

# Migration and Modernity

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## **Abstract**

Migration and modernity are often regarded as correlated factors. Migration, or the resettlement of the people within a country or across national borders, can be forceful, voluntary, permanent, or temporary, and displays diverse types. But it is proper to aver that the process of modernization propels migration, causing international mobility, or the fluidity in terms of peoples' shifting to another locale, apart from the transfer of goods. The objective of this paper is to inquire into the challenges of modernity that confronts migrants in particular, or each global citizen in general. New technologies, new economic relationships, new social processes, and new political developments are all characteristics of modernity. Indeed, as we move into the post-industrial age, several aspects of social and economic life simply present greater challenges, unparalleled by virtue of the interconnectedness that brings together the corners of the globe. Migration characterizes and epitomizes modernity. The condition of migration helps us better grasp, or even grapple with modernity.

## **From Migration to Modernity**

Migration can be referred to as the resettlement of the people within a country or across national borders. The term encompasses both movement from (emigration) and movement to (immigration) a country. Historically, incentives to migration take the form of economic forces. People have long moved to facilitate access to resources like food and other necessities in life. Migration in modern era displays more complex demands. Woodward discusses the reasons for movement with the term of push and pull factors (2002). Push factors apply to people who move under the situation of threat, violence, starvation, like war victims and political refugees. Pull factors drive people to move towards a part of the city, nation, or globe in quest of better economic, social and political conditions. Today, multiple factors can be collectively associated behind the movement of people. In today's modern world, people move far and wide, thanks to the advancement in technology and transportation. Migration can be forceful, voluntary, permanent, or temporary. Bauman, for instance, uses the term vagabond and tourist to elaborate the inequality in the freedom of movement among migrants around the world nowadays (2000). Vagabond constitutes those immigrant groups who move under forceful circumstances, while tourists exercise as a more autonomous and privileged category, without being subjected limited alternatives. Despite the diverse meanings and types of migration, it is

pertinent to argue that modernization propels migration, the process of moving or travelling to another locale. It heightens the possibilities for human interaction across existing geographical and political divides. It triggers change of place, or fluidity of location for people, in addition to the transfer of goods. Migration is itself a condition of change, which results from modernization. Migration characterizes, epitomizes, and helps us better grasp, or even grapple with modernity.

The trend of international migration is catching on in today's modern era of globalization. Processes of globalization prompt international migration, by means of disparities of development, segmentation of global labor market, revolutions in communications and transnational social networks. According to United Nations data, in 2015, 244 million people had lived outside their country for more than one year. This total includes about 20 million refugees, a relatively small portion of the totality of migration. International migrants comprise about 2.8% of the world's population in 2000, and 3.3 % of a significantly larger world population by 2015. Most projections suggest that the proportion of migrants in an expanding world population will continue to grow over the next century, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution is likely to further boost or complicate international migration. Globalization is characterized by the general increase in international flow of goods and

capital, consistent with the movement of people on a global scale. There have been two episodes of globalization so far in modern economic history: the first episode took place during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and the second episode is currently ongoing and started roughly thirty years ago. The first era of globalization has been termed “the age of mass migration” (Hatton and Williamson, 1998). The second era sees most migration transferring from developing to developed countries. Indeed, comparatively, the share of migrants in the world population was two to three times higher than what it is today. Though quantitatively reduced, the role of migration today is as essential as before. International migrants represent an important development for the receiving countries, both quantitatively and qualitatively. They are driven by the assumption that modernization is beneficial, and they contribute to further development of the receiving economies. They place faith in the power of modernization, or the dynamics of cultural, socio-economic change whereby less developed countries acquire characteristics from western, industrial civilizations. In today’s global scenario, the world is modernizing at a rapid speed, and the scope and impact of change have multiple dimensions and implications that transcend geographic and cultural boundaries (Turner 2006). How international migrants could now respond to the common predicament of modernity deserves

contemplation, because they are subject to, or they constitute, modernity. The reality of continuing international migration is indicative of modernity in progress. Therefore, what is modernity, and what impact it exerts on every one of us, say global citizens, also requires much deliberation.

With the concept of globalization, we think of the processes by which the world is made into a single place with systematic properties, and people become more interconnected and interdependent. We can even think of “a reorganization of time and space in which many movements of peoples, things, and ideas throughout much of the world have become increasingly faster and effortless (Morris 2010). Giddens defines globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which links distance localities and transactions, associated in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact generating trans-conditional or interregional flows and network of activity” (2003). The contemporary globalized world order originates in the international organizations and regulatory systems set up after World War II, including the United Nations. As the Cold War ended, it is possible to imagine a “borderless” world (Ohmae 1990) in which people, material or non-material products could flow with relative ease. An “invisible continent” is also conceivable, meaning a moving, unbounded global economy in which the primary linkages are now less between nations than between regions (Ohmae

1990). Politically, the major global division between the East and West had gone. A world once divided by competing ideologies of capitalism and state socialism has given way to a world in which the former has become the dominant socio-economic system. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and USSR, coinciding with the growth of digital technologies of communication, contributes to a global restructuring of state, finance, production, and consumption.

But such unifying principle is not always at work, nor is the globalized world necessarily “one”. Specifically, it is on the one hand, a world full of movement and mixture, interaction and exchange, but on the other, a world so internally divided. It is a single place but diverse, integrated but not harmonious, prone to multiplicity and fragmentation. Harvey, focusing on globalization as a distinct shift in the temporal and spatial dimensions of social life, delineates the way it disrupts, or even revolutionizes the qualities of time and space. He, along with several other social theorists, argues that the novel high-speed social activities have increased so greatly that the social space has compressed or even annihilated. While social theorists may think differently about the precise source of this alteration of social time and space, most agree that technological innovation in communication, plus the move to post-Fordist or flexible mode of capitalist production, have been two determining factors. According to Harvey, social space appears to

have shrunk to what Marshall McLuhan refers to as a “global village” of telecommunications and ecological interdependencies, as time horizons shorten to the point where the present is all there is. Pointing for practical cases to the ephemerality of production techniques, financial markets, computerized trading, and even fashions, he calls for the need to cope with the overwhelming sense of compression of spatial and temporal worlds (1990). In propounding the notion of time-space compression. Harvey recapitulates much of Marx’s argument about capital, and traces many contemporary features of capitalist modernization, the fluidity of corporate locations, the constant drive to increasingly rationalize production, to the very basic aspects capitalist production. In fact, a large portion of recent intellectual discourse of globalization is replete with allusions to the phenomena that had garnered the attention of philosophers since the advent of industrial capitalism. Conversely, much of the nineteenth and twentieth philosophy has already included references to a shared awareness of distance being twisted, space being dramatically annihilated, by means of technological development. In this regard, Bauman proposes a rewriting of human history based on what he calls “the retrospective discovery” of the centrality of time and space in the constitution of all societies (1979). Therefore, the original concept of modernity is worth being re-examined, in an attempt to unmask the implications of globalization.

Long before the introduction of the term globalization, the high-speed everyday occurrence had generated extensive commentary about the compression of space. Marx, in 1848, formulated the first theoretical explanation of the sense of spatial compression. In his account, the imperatives of capitalist modernization, particularly its mode of mechanical production, forced people to confront the fact of the annihilation of space by time, as it pushed the bourgeoisie to: nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, and establish connections everywhere. The juggernaut of industrial capitalism constituted the most basic source of technologies resulting in the annihilation of space, helping to pave the way for intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. (1998)

Clearly, Marx witnesses a new scope of transnational relations, and paints a globalized picture. What lies at the heart of it is the law of motion, central to industrial capitalism. New lines of production are opened up, industrial machinery is all racing off, and turn-over time is being reduced to twinkling of an eye, in the technologically orchestrated process of modernization. The temporal experience is radically shifted, which deepens the resultant transformation in the sense of space. On the one hand, a new internationalism, a global system, is created, and spatial integration is made possible by industrial capitalism. But on the other hand, since capitalism is necessarily technologically

dynamic, there is an ever-rising, immanent disruptive force always ready to pose threat to the unified entity of capitalism. Therefore, the underside of spatial disintegration is bound to occur. Capitalism, in short, is a social system internalizing rules that ensure it will remain solid and stable. But, since capitalism is essentially revolutionary, the advent of which marks a point of departure from previous history, namely the pre-modern, its disruptive force will be permanently at work. Paradoxically, such disruptive force accompanies the very founding of capitalism, while leading to its internal split or systematic destruction, and inevitably becoming the locus of insecurity and uncertainty. All that is solid melts into air, which is the paradox that reveals the dual nature of modernity. It is still in full swing even in the era of globalization, and definitely deserves our critical reflection.

## **The Dialectics of Modernity**

The objective of the study is modernity, in which I intend to give an account of a melting story, mainly from the perspective of Marx, whose theory of capitalist modernization makes for particularly compelling reading when set against the contemporary intellectual discourse of globalization. Apart from Marx, who unleashes a rhetoric that defines the underside of modernist aesthetics, Baudelaire, in his seminal essay *The Painter of Modern Life*, defines modernity as “the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent” (1995). When modernity emerges, there is a state of

perpetual flux, and things are prompted into a process of becoming. The condition of modernity can be so characterized: Modern environments and experiences cut across all boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology; in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity; it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, 'all that is solid melts into air.' (Berman 1988)

Nothing is ever fixed. Modernity alters when it finds alternation. Such a condition of modernity is widely recognized, if not universal. A number of writers in different places and times have confronted this overwhelming state of ephemerality and have managed to deal with the extraordinary change of our age. William Butler Yeats expresses his sensitivity to transitoriness and disintegration through the poetic touch: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world". Frisby, in his study of three modern thinkers, Simmel, Kracauer, and Benjamin, emphasizes that "their central concern was with a distinctive experience of time, space and causality as transitory, fleeting, and fortuitous and arbitrary" (1986). Marx's Manifesto of the Communist Party presents a drama of ongoing disruptions. The first section, Bourgeois and Proletarians, sets out to offer an overview of the chaotic process of modernization,

the historical stage which Marx believes will lead to the revolutionary climax. Even the way he writes the Manifesto is itself an expression of the maelstrom of change. Berman once records his reading experience while moving along with the first section. He finds that, as he reads on, different images succeed and blend into one another, and feels as if he is hurtled along with reckless momentum and breathless intensity. Based on the experience, he concludes that Marx is not only describing, but evoking and enacting the desperate pace and frantic rhythm that capitalism imparts to every facet of modern life (1988). Berman's personal experience tells us something about Marx's writing style, which he probably uses to reinforce our sense of ephemerality. Presumably, it is Marx's intention to make one feel that it is part of the action, drawn into the stream of fragmentation, and at once menaced by the onward rush. Sharing Berman's particular reading of Marx, one becomes better aware of the condition of modernity. Indeed, modernity, in bringing about drastic change, is the cause of disintegration. As "all that is solid melts into air," modernity is the protagonist in my melting story.

It is necessary to draw on the historical complexities of disintegration in search of something that is actually melted away, as induced by modernity. So let us see how Marx can help with our storytelling. He has a vivid melting vision to offer. To portray the topsyturvy image, Marx specifies the institutional core

of modernity. The rise of modernity firstly requires the emergence of the world-market. Apart from the economic aspect, some legal, fiscal and administrative centralization must also take place. Additionally, national states must arise. When these developments are in place, disorder occurs, and the disruptive process of disintegration is underway. Also worth mentioning is the fact that, in the first section of the Manifesto, it is the bourgeoisie that works out the development scheme. When the bourgeois put it into practice, feudalism is endangered. Once solid, the social formation now melts away. Politically, the world stage on which the old aristocracy has long enjoyed its supremacy also melts away, being disintegrated into a mobile construction. Such socio-political disruption makes for the scene our melting story first seeks to portray.

Temporally, something also melts away. History has told us that the stability involving feudalism and aristocracy is gone; accordingly, it is proper to say that the past has melted away. When the traditional elite no longer ensures social injustice and class distinction with a solid framework, something is bound be driven away from the present. It is true that “modernity can have no respect for its own past, let alone that of any pre-modern social order” (Harvey 2002). Whenever modernity arises, the transitoriness of things makes it difficult to preserve any sense of historical continuity. Modernity is the volatility that does away with the past, entailing a ruthless

break with any preceding historical conditions. Modernity is a history changer which melts away the pre-modern.

Modernity tends to break. What Baudelaire sees as the ephemeral is for Marx a destructive force. In the changing universe in which everything is melted, Marx considers modernity to be the “unearthly power” that explodes on the scene of human history (1998). The metaphor could be further explored with reference to Goethe. In Goethe’s Faust, the devil takes center stage, and the power from the underworld plays a pivotal role. We are all familiar with the story: in the middle of the night, the devil comes to Faust and offers to help. In eagerness to approach Faust, he winds up making a pact with him. What is seen is a connection between a dreamer and the unearthly power. Or, according to Berman who manages to explain it from a Marxist standpoint, it is the relationship between a developer and modernity (1998). In this context, Faust is the dreamer who longs for capitalist development, while the devil personifies modernity to answer his prayer. In Faust, the devil carries destructive force, while in our interpretation, it is the dynamism of modernity. Modernity is essentially destructive, but is a necessary evil. In the same way, the devil is made indispensable for Faust’s developmental scheme aiming to make his world a better place. Modernity is so important as to serve the foundation for the future. Considering the inherent necessity of a brave new world, one widens its knowledge of modernity. The

conception of modernity as essentially destructive is correct but could fall short without expanding the dimension of it. If the Faustian utopia has much to rely on the unearthly power, modernity must also serve to construct. At this point, it is possible to reach the assumption that modernity is a dual formation. So allow us quest for modernity's other half.

Modernity has two parts, and Baudelaire has helped us confirm the duality. His definition features "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent," but also embraces "the eternal and the immutable" (1995). In Baudelaire, it is clear that modernity is a mutual entity. Ephemerality defines modernity, and so does eternity. Ephemerality and eternity are two worlds apart; however, they are inseparable in our understanding of modernity. More than being oppositional, they are correlated. Mutual originality describes the relation, in which eternity stems from ephemerality. As ephemerality gives rise to eternity, they constitute a dialectical interplay. For eternity, the condition of possibility is the exact opposite, these two being the verso and recto on the same sheet of paper. The dialectical relationship is the core of Baudelairean modernity. But how is it possible to understand eternity? In other words, when the unearthly power of modernity is released, what is the gain? Baudelaire's attribution of eternity to ephemerality begs more questions. To ensure that our melting story could move on, we demand answers.

I just made the point that modernity is also constructive. Harvey supports the point, suggesting that, to comprehend modernity in fullness, it is necessary to have the image of creative destruction (2002). But what can the destructive modernity possibly create? Baudelaire links the creation to the idea of eternity. Pertaining to the notion, it is something we need in order to live, or to carry on with our existence. It is life's necessity, an element that gives meaning to our existence. The much-coveted nature can be detected. Baudelaire discovers it in dandies, the characters in whom modernity finds a proper realization. Baudelaire sees eternity shining forth from dandies in his unflagging search for an original personality. For Baudelaire, dandies possess the spiritual property of individuality. Their life is worth living because they are what they are. They deserve life, probably holding the key to eternal life insofar as they are free and autonomous individuals. Baudelaire's personal admiration for dandies has cast some light on the product of modernity. If modernity also tends to construct, it creates subjectivity. If the destructive modernity can lead somewhere, subjectivity is the end. If the melting necessity bears fruit, this is the benefit of modernity.

Modernity is two-dimensional, dialectical in nature. It finds its expression in ambiguity as "a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity," always wishing to "pour us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle

and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish” (Berman 1988). It takes delight in the fact that “All that is solid melts into air,” a well-known remark by Marx in survey of a chaotic modern environment. The condition of disintegration has been briefly treated, while it is necessary to shift the focal point onto the prospect of renewal. For Baudelaire, the prospect is confirmed with dandies, emerging in modern time as subjects. For Marx, modernity is equally promising. He believes the modern force to be fully realized in proletariat revolution. At the climactic point of the proletariat revolution, the ruling bourgeoisie will be thrown away to bring about the end of oppression. The birth of freedom is possible. Goethe is also convinced in the gain of modernity. In Goethe’s *Faust*, Faust’s yearning for development represents a humanistic ideal. His goal is to enable mankind to be free to act as subjects. For this purpose, he resorts to the devil, or the unearthly power of modernity. The shared belief of Baudelaire, Marx, and Goethe states the fact that modernity delivers. Thanks to modernity, the chance to grow as subject sparks. For these three thinkers, the desirability of modernity is without much dispute, regardless of its dubious, double nature.

If it is held that modernity delivers, creative destruction is possible. The dialectical interplay between destruction and construction could be agreed, based on the assumption that if there is going to be something new, nothingness must be put forward. Whoever owns the Faustian spirit

must acknowledge the dialectic of modernity, boldly undertaking destruction for the sake of creation. He is a modern hero. Or he can, like Baudelaire, look into the paradoxical logic of modernity, able to represent the eternal truth through the underside of the ephemeral. All in all, the modern hero would ensure that, for history to take a quantum leap, progress does not come smoothly. It is necessarily dynamic, involving both disintegration and renewal. Throughout history, there are some visionaries who have managed to make the image of creative destruction more than a myth. Among them, the city planner Haussmann stands out. His enormous effort is the carrier of modernity.

Haussmann works in Paris during the Second Empire, armed with the imperial mandate of Napoleon III. He envisions the new roads in Paris as arteries in an urban circulatory system. His major achievement is the new Parisian boulevard. It is one of the most spectacular urban innovations of the nineteenth century, and a decisive breakthrough in the modernization of the traditional city. The new boulevards enable traffic to flow much faster, stimulating a tremendous expansion of local business. They paint a rosy picture, but the gain does not come without pain. To execute the intuitive, Haussmann finds it necessary to clear slums for more space. For the new construction, he must wreck old buildings, displace many people, and destroy their neighborhoods. Destruction must be in place, and all is worthwhile. After the destruction, Paris

becomes a unified area, and the life has gone beyond being a cluster of isolated cells to which people are confined. Haussmann's destruction scheme ends up opening up the whole of the city to nearly all inhabitants. For the first time in history, the Parisians enjoy what Berman calls "breathing space" (Berman 1988). It depicts not only a physical space but a humanistic one, in which freedom is available and individuality burgeons.

In Haussmann's urbanizing project, the logic of creative destruction finds a practical application. Haussmann is a modern hero as well as a remarkable developer, who grasps the dialectical principle of modernity and carries it to the ideal end. Owing to him, Paris becomes the locus of modernity. In the city of Paris of the Second Empire, modernity breaks and makes, or it breaks to make. There are some other developers who follow suit in realizing modernity. Moses is Haussmann's most illustrious successor. The city planner contributes to the urban modernization of New York, which likewise begins with large-scale demolition. The result is pretty much the same: the opening up of free space for inhabitants and commuters. Indeed, urbanization exemplifies the function of modernity.

The dialectical logic also holds true for the economist Schumpeter. In order to understand the process of capitalist development, he deems it necessary to pick up the same image of creative destruction. The capitalist entrepreneur, in

Schumpeter's view, is a heroic figure. He is a modern hero as a creative destroyer par excellence. He destroys, using the weapon of technical innovation. In the meantime, he is capable of pushing the consequences to the vital extreme of creation. Schumpeter barely questions such heroism, declaring that creative destruction is the progressive leitmotif of benevolent capitalist development (Harvey 2002). Those laying similar claims to creative destruction are not hard to find. In art, the ephemeral and the destructive are broadly discerned. Picasso even acknowledges them as the integral part of twentieth-century progress. Here is Stein writing on Picasso: As everything destroys itself in the twentieth century and nothing continues, so then the twentieth century has a splendour which is its own and Picasso is of this century, he has that strange quality of an earth that one has never seen and of things destroyed as they have been destroyed. So then Picasso has his splendour. (Berman 1988)

Stein praises Picasso for his prophetic conception of creative destruction. According to Stein, Picasso has a personal quality, strange but magnificent, radiating in his belief in the ephemeral and the destructive. Our twentieth century is worthy of praise. It could be equally glamorous, as long as it absorbs itself within the ephemeral and the destructive. Modernity can be celebrated, being the splendor of our time. It has a tendency towards destruction, through which it is meant to create. The eternal and the constructive are modernity's other half, co-

existent with its melting potential. Subjectivity is the achievement of modernity. If the dialectic of modernity follows through, it is possible. At least it should be embedded into our melting story.

## **The Excess of Modernity and Its Non-Fulfillment**

Regarding the light of subjectivity flashing through modernity, one is prone to reach identification with it. With its dubious nature, suspicion arises. The prophetic ideal of creative destruction is likely to raise doubts to twist our melting story. We let the dialectic of modernity have its way to secure its achievement. But by so doing we have to put our stamp upon the ephemeral and the destructive. The heart of the matter thus becomes: How much can be created by means of destruction? Harvey invites us to ponder upon a hypothesis: If destruction has to be established for the certainty of eternal truth, in the end, the destruction is “to be destructive of those truths” (2002). With the ephemeral comes the eternal, and previously we managed to bridge the gap between these two extremes with the help of Baudelaire. With modernity that melts away socio-political solidity in the past, the creation of freedom dawns, as could be expected from Marx’s historical perspective. But how can the eternal truth of freedom sustain itself, if it has to rely on the ephemeral and the destructive? Is modernity bound to be destructive of it? Is it appropriate to put our faith in modernity, especially in its promise of creation? If Goethe’s

Mephistopheles is the literary embodiment of modernity, it is necessary to take caution. Aligning modernity to a Mephistopheles, we must beware of its devilish character, being deceptive and untrustworthy. It is necessary to incur another paradox about modernity. Modernity makes. On the one hand, it creates to fulfill its promise. It breaks, possibly, in the sense that it breaks promises. Modernity’s ability to deliver now seems questionable. Whether the achievement exists is the kernel of the paradox. To further develop our melting story, we take the paradox into account.

Pessimism abounds regarding the fulfillment of modernity. Modernity’s destructive potential is supposed to reveal itself in the presence of fulfillment. Historically speaking, modernity, characterized by a process of rupture, is meant to make a new epoch. But Harvey’s worry just reminds us of the possibility that the act of destruction is dangerously continuous. The process of rupture could end up being dangerously ongoing, and the dynamism could be directed towards itself, modernity’s own product or achievement. In the end, nothing remains in the midst of such radical disruptions. Conceivably, modernity’s tendency to create is more a myth than a fact. Harvey’s worry could serve as a critique of Baudelaire. While Baudelaire perceives modernity as a dual structure, “the most ‘modern’ writers have recognized that the only secure thing about modernity is its insecurity, its penchant, even, for ‘totalizing chaos’” (Harvey

2002). Baudelaire is right to point out that modernity also has the side of being eternal and constructive, but he seems to underestimate its ephemerality and destructivity, its penchant for totalizing chaos so to speak. This other side, according to Harvey, seems to go wild and excessive, leaving only chaos or nothingness. So what is the condition of modernity? It is a melting vision that used to paint a rosy picture. However, now we have to think of a grim picture, in which modernity melts, continuously and chaotically. To our dismay, it only melts, and there is nothing left.

Harvey's warning reverberates in the following words of Schorske, who also gives us a snapshot of the condition of modernity. His vantage point is fin de siècle Vienna: High culture entered a whirl of infinite innovation, with each field proclaiming independence of the whole, each part in turn falling into parts. Into the ruthless centrifuge of change were drawn the very concepts by which cultural phenomena might be fixed in thought. Not only the producers of culture, but also its analysts and critics fall victim to the fragmentation. (2002)

Schorske's cultural view is clear. Whichever perspective we adopt for our understanding of modern culture, one thing must be ensured. The idea of permanent change has to be admitted and fixed. To conceive it correctly, our concept must itself be vulnerable to infinite change. When our concept is entangled in the vortex of change, it shows the sign of fragmentation, serving as a

direct expression of the cultural phenomenon in fin de siècle Vienna. Everything is falling apart. Neither the external cultural activity nor our mentality could escape the route to fragmentation. Nothing assumes solidity, and this part of truth should be well-established amongst cultural analysts and critics. If there is nothing outside the harsh scene of fragmentation, the condition of modernity is nothing, again nothing.

Schorske deems it necessary that we all confront this modern image. Or better, we allow ourselves to be part of the action of fragmentation. So we not only well capture the modern image, but our understanding itself well represents the cultural reality. A large number of modern artists have sought to represent this aspect of modern culture. In the history of modernism, the avant-garde plays a vital role, notorious for interrupting any sense of continuity by radical surges, recuperations and repressions (Bürger 1984). Based on the cultural perspective of avant-gardism, any commitment to continuity would seem false in the attempt to grasp the fact about modern time. Consequently, artistic creation and judgments have to be conducted on a kind of "maniacal scrapbook filled with colorful entries that have no relation to each other, no determining, rational, or economic scheme," and this scrapbook gives a vivid picture of modern life (Bürger 1984). Modernism has a vast history behind since its inception in the mid-nineteenth century. Undoubtedly, it is filled with conflicting meanings and extraordinarily diverse currents of

aesthetic practices. It cannot be denied that some of these practices are dedicated to discovering the bitter truth of fragmentation and nothingness, since the ephemeral and the destructive seem to best represent the condition of modernity.

Where are the eternal and the constructive, though? Overshadowed by the dialectical counterpart, they become less discernible. Harvey studies the history of modernism, finding an interesting course in the aesthetic movement. In his survey, modernism in general does not evolve in a straightforward direction but keeps swinging around. Specifically, “it has wavered from one side to the other of this dual formulation,” echoing Baudelaire’s dualistic conceptualization of modernity (2002). He observes that modernism has once moved back and forth between the ephemeral and the eternal. But as modernism develops, it directs itself totally towards the ephemeral end. Finally, it rests on the ephemeral, overemphasizes it, and acknowledges it as the single truthful representation. So what is the significance of modernism which ends up looking exclusively at the ephemeral?

The developmental course of modernism could tell us one crucial fact about modernity. Finding that the focal point of modernism has switched one-sidedly to the ephemeral, we cannot help wondering about modernity’s balanced structure. It has two parts, as the aforementioned, each carrying equal weight. But as modernity rolls on, one part breaks up or stands out to capture more artistic attention, and that is the

ephemeral. The ephemeral overpowers the eternal and therefore becomes more noticeable in modernism, forcing modernity to lose equilibrium. The ephemeral is not only more powerful but perhaps too powerful. Arguably, modernity’s destructive potential is too much. When this overwhelming dimension of destructivity goes rampant, modernity necessarily presents a broken image, all broken. In this image, all that is solid melts into air, once again. It happens one more time as the ephemeral and the destructive carry on to melt away whatever the eternal and the constructive have given us. It is the benefit of modernity, once created by it, while the dangerous immensity of modernity would go so far as to destroy its own creation. What is modernity if not being essentially “self-destructive” (Berman 1988)? How do we properly understand modernity without concentrating on its excessive momentum of destruction which leaves us with nothing or, how can we expect any fulfillment from modernity?

The balance is tipped. The ephemeral and the destructive are simply too much, too powerful, and too dangerous. I do not doubt modernity’s double identity, and nor am I raising questions about the dialectical presumption that the destructive force will metamorphose into a creative potentiality. I am just trying to keep track of what follows. Also I am trying to argue that the outcome of modernity is dangerous self-destruction of its own creation. Baudelaire’s insistent conjoining of the ephemeral and the

eternal paints a rosy image for modernity. But now, we need a grim image, in which the overpowering destructivity takes center stage. Nietzsche is there to paint. Nietzsche sees the modern as nothing more than a vibrant force, the “will to power” in his language: “Beneath the surface of modern life, dominated by knowledge and science, he discerned vital energies that were wild, primitive and completely merciless” (1956). Nietzsche unearths the will to power that drives us into a sea of despair, disorder, and destruction. Interestingly, the will to power is not all negative. It is also the will to live; in this way ephemerality has the other half of eternity. The Nietzschean will to power is Janus-faced, characterizing modern life. Regarding this, Nietzsche shares with Baudelaire a dualistic perception of modernity. But Nietzsche sees more about the later development of such a destructive force, leaving a tragic vision for the modern life.

Tracing Nietzsche’s philosophical currents in conjunction with Baudelaire, Harvey well points out that later “he plunged totally into the other side of Baudelaire’s formulation” (2002). That is to say, as his thinking evolves, Nietzsche is concerned primarily with will to power’s destructive nature, corresponding to the side of ephemerality in Baudelaire. The will to power returns, inevitably and eternally. When it surges back, it becomes what it used to be, exercising its destructive energy as before. This is what happens when the will to power reasserts its destructive identity: “All the Enlightenment

imagery about civilization, reason, universal rights, and morality was for naught” (Harvey 2002). The achievement of modernity is void, as the progress guaranteed by modernization is terminated. At this moment, the metamorphosis of the will to live can hardly be recognized, due to the fact that the will to power eternally returns and eventually overpowers.

Nietzsche’s tragic, modern vision can also be conceived metaphorically and mythologically. In his literary landscape, the mythical figure of Dionysus is a proper representation of will to power. Dionysus is wild and irrational, but is helpful. He is described as being creatively destructive, and therefore is a good god. He drives changes, creatively capable of initiating a process of becoming. For that reason, unity has to be destroyed in the first place. But we shall not forget that he can also generate “a process involving the reaction of unity” to “devour the illusory universe of individualization” (1956). In a nutshell, one more process has just begun, a dangerous one as the reaction to the unity of individuality. It gives an idea of the final product of Dionysus, who renders individuality an illusion rather than a reality. In this light, Nietzsche’s Dionysus is also destructively creative, and is bad. To sum up the entire work of Dionysus, it is possible to say that at almost one and the same time, he forms “the temporal world of individualization and becoming, a process destructive of unity” (1956). The vision of individualization is possible as a result of the

process of becoming, and this exemplifies his contribution. But he then proceeds to destroy what he just shapes into being, and this is where he is at fault. Nietzsche's Dionysus never abandons his insanity; his strong inclination to destruction remains, in this way the will to power returns. What should modern people do if the will to power ultimately holds sway? The only path to self-affirmation is "to act, to manifest will, in this maelstrom of destructive creation and creative destruction even if the outcome was bound to be tragic" (1956). If the eternal recurrence of the will to power is inevitable, the tragic outcome is almost foreseeable. In the tragic scenario, the impossibility of individuality is almost certain. The core of humanity is nothing more than a void, sheer emptiness. In Nietzsche's mind, the vigorous will to confront the absence of individuality seems to be the only thing left for modern man.

Modernity is not only vital but fatal. The outcome of modernity is the tragic disappearance of individuality, as could be cautioned by Nietzsche. Baudelaire's dual formulation tells us that modernity could go from the ephemeral to the eternal in order to bestow individuality. Nevertheless, it is not the only course modernity could take, and neither could individuality be realized. Nietzsche's idea of the will to power also suggests that a destructive energy could fluctuate back and forth between two opposing ends, the destructive and the creative. But ultimately it insists on being what it used to be,

miserably resulting in self-destruction of its own creation. Reviewing Nietzsche's intervention, we find it very difficult to give modernity any credit of fulfilling the eternal essence of human nature, namely individuality. Also we deem it necessary to see modernity in a different light. What does it look like now? In the literary tradition, it once corresponds to the Faustian devil that tends to negate and destroy, while it also affirms and creates. We might feel content with the devil as long as the creation promise is fulfilled. But on the other hand, it leaves us discontent, breaks its promise by destroying what it creates. Modernity is the capricious devil who flip-flops, carrying the attribute of self-contradictoriness. It is inconsistent, unreliable, and even deceitful. Modernity is once concerned with the ephemeral, essentially ever-changing. Maybe this is the way it is, being forever volatile. Modernity's merciless act of self-destruction would throw us into the grief of nothingness. Recognizing the tragic route, what is the best way to react to modernity, in a search for a possible solution? This issue has continued to vex modern people ever since the industrial capitalism, and global citizens should learn to cope with such a predicament, as the discontent and insecurity have remained unsettled for centuries.

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