfied. These drive each other reciprocally to yet greater extremes. We see that the gap between expectation and experience that Koselleck (1985) documented in Western notions of "progress" during the late eighteenth century is not just alive; it reinvents itself with ferocious and pernicious intensity in many if not most corners of the contemporary world. Ultimately enforced by military power, the increasing intensity of international development projects, of well-meaning human rights initiatives, of leveraged control of poorer nations by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, and the NGO-ization of international influence—all of these fuel escalating ideologies of progress and "development" even as their well-intentioned agents strive in vain to close the reality gap. It is a hopeless battle. In outcome, the problems of cold war schemes for modernization have not subsided. Rather, they have expanded, intensified, and insinuated themselves into social lives and subjectivities in new and more fearful ways. If the academic conceptualization of modernity still borrows too much from its intellectual predecessors, the work of modern progress as ideology and as power cannot be ignored. It is important to remember this as we use our skills as ethnographers and
theoricians to expose the meanings and inequities of contemporary lives in newly critical ways.

Notes

5. See Greenblatt 1980; Horkheimer and Adorno 2000, chap. 3.
6. Of course, the development of modernism as a Western artistic movement pervaded much of the twentieth century. And the use of “modern” as a casual descriptor has long been common in both popular and academic discourse.
9. For Habermas, an analytical and philosophical understanding of the modern lifeworld integrates with analysis of “external” structural systems to provide proper grounding for general social theory.
10. In a longer temporal perspective, the relationship between rationality and anti-rationality has been a key tension in Western thought at least since the growth of romanticism during the eighteenth century (see Berlin 1999).
12. Outhwaite (1994:152, 154), who describes himself as an “unabashed enthusiast” of Habermas, writes, “He has clearly become a classic, often anachronistically set among the previous generation of the founders of the Frankfurt School.” In terms of the debate concerning modernity specifically, Outhwaite (1994:136) suggests, “Habermas’ own critique inevitably begins to look, even more than it did before, like the American and Soviet anti-guerrilla campaigns which unsuccessfully deployed what should have been devastating firepower against an army which refused to stand still and be shot at.”
13. In this regard, Harvey’s scholarship provides a salutary counterexample to

the excesses of slipshod impressionism that marked the high-water mark of postmodernism during the late 1980s.
15. Rostow (1952, 1960, 1963, 1971) was one of the strongest and most consistent advocates of growth through the global spread of Western-style modernization (see critique by Arndt 1987).
16. See, for instance, the theme issue of Public Culture on “Alter/Native Modernities” (1999, no. 27), and the special issue of Daedalus devoted to “Multiple Modernities” (winter 2000, vol. 129, no. 1). A similar emphasis can be found in books such as Timothy Mitchell’s edited collection, Questions of Modernity (2000).
17. The size and speed of this trend was thrown into relief by the circumstances of my own research. During extended fieldwork in a remote rainforest area of interior Papua New Guinea in 1998 (Knauf 2002), I was struck by how peculiarly modern the Gebusi people I had previously lived with had since become. On my return to the United States, I started to organize a session for the ensuing annual anthropology meetings on “Alternative Modernities”—thinking that this was a relatively novel way to conceptualize such development. My plan was short-circuited by a request by my university to propose a program for the Ford Foundation’s “Crossing Borders” funding initiative. My proposal for Emory was entitled “Vernacular Modernities.” Only in the ensuing months did I realize how rampant the notion of plural modernities had become during my absence in the field. When the Emory project was funded (with me as its director—see <http://www.emory.edu/COLEGE/ICIS/programs/vm/index.html>), one of the other initiatives simultaneously funded by Ford was a program on “Alternative Modernivities” (my original title), submitted by the five-college consortium in Massachusetts. Later that semester, I was invited to the University of Chicago, where I presented a version of my chapter on the oxymodern (published as chapter 3 in the present volume). A scant fifteen minutes after my presentation, Marshall Sahlins announced that he had just pulled from his office mailbox the new special issue of Daedalus—entitled “Multiple Modernities.”
19. For instance, the omnibus sociology textbook of contemporary societies by Stuart Hall et al. is titled Modernity and subtitled An Introduction to Modern Societies (1996)—but it has precious little analysis of the concept itself. Hall et al. suggest simply that modernity entails a decline of tradition and of associated religious practices amid the rise of a market economy and secular forms of political power (1996:8). Toward the end of the book, Giddens’s notion of modernity is summarized as entailing capitalism, industrialism, administrative power, and military power (1996:432 ff.). These features are mixed in a vague manner rather than differentiated or analyzed
in relation to historical or cultural specifics. Such formulations do little to capture the subjective and cultural—much less the sociopolitical and economic—dimensions of alternative modernities, which are importantly different in different world areas. This problem also pervades influential works such as Held and colleagues’ Global Transformations (1999).

20. Rofel is concerned with the implications of Chinese socialist and post-socialist ideologies for gendered subjectivity and labor. She states toward the end of her book that “the state has generated multiple imaginaries of modernities” (1999:279). Rofel focuses on the way these versions of modernity are differentially responded to, appropriated, or resisted by different groups of Chinese women—in generational terms, in discursive histories, and in micropractices of work.

21. In a Melanesian context, see also Akin and Robbins’s important edited collection Money and Modernity: State and Local Currencies in Melanesia (1999), and Friedman and Carrier’s collection Melanesian Modernities (1996).

22. The comments of Slavoj Žižek on the book jacket of Empire aver that “What Hardt and Negri offer is nothing less than a rewriting of The Communist Manifesto for our time.”

23. As Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari put it in What Is Philosophy?, “The concept is defined by the inseparability of a finite number of heterogeneous components traversed by a point of survey at infinite speed” (1994:21).

24. Prominent recent works concerning globalization include John Tomlinson’s Globalization and Culture (1999), Anthony Held and colleagues’ Global Transformations (1999), Saskia Sassen’s Globalization and its Discontents (1998), Martin Albow’s The Global Age (1997), and a host of other more popular works, such as Thomas Friedman’s The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization (2000). This emphasis has been pressed by works such as Jonathan Friedman’s Cultural Identity and Global Process (1994) and analyses of global political economy and history by Immanuel Wallerstein, Andre Gunder Frank, Giovanni Arrighi, and, in anthropology, the late Eric Wolf (1982). Current interest also includes avant-garde formulations, as in Arjun Appadurai’s special issue of Public Culture on “Globalization” (2000).

25. By contrast, there is little current interest in cultural anthropology to develop grand theories. The same is generally true of cultural studies, post-colonial or diasporic studies, queer theorizations, and post-Marxist studies.

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