



Modernity

Modernity generally refers to a set of theories that try to explain the meaning of contemporary civilization. These theories are concerned with explanations that engage and encounter the capitalist, neoliberal international world system in order for civilizational survival, maintenance, progress, and advancement as seen in the enlightenment project that ostensibly began with the Industrial Revolution in the west. However, the experience, consciousness and modality of modernity has itself gone through three main reinventions and rejuvenations over the past two hundred years. These are the information, communications, and the consumption revolution. While the information and communications' revolution are intimately interwoven, the one facilitating (while simultaneously implicating) the other as seen in third and fourth generation Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and nano-biotechnology, the consumption revolution is itself a larger and massive reinvention of how goods and services are simultaneously traded and consumed across the globe. Indeed,

the consumption revolution in modernity as we experience it today is often called globalization. A principal characteristic of the consumption revolution is its homogenizing effect on consumers; an effect of capitalism, the driving force of modernity that widens and deepens the modernists' control over the political, social, cultural, and economic environment.¹ Modernity tends to homogenize identity and commodify all goods and services into products for sale and purchase; and as a result, homogenize those who identify with these goods and services. This chapter introduces the main conceptual themes and background to modernity and consumption in Singapore and Malaysia and is organized into the following sections: this book's intention, modernity and political theory, the three major prevailing debates in the literature on modernity, and the Modernity/Resistance (mRf) frame used for explanation and analysis in the book. This chapter concludes with the meaning and nature of consumption, highlights some work done on consumption, and introduces a quantitative description of consumption patterns in Singapore and Malaysia.

Synopsis

Richard Rorty suggests in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989:xiii) that the Platonic endeavor to fuse “public and private” space similarly motivated the search for an answer to “Why is it in one’s interest to be just?” and Christianity’s claim that “perfect self-realization can be attained through service to others...Ever since Hegel however historicist thinkers have tried to get beyond this familiar standoff... there is nothing ‘beneath’ socialization or prior to history which is definatory of the human. Such writers tell us that the question, ‘What is it to be a human being?’ should be replaced by questions like ‘What is it to be rich and inherit a rich twentieth-century democratic society?’ and ‘How can an inhabitant of such a society

¹ See for example the excellent commentary and the significant political question raised by Melissa A. Orlie, “Political Capitalism and Consumption” in Aryeh Botwinick, and William E. Connolly, (eds.), *Democracy and Vision: Sheldon Wolin and the Vicissitudes of the Political* (Oxford and Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 138-160.

be more than an enactor of a role in a previously written script?' ... But even after this substitution takes place, the old tension between the private and the public remains". (Rorty, 1989) Given Rorty's position, it seems to me that the classical foundationalists, and both groups of historicists who freed us from "theology and metaphysics" (and whom that Rorty valiantly tries to reconcile) leave little room for understanding private choice and private consumption today in the early twenty-first century. However, Rorty's Northcliffe lectures (University College, London) and Clarke lectures (Trinity College, Cambridge) certainly provide a useful point of departure for this book.²

By accepting the Rortyan dynamic, it would be prudent, I think, to reject the Habermasian one, especially the latter view in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1985). Rather, we see that Rorty illustrates the differences between Foucault (for us) and Habermas (against us) in stark terms:

Michel Foucault is an ironist who is unwilling to be a liberal, whereas Jurgen Habermas is liberal who is unwilling to be an ironist...and sees [Nietzsche] as leading us to a dead end (Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, 1989:61-2).

The deadening effect of Nietzsche's *telos* is the unseen philosophical guide of this book which proffers a non-Marxist, theoretical approach, the modernity-Resistance-frame (mRf), for examining consumption based on concepts developed in the work of William E. Connolly, Stephen K. White, Gianni Vattimo, Theresa Brennan, and Wendy Brown within late modernity.

Late modernity — the experience and consciousness of global and technological transformation today — does not result in the fusion of "public and private" spaces but in the penetration of private space by public space to the extent that private space becomes conditional, ephemeral, and decrepit. What appears in *Private* is ironically contingent on what is determined by the *Public*. Decisions about consumer goods and services no

² See Michael J. Shapiro, *Reading the Postmodern Polity: Political Theory as Textual Practice* (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 46-47.

longer represent the conscious choices of private, interest-seeking, wealth-maximizing individuals but are symbols of “social status”, “public prescription”, and “public constructions” that are grounded in a foundational fantasy of modernity that involves the theoretical work of Connolly, Vattimo, Brennan, White, and Brown.

Intention

This book focuses on the way in which things are consumed in Singapore and Malaysia in terms of how the patterns of consumer behavior contingently abrogates, qualifies, and affirms the meaninglessness (and meaningfulness), the emptiness and vacuity, and the power and discipline of consumption in late modernity. It promotes the need to think critically about the patterns of consumption across the globe, and in Singapore and Malaysia, and how these public patterns determine the meaning of life in late modernity.

Modernity & Political Theory

The modern period in the disciplines of political philosophy, political theory, and political science may be traced to the writings of John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume who were grouped together and known as the “enlightenment” theorists although many political theorists recognize that the study of politics in the modern period began with the publication of the work of Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* in 1651. For the purposes of this discussion, Hobbes and the enlightenment theorists are considered modern theorists but are not thought of as theorists of modernity.

The difference between “modernity” and “modern” is clear. Modernity is both a civilizational period, and a set of theories that try to explain contemporary civilization. The concept of the “modern” on the other hand is that which is neither traditional nor backward. In the 1950s and 1960s, positivist political science suggested that the world about us could be quantified and systematically illustrated through a reliance on objective

observation and deductive reasoning (of political, social, cultural, and economic phenomena) through the scientific method. Modernization theory provided political scientists with simple conceptual and pedagogical devices that separated tradition from modernity: that tradition was associated with backwardness, subjectivity, irrationality, and bias; while modernity and the modern period is characterized by advancement, progress, objectivity, rationality, technology, and logic. There were two main failures of positivist political science that dominated the study of modernity in the early years of the Cold War: (1) human beings could not be placed in neat boxes for observation and examination, and neither could human beings be reduced to numbers, digits, and data (almost without consequence) as seen in the early empirical theory and research of Dahl, Easton, Lipsett, Almond, Verba, Wildavsky, Cnudde, and Neubauer; and, (2) positivist political science cannot effectively predict human behavior or the outcome of even the most simply held democratic elections. It would be a major victory for neo-positivist political scientists all over the world and punters alike had they predicted the outcome of the 2000 U.S. presidential elections, perhaps even without the benefit of the New Hampshire primaries.

By the 1970s and 1980s, positivist political scientists began a period of hyper-entrenchment of their research in elegant, and highly sophisticated equations that continued deep into the turn of the last century. These quantitative refinements lend an aura of “authority” and “factual” legitimacy to the *science* of politics. The strength of neo-positivist political science (lead by academics such as Gary King at the Center for Basic Research in the Social Sciences at MIT-Harvard University) suggests that quantitative political science remains an important and significant minority within the academic discipline of political science.³ This is not to imply that positivists

³ The seductive language of the “positivists” continues to sound wonderfully “retro” today, and as pro-canonical as it was in its heyday in the late 1950s and early 1970s, seen for example, in the very early work of Michael J. Shapiro, “The House and the Federal Role: A Computer Simulation of Roll-Call Voting”, *The American Political Science Review* (1968), 62 (2): 494-517; Michael J. Shapiro, “Rational Political Man: A Synthesis of Economic and Social-Psychological Perspectives”, *The American Political Science Review*, (1969), 63(4): 1106-1119; and Paul M. Sniderman, and Jack Citrin, “Psychological Sources of Political

and neo-positivists did not possess their own internal mechanisms for self-critique and development as part of a movement towards general theory-building.

Rather than being anti-positivist for the sake of critical exposure, I think that it becomes increasingly important for political scientists interested in quantitative political science and “formal theory” to see for themselves the shortcomings of their chosen methods and practices; while at another part of the methodological spectrum, political scientists who are likely to be more concerned with normative movements and methods in the discipline of political science — consumers of work that consumes us — ought to recognize that even quantitative political science has a place under a plural political cosmology, though it appeared to have rapidly emptied itself out of vigor sometime in the middle of the last century. This work rejects the metanarrative belief systems propagated by the rhetoric of the power elite; discards the universal claims of scientism; and cautions modernists against ephemeral positivist explanations of reality (through enumeration, mathematical reductionism, econometric symbolism, and foundationalism) that serve to seduce the mind while diminishing the mind’s capacity for creative reasoning and thoughtful explanations of modernity.

Modernity and Consumption: Theory, Politics and the Public in Singapore and Malaysia is about being comfortable with “contingency, and indeterminacy” (after White, 2000:6-9) and being satisfied with “less” rather than “more”, ambiguity rather than clarity, and an increasingly blurred division of labor between fact and fiction. This position is allied with a recent and decontextualized ontological turning point in contemporary political theory itself:

...The sense of living in late modernity implies a greater awareness of the conventionality of much of what has been

Belief: “Self-Esteem and Isolationist Attitudes”, *The American Political Science Review*, (1971), 65(2): 401-417. The relatively unique language of the “positivists” has ironically become commodified by modernity itself and may now be bought and sold across libraries, institutions, and other institutional marketplaces.

taken for certain in the modern West. The recent ontological shift might then be characterized generally as the result of a growing propensity to interrogate more carefully those “entities” presupposed by our typical ways of seeing and doing in the modern world.⁴

Stephen K. White’s position makes the assumption that in order for life to exist in late modernity there must exist, at least some level, a certain sense of connectivity between the living being and her modern universe especially with regard to recognizing the largesse of western conventions and certitude. Other scholars however, conceive of the modern universe quite differently.

In the case of Gianni Vattimo, for example, the familiarity of being “modern” is the fundamental value in modernity; and that the central location of such a value in modern interpretation, in modern sense-perception, in modern worldviews, and in modern prescriptions of reality makes being modern invaluable to a point. That point is where the value of “being modern” is centrally located and sited in public spaces everywhere there are reminders of the modern epoch. The need to escape from the problems that beset modernity however does not diminish the central value of being modern. There is nowhere to escape but to modernity and to the value of being modern. This makes vital sense in Vattimo’s work especially where attendant ethical considerations are eventually devalued in the face of modernity, and while universal resources find their way slowly but surely towards the modern public centerpiece, diminishing in their own private identity while increasingly adapting and adhering to the modern public one. Where the only alternative for intellectual empowerment might be through his concept of *pensiero debole* or “weak foundationalist thought”.

Similarly, White’s articulations are unequivocally and eloquently borne out in the hermeneutical discourse of his most recent work, *Sustaining Affirmation* (2000), where he reminds us of the distinction between strong and weak ontology. Strong ontologies such as the premodern and modern

⁴ Stephen K. White, *Sustaining Affirmation: The Strengths of Weak Ontology in Political Theory* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 4; pp. 119-120.

ones are preferred by those communities and individuals who desire deep, metaphysical, epistemological anchors in a basic set of values, and beliefs that provide certitude and the promise of progress and advancement. But there appears to be a shortcoming to this articulation, and if I read White correctly, he argues that strong ontologies provide answers and solutions that potentially offer to “solve” the problems in late modernity. Yet such ontological resolution(s) “demands too much initial forgetfulness of contingency and indeterminacy...strong ontologies involve too much ‘metaphysics’”(White, 2000:8). The problem here for the proponents, interlocutors, interrupters, investigators, and interpreters of late modernity is that they are more likely than not to entangle themselves and get caught between such strong and weak ontological designs as and when they (in effect, us) continue to negotiate and encounter modernity through a theoretical triple-link skein between White’s weak ontology in *Sustaining Affirmation* (2000); Vattimo’s *pensiero debole*, or weak foundationalist thought in *La fine della modernita* (1985), and Kathy E. Ferguson’s conception of “mobile subject[ivitie]s” in *The Man Question: Visions of Subjectivity in Feminist Theory* (1993). Their complex theoretical persuasions are linked via a set of shared commonalities grounded by cultural symbols and economic signs, the political markers of a seemingly ageless modernity.

Modernity & the Mark of Men

The genealogical origins of culture reveal ancient man as marked by fear of the unknown. Unexplained events in nature were attributed to the presence of some divine or superior power. Truth was to be found in knowledge about the divine; as the interlocutors of such secret knowledge, the priesthood became as powerful as (the) god(s). The universe was small and limited to spatial metaphors based on vague abstractions of the sky, sea, and land. Public and private space were idealism and realism conflated. There were no distinctions or differences to be made between one kind of space and another, and if indeed such differences did exist, they were simple and

uninteresting. Theory had no place in the ancient world. The dominant mode of knowledge involved ritual and sacrifice as expedient measures of simple social, political and cultural organization.

Medieval man was marked by faith in the unknown. Unexplained events in nature were attributed to the presence of a larger, secret, and divine-inspired master narrative, a larger and humanly unknowable masterplan that mortals could not conceivably understand nor were expected to understand. Truth was built on knowledge of religious and quasi-religious dogma that was founded on blind faith. Everything conceivable, and every conceivable thing in life, death, and the afterlife had been predestined by a greater power and an unseen entity. Fate was all that medieval man could rely on. As the interlocutors of faith, the priesthood remained powerful but were not as powerful as God since God was removed to the security of a secondary place and an infinite time zone where He could not be seen, nor heard, nor faulted. The earth was at the center of the universe and God's image was in a central position. Public space was occupied by God while private space was occupied by man. God could however visit man in his private space, though this was not possible in the other direction. The distinction between the public and the private was also seen in the division between the Church (or Mosque or Synagogue or Temple) and the State. Theory was based on criticism within the pre-Enlightened religiosity, theological doctrine and canonical dogma.

Modern Man is marked by science. Unexplained events in nature are explained by several competing and competent physical and emotive theories that quantify and diagnose civilization. The Divine masternarrative was displaced and replaced by the Scientific masternarrative. Truth was to be found in knowledge about science and technology, communications' revolutions, systemic, and informational analyses. The modern epoch displaced God and replaced him with Man. As the new interlocutors of the new faith, the scientists assumed power from the religious priests. The earth was no longer at the center of the Enlightened universe, although Man's image now occupied a central position in that cosmology. Man was considered the generic term for women. The distinction between public and private space was clear. Politics stopped at the door, and private space

visited itself upon a public to the extent that it could not and should not remonstrate or violate the private space of another person. The critics of the modern period are postmodern theorists. However, such contemporary theorists as Michael J. Shapiro and William E. Connolly differ by the pastiche of their patterns while offering similar conceptual reflections under different shades of theoretical light. Shapiro for example, once argued, “Whereas contemporary modernists have sought to replace the destabilized bases of objectivity and subjectivity with alternative stabilities — for example, a reliable, universal, and felicitously aimed intersubjectivity in the case of Jurgen Habermas — critical postmodernist thinking is based on an acceptance of instability”.⁵

Postmodern thought and postmodern thinkers — whether they be of the critical, non-Marxist, high octane, or regular “persuasions”, and as Shapiro’s title suggests, “intimations” — tend to accept unstable situations as a tacit recognition of the shifting background of serious and playful narratives that bear the marks and scars, for example, of urban life and urban legend — terrorism, crime, delinquency, husband-beating, murder, rape, arson, loss of property, loss of life, some Acts of God, and most acts of men. Some narratives are partially inherited while other narratives are partially understood and conceived in making sense of the world and of other possible worlds. Unexplained events in nature are always shifting and static. There is no need to explain anything in the natural world because it is mostly unnatural. The postmodern person resents masternarratives and possesses a high sense of disbelief in systemic productions of truth and reality. Truth no longer exists as singular theme but a plural one. There is no universe but multiple layers of multi-verses within the limitations of our three dimensional world. The existence of other worlds is not possible because our entire modern belief system is built and designed on a three-dimensional model of everything. If we could only perceive in six, eight or nine dimensions, death and the afterlife, our systems of morality and ethics, our modes of discipline and punishment would no longer exist. Public space,

⁵ Michael J. Shapiro, “Eighteenth Century Intimations of Modernity: Adam Smith and the Marquis de Sade”, *Political Theory* (1993), 21(2): 289-290.

rather than being fused, collapsed, conflated, or periodically separated in the past is now the primary determinant of private space. The public and private roles of contemporary political theory include: (1) the deconstruction of the discontinuities, inconsistencies, and contradictions in analytical philosophy (2) weakening the weak claims of foundationalism and reductionism in grand narrational strategies; (3) challenging and criticizing post-Enlightenment movements against the romantic movement, the reformation, metaphysical speculation and theology; (4) encountering and disparaging the modern penchant for positivism and the secular support for the quantification of the world and the enumeration of persons; (5) and to reintroduce pathos and pastiche as exemplars of passion, color, plurality, difference, and verve in the late modern post-digital age.⁶

Reviewing Modernity

Jean- Francois Lyotard argues, “Modernity consists in working at the limits of what was thought to be generally accepted, in thought as in the arts, in the sciences, in matters of technology, and in politics.”⁷ How do we know what public and private spaces are about apart from what we receive from our five(-to-six biological) senses? How can we effectively predict “quotidian” activities, and negotiate “immediate” tasks before us with some degree of reliability? How might it be possible to measure with discretion what it means to be modern? These three questions suggest that there must at least exist in language some degree of reasonable expectation on our part that demands a primary dissatisfaction — even disaffection — with our inherent, ordinary, and congenial means of understanding consumer life today. These questions are more than mere doubtful questions about modernity. These

⁶ Consider the import of Shapiro’s treatment of “Politicizing Ulysses — Rationalistic, Critical, and Genealogical Commentaries”, Ch. 2, Michael J. Shapiro, *Reading the Postmodern Polity: Political Theory as Textual Practice* (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 18-36.

⁷ Jean-Fancois Lyotard, *Political Writings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p 24.

doubts pressure us to consider alternative ways of gaining access to knowledge while we simultaneously gain access to the ways of understanding the knowledge that we are rapidly acquiring. Modern people (the moderns) are dependent on modes of measurement, pre-written scripts, complete stereotypes, name-card holders, and prefabricated structures to hold us in place. We are merely moving abstractions of life. We need speed, but can't go too fast for fear of flying-off the handle; we need reliability, but are not always reliable ourselves; we have a need for security, though we make others insecure; we need certitude, but that often detracts certainty from others; and we need perspective, but not too much lest it throws us off balance. Some people want more of modernity, some less, others, none at all, mainly because it is too troublesome and difficult to do the thinking ourselves. Modernity, in that sense, is about revealing perspectives on life. The three questions also require an ability to step back and take a second view of life. The second view is like looking at the scenery, as Neil Postman once mentioned, through the rear view mirror of a speeding car as opposed to looking at it through the windshield. It is about a quest for knowledge over our shoulders. The quest for knowledge in the history of ideas is similar to looking for things but with temporary glances to images of a recent past. These glances fill the little blank spaces between confronting the immediate reality that we face, and the disappearing reality behind us, the disappearing view behind us, the view that eventually becomes so small as to be unrecognizable. The quest for *sophia*, knowledge, or *scientia*, is an expedition that requires a certain sense of disbelief, and a strong sense of the present. The quest for knowledge seems to require a certain sense of disbelief, or at least the temporary suspension of our belief systems because we have to be able to doubt the world around us and not immediately accept whatever might be placed before us. There is a need for a strong sense of the present to "ground" us in some reality at some point in time and space.

Variations on the theme of modernity are not new. The history of ideas suggest an accumulation of different fragments in the disparate work of St. Augustine of Hippo, St. Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant, Sören Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Their political, social, and cultural philosophies continue to resound within and among the

interpretations held variously by Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Sheldon S. Wolin, Charles Taylor, Jurgen Habermas, Judith Butler, Michael J. Shapiro, William E. Connolly, Aryeh Botwinick, Stephen K. White, Susan Moller Okin, Kathy E. Ferguson, Wendy Brown, Quentin Skinner, Charles Larmore, Gianni Vattimo, Thomas L. Dumm, and J. Donald Moon — to name several but not the entire list of proponents of theoretically deep voices that apodictically interrogate modernity on a daily basis. The following section, here and below, reflect some of these voices with the main themes that tie the chapters of this book together.

CONNOLLY

While Shapiro tends towards “language” and “media” centered theoretical analyses of discursive formations, William E. Connolly has carved out his career on a “pluralism-plus” motif.⁸ Connolly believes that a crucial aspect of cosmopolitanism’s modernity works in a complex matrix involving the correlatives of speed, cosmopolitanism and concentric cultures (Connolly, 2000:596-618). Connolly’s says that we are short on time, but potentially long on the plurality of cosmopolitan complexity. He makes a crucial and succinct distinction of modern cosmopolitan life where the political culture of cosmopolitan cities is contingent on the ways in which (1) “time is being sped up” (Connolly, 2000:597); and (2) “the [greater] speed at which we perform tasks today tends towards softening up universal explanations of life” (Connolly, 2000:609). The “speeding up of time”, and the “softening up of universal categories” makes it difficult, indeed, almost impossible to sustain the value and applicability of universal laws. However, Connolly is a serious and skeptical optimist. For him, cosmopolitan modernity lives in the ironic metaphors that center on concentrated images of culture (Connolly, 2000:602).

In an earlier work on the *Ethos of Pluralization* (1995) Connolly speaks of two main kinds of consumption in modernity: exclusionary goods and

⁸ This is stridently different from the younger Connolly as seen in the first edition of the award winning *Terms of Political Discourse* (1974).

inclusionary goods. Connolly's interpretation of exclusionary and inclusionary goods falls under the rubric of Foucault's architectonic unities of systems that are concerned with "internal coherences, axioms, deductive connexions, compatibilities" (Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, 1972:5). This ties in his concepts with the ontological strategy of postmodernism that is closely associated with Foucault. The synchrony between Connolly's concepts and Foucault's projections in the "Analysis of Wealth" is uncanny. It is exemplified in the American political economy:

built around the illusory promise of universalizing exclusionary goods. As it becomes increasingly clear to a variety of constituencies that they are losing ground in this elusive quest, they either drop out of institutional politics or vent their anger on the most vulnerable scapegoats available. An economy built around the elusive promise to generalize exclusionary goods eventually turns against the promise of pluralism, as many caught in the binds it creates respond with restrictive versions of family life, sexual practice, gender authority, race relations, consumption practices, and norms of self-sufficiency rooted in rosy memories of the past.⁹

Carefully constructed and stilted with style, this instructive verse bends our thoughts towards states and economies outside America, contributing to a re-interrogation of the foundational questions of the modern commitment to political power. We do not have to go far to witness the extent of the successes, and the depths of the global impact of these exclusionary goods in the private stores of wealth of the political, social, cultural, and economic

⁹ William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 83.

elite of Singapore and Malaysia.¹⁰ Is there an alternative, a panacea, to such exclusivity? Connolly suggests that,

An inclusive good reverses these pressures. It is susceptible to generalization because its private value increases as it is extended; because its unit social costs are reduced through extension; because state supports for its development and extension reduce the per capita public costs of meeting consumption needs in its domain; and because it curtails economic sources of the politics of revenge against vulnerable constituencies.¹¹

Connolly goes on to exemplify his arguments with illustrations from health care in the United States, the shift from private insurance programs to universal state-sponsored medical political economy; and the re-concentration of public monies towards infrastructural development “in-between” urban and rural America through rapid, people-mover systems. His suggestions regarding the differences between the mass desire for exclusive goods is part of an argument about redirecting our thoughts away from individual expenditure patterns towards taking note and radicalizing the way in which public consumption takes place.

Connolly’s concept is useful for the study of consumption in Singapore and Malaysia where the problems of modernity are stridently similar within a milieu of traditional, cultural and religious resistance to western modernity. Connolly offers all irascible and petulant moderns a powerful and radical pluralist strategy for reconciling the use of private and public time, space, and money in modernity. His strategy continues to evoke important and instructive devices for unlearning the problems that currently appear in the west. Although Connolly has not designed nor designated his

¹⁰ Compare with the analyses of Russell J. Dalton, “Generational Change in Elite Political Beliefs: The Growth of Ideological Polarization”, *The Journal of Politics* (1987), 49(4): 976-997.

¹¹ Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, *ibid.*

strategy for use worldwide, I think that his strategy provides a parsimonious theoretical concept for understanding Southeast Asian modernity and consumption in general, and, for understanding theory, politics, and the concept of the public in Singapore and Malaysia. With the Asian putsch for modernization built on modified versions of the advanced industrial west, the problems that now exist in western modernity will eventually arise in Singapore and Malaysia regardless of how traditionalists and fundamentalists try to subvert the processes of modernity in Southeast Asia. We can already see partial images of Southeast Asia's future in the present political economies of North America and many (former western) European countries. Connolly's strategy on consumption is this: Connolly argues that exclusionary goods decrease the private value while increasing the private costs; exclusionary goods also accentuates the social costs to the detriment of society; and increases the costs to the state and hence the general public burden (Connolly, 1995: 82). Therefore, the state and civil society organizations must cooperate to reduce the consumption of exclusionary goods over inclusionary ones in terms of state and civil society measures and policy implementation (especially of large infrastructural projects) vis-à-vis the *ways* in which goods and services are likely to be consumed rather than the *type* of goods and services that are likely to be produced if only to avoid advanced economic recidivism in these countries.

VATTIMO

In *The End of Modernity* (1988) Gianni Vattimo defines modernity as “that era where the modern becomes a value, or rather, it becomes *the* fundamental value to which all other values refer” (Vattimo, 1989:99).¹² Therefore if the modern is in fact the main value, and consumption — in theory and in practice — becomes subordinated to “the modern” than we have “consumption” embracing all the traits that are considered modern: this

¹² Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 99.

leads to a situation where material and non-material consumption patterns exist for the sake of representing modernity. Therefore consumers continue to consume goods and services because these material and non-material goods and services make the consumers modern, and to be modern is to remain relevant, and to remain relevant is to continue to be needed. Where the definition of modernity as the *primus inter pares* value is highlighted, we immediately see the importance of consuming material and non-material goods as emblematic of staying alive, staying relevant, controlling. For Vattimo, the end of modernity refers to the belief — in his conceptual method of *pensiero debole* or weak foundationalist thought — that all values are meshed and work themselves into the single value of the modern. There is no need for any other value in the world of consumption, indeed, in modernity, since all past, present, and future values are united in the value of “the modern”.

BRENNAN

Theresa Brennan offers similarly didactic work, though apparently less compassionate, in her recent book, *Exhausting Modernity* (2000). Brennan argues that we now have faster and more efficient means of extracting the surplus value of natural substances needed for capitalist production (Brennan, 2000:118) that is evidently built on consumption in terms of her interpretation of a Faustian foundational fantasy:

The desire for instant gratification, the desire to be waited upon, the envious desire to imitate the original, are more troubling in that their universality is more difficult to locate...the desire to know by dismembering and destroying...or the denial of time in relation to power and control.¹³

¹³ Theresa Brennan, *Exhausting Modernity: Grounds for a New Economy* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p.160.

Building on the calculated desires of unthinking moderns, the supporters of neoliberal institutionalism and capitalist reproduction continues to reap huge benefits from mass produced goods and services maintaining the essence of the Faustian fantasy as it is reiterated in consumer behavior and reified in the minds of modern consumers.

WHITE

Stephen K. White's *Sustaining Affirmation* (2000) offers the modern imagination "a greater awareness of the conventionality of what has been taken for certain in the modern West".¹⁴ How do we know for sure that convention is sufficiently knowledgeable a guide as to comfort our belief in the future, and more importantly to act as the harbinger of advancement and progress? Agreeing with Connolly's assessment of late modernity in the latter's *Ethos of Pluralization*, White argues that the conditions of late modernity have "accelerated the drive for further cultural pluralization" and secondly, there is more "aggressive fundamentalization of existing identities".¹⁵ It isn't so much that together, these two theorists have given Americans, and indeed, all non-violent human beings a complex cautionary ontology that engulfs the events surrounding September 11, 2001, in New York City's World Trade Center, the bastion and symbol of global consumption, and global capitalism, if we interpret their work as offering us contemporary philosophical precautions and reminders against the fundamentalization and resistance that terrorism proffers. Rather, the point here is that Connolly and White reveal that domestic public space is not invulnerable to the power of identities, ignorant and unenlightened, that embrace religious fundamentalism, fascism, ultra nationalism, and hyper-communalism despite our search, and Connolly's optimism for discovering — and at some level, disavowing — an affective, self-sustaining disaffection with (the conditions of late) modernity.

¹⁴ White, *Sustaining Affirmation*, *ibid.*

¹⁵ White, *ibid.*, p. 120.

BROWN

In her excellent overture to Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment* in *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (1995), Wendy Brown reminds us that "Foucault takes modernity's most pervasive mode of social power" to be disciplinary power (Brown, 1995:19). The power of Brown's assessment however derives not from her reading of Foucault's exposure of crime, discipline, and punishment; nor his re-conceptualizations of the discursive formations of power, truth and madness of this, "our" civilization. Rather, we are drawn to Brown's comment and sustained energy in terms of the deconstruction of familial hierarchies of control:

Within a general sexual division of labor — female labor within and male outside the household — two roughly contradictory tendencies unfold in the course of capitalism's development. On one side as household production shrinks and (increasingly industrialized) socialized production takes its place, women's varied tasks associated with the double-sided reproduction of labor — generating the new, replenishing what exists — are increasingly privatized and confined to the household, while men's work is increasingly socialized and removed from the home. The steady widening of the spatial separation between "home" and "work" has significant indirect effects: women's work in the home becomes less visible as work, and the constitutive values of the realm of civil society are distinguished from the order of the family...on the other side, the steady movement of "women's work" into the market (production of food and clothing, education and socialization of children, service work of every variety) increasingly reduces women's work in the home to service functions and also erodes the separation between home and market, rendering the membrane between them highly permeable in both directions (Brown, *States of Injury*, 1995: 144).

The disappearance and gradual invisibility of (the recognition of the value of) women's work (and of women *per se*) contradicts the movement of women's work into public spaces and the market spaces where much of consumption takes place. The contradiction arises because the incongruent arrangements of the international neoliberal political economy have resulted in a mismatched, lopsided, and gendered division of labor in late modernity: women cannot be "physically" present at two places at the same time. Yet with the technologization of the home and the market place, it is now possible to be in two places at the same time at least theoretically or cyberspatially: a human being can potentially monitor the household with internet-web cameras positioned in the private/home space while at work any where else in the world. The permeability that Brown suggests increasingly burdens the role and gendered division of labor in the politics of consumption because the structure of patriarchal discursive formations annihilate the need for men to serve home-bound functions (although there appear to be well advertised detractors) and for women to be expected to carry their "traditional" burdens in addition to the expectation of entering the work force and market places of consumption. The net result, says Brown, is the erosion of the familial structure in (what I have paraphrased as the work-gender contradiction thesis). The socio-pathetic contradictions have indeed resulted in feminism as being an historical outcome of such eroded arrangements.

Summary

This introduction helped what Lyotard calls the ability to “distinguish intelligence from the paranoia that gave rise to ‘modernity’”¹⁶ and provided the general theoretical background of modernity, the movement within the classical and historicist debates on the public/private tension, and introduced the major writers and the concepts who influenced the concepts used in this book. The following chapters explain the theories, politics, and the idea of “the public” in terms of the hierarchies of political discourses within the discursive formations of the family, education, narrative, and public space that are explained and analyzed within the modernity/resistance frame (mRf).

¹⁶ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *Political Writings*, “Tomb of the Intellectual” (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 7.

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