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Global Modernity and the Contemporary: Two Categories of the Philosophy of Historical Time

What is the relationship of contemporaneity to modernity as forms of historical time? In particular, how does the notion of the contemporary involve a transfiguration of the phenomenological subject of ‘the modern’. My title here mimics a well-known essay by Reinhart Koselleck, ‘ “Space of Experience” and “Horizon of Expectation”: Two Historical Categories’ (1976),¹ as a mark of both acknowledgement and difference. Acknowledgement of the fact that it is in large part a result of Koselleck’s historical semantics of the basic temporal concepts of modernity – *Neuzeit*, history, progress, revolution, expectation, crisis, the new – that the problematic of ‘the modern’ has been established in its philosophical meaning as part of a philosophy of historical time; or more precisely, as a temporalization of history; indeed, as the *founding* form of such temporalizations. Difference, because the restriction of Koselleck’s analysis of these concepts to, on the one hand, the horizon of their founding period (from late eighteenth- to late nineteenth-century Europe) and, on the other hand, the philosophical framework of phenomenological ontology, registers the narrowly or *merely historical* character of his work. That is to say,

‘space of experience’ and ‘horizon of expectation’ cannot be treated as transcendental categories of historical analysis (as Koselleck presents them, from within their own absolutized historical domain), for both historical and philosophical reasons – philosophical reasons that the passage of time has itself made clearer.

It was always conceptually incoherent, for example, to delegate ‘experience’ solely to the present, in counterpoint to the futural horizon of expectation; and to restrict ‘the new’ to such a purely futural horizon, suppressing both its element of ambiguous externality and its ruptural quality with regard to the phenomenological subject.² Rather, today, these categories appear relative to historical and philosophical conditions that are in the process of being fundamentally transformed. The two main conceptual registers of this process of transformation, and the emergence of new structures of temporalization of history that it involves, are (1) the ‘globalization’ of the (historically, ‘Western’ colonial) concept of modernity, and (2) the becoming-world-historical of the concept of the contemporary, as a more adequate way of grasping certain relational aspects of the spatio-temporal structure of a now-global modernity.

Here, I offer a schematic account of some of the main aspects of this dual process, through an elaboration of the concepts ‘global modernity’ and ‘the global contemporary’ as categories of the philosophy of historical time. As should already be clear, I do not understand these concepts to denote successive ‘regimes of historicity’,³ but rather integrally connected structures of historical temporalization: objectively produced subjective structures, subject to reflexive theorization, which perform a heuristic but nonetheless constitutive interpretative function.⁴ These concepts grasp discrete aspects of the historical process, corresponding to qualitatively different subject positions, and they pose correspondingly different theoretical and practical challenges. Only when they are thought *together*, however, can the complex and disjunctive temporality characteristic of the current historical process be grasped in something like its unity, in outline at least.

‘Modernity!’: From the Colonial to the Global

The concept of global modernity may be expounded via five, brutally reductive theses on the development of modernity as a historical form:

1. As a historical concept, 'modernity' designates the social forms and conditions of the *self-absolutizing* and thereby *structurally contradictory* temporality of the modern: the temporality of the new.
2. This concept is further contradictory, insofar as it involves the territorialization – or spatial delimitation – of an *infinite* process of temporal differentiation. (Temporal infinite, spatial finitude.) This contradiction is the dialectical motor of modernity as a distributed series of historical forms.
3. This second, spatio-temporal contradiction is epitomized by – but by no means restricted to – the historical relationship of modernity to the colonial and postcolonial (or decolonizing) imaginaries. It also applies to the historically discrete case of socialist modernities, for example, that is crucial to the comprehension of current developments in China.
4. Postcolonial relations are in the process being qualitatively transformed by their immanence to now-global processes of transnational capital accumulation, as a result of which a new kind of postcolonial temporality is emerging. This temporality is antiquating the spatial framework that the earlier form of postcoloniality inherited (through inversion) from the colonial modern: essentially, the spatial framework of anti-colonial nationalisms.
5. The transnational globalization of processes of capital accumulation and exchange, recoding relations of colonial difference, raises the question of modernity as a global form. However, insofar as this is understood as the projection of anthropological and national senses of cultures on to a single global plane, the idea of global culture is *vulgar* – in Marx's sense of offering an 'imaginary satisfaction' which disavows the insatiable temporal logic of the modern.⁵ Any global modernity will, rather, be internally self-differentiating. The spatially relational aspects of this internally self-differentiating global

modernity are better grasped by the idea of the global contemporary.

Allow me to elaborate.

Thesis 1. As a historical concept, modernity designates the social forms and conditions of the self-absolutizing and thereby structurally contradictory temporality of the modern. Indeed, ‘modernity’ is still best written (as it often was early in the twentieth century) in exclamatory form: ‘Modernity!’ This exclamation mark conveys modernity’s peculiar triple status of being, at once, a *declaration*, a *demand* and a *command*. There is the *declaration* of a state of affairs – ‘modernity’ (negation of the temporality of tradition) – and hence a description of an always-still-emergent situation. There is a *demand* that one recognize this state of affairs: an appeal to some other or others for its recognition, and everything that is implied, politically, by that. And there is a *command*, implicit in that recognition, to further actualize this state of affairs, to fulfil or complete its description. That is to say, there is a *performative logic* to the declaration of modernity that combines *description*, *desire* and *compulsion* (indeed, *subjection* – *l’assujettissement* – in the multiple senses which that term has come to acquire),⁶ in a way that is familiar from the retrospectively self-validating logic of claims for recognition more generally. In the case of the exclamation ‘Modernity!’ however, this general performative logic of description, desire and compulsion takes on a peculiar and paradoxically absolutizing form. Herein lies both its *irresistibility* and its specifically *philosophical* significance.

To quote the French poet Arthur Rimbaud from 1873, writing at the moment of the opening up of a new stage of capitalist colonialism, consequent upon the increased competition between European powers stimulated by the emergence of Germany as an industrial force, in the final ‘Farewell’ sequence of his poem *A Season in Hell*: ‘il faut être *absolument moderne*’ – ‘it is necessary to be absolutely modern’, or ‘one must be absolutely modern’. This is a strange and compulsive existential-categorical imperative, this declaration of a necessity not to act but *to be* in a certain way.⁷ Writing a decade earlier, in the wake of Baudelaire’s founding formulation, of the time-consciousness of *modernité* as a quality of temporal experience, Rimbaud was the first to articulate the paradoxical universality of the existential demand imposed upon the historical process

by the self-absolutizing temporal logic of the modern as the logic of the new. This is a demand coterminous with the increasing semantic density of 'the new' marked by an intensification, differentiation and growing reflexivity of temporal meanings.

To grasp the significance of this absolutization, it is necessary to recall that 'modern', 'modernity' and 'modernism' are phenomenological-temporal concepts that, during the nineteenth century, came to be extended to the level of the concept of history (in the collective singular), at once displacing and rearticulating the category of 'history' itself. In this respect, the discourses of modern/modernity/modernism have no direct conceptual connection to 'reason' in an Enlightenment sense (although they are contingently historically associated with it) – an identification that has wrought havoc in the literature – but they are structurally tied to the philosophical concept of *the subject* (and its predecessors and successors). As Paul Ricœur put it, in his belated few pages on the category of modernity in his final major work, *Memory, History, Forgetting*: the 'full and precise formulation' of the concept of modernity is achieved only 'when one says and writes "our" modernity'.⁸ That is to say, as a form of historical experience – and more precisely an experience of 'history' in the collective singular – modernity posits Hegel's 'I that is We and We that is I' as its ideal addressee. Modernity involves the construction of 'the subject', as such, as the action of the contradictory temporal structure of 'the new'.⁹

It is the phenomenologico-temporal comprehensiveness of the Augustinean threefold present (the presence within the soul – we might say, to 'consciousness' – of the objects of memory, attention and expectation, respectively) that is the conceptual basis of the tendency towards absolutization inherent within the time-consciousness of the modern.¹⁰ It is the fluidity of temporal differentiation and its indifference to the chronological time in which it is retroactively measured that constitutes historical time as the medium of historical meaning and political action alike.

The tendency towards absolutization inherent within the time-consciousness of the modern conjoins and condenses three phases in the development of its concept. First, at its root, the modern designates the valorization of the present *as new* over the past, thereby splitting the present itself from within and *antiquating* those aspects of the present that are not

new. Second, the *generalization* of this antiquating dynamic necessarily involves its application to the new itself, at any particular time, thereby instituting a self-transcending temporal structure that opposes itself not merely to what is received by any particular tradition, but to tradition as such, as a structure of temporalization. (This is the moment of the coinage of *Neuzeit*, in Koselleck's account.) Finally, this affirmation of the new as such, in its transitoriness, across the totality of its manifestations (modernism) reveals the new to have become 'ever-same' (Walter Benjamin); to have itself become a new kind of 'tradition'. The new thereby contradictorily represses the very temporality it affirms, by instituting a new temporal structure of differentiated repetition.¹¹

This is not the only contradiction that infects the concept of modernity as a result of its self-absolutizing, performative temporal logic.

Thesis 2. As a historical process, this temporal absolutization is further contradictory insofar as it necessarily involves the territorialization (or spatial de-limitation) of an infinite process of temporal differentiation. The application of the concept of modernity at the level of the concept of history, which constitutes it as a historical concept, carries with it the spatialization or territorialization of the phenomenological concept of 'world'. What is now called 'globalization' appears from this point of view as the planetarily expanded process of social actualization of the phenomenological concept of world.¹² And, as Marx foresaw, the medium of this social actualization is the universalization of relations of exchange. The idea of global modernity thus posits a (virtual) absolute 'we' of universal exchange. Ultimately, it is the value form (in Marx's specific sense) that is 'the' subject of modernity.¹³ At the level of the actual historical process, however, geopolitically, irreducible (embodied) elements of spatial finitude (place) accompany the electronic actualization of this virtual 'we' in the (cyber)space of capital 'flows'.¹⁴ The contradiction here between the temporal infinite of a self-absolutizing modernity carried by the tendential universalization of exchange relations and the spatial finitude of actual historical subjects is the dialectical motor of modernity as a distributed series of historical forms. In the first ('anthropological' and 'sociological') phases of historical modernity, these forms were primarily constituted through relations of colonial difference, transcoding socio-

economic differences internal to European societies: ‘feudal’ versus ‘capitalist’ relations of production, ‘religious’ versus ‘secular’ worldviews.

Thesis 3. This second, spatio-temporal contradiction is epitomized in the historical relationship of modernity to the colonial and postcolonial or de-colonizing imaginaries. The first, still-abiding historical form of modernity was the colonial modern. In its generalized historical sense, the category of modernity was constituted in the course of the eighteenth-century European Enlightenments through a dual process of the transcoding of immanently European temporal differences (‘revolution’) and colonial spatial differences (‘the colonies’) to produce a geopolitical spatialization of temporal differences and a temporalization of spatialized colonial differences. In this respect, as colonial difference, the colonial is constituted *internal to* the conceptual dialectics of the modern as a historical concept, in a much more fundamental manner than its mere attribution to the modern, as one possible attribute among others, in a phrase like ‘the colonial modern’ (which suggests a variety of kinds of the modern), is able to convey.

Indeed, the phrase ‘the colonial modern’ may even function to *disavow* the constitutive character of colonial difference; in particular, when used to refer to only one side of the colonial relation – the colonies – rather than the spatialization of the relation itself, which includes the territorial sites of the colonial powers. On this understanding, the colonial modern is a historical *a priori*, in Foucault’s sense: a historically particular spatialization of the modern that was nonetheless *constitutive* of the modern itself as a historical concept, in the full sense. As such, it includes an investment of state power in a distinctive temporalization of the variety of political-territorial differences of the colonial relation constitutive of the first phase of historical modernity. This applies as much to non-European examples, such as Japanese colonialism in northern China, as it does to the paradigmatic instances of the capitalist colonialism of the European powers. More precisely, the colonial functions here as what we might call the historical modern’s first spatial *reserve*.

As a geohistorical category, the modern can never be actual (as opposed to imaginary – which is also real, albeit in a different way) ‘without reserve’. And this reserve must necessarily be, in part, spatially conceived, since every temporal designation (‘the medieval’, for example) has spatial presuppositions, be they explicit or implicit, which resist the *pure*

temporalization of social differences. Categories like ‘the Middle Ages’ make no sense outside a restricted ‘Western’ topography. To use the terms of Jacques Derrida’s famous 1967 essay on Georges Bataille, the colonial modern is a particular ‘restricted economy’ of the modern, a Hegelianism *with* reserve.¹⁵ Colonial spatialization is a ‘reserve’ here in each of the contradictory senses of the term ‘reserve’: the sense of (1) a reservation, a spatial delimitation that puts something aside; but also (2) something that is held in reserve, as an as-yet-unrealized potential, something ‘beyond’ the actual, in the sense of the beyond of Bataille’s conception of an expenditure beyond meaning. At its most general, this reserve is the *future*. In Blanchot’s phrase, the modern affirms a future that ‘obstinately holds itself in reserve’.¹⁶ This is the contradictory double coding of the colonial reserve. On the one hand, it is that which is held back, delimited, segregated, enclosed; but on the other hand, it is also that which contains the future within itself, the postcolonial. It is in the postcolonial that the colonial modern actualizes its futurity, that is, its temporal status as ‘reserve’. This is a dialectical reversal internal to the problematic of modernization, in which colonies, initially figured as sites of the past, appear anew as the sites of the future, antiquating their colonial masters.

However, the future that the colonial both holds back and projects, the future that the modern affirms – the postcolonial as the new – will always itself involve another (spatial) reservation, another holding back in the sense of a delimitation, another spatialization of temporal differentiation that cannot but contain another metaphorical ‘colonialization’ of that which is produced as ‘the antiquated/old’ by ‘the new’. This leads to the questions: What is the new today, geopolitically speaking? And what is the postcolonial today? Are postcolonial structures of difference still running on the modern’s colonial reserve? Or have they acquired new, immanently self-differentiating temporal powers? The answers to both these last two questions must surely be ‘yes’.

Thesis 4. Postcolonial relations are currently being transformed by their immanence to now-global processes of capital accumulation, as a result of which a new kind of postcoloniality is antiquating the futures of the colonial modern. Yes, postcolonial structures of difference are still running on the modern’s colonial reserve, insofar as the relations between territorially defined nation-states continues to regulate capital accumulation (including, crucially, the flows of variable capital, that is, migration). But yes, also,

these postcolonial structures of difference have acquired new, immanently self-differentiating temporal powers, insofar as the deterritorializing logic of capital accumulation is leading to new and genuinely transnational (rather than international) reterritorializations or socio-spatial forms. That is to say, capital markets have developed transnational dynamics that have transformed the economic, political and cultural significance of nationality beyond the purview of the problematic of postcolonial nationalisms and metropolitan multiculturalism, which nonetheless retains significant *residual* meaning and power. This is what Gayatri Spivak in her 2004 Wellek Lectures, *Death of a Discipline* – the discipline being Comparative Literature – called the ‘new post-coloniality’.

On this argument, ‘demographic shifts, diasporas, labour migrations, the movements of global capital and media, and processes of cultural circulation and hybridisation’ have rendered the twin geopolitical imaginary of a culturalist postcolonial nationalism and a metropolitan multiculturalism at best problematic and at worse redundant.¹⁷ *That* geopolitical imaginary may now be retrospectively periodized as belonging to a ‘first stage’ of postcolonialism, insofar as the world is currently in transition from postcolonial nationalisms to transnational postcolonialities, that is, a new *kind* of postcoloniality. However, this is by no means capitalism or modernity ‘without reserve’, but rather the modern’s *new* post-colonial reserve: a dialectics of ‘old’ and ‘new’ postcolonialities that is respatializing social relations, geopolitically, at a global level, as an effect of the immanently temporalizing modernity of capital. The globalization of processes of capital accumulation and universal exchange thus raises anew the question of the structure of modernity as a cultural form.

Thesis 5. Insofar as it is understood as the projection of anthropological and national senses of cultures on to a single global plane, the idea of global culture is vulgar, in Marx’s sense of offering an ‘imaginary satisfaction’ which disavows the insatiably self-differentiating temporal logic of the modern. The spatially relational aspects of this internally self-differentiating global modernity are better grasped by the idea of the global contemporary. Global networks of communicative action are more radically de-nationalizing and de- and re-culturing than the idea of global culture can sustain. ‘Cultures’ of modernity are constituted, first, at the point of intersection of received cultural practices with the logic of the value form (what Marx called ‘formal subsumption’) and, second, in the enculturation

of that form itself (which he called ‘real subsumption’).¹⁸ This can be as much a matter of *currencies* as it is of ‘cultures’. (Think, for example, of the imperial significance of the US dollar, or more recently the euro, as economic-culture forms.)

We need to distinguish here between at least three rather different senses of the global or ‘total’ application of the logic of the modern in the construction of the concept of global modernity under the condition of transnational capital. First, it could mean something like the paradoxical spatial totalization of modernity at the level of the planet, into a *single* internally temporally self-differentiating global cultural modernity – an absolute modernity, if you will. This is a powerful fantasy of capital. Yet the social unification of the global through universal exchange has not yet reached anything like this point of abstract, *purely self-generating* temporal differentiation. There is no actual global culture in this sense (however ‘vulgar’). For even on the implausibly singular interpretation, the form of unity – namely exchange – abstracts radically from the ‘meaningful wholes’ of the plural ‘cultures’ in either their anthropological or nation-state senses, which, however imaginary, retain a social actuality. ‘Global modernity’ may have everything to do with ‘culture’, in the sense of the social processes of formation of subjectivity and meaning, but it has little to do with culture in the conventionally particularistic anthropological and national senses. Yet it is precisely these senses that are kept alive through the multiple culturalisms through which various regional and state forms are currently *represented* within transnational cultural spaces.

Second, the concept of global modernity could refer to something more empirically particularistic, namely, the empirical totality or *global aggregate* of the spatial multiplicity of modernities, each with their own relatively territorially contained unities (Japanese modernity, Moroccan modernity, Argentine modernity, etc.): multiple modernities – even, for some, ‘alternative’ ones, although that term is implausible when used in a generalized manner, since socialist modernity has been, to date, the only *historically* genuinely ‘alternative’ modernity to those generated by the temporal logic of capital accumulation (‘expanded reproduction’) driving the capitalist system of production. The problem with this second notion is that it gives no credence to the relative unity of the world capitalist system, or its overdetermining systemic effects on particular territories – and so remains within an essential national-colonial spatial imaginary.

Third, one might understand global modernity more processually as a play of forces between the abstractly unifying and temporally self-differentiating power of the universalization of exchange relations at the level of the planet and the persisting complexly interacting multiplicity of relatively territorially discrete, immanently self-differentiating modernities. This is the most realistic and also the most messy option, which can only be adequately addressed concretely, through theoretically informed, lower-level historical analysis. The comprehension of modernity in China (which is by no means the same thing as ‘Chinese modernity’) is particularly important in this regard, given the role of the development of capitalism in China in unifying the world economy since 1989. At a theoretical level, however, the relational aspects of this third conception are, in certain respects, better grasped by the idea of the global contemporary, as the speculative positing of the living, disjunctive unity of a multiplicity of social times. This is a temporality emergent from global coevalness, a massively complex set of practical articulations and mediations of different temporalities within a present constructed by these articulations themselves.¹⁹

The Global Contemporary

In its most basic form, the concept of the contemporary is simply that of the coming together – hence the unity in disjunction, or better, the *living disjunctive unity* – of multiple times.²⁰ More specifically, it refers to the coming together of the times of human lives within the time of the living. Contemporaries are those who inhabit (or inhabited) the same time. As a historical concept, the contemporary thus involves a projection of unity onto the differential totality of the times of lives that are in principle, or potentially, present to each other in some way, at some particular time – in particular, ‘now’, since it is the living present that provides the model of contemporaneity. That is to say, the concept of the contemporary projects a *single temporal matrix of a living present* – a common, albeit internally disjunctive, ‘living’ historical present. As I have argued elsewhere, such a notion is inherently problematic but increasingly inevitable.

It is theoretically problematic, first, because it is an idea, in Kant’s technical sense: its object (the total conjunction of present times) is beyond

possible experience.²¹ This is so not merely for narrowly Kantian reasons about finitude and totality (which are themselves problematic, as the Romantics showed), but also, more fundamentally, for temporal-philosophical reasons of an early Heideggerian kind. ‘The present’, in its presentness, cannot be understood as ‘given’ with experience, even transcendently, as a fixed temporal form with its own objects (the objects of attention), since it exists only as the differentiation or fractured togetherness of the other two temporal modes (past and future), under the priority of its futural dimension.²² From this standpoint, the concept of the contemporary projects into presence a temporal unity that is in principle futural, ‘horizontal’, or better, *anticipatory*, and hence *speculative*. Furthermore, the relational totality of the currently coeval times of human existence (however theoretically comprehended in their presentness, and however increasingly interdependent) remains empirically, fundamentally, structurally and socially disjunctive. There is no actual shared subject position from the standpoint of which its relational totality could be lived *as* a whole, in whatever futural, temporally fragmented or dispersed a form.

Nonetheless, the idea of the contemporary functions *as if* there is. That is, it functions as if the speculative horizon of the unity of human history had been reached, as a phenomenologically actualizable standpoint. In this respect, the contemporary is a utopian idea, with both negative and positive aspects. Negatively, it involves a disavowal; positively, it is an act of the productive imagination. It involves a disavowal – a disavowal of its own futural, speculative basis – to the extent to which it projects an *actual* conjunction of all present times. This is a disavowal of the futurity of the present by its very presentness. Essentially, this is a disavowal of politics. It is a productive act of imagination to the extent to which it performatively projects a non-existent unity onto the disjunctive relations between coeval times. In this respect, in rendering present the absent time of a unity of times, all constructions of the contemporary are *fictional*. More specifically, the contemporary is an *operative* fiction: it *regulates the division* between the present and the past (the ‘non-contemporaneous’) within the present. Epistemologically, one might say, the contemporary marks that point of indifference between historical and fictional narrative which, since the critique of Hegel, has been associated with the notion of speculative experience itself.²³

It is the *fictional* ‘co-presentness’ of the contemporary that distinguishes it from the more structural and dynamic category of modernity, the inherently self-surpassing character of which identifies it with a permanent transitoriness, familiar in the critical literature since Baudelaire. In this respect, the contemporary involves a kind of internal retreat of the modern to the present. If the primary value of the modern is ‘the new’, in its distinction from ‘the old’ (which it produces), the primary value of the contemporary is its *actuality*, in distinction from the fading existential hold of what is still present but ‘out-of-date’ – that is, no longer articulating *living* relations between a multiplicity of spatially distributed standpoints.²⁴ If modernity projects a present of permanent transition, the contemporary fixes or enfolds such transitoriness within the actuality of spatially distributed conjunctures, or at its broadest, the envelopes of lives. This is the second aspect of the theoretical problem of the contemporary: the problem of the disjunctive unity of present times is the problem of the unity and disjunction of social space – that is, in its most extended, global form, the problem of the *geopolitical*. In its current, global variant, the idea of the contemporary thus poses the problem of the disjunctive unity of the *geopolitically historical*: temporal unity/spatial disjunction – in contrast to modernity’s temporal differentiation within a unified space.

The temporal dialectic of the new, which gives qualitative definition to the historical present (as the standpoint from which its unity is constructed), but which the notion of the contemporary cuts off from the future, displacing it into the actuality of a shared present, must be mediated with the complex global dialectic of spaces if any kind of sense is to be made of the notion of the historically contemporaneous. Or to put it another way, *the fiction of the contemporary is necessarily a geopolitical fiction*. This considerably complicates the question of periodization: the durational extension of the contemporary ‘backwards’ into the recent chronological past. For the backwards extension of the contemporary (as a projected unity of the times of present lives) imposes a constantly shifting periodizing dynamic that insists upon the question ‘*When did the present begin?*’ This question has very different answers depending upon *where* you are thinking from, geopolitically, which depends upon one’s answer to the question ‘*Where is the now?*’²⁵

Despite these theoretical problems of the fictive character of unity and spatial standpoint, however, constructions of the contemporary increasingly

appear as inevitable, because growing global social inter-connectedness gives historical content to these fictions, filling out their speculative projections with empirical material ('facts'), thereby effecting a transition from fictional to historical narrative. Such histories are as performative as they are empirical (i.e. they are constructions), but they nonetheless aspire to a hypothetical empirical unity of the present, beyond pure heteronomy or multiplicity. In this respect, the concept of the contemporary ('contemporary history') has acquired not merely the totalizing scope of a Kantian idea but its regulative necessity too. Increasingly, 'the contemporary' has the transcendental status of a condition of the historical intelligibility of social experience.

Today, the fiction of the contemporary is without doubt primarily a global or a planetary fiction. Fictions of global transnationality have recently displaced the 140-year hegemony of the internationalist imaginary, 1848–1989, which came in a variety of political forms. These are fictions – projections of the temporary unity of the present across the planet – grounded in the contradictory penetration of received social forms ('communities', 'cultures', 'nations', 'societies' – all increasingly inadequate formulations) by capital, and their consequent enforced interconnection and dependency. In short, today, the contemporary (the fictive relational unity of the spatially distributed historical present) is transnational because our modernity is that of a tendentially global capital. Transnationality is the putative socio-spatial form of the current temporal unity of historical experience.

It is at this point that the historical concept of the contemporary connects up to Spivak's 'new postcoloniality', which, as we saw, marks a movement beyond the colonial modern, associated with the notion of global modernity. This 'return of the demographic, rather than territorial, frontiers that predate and are larger than capitalism',²⁶ in response to large-scale migration, is made possible by the new communicational forms that are establishing a virtual dimension to social reality. These transversal relations of a transnational contemporaneity are overlaid upon the immanently self-differentiating temporal dynamic of the new that characterizes the now tendentially global capitalist modernity.

The question thus arises as to how we are to think about the relationship between the two forms. Might the historical time of the present (*this* present, *now*) be best thought in terms of the articulations mediating these

two temporalities of global modernity and contemporaneity, as an unstable coexistence of these two distinctive forms of time? More specifically, might we not think of their mediation, primarily, as that of temporalities of *crisis*?

As the coming together, disjunctively, of different temporalities expressing conflicting tendencies or ‘contradictions’ at the level of a tendentially systematic, self-reproducing whole, global contemporaneity is a temporality of crisis. Contemporaneity is the overarching temporal form of global crisis – it carries the temporality of crisis immanently within itself – because crises are expressed as forms of temporal disjunction. All structural crises of capitalism are at root crises of the realization (or overproduction) of value grounded in *disjunctions between moments in the circuit of money-capital*, of one sort or another: a lack of balance, or ‘unbalancing’, as they say, between the circuits of different kinds of capital, between sectors, or between regions of the system. The crisis itself is the expression of these temporal disjunctions.

The primary difference of a globally extended contemporaneity from the temporality of a global modernity is that while the latter projects a collective subject of utterance (Ricœur’s ‘*our* modernity’) ‘of which it is full’ (as Meschonnic put it),²⁷ the *transnationally* disjunctive coding of the global contemporary projects a multiplicity of subjects, constituted by relations of temporally coded spatial difference, within a self-consciously *coeval* time: the ‘contemporary’ itself. In this respect, the phenomenology of the contemporary exceeds the categorical framework of phenomenology itself, as a philosophical movement. We can see this in, for example, the contrast between the ‘heroism’ of the Baudelairean quest to ‘conquer’ modernity – what Laforgue called Baudelaire’s ‘Americanism’²⁸ – and the constitutively *unconquerable*, because radically distributed, character of the contemporary. The contemporary is not to be conquered, even paradoxically via self-dissolution (Baudelaire’s solution); it can only be *engaged*.