Modernity: Are Modern Times Different? ❧

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Modernidad: ¿Son distintos los tiempos modernos?

Resumen:

En años recientes, la "modernidad" ha sido objeto de considerable debate entre los historiadores. Este artículo evalúa algunos de esos debates y argumenta que la modernidad es un concepto problemático porque implica una completa ruptura con los modos de vida "tradicionales". El artículo realiza un estudio de términos clave apoyado en *Ngrams de Google*, que indican que los términos "modernidad," "tiempos modernos" y "tradicional" —en inglés y otros idiomas— tienen una historia propia. Un breve análisis de la transición desde la auto-orientación al equilibrio hacia la auto-orientación a la estimulación demuestra que la modernidad no es necesaria para el análisis histórico.

Palabras clave: *modernidad, tiempos modernos, tradicional, historia del yo.*

Modernity: Are Modern Times Different?

Abstract:

"Modernity" has recently been the subject of considerable discussion among historians. This article reviews some of the debates and argues that modernity is a problematic concept because it implies a complete rupture with "traditional" ways of life. Studies of key terms are undertaken with the aid of *Google Ngrams*. These show that "modernity," "modern times," and "traditional" —in English and other languages— have a history of their own. A brief analysis of the shift from a self oriented toward equilibrium to a self oriented toward stimulation demonstrates that modernity is not necessary to historical analysis.

Keywords: *modernity, modern times, traditional, history of the self.*

Modernidade: Os Tempos Modernos são Diferentes?

Resumo:

Recentemente a "modernidade" tem sido objeto de discussão substancial entre os historiadores. Este artigo analisa alguns desses debates e argumenta que modernidade é um conceito problemático porque implica uma ruptura completa com as formas "tradicionais" de vida. Estudos de termos-chave realizados com a ajuda da ferramenta linguística *Google Ngrams* mostram que os termos "modernidade", "tempos modernos" e "tradicional", —tanto em inglês quanto em outras línguas—, têm uma história própria. Uma breve análise da mudança de um tipo eu voltado ao equilíbrio para um outro voltado à estimulação demonstra que a modernidade não é imprescindível para uma análise histórica.

Palavras-chave: *modernidade, tempos modernos, tradicionais, história do eu.*

Modernity: Are Modern Times Different?

"Modernity" as a concept has close links to the development of history as a university discipline in the Western world. In recent years, scholars have drawn attention to the ways in which the narrative of modernity has distorted historical writing, especially of the places outside of Europe. As South Asian historian Dipesh Chakrabarty famously maintained, "There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called 'the history of Europe.'"[1] Europe sets the template of modernity; all other places are compared to it and almost always found lacking, that is, behind in terms of historical development. Sebastian Conrad has shown how post-World War II Japanese historians followed the European model of periodization: "The concepts and terminology of historical understanding —development, progress, and modernity— owed their explanatory substance to the European experience."[2] In short, the western concept of modernity has come to define the discipline of history for everyone in the world.

The problems created by the concept of modernity are not limited to the non-West. As Frederick Cooper, a historian of Africa, argues, the notion of modernity tends to flatten time and therefore discourage analysis of the conflicts within presumably modern societies in the last two hundred years while simultaneously ignoring much of what went on before, in Europe and elsewhere in the world. It confuses certain processes of undeniable significance (urbanization, for example, or secularization) with a particular time period, not to mention a particular place, the West. Modernity also tends to proliferate even among its critics with alternative modernities, colonial modernity, Japanese modernity, Indian modernity, etc. Cooper sums up the result: "The concept of modernity, multiplied, therefore runs the gamut, from a singular narrative of capitalism, the nation-state, and individualism —with multiple effects and responses— to a word for everything that has happened in the last five hundred years."[3]

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1   Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?," *Representations* 37 (1992): 1.

2   Sebastian Conrad, "What Time Is Japan? Problems of Comparative (Intercultural) Historiography," *History and Theory* 38: 1 (1999): 67–83.

3   Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 127.

Yet, for all his criticisms, Cooper stops short of jettisoning the concept altogether. "My purpose," he maintains, "has not been to purge the word modernity and certainly not to cast aside the issues that concern those who use the word."[4] Similarly, in the book that develops his critique of Eurocentrism, *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty repeatedly uses the term, whether as global modernity, colonial modernity, Indian modernity, or political modernity.[5] He contests European domination of the concept but not its use in general. In a more recent consideration of "The Muddle of Modernity," he insists that "Historians have to take responsibility for the normative freight that the word 'modernity' … has carried globally," but nowhere does he suggest that they dispense with it.[6] Writing history without modernity as a concept turns out to be nearly impossible. In one of my own books, I used the term in a title, *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity*, so I can hardly claim to have solved this riddle myself.[7] Moreover, I have worked all my scholarly life on the French Revolution precisely because I considered it a foundational event for modern times. Is there any way to sort through this "muddle," as Chakrabarty calls it?

We can start by developing a history of the term itself, an endeavor that can only be sketched out here in a preliminary way. Although modernity can be traced as far back as 1635 in English according to the Oxford English Dictionary, the digital resource Eighteenth Century Collections Online yields only two references, and only one in English for the entire eighteenth century. The novelist Honoré de Balzac used the French term *modernité* a few times in the first half of the nineteenth century, but in the 1870s Littré's famous *Dictionnaire de la langue française* could still refer to it as a neologism.[8]

A series of Google Ngrams can bring greater specificity to this question. Figure 1 seems to show that "modernity" as a term really only takes off in English after 1960 and even after 1980. But appearances can be deceiving especially when it comes to the visual representation of big data. If we ask about modernity in English between 1800 and 1900 (Figure 2) we see a distinct take off between 1890 and 1900, and if we query about 1890-1960 (Figure 3), we get

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4   Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 149.

5   See: Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

6   Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Muddle of Modernity," *The American Historical Review* 116: 3 (2011): 674.

7   Lynn Hunt, ed. *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity* (New York: Zone Book, 1993).

8   None of the previous dictionaries available at ARTFL, an online data resource for French literature, include *modernité*. See: "Dictionnaires d'autrefois: Émile Littré. Dictionnaire de la langue française (1872-77)," *The ARTFL Project*, <http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/dicos/pubdico1look.pl?strippedhw=modernitE>, paragraph "Modernité."

a more nuanced picture of the twentieth century, one of continuing increase in the use of the term between 1890 and the 1930s, then stagnation and even decline until the mid-1950s (for reasons that may be obvious or may not be — is this due to the shock of World War II?), and then a huge increase thereafter, perhaps because of the influence of modernization theory. A Google Ngram of "modernity", "Marxism", and "modernization" (Figure 4) suggests that the concept of modernity received a boost from the two most important social theories of modernity, Marxism and modernization theory, but then took on a life of its own after the 1980s, rising even more quickly while they began to decline.

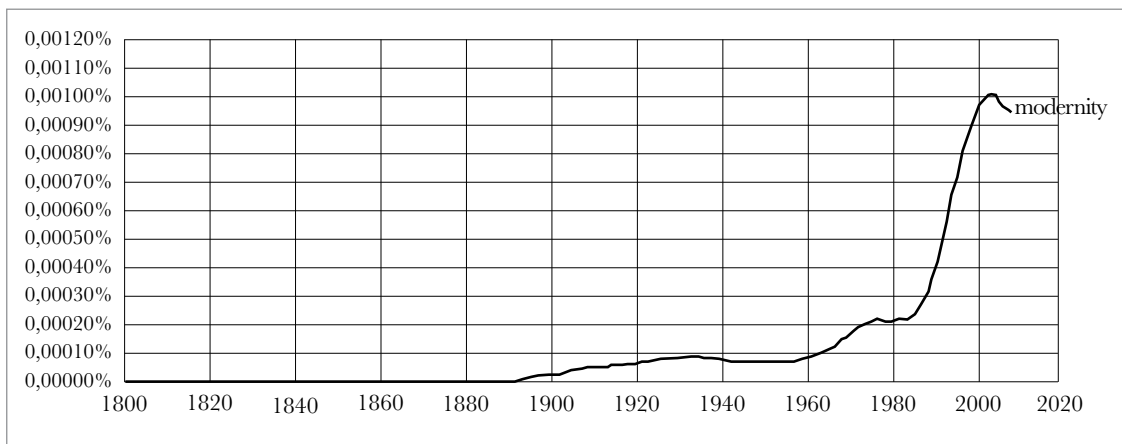**Figure 1.** Google Ngram Viewer of "modernity," 1800-2008

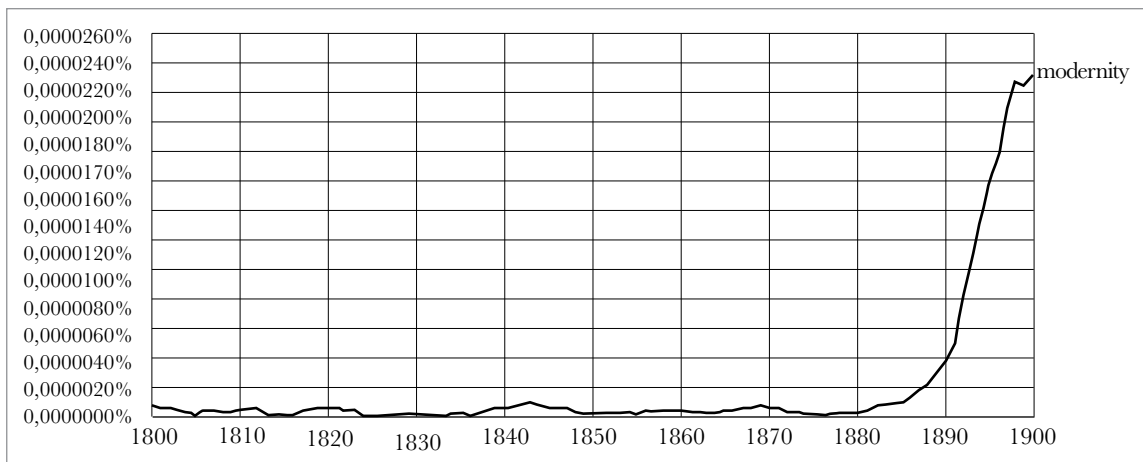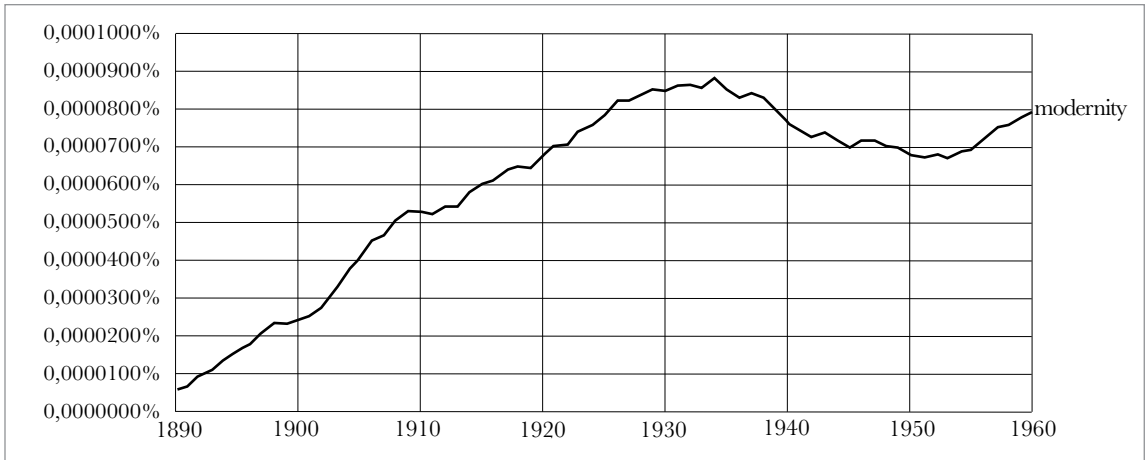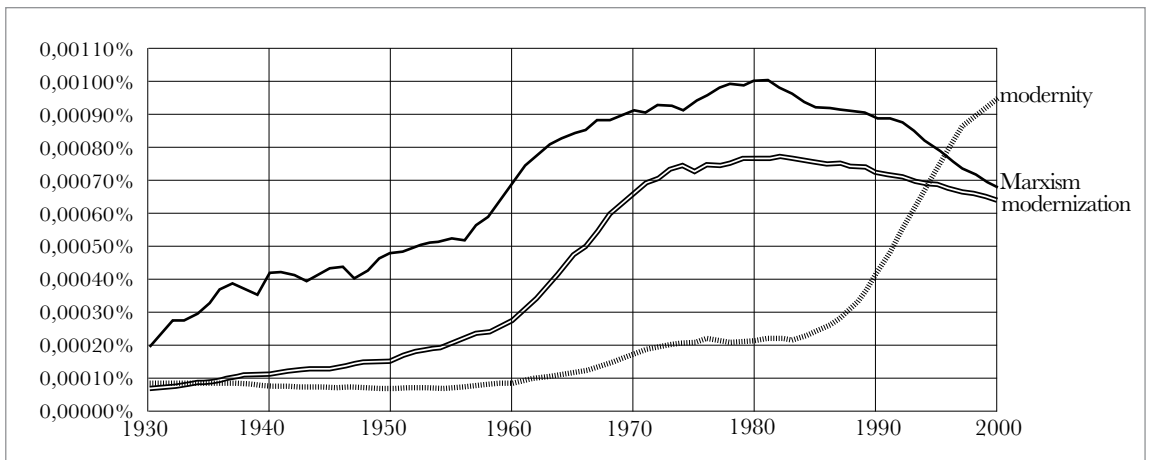**Figure 2.** Google Ngram Viewer of "modernity," 1800-1900

Figure 3. Google Ngram Viewer of "modernity," 1890-1960

Figure 4. Google Ngram Viewer of "modernity," "Marxism," and "modernization," 1930-2000

The key point is that "modernity" as a term only became prominent in English toward the end of the nineteenth century and during the twentieth century. A similar case can be made for French, German, and Spanish, though here any doubts about using Google Books would only be magnified because of the much smaller database. Still, the overview of the French situation, for example, shows a vast increase after the 1960s, while a more nuanced view of 1850-1950 indicates that in French the turning point comes earlier, in the 1880s and even the 1870s, which seems credible given the modernizing policies undertaken by the Third Republic. In German *Modernität* gains at the expense of *Neue Zeit*, but both pale in the face of *Neuzeit*, which takes off in the 1840s and increases greatly in usage from the 1980s onward.

A Google Ngram cannot explain why "modernity" first emerges toward the end of the nineteenth century or why it leaps up in usage from the 1980s onward. Is it related to European imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century? Toward the end of the nineteenth century Europeans and North Americans, too, saw the great impact on other peoples of their ways of thinking about modern life, while at home their governments were developing programs of mass education to accompany the development of mass culture in transport and media. At the same time, the emergence of the term toward the end of the nineteenth century may also reflect the sense that many in modern nations, such as France, had not yet become modern; in France, for example, peasants in peripheral regions had to be taught and even forced to learn French as the national language. The subtitle of Eugen Weber's influential book on this process is "The Modernization of Rural France."[9]

To get at the process —or at least the timing— of the European and North American understanding of their own ways of life as distinctively modern, I have chosen to trace the expression "modern times." In English "modern times" is used increasingly toward the end of the 1700s and actually reaches a high point in the middle of the nineteenth century (Figure 5). "Modernity" then begins to overtake it.

Figure 5. Google Ngram Viewer of "modern times" and "modernity," 1700-2008

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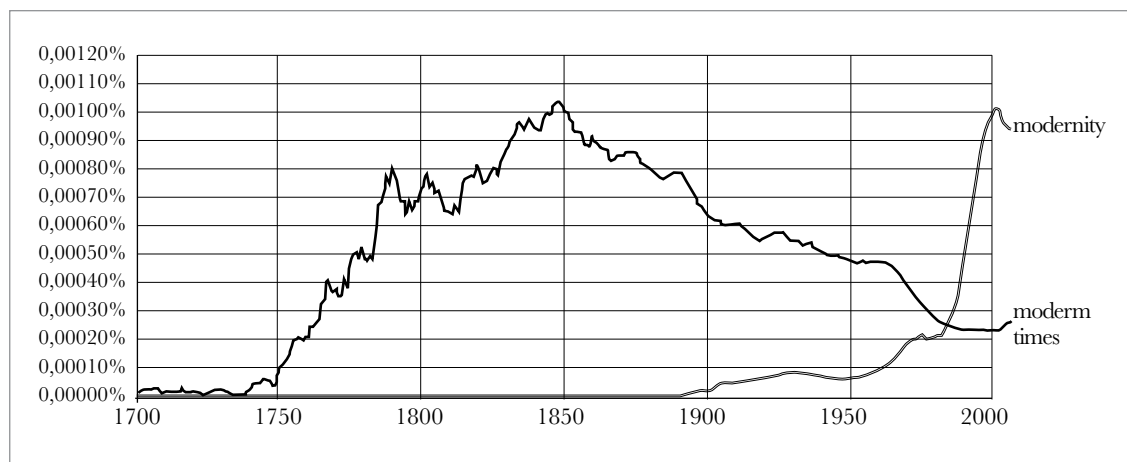
9   Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

The practice of history is fundamentally affected by this sense of the difference of modern times. The academic discipline of history took shape in Western Europe at the very moment when Europeans and their American acolytes were beginning to think of themselves as modern, that is, as living in times that were fundamentally different from previous times. Previous times were now increasingly associated with "traditional" or pre-modern practices and attitudes (Figure 6). "Modern history" became a more and more frequent point of reference in the eighteenth century (Figure 7).

Figure 6. Google Ngram Viewer of "traditional," 1700-1900

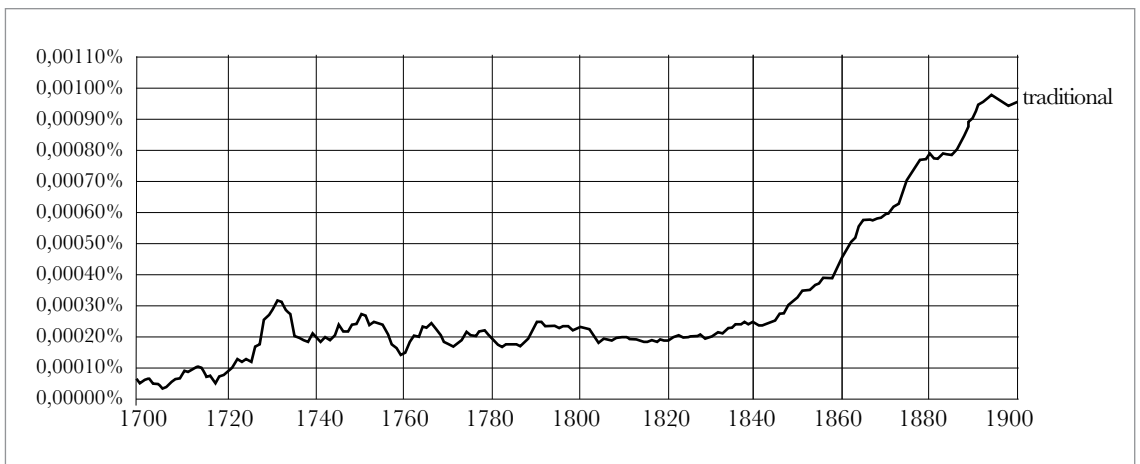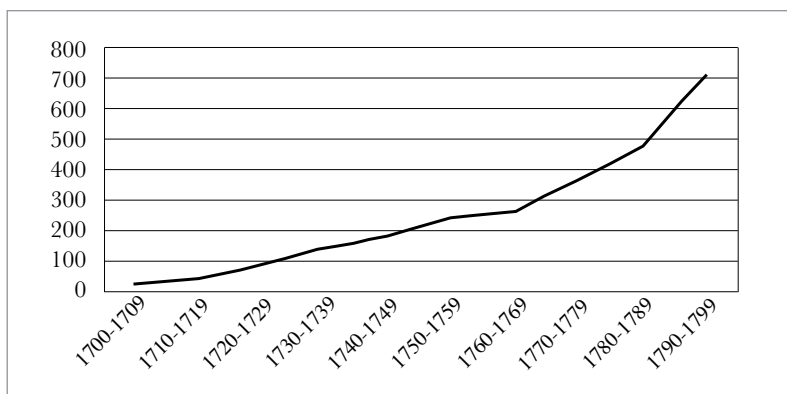**Figure 7**. Number of references to "modern history"

Source: *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* <http://gdc.gale.com/products/eighteenth-century-collections-online>.

The alliance between history and modern times has proved highly problematic over the course of time, creating a pull toward teleology, presentism, and even a certain indifference to the more distant past. History is seen as leading ineluctably toward modernity's triumph over tradition, and what precedes modern times is often seen as largely unchanging and therefore ultimately of less interest.

The problems with this modern time schema are not limited to its imperialist past or present, that is, its effects on non-Western peoples. Reinhart Kollselleck and François Hartog have shown that it distorts the European understandings of Europe's history, too.[10] At the end of the eighteenth century, in no small measure as a result of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, it became possible and then increasingly common to view modern times as a rupture from the past. In German this notion of a break in time was expressed by *neue Zeit*, a term that appears in the early 1800s, and then by the reference a few decades later to *Neuzeit*, or the modern age. In this new conception of time, according to Koselleck, the past no longer illuminates the present by providing exemplars for present behavior. The present takes its meaning instead from the future toward which it is ineluctably headed.

Ironically, however, as Peter Fritzsche argues, this shift at first gave history writing a much larger role than ever before. Because the past turned opaque, it required more serious scholarship. It also appealed to more and more people. The French Revolution had brought the people on to the stage of politics, and historians therefore had to pay attention to them in their writing. The genres of historical writing proliferated, with the historical novel being one of the striking examples. Thus the idea of the modern as a break from the past helped bring into being both the academic discipline of history and the popularity of history writing. By reconfiguring the past, the very positing of modern times opened up a new role for history.[11]

The development in tandem of modern times and history writing eventually ran into a *cul de sac*, especially once modernity came onto the scene. Having once energized history writing (around 1800 and for a few decades thereafter) the complicity with the idea of modern times as rupture proved enervating over the long run. The past lost its opaqueness and became increasingly subservient to the obsessive search for new understandings, new

10 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). François Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: Présentisme et expériences du temps* (Paris: Seuil, 2003). On the differences between the two, see Gérard Lenclud, "Traversées dans le temps," *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 61 (2006): 1053-1084.

11 Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).

interpretations, and supposedly new histories.[12] Over time, this translated into diminishing attention to "pre-modern" history as increasing emphasis was laid on the direct and even immediate sources of the present.

In the nineteenth and even much of the twentieth century, the vast majority of history students studied ancient and medieval history, but now most undergraduates and even many graduate students —at least in the United States— prefer to study the nineteenth and twentieth century. The same holds true for the writing of history. Students —and scholars— are more likely to know the most recent historical writings and to be almost entirely ignorant of the work of historians before 1950 and especially before 1900. With an increasing focus on the present and a growing disregard for previous historical writing, the historical discipline has become, it seems, less and less oriented toward the past. It has become presentist along with Western culture itself.[13]

Is the use of modernity inescapable? As with many things in life, the answer is yes and no. Since Indian, Japanese and other non-Western historians and literary critics readily use the term modernity and bend it to their own purposes, it hardly seems appropriate for a Western historian to announce it as off-limits. At the same time, the teleological elements of the concept need to be rooted out. The history of the world should not be seen as marching ineluctably toward modernity through a homogenizing process of modernization or globalization.

Recent work by Andrew Shryock, Daniel Smail and their colleagues on deep history offers a way of cutting modernity down to size without entirely dismissing it. They argue that all of human history "is punctuated by momentous leaps in population, energy flow, efficiency, levels of political organisation, and degrees of connectivity."[14] The leap from communities numbering in the tens of people to thousands of people may be just as significant, for example, as one from millions to hundreds of millions and might well require even more complex and meaningful modifications in human interactions.

Therefore, they argue, we need more appropriate metaphors than those implied by modernity: take off, for example, or the one they discuss in detail, the J-curve, where all before is flat and largely immobile compared to what comes after the breakthrough. Figure 2 and even Figure 1 are examples of the J-curve. Smail and colleagues advocate replacing

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12 I have participated in this myself with the use of "inventing," "invention," or "new" in book titles: Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

13 Lynn Hunt, *Measuring Time, Making History* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008).

14 Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail, *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 247.

the current historical metaphors of breakthrough, e.g. "the birth of the modern," with those of webs, trees, spirals, scalar integration and fractals (a fractal is a repeating pattern at ever smaller or larger scales).[15]

The point of using such metaphors is to insist that the smaller scales (that is, events, structures, and patterns of human interaction developed in the far distant past) are not erased by the emergence of larger ones. As scales —for example of political organization— increase, they add new levels of behavior with new social actors and larger contexts but they do not efface the smaller ones of families, clans, cities, or for that matter, nation-states, as some have feared with the extension of globalization. Modernity is not the benchmark of human development; it is only one step along a road whose outcome is far from certain.

Historians are probably not going to embrace fractals or scalar integration as metaphors for historical development, but trees, webs, and spirals do have an appeal because they enable us to think outside of the confines of straight lines, arrows of time moving directly to modernity. Many different branches grew out of past events, some of which were stunted while others flourished, but no one knew which would be which when they first emerged. When writing history, hindsight seems omniscient whereas life as we live it seems rather murky and inchoate. The directions of the future are unknown and largely unpredictable, so we should only use modernity with second and third thoughts about what such usage may suppose.

To insist on the uncertainty of the future does not mean that time is directionless or that "modern times" do not differ from previous times. But the difference from previous times is not categorical, as modern vs. traditional or the use of modernity implies. The definition of "modernity" is almost always ideological if not downright tautological. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, for example, modernity is "an intellectual tendency or social perspective characterized by departure from or repudiation of traditional ideas, doctrines, and cultural values in favour of contemporary or radical values and beliefs (chiefly those of scientific rationalism and liberalism)."[16] Everything then depends on how traditional and radical are defined and how the temporal break between the two is determined. But traditional can hardly be considered monolithic and unchanging,

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15 To get a good sense of a fractal, it is necessary to go online to see, for example, a Koch snowflake. Fractal geometry is now used more and more in environmental and urban studies and is not just of interest to mathematicians. See, for example, Marie-Laurence de Keersmaecker, Pierre Frankhauser, and Isabelle Thomas, "Using Fractal Dimensions for Characterizing Intra-urban Diversity: The Example of Brussels," *Geographical Analysis* 35: 4 (2003): 310–328.

16 "Modernity", *Oxford English Dictionary*, <www.oed.com/view/Entry/120626?redirectedFrom=modernity#eid>.

and the break from it is rarely sudden. If modernity is defined by the rise of secularism, the use of science and reason as standards of truth, the development of representative government, and a growing emphasis on individual autonomy, then modernity does not appear all at once in the same way everywhere. It is still very much contested. It is "modern" only in the sense that it is recent.

It is possible to determine, for example, how one kind of emotional, social, cultural or political regime replaced another in the eighteenth century without casting the change as one of the traditional or pre-modern giving way to the modern. Changes do take place but they are not necessarily best understood in relationship to a master narrative of modernity. Moreover, insofar as they have been inscribed in a narrative of European modernity, that narrative has all too often overlooked the crucial component of global interactions. A brief look at the transition from an embodied self oriented toward equilibrium in bodily fluids and emotions to an embodied self looking for increased stimulation will have to serve as an example.

The evidence for this shift can be found in many places but has not been brought together in one place because scholars have directed their attention elsewhere, to broader social trends rather than to the experiences and emotions of individuals. The shift from a self oriented toward equilibrium to one inclined toward stimulation is not a conscious evolution explicated by physicians, philosophers, or politicians. Evidence for it must be sought in a combination of direct and indirect sources from personal letters and commentaries on new products and practices to paintings and engravings of ordinary people. Here only the tiniest bit of the terrain can be turned over in the hope of showing, nonetheless, that this change in the experience of the self had momentous economic, social, and political consequences.[17]

Tobacco, coffee, and tea were essential ingredients in the transformation (that I do not want to label modernization). Like tobacco, coffee and tea were first prized for their medicinal uses. As their consumption spread from the upper to the lower classes in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Western Europe, they took on meanings more related to their pleasurable qualities. In 1675 the French aristocrat Marie de Sévigné compared her favorite perfume to tobacco: "it is a folly like tobacco; when you get used to it, you cannot live without it." In her letters she also constantly commented on coffee, recounting her efforts to give it up

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17   The problem of evidence for this kind of analysis has been very usefully discussed in Jeremy Trevelyan Burman, "History from Within? Contextualizing the New Neurohistory and Seeking Its Methods," *History of Psychology* 15: 1 (2012): 84–99.

but always coming back to it in the end. A century later, in the 1780s, French writer Louis-Sebastien Mercier noted that "coffee drinking has become a habit, and one so deep-rooted that the working classes will start the day on nothing else."[18]

These once exotic products served as relay points connecting newly felt individual desires with social patterns that arose in response. Ordinary people discovered a taste for tobacco, coffee and tea, a taste now linked to stimulation and pleasure rather than to cures for ailments. But once upper class people saw the lower classes indulging in what had once been more elite activities, they began to insist on their social distinction in new ways. In the eighteenth century, snuff came into fashion so that the upper classes could separate themselves from the pipe-smoking lower classes and Native Americans. Prosperous people patronized coffee houses while workers in cities like Paris took their coffee with milk and sugar from female street vendors. Tea, on the other hand, was associated primarily with women and with domestic consumption, though in England male workers also guzzled it.[19]

The desiring, deciding, stimulus-seeking self developed in tandem with an increasing social awareness. Coffee drinking, for example, promoted both individual choice and new forms of socializing. Some chose their coffee house based on their politics —the Cocoa Tree for Tories and St. James for Whigs in London— and still others went to the coffee house that carried the papers they wanted to read. As new social practices spread, the opportunities for individual choices multiplied.

After imports of tea began to increase in the early seventeenth century, the beverage stimulated a cascading series of consumption demands, especially in the Anglophone world, where drinking tea took root in the middle and upper classes as a domestic activity. Tea from China brought in its wake Chinese porcelain teapots, dishes to hold the teapots, spoon boats, not to mention cups and saucers. The changes that followed from tea drinking in the Anglophone world were astounding when considered over the long term. Under the influence of tea, all meals gradually became important domestic activities. Eating became both more social and more individual. Rather than gulping down one's food in a hurry off a knife or fork or fingers, people now sat down at table and ate off individual

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18 Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, Marquise de Sévigné, *Correspondance*, vol. II: 1675-1680, ed. Roger Duchêne (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), 133. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Panorama of Paris: Selections from Le Tableau de Paris*, ed. Jeremy D. Popkin (University Park: The Penn State Press, 1999), 97. Colin B. Bailey *et al.*, *The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard: Masterpieces of French Genre Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

19 Jason Hughes, *Learning to Smoke: Tobacco Use in the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 73-77.

plates. Women no longer stood to serve but joined other members of the household at the table. Eating or drinking tea together signaled civilization and refinement, as did the equal partaking of women in these activities.[20]

New print forms such as newspapers, magazines, and novels benefited —if they did not in fact grow out of— the taste for tea and coffee, and their readership included women, too. In 1711 the new daily, *The Spectator*, opined, "I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries, Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs and Assemblies, at Tea-tables and in Coffee-houses." The editor Joseph Addison hoped specifically to "recommend these my Speculations to all well-regulated Families, that set apart an Hour in every Morning for Tea and Bread and Butter; and would earnestly advise them for their Good to order this Paper to be punctually served up, and to be looked upon as a Part of the Tea Equipage." The new dailies were being sold as accessories to the newly popular beverage.[21]

Consumption democratized in the eighteenth century and in turn promoted the democratization of politics. A study of probate inventories for Annapolis, Maryland shows that tea tables first appeared in estates of the wealthy in the 1720s and then made their way into the belongings of the middle classes in the 1740s and the poor thereafter. Cups and saucers followed a similar trajectory. The popularity of tea in the American colonies made it a singularly effective rallying point for resistance to British authority.[22]

The democratization of politics did not follow because ordinary people now had access to more items for consumption. It followed because ordinary people learned through consuming that their choices mattered, even if many of them were making the same choices. People took tobacco, coffee, and tea for many reasons, but high on the list was stimulation. Workers in particular consumed immense quantities of coffee and tea. Mercier remarked on Parisian workers claiming that if they had coffee for breakfast they could keep going all day even if they ate nothing else. In England heavily sweetened tea often took the place of a meal for working people. Sugar consumption in England went from four to eighteen pounds a person over the course of the eighteenth century.[23]

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20 G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 159.

21 *The Spectator* No. 10, London, March 12, 1711, s/p. [Digital version], <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/12030/12030-h/12030-h/SV1/Spectator1.html#section10>.

22 Paul A. Shackel, *Personal Discipline and Material Culture: An Archaeology of Annapolis, Maryland, 1695-1870* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993).

23 Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Panorama of Paris*, 97; Beatrice Hohenegger, *Liquid Jade: The Story of Tea from East to West* (New York: Macmillan, 2006).

The democratization of politics followed from the mutually reinforcing expansion of selves and societies in the eighteenth century. If the stimulus-seeking self gradually edged out the self oriented toward equilibrium, it did only in fits and starts. Marie de Sévigné once again provides a telling example because she lived on the cusp of the change. She tried to navigate between coffee's effects on the body's equilibrium and the recurring desire —hers, her daughters, and her friends— for coffee. In November 1679 she insisted to her daughter that coffee heats and agitates the blood and was therefore bad for her beloved daughter's fragile health (very much the equilibrium model). Yet in April 1694 she wrote to her daughter that coffee "will console me for everything [she was preparing for a purge]" and "bring me closer to you." The two versions of the self were in tension with each other for Sévigné and for many others.[24]

Coffee houses provided a different kind of self-society interaction and, because they were public spaces, they became synonymous with a newly demanding public, whose impact then spread across Western Europe. They carried the pamphlets, satirical broadsheets, and newspapers of the moment. Coffee houses so evidently set the temperature of political discussion that governments across Europe sent their undercover agents to report on what was being said in them. King Charles II of Britain tried to suppress them in 1675, and his advisors wanted to limit the circulation of news as well, without success. In the early eighteenth century, the police reported to King Louis XIV of France that while popular cabarets posed no threat, "in cafés, politics is discussed by malcontents who speak wrongly of affairs of state." Louis' successors had even more to fear from cafés. The leading figures of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment such as Voltaire, Rousseau and Diderot met friends, discussed philosophy, and played chess in their favorite cafés. On July 12, 1789 the young journalist Camille Desmoulins jumped onto a café table in the Palais Royal in Paris and exhorted his listeners to take up arms to defend freedom. In this way, it might be said that coffee led eventually to revolution.[25]

It only did so, however, through a series of intermediate steps. Tobacco, coffee, and tea only became widely available in the eighteenth century. Coffee consumption, for example, increased 200-fold in Europe between 1700 and 1800, largely thanks to the spread of coffee cultivation, first to the Dutch colonies of Java and Surinam and then to French colonies in the Caribbean.[26] Why did people develop a taste for these products? Increasing

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24 Marquise de Sévigné, *Correspondance*, vol. II: 729; and Marie de Rabutin-Chantal, Marquise de Sévigné, *Correspondance*, vol. III: 1680-1696, ed. Roger Duchêne (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 1036.

25 W. Scott Haine, *The World of the Paris Café: Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 7.

26 On coffee consumption, see E. M. Jacobs, *Merchant in Asia: The Trade of the Dutch East India Company during the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden: CNWS Publications, 2006).

European contacts with the New World, the Middle East, and Asia certainly played their part, yet new consumption patterns did not follow inevitably. Prices had to go down because of increased supply, but supply would not have increased if consumers had not developed a taste for the new products. They did so because people increasingly opted for stimulation, novelty, individual choice, and meeting together in spaces outside the market, the church, and the family. Tastes changed as the experience of the self changed, and as tastes and selves changed, social prospects changed too. It may be impossible to say just which came first, new selves or new social outlooks, but both had to occur. People learned to make new kinds of choices, while at the same time the texture of society became more varied, affording more arenas for individual choices.

In short, the domain of the self and the domain of society expanded together. Unlike Michael Foucault, who locates the source of all productive energy in power, usually as expressed in institutions and their practices, I find it in the spaces in which each individual mind engages with other minds and in the process that creates the collective, inter-subjective domain of practices and understandings known as society. As the domains of the self and society expanded, so too did the prospect of new expectations and behaviors such as drinking coffee, sitting in coffee houses, and grumbling about the ruler's politics. Revolution grew out of the interaction between increasingly autonomous, deciding, stimulus-seeking selves and an increasingly autonomous, demanding society.[27]

Emotional energy is not fixed, like some kind of universal constant. It has increased dramatically in the Western world over the last few centuries as the domain of the self and the domain of society have expanded together, mutually reinforcing each other even at points of tension and conflict. Democratic or representative politics are one important consequence of this growth of energy, and at the same time, a booster for its continuing increase. Democracy only became imaginable when large numbers of individuals could make claims to their rights and when societies could claims rights against their monarchical and aristocratic rulers, that is, when selves and societies extended the range of their claims in tandem.

This brief account might seem a variant on the modernization narrative, one that simply gives more attention to the effects of global economic interchange on experiences of the self. But nothing is gained by associating it with the label "modernity." The shift from one experience or regime of the self to another does not happen all at once or evenly. The

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27   A particularly helpful book on this area is Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, trans. George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967).

equilibrium-seeking self is not inherently traditional or the stimulus-seeking one inherently modern; one just comes before the other, and nothing precludes a later reversal. If we think twice about using the labels "modern" and "modernity," we can still tell the histories we want to tell, and by not taking the shortcuts offered by dichotomous categories such as "traditional" and "modern," we might even tell them better.

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