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Globalization Theory: A Post Mortem

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‘Globalization’ was the *Zeitgeist* of the 1990s. In the social sciences, it gave rise to the claim that deepening interconnectedness was fundamentally transforming the nature of human society, and was replacing the sovereign state system with a multi-layered, multilateral system of ‘global governance’. A decade later, however, these expectations appear already falsified by the course of world affairs. The idea of ‘globalization’ no longer captures the ‘spirit of the times’: the ‘age of globalization’ is unexpectedly over. Why has this happened? This article argues that ‘Globalization Theory’ always suffered from basic flaws: as a general social theory; as a historical sociological argument about the nature of modern international relations; and as a guide to the interpretation of empirical events. However, it also offers an alternative, ‘conjunctural analysis’ of the 1990s, in order both to explain the rise and fall of ‘globalization’ itself, and to illustrate the enduring potential for International Relations of those classical approaches which Globalization Theory had sought to displace.
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Contents

1. Introduction 3

2. Theoretical Post Mortem 11
   Globalization and social theory 11
   Globalization and historical sociology 15

3. Historical Post Mortem 26
   The nature of conjunctural analysis 29
   ‘Social origins’ of the conjuncture 40
   Inside the vacuum 48
   The waning of the conjuncture 59

4. Conclusion 63

Introduction

The 'age of globalization' is over.[1] There was a period in which that word globalization, seemed to many people to capture the essence of what was going on around them. During the 1990s, activists and politicians, journalists and academics observed the spread of economic liberalization, the rise of new information and communication technologies, the increased salience of international organizations, and the resurgence of a cosmopolitan Human Rights agenda; and many of them believed that the world was opening up to a new form of interconnectedness, that a multi-layered, multilateral system of 'global governance' was emerging, which was set to transform the very nature of international politics. Perhaps, in the end, the temporary but real ascendancy of this belief marks the only sense in which an 'age of globalization' could undeniably be said to have existed. But, at any rate, that period has now passed. The recent disappearance of this word from Anglo-American media and governmental commentaries has been almost as sudden as its meteoric rise a decade ago.

It is not hard to see why this should have happened. After all, the course of events in the real world has radically diverged from the historical expectations associated with the idea of 'globalization'. '[T]hrough a process of progressive, incremental change,' predicted David Held and Anthony McGrew in 1998, 'geo-political forces will come to be socialized into democratic agencies and practices' (1998, 242). If anything, however, recent international developments — including the stymieing of the Kyoto Protocol, the crippling of the International Criminal Court, and the multiple crises of the international organizations (UN, NATO, EU) in the run-up to the second Iraq war — have been dominated by the very opposite process: a vigorous re-assertion of great power national interests. And the talk is therefore now more and more of 'unilateralism' and even 'empire', and less and less of 'multilateralism' and 'global governance' (Cox, 2003). Doubtless, some of those who wrote about 'globalization' in the 1990s will try to shoe-horn current events back into that intellectual framework. But it seems likely that they will face an uphill struggle, and a diminishing audience. For the idea of 'globalization' has now lost that enormous suggestive power, which derived from its temporary, subjective correspondence to the lived experience of the times. It was that effortless correspondence which made it such a dominant intellectual and cultural motif of the 1990s. Not any more. 'Globalization' today is yesterday's *Zeitgeist*.

To suggest that 'globalization' was a *Zeitgeist* is not to say that the events that generated it were insignificant. 'The dispute between globalists and sceptics' was, as Linda Weiss insisted '*not* about the *reality* of change; it [was] about the nature and significance of the changes underway as well as the driving forces behind them' (1999, 59). Huge changes did indeed occur during

the 1990s. The international system itself underwent a major restructuring. But the idea, so current at the time, that underlying this restructuring was a spatio-temporal transformation of human existence, 'globalization', which was carrying us rapidly into a post-Westphalian or even post-international 'global' future, seems now to be passing away. It no longer clearly speaks to what is happening in international relations. In retrospect it will perhaps increasingly be seen as a conjunctural phenomenon of the 1990s — reflecting, but not explaining, the experience of those years.

An entire academic literature — the literature of Globalization Theory — has arguably been left high and dry by this turn of events. The best-known names in that literature included Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck, David Held, Tony McGrew, Manuel Castells and Zygmunt Bauman; but it attracted a much wider following across the social sciences. And what united the various contributions to Globalization Theory in the end were two distinctive and extremely ambitious claims about the contemporary world and how to understand it.

First, they argued, 'globalization' — variously manifested in the collapse of military and ideological divisions, the transnational integration of the world to form a single social space, and the rise of new patterns of 'deterritorialized' social relations enabled by new means of communication — was producing a fundamental shift in the spatio-temporal constitution of human societies. And second, the consequences of this shift were turning out to be so profound that they revealed in retrospect a basic lacuna in the classical tradition of social theory. Formulated in an earlier age, when the 'territorialist' basis of social life was still intact, that tradition could not discern how much of what it analysed was in fact contingent upon spatial and temporal orderings of social life which would later be transcended. 'Globalization', it was therefore argued, also brought with it the need for a new, post-classical social theory, in which the categories of space and time would receive the central explanatory role which they had always deserved.

To identify Globalization Theory in this way, of course, is to focus on one particular strand of a vast literature — namely, that strand which not only emphasized the centrality of growing interconnectedness to late-20th century social change, but also sought to provide the sociological underpinnings for a corresponding revision of social theory itself in line with the nature of this change. Very few writers, it is true, tried to rise to this challenge. Arguably, however, the work of those who did occupied a strategic position in the literature as a whole. For it was upon their success or failure that the overall provenance of the concept of 'globalization' ultimately depended. Success would finally anchor the premise which was operative across the field — namely that the term 'globalization' identified the causality involved in a fundamental transformation of social existence. Failure would leave it adrift on

the same tide of intellectual fashion which first raised it to prominence, and without any independent intellectual ability to hold its position when that tide receded.

And it is worth recalling just how ambitious and all-encompassing these claims became during the high tide itself. When Martin Albrow (1996, 4) wrote about 'the supplanting of modernity by globality', he expressed in its starkest form a common belief that the term 'globalization' identified a social change of *epochal* dimensions. Moreover, when Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash reported that globalization had now become 'the central thematic for social theory', they described this change as comprising above all else 'the spatialisation of social theory' (1995, 1). Jan Aart Scholte struck a similar chord when he argued that the traditional social sciences had been shaped by a 'methodological territorialism' which prevented them from seeing the reality of globalization, and that it was therefore necessary to produce nothing less than 'a paradigm shift in social analysis' (1999, 18). Anthony Giddens implicitly claimed to have provided the new paradigm in his 'problematic of time–space distanciation', offered as a replacement for 'existing sociological perspectives' (1990, 16). So too did Manuel Castells, whose concept of a 'network society' was designed to illuminate a newly dominant social reality 'organized around the space of flows and timeless time' (Held and McGrew, 2000, 80). Meanwhile, Zygmaunt Bauman proposed nothing less than a rewriting of human history based on what he called 'the retrospective discovery' of the centrality of spatial distance and speed of communication in the constitution of all societies (1998, 15). All in all, Michael Mann was not exaggerating when, surveying the scene in 1997, he remarked that '[t]he human sciences seem full of enthusiasts claiming that a new form of human society is emerging' (Held and McGrew, 2000, 137).[2]

The sheer enormity of these claims should perhaps have rendered them theoretically implausible from the start. Today, however, intellectual scepticism might well draw empirical reinforcement from the events of recent years. And increasingly it appears that the supposed need for a new social theory has been unexpectedly overtaken by a quite different need. The strange death of 'globalization' now requires a two-fold 'post-mortem' examination of the whole idea of 'globalization' itself. One part, mainly theoretical, must be a dissection of the *concept* of 'globalization', to determine how and where it went so wrong as a basis for social theory. But we also now need an historical post mortem — an *empirical* reassessment of the 1990s in order to provide an alternative explanation of what was actually going on in this period, and why therefore the idea of 'globalization' became the craze that it did.

In the following pages, each of these is attempted in turn. And the scale of the revision which this entails may be gauged by briefly summarizing one result

of the historical post mortem now, before returning to it in more detail later on.

What were the 1990s about? The answer given by Globalization Theory was broadly as follows. Social changes in the West combined with the end of the Cold War to remove the fetters on transnational forces of all kinds; and those forces, newly armed with the latest communications technologies, finally had a free hand to integrate the globe. As the transnational interconnections proliferated, state sovereignty would become increasingly unworkable. In its place was emerging a new 'post-Westphalian' system of multi-lateral world governance, which would increasingly consign traditional international relations to the past. This is what they meant when they said that the future was 'global'.[3] (And in fact they had to mean something like this; for nothing less than transformation on this scale could have justified the idea that 'globalization' necessitated a new paradigm for social science.)

Yet in retrospect, it can now be suggested that something very different was happening. The Soviet collapse in the East and the deregulating thrust of neo-liberalism in the West were indeed central to the events of the decade. But what their combination, in fact, produced was a distinct, and in some ways self-contained historical conjuncture, in which the filling of a socio-political vacuum (generated by the Soviet collapse and its effects) created an enormous *sense* of temporal acceleration and spatial compression — but one which could by definition only be temporary. When this process of filling the vacuum came to an end, the salience of the spatio-temporal phenomena which produced Globalization Theory would start to fade — because it was the *movement* of the process which generated that salience. Like a misleading statistical projection, based on an uncorrected extrapolation from the peak of a cycle, Globalization Theory was thus doomed to misread both the direction and the momentum of the historical process. The future, it turns out, is not 'global' in the sense that they meant it. In fact, the actual historical movement which was called 'globalization' is already in the past.

A close-up empirical argument of this kind cannot by itself provide the historical reinterpretation of the 1990s which our post mortem ultimately requires. (For that we shall need both a longer timescale and an intellectual return to the discarded resources of classical social theory.) If it could be substantiated, however, this argument would clear the ground for that constructive re-interpretation in three important ways. First, it would identify what it was about the course of events in that decade which produced the peculiar idea that spatio-temporal change was the axis around which a wider social change was turning — and why, therefore, 'globalization' became the *Zeitgeist* of the 1990s. This, secondly, might help to clarify the nature of the wrong turn at the origin of Globalization Theory: for by attempting to transform this *Zeitgeist* into a social scientific concept, the Globalization

Theorists were led to do the opposite of what social theorists are supposed to do. Instead of acting as interpreters to the spirit of the age, they became its ideological amplifiers. Instead of deconstructing the popular *Zeitgeist*, they elevated it to the role of an intellectual *Weltgeist*. And if this is indeed what happened, it would also, finally, explain why they were bound to be wrong-footed when the conjuncture closed, the *Zeitgeist* evaporated, and the worldview of 'globalization' itself started to recede into history.

* * *

How should we go about conducting the overall post mortem proposed above? Here the nature of the subject matter must have a voice. The passing of a *Zeitgeist* is a cultural event of a special kind. It brings with it a distinctive mix of intellectual challenges and opportunities. Three of these in particular have governed the writing of this article, and may go some way to excusing its inordinate length.

From the moment its cultural zenith is passed, a ruling idea of this kind begins to manifest a growing inability to make sense of the continuing historical process; and as the empirical contradictions mount up, they increasingly throw into relief the intellectual limitations of the idea itself, limitations previously obscured by its temporary subjective correspondence to the lived experience of social reality. Criticism of the *Zeitgeist* now becomes conclusive in ways that it could not be during the period of its ideological ascendancy. Only now, therefore, is a post mortem even possible.

At the same time, however, this process of decline leaves behind an intellectual gap — a gap which is larger than could be caused by the invalidation of any purely empirical claims or expectations. For the ideological power of a *Zeitgeist* lies not least in its temporary ability to resolve (or suspend) within its worldview a range of fundamental questions about the nature of social reality and the means by which that reality can be understood. In the case of 'globalization', this ideological resolution was unusually ambitious, yielding distinctive interlocking premises about the nature of human society, the relations between its domestic and international dimensions, and the dynamics and periodization of historical change — all of which were arguably unguarded extrapolations into social theory of the subjective experience of the *Zeitgeist*. The historically local event of the passing of such an idea therefore stimulates a re-opening of these more general and enduring questions of social scientific knowledge production. Compelled to answer these questions anew, we hereby rejoin (and might hope to advance) debates whose significance extends far beyond our immediate imperative of collective intellectual recovery. In fact, in the case of International Relations, the questions we must re-answer are fundamental to any prospect of a fuller,

historical sociological understanding of its object. Faced with this opportunity, our post mortem should therefore not remain only a post mortem.

Finally, this moment of passage brings not only new opportunities for critique and constructive theorizing, but also a fresh field of human experience in which to deploy and evaluate the latter. As the imaginative hold of the *Zeitgeist* weakens, the historical period which had unfolded under its thrall begins for the first time to become available for re-analysis — inviting us to unite all the opportunities of the moment in a composite historical and theoretical re-interpretation of the recent past. Ultimately, we can and must move beyond a short-term explanation of the *Zeitgeist* (such as that sketched above), and into a wider historical reinterpretation of the 1990s themselves. By the end, the object of critique and the proposed replacement should both be visible, ranged side by side on a common field of historical explanation.

How then are these tasks taken up in the pages that follow? The elements of the first of them are perforce distributed across the article as a whole: this is, after all, a 'post-mortem' examination of Globalization Theory. The movement of the argument traces a line from social theory through historical sociology and into the historical analysis of the 1990s. At each level, in successive sections of the article, a different aspect of Globalization Theory is subjected to critique: first its methodological foregrounding of space and time; then its substantive belief in the significance of transnational relations for the transformation of sovereignty; and finally, its particular reading of the 1990s in the light of that belief. This three part movement from the abstract to the concrete is also designed to facilitate a cumulative refinement of the diagnosis: from an initial, general designation of 'globalization' as a *Zeitgeist* (rather than a plausible social scientific concept); through the identification of its symptomatic affinities with the experience of capitalist development; and into the pin-pointing of its concrete production and dissolution in the unique international conjuncture of the 1990s.

I hope that this direct critique of Globalization Theory succeeds. In the longer view, however, it responds to the least significant of the three opportunities mentioned above. And by the time it is complete, the argument will therefore have been widened considerably, in order to address the other two opportunities as well. In order to fill the intellectual gap which 'globalization' has left behind, two large questions will need to be re-answered, *en route* to the concluding re-interpretation of the 1990s. The first concerns the relation of social theory to historical explanations in general, while the second involves the particular significance of international relations for such explanations. And they will arise in the following way.

In the course of the theoretical post mortem, we shall draw out an alternative, Marxian conception of the interrelation of sovereignty and transnational relations. Framed within Marx's general theory of capitalist

society, however, this move will leave us confronting a much broader epistemological question when we arrive at the historical section of the post mortem: how, if at all, can such a general social theory be combined with detailed empirical analysis in order to theorize a sequence of historical *events*? If we cannot provide a positive answer to this question, then our alternative account of the 1990s would have to be restricted to a purely empirical description of immediate causes and effects — such as that already invoked in the image of the 'vacuum'. And yet the tradition of classical social theory, which we are also invoking, promised more than that. By extrapolating their analyses into the identification of (abstract) developmental tendencies, these writers sought to extend the explanatory reach of their concepts into the movement of events itself — an extension which, however, fraught with dangers, remains foundational for any discourse of historical sociology (Abrams, 1982, 79–82). If we allow these dangers to be conclusive, then the promise of historical sociology itself would have to be given up. And in order to avoid this outcome, the historical section of this article opens with an *excursus*, which attempts to reconstruct an historical method of 'conjunctural analysis' — a methodological bridge between social theory and empirical history which will then be used to frame the attempted reinterpretation of the 1990s that follows.

In building this re-interpretation, however, we shall encounter a second question, which also needs re-answering. And this time, the answer cannot be found in the tradition of classical social theory itself. Globalization Theory, we shall argue, was wrong to proclaim the imminent dissolution, even partial, of the 'international' dimension of social life into some broader 'global' condition. If so, however, a conjunctural analysis, which draws upon classical social theory, is drawn into a further problem which must now be overcome: how can we integrate the explanatory significance of this *international* dimension into the schemas of a tradition of thought which was, at the deepest theoretical level, largely silent on the matter? This non-integration of the international into classical theories of social development has long been identified as a stumbling block for attempts to deploy those theories directly in the field of international relations (Waltz, 1959; Berki, 1971). The problem, I would argue, is real, but not insoluble. It is real because the 'international context' of modern social development is not, and never has been, external to explaining the course of that development. On the contrary, within the increasingly worldwide socio-historical process initiated by the emergence of modern capitalist society, relations and interactions *between* societies have been the site of distinctive causal dynamics whose operation has deflected the movement of events, both domestic and international, substantially away from anything which could have resulted from a unilinear path of endogenous development alone. Indeed, so pervasive and systematic has this influence been that one must wonder

whether the failure to conceptualize it affects not only the ability of classical social theory to furnish international theories, but even the adequacy of its conception of its own subject matter — the modern developmental process itself.

Yet the terms of a solution to this problem are clear enough. Having re-asserted the claims of historical sociology in general, we now need to find an actual historical sociological theory in which these specifically international causal dynamics are rediscovered as internal to the overall historical process of social development. If we cannot find such an approach, then our critical engagement with Globalization Theory will have re-opened the question of historical sociology in international relations only to leave it straddled uncertainly across the existing opposition between sociologically and geopolitically grounded forms of explanation. It is for this reason that we shall turn, when applying our conjunctural method, to the theory of uneven and combined development. For in this theory the international dynamics referred to above have been systematically worked into that conceptual derivation of developmental tendencies through which historical sociology — any historical sociology — seeks a lien on the historical process. And the result is not only a radically altered theoretical conception of the modern developmental process. It is also one which, when deployed in a conjunctural analysis, appears to re-open the empirical course of 20th century history itself — including its denouement in the 1990s — to what might be called an international historical sociological explanation.

Harnessed to the narrower critique of Globalization Theory, these constructive reflections come to a head in the historical re-interpretation of the 1990s which concludes the critique. And the reason should by now be apparent. For it was suggested above that the inner reflex of Globalization Theory was an unreflected extrapolation of a *Zeitgeist* into the realm of social theory, from where, having elbowed out the assumptions and resources of more traditional approaches, it became the basis of a systematic misinterpretation of real-world events. Such a suspicion, however, if it is to be confirmed, requires a convincing application of the reverse procedure: ultimately we must show how those same resources can be used both to bring the *Zeitgeist* back to earth, and to mount a better historical explanation of the events that gave rise to it. Thus, the historical section of the argument turns in the end on the cumulative substantiation of three main claims. First, the undeniably dramatic *spatio-temporal* phenomena of the 1990s were overwhelmingly produced by a process of *social* change — and not *vice versa*. Second, the climax of this social change was driven largely by the temporary pressures generated by the 'vacuum' described above — rather than reflecting the epochal emergence of 'a new form of human society'. But finally, in order for the nature of this change to be fully understood, that 'vacuum' itself needs to be located as a

conjunctural moment in a longer socio-historical process of uneven and combined development set in train by the emergence and expansion of capitalist society. Adjusted in this way (both to the methodological requirements of historical explanation and to the substantive significance of 'the international'), the classical Marxian analysis should then come back into its own, enabling us to resolve what was perhaps the central conundrum of Globalization Theory, namely the fate of political sovereignty in this period.

If this argument succeeds, then the international conjuncture of the 1990s, which appeared so exceptional at the time, may become recognizable within that framework of classical social theory which Globalization Theory had sought to replace. And if the methodological challenges encountered along the way have been overcome, then the basis for an historical sociological approach in the field of International Relations may also have been strengthened. One day, after all, the follies of Globalization Theory will be only a memory. But the need for International Relations to reflect historically and theoretically upon its subject matter will still be there.

Theoretical Post Mortem

Looking back from the present day onto the literature of Globalization Theory, is it now possible to pin-point the intellectual problems that made it liable to the fate described in the Introduction above? Arguably there were at least two such problems — problems that were, in fact, perfectly visible throughout the 1990s, even before we knew the historical end of the story. The first of these concerns its ambitions regarding social theory in general, while the second is bound up with its implied historical sociology of modernity in particular. Let us consider each of these in turn.

Globalization and social theory

The problem of 'globalization' and social theory may be summarized briefly in three steps.[4] First, the word 'globalization' is a geographical term, denoting a process over time of spatial change — the process of becoming worldwide. Twist and turn this word as you will, space, time and a reference to the shape of the planet are its only intrinsic contents. *Prima facie*, it contains nothing else which can be drawn upon in order to explain any real-world phenomena it is used to describe.

In this respect, it differs markedly from, for example, the word 'capitalism', which specifies a particular nexus of social relationships — centred upon private property and wage labour — from which spatial and temporal implications, among others, might be argued to follow. Many writers have

worked in this latter way, reasoning from the distinctive relational form of capitalist society to an explanation of modern spatio-temporal phenomena. Among the richest contributions have been those by Thompson (1991) (first published in 1967), Nicos Poulantzas (1978), Donald Lowe (1982), David Harvey (1975, 1990) and Robert David Sack (1980, 1986). And of course this was the direction of Marx's argumentation too. Marx was far from inattentive to spatio-temporal phenomena: he returned repeatedly to the spatially 'universalizing tendency of capital', the 'annihilation of space by time', the deterritorializing properties of commodity exchange, and the constantly increasing tempo of both production and circulation.[5] Indeed, these were not marginal features in his analysis of capitalism, but rather central dynamics arising from its 'laws of motion' — and no-one was more impressed than Marx by their ongoing result: the creation 'of world history for the first time' (Marx and Engels, 1976, 73). And yet, as with all the other writers just mentioned, this result was identified as an emergent property of a particular historical form of human society — a procedure which, incidentally, expanded the remit of sociological analysis from simply charting the impact of a spatio-temporal change to specifying its human relational dynamic.

By contrast, the term 'globalization' in itself specifies no particular kind of society at all, but simply denotes a process of worldwide spatial expansion and integration *per se*.

Second, and for this reason, any attempt to involve this term in the explanation of large-scale social change faces an inevitable choice: either it must — consciously or otherwise — incorporate a social theory drawn from elsewhere, of what is being 'globalized', why, and with what effect — for none of these is visibly intrinsic to the term; or, alternatively, it must — again, consciously or otherwise — claim that the necessary social theory can after all be derived within the term, because space and time themselves are the foundational parameters of social explanation.

In the former case, the explanatory standing of 'globalization', however great, is ultimately derivative. Indeed in the overall scheme of explanation, it remains a primarily descriptive term, identifying an *explanandum*. In the latter case, however, it becomes itself the *explanans* of the argument, and can legitimately function as such only insofar as a spatio-temporal reformulation of social theory succeeds. In this contrast lies the distinction between a 'theory of globalization' and Globalization Theory. And when that distinction is applied to the literature, it reveals a substantial body of writers for whom 'theories of globalization' were not enough: convinced of the world-historic significance of contemporary developments, they believed that a fundamental revision of social theory was indeed necessitated; and, reversing the polarity of *explanans* and *explanandum* identified above, they took up the challenge of Globalization Theory. From this point onwards, the direction of the resulting argumentation

was set ineluctably by the intellectual requirements of that challenge. One way or another, the starting point was always, and necessarily, the purification of 'globalization' into a spatio-temporal concept; and claims for the real world significance of 'globalization' as an empirical phenomenon then became dependent upon the successful application of this concept to explain contemporary social change.

Yet here, thirdly, lay the nub of the problem. There is no question that the relational form of any given society is inseparable from particular orderings (practical and imaginative) of space and time. Both classical social theory and the contemporary disciplines of Anthropology, History, Geography and Sociology furnish rich explorations of how and why different kinds of society have 'produced' space and time in different ways. However, the call for a spatio-temporal problematic for social science as a whole demanded more than this. For, as we have already noted, it implied a claim that the spatio-temporal dimension of human social reproduction is in some way ontologically prior to other dimensions — and therefore legitimately constitutes the starting point for social explanation. And once again, we should remind ourselves that (for example) Giddens' theory of 'time–space distanciation' rested ultimately on just such a claim: social analysis, he argued, should proceed by identifying the ways in which different societies achieve the 'binding' of space and time through which the ontological security of their members is maintained (1990, 14).

Now, it is not easy to say in principle why such claims are invalid — not, at any rate, without presupposing alternative starting points (such as 'relations of production'), which themselves can have no *a priori* justification. Indeed, this whole line of criticism might initially seem rather obscure and even pedantic to the point of triviality. Yet the error being identified here has a familiar name: misplaced concreteness. And its consequences, here as elsewhere, were anything but trivial. For again and again in this literature, the attempt to ground sociological explanation in a spatio-temporal definition of social structures produced instead a systematic reification of space and time themselves: the causal properties of particular social relations that were undergoing spatio-temporal expansion or compression were instead attributed to the expansion or compression itself. This in turn placed an explanatory weight on the phenomenon of time–space compression *per se* which it could not possibly bear: just how much causality, for example, could one really squeeze out of the fact of real-time communication between stockmarkets in itself, without including (knowingly or not) the causal properties of the specifically capitalist social relations which are the substance of the communication (and arguably also the source of its acceleration)?

Consequently, explanations of social phenomena, which claimed to be based on spatio-temporal analyses, were always beset by one of two problems. Either

they were indifferent to the qualitative form of specific social relations, which rendered them incapable of explaining the sources of power and causation to which these forms gave rise (Giddens' discussion of the 'disembedding' properties of 'abstract systems' had this characteristic); or, alternatively (as in the case of Bauman), the explanation turned out to have included these other sources of causality all along, in which case its self-designation as a specifically spatio-temporal explanation was heavily vitiated — together with the grounds it supposedly provided for the pursuit of a new problematic.

In the writings of Globalization Theory, this negative antimony led to intellectual difficulties that were so severe that the outright collapse of the argument was only ever avoided in one of two ways: either the spatio-temporal claims were tacitly withdrawn before the end of the argument (as indeed occurred in the writings of both Giddens and Bauman); or they were so heavily qualified from the start that no clear argument could emerge at all (a spectacle which could be observed variously in the works of Held *et al.*, Castells, and Jan Aart Scholte). Either way, the resulting argumentation came to resemble the intellectual equivalent of an architectural folly — the structure could not be completed without destroying the effect; it was necessarily built as a ruin. To be sure, no concept is without explanatory limits and weaknesses, and these always need to be acknowledged through qualification when it is applied. But that process ought to clarify and strengthen the argument being made. What distinguishes a concept as an intellectual 'folly' is that the qualifications involved in its application are necessarily of such a kind that they add up to a *retraction* of the argument itself, without however being recognised as such by their author.[6]

This phenomenon of the folly recurred so regularly in these writings that, in the absence of other explanations, it seems reasonable to conclude that it reflected a systematic flaw in the entire enterprise of Globalization Theory. And, given what has been said above, it seems likely that this flaw lay in the common starting point of these writings, a bold inversion of the normal designation of *explanans* and *explanandum*: sociological explanation of spatio-temporal phenomena was not just supplemented with but actually displaced by attempted spatio-temporal explanation of social change. Nothing less, to be sure, could have vindicated the elevation of 'globalization' from an empirical, descriptive category to an alternative problematic for social theory *tout court*. But the penalty was all too clear: there was, and is, a limit to how deeply the categories of space and time may safely be inserted into the logical structure of social explanation. The foundational claims of Globalization Theory themselves carried it over that limit. This was its general problem — a problem that was never overcome. Towards the end of the 1990s, the authors of *Global Transformations* reported 'somewhat surprisingly' that there still existed 'no cogent theory of globalization, nor even a systematic analysis

of its primary features' (Held *et al.*, 1999, 1). But this was not for want of trying.

To conclude this opening section of the argument: the concept of 'globalization' remained intellectually unstable from its arrival at the start of the 1990s right up till it faded from the screen at their end. But this was not simply, as was sometimes implied, because writers disagreed over the measurement or even the significance of various quantitative indicators. The cause was at once deeper and more straightforward than that. Quite simply, the enormous subjective plausibility of the idea was never matched by an equivalent theoretical potential for orienting coherent social analysis. World-wide social changes were indeed occurring during the 1990s; and these changes do indeed, as will be argued later on, explain the rise of the idea of 'globalization'. But the reverse never applied. The idea of 'globalization' could not in turn explain the changes. It was a *Zeitgeist*, not a proto-scientific concept. And the attempt to turn it into the latter, however understandable, could only generate confusion and equivocation, in short, 'follies'.

Perhaps, however, we should turn the force of those last two sentences around: with intellectual liabilities like these, such an idea could spread across the social sciences only if, as *Zeitgeister* do, it corresponded powerfully, in all its inner confusion, to the subjective experience of the times. And spread it certainly did.

Globalization and historical sociology

As the 1990s wore on, there was a rapid widening of the disciplinary range of idioms in which the 'globalization thesis' was propounded. Economists, sociologists, political scientists and philosophers, geographers, writers in the fields of development studies, literary and cultural studies, and of course in international relations — added their distinctive voices to the many-sided discourse. (e.g., see Benyon and Dunkerly, 2000; Held and McGrew, 2000) And within this expanding variety a further axis of differentiation was opened up by a group of writers who rejected the simplistic claims of those they termed 'hyperglobalists', seeking instead a more empirically nuanced and theoretically moderate 'transformationalist' version of the argument (Held *et al.*, 1999, 7ff.).

For all that, however, the 'great globalization debate' (Held and McGrew, 2000, 1) necessarily turned on a common empirical referent: the real-world basis on which the Globalization Theorists actually tried to erect their spatio-temporal arguments was the rising volume of transnational flows and relations in the contemporary international system — and the idea that these must at some point qualify, transform or even spell the end of the territorial principle of political sovereignty and/or its supposed Economic, Sociological, Cultural and Philosophical corollaries (Weiss, 1999, 64). The rise and rise of

transnational connections of all kinds was thus the concrete historical phenomenon through which the *transformative* agency of globalization was supposedly operating.

This idea did not always lie visibly on the surface of the writing. Thus, for Giddens, in what became the most influential of all the sociological definitions used in the literature, '[g]lobalization can… be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa' (1990, 64). This definition makes no explicit claim at all about the causal significance of the phenomenon to which it refers. Perhaps it drew its protean appeal from this very fact. Yet without such a claim being assumed, no determinate implication about major social change could follow. The assumption therefore may have been buried at different levels in the writings of different authors. But it was always there. It had to be. Nothing but this assumption could transform empirical observation into the foundation of a causal argument. And in this way, the *social theoretical* assumption about the centrality of space and time to social explanation was necessarily supplemented by a *historical sociological* assumption about the nature of modern societies and their political inter-relation. Specifically, and irrespective of all the wild speculations about space and time, Globalization Theory had tied itself to a particular analysis of the nature of modern political sovereignty itself.

Were that analysis to prove mistaken — if there were no necessary contradiction between the indefinite expansion of transnational relations and the persistence of territorial sovereignty — then the basis for expecting a transformation in the very nature of world politics would disappear. But remove *that* empirical expectation, and Globalization Theory would no longer have had an epochal claim to make.

In vain, therefore, did the self-designated 'transformationalists' insist that such an expectation 'represents a crude zero-sum view of power', that it '(mistakenly) assume[s] that state power was much greater in previous epochs', and that '[n]either the sovereignty nor the autonomy of states is simply diminished…' (Held *et al.*, 1999, 440–441). All this was true enough. The trouble was, by the time that they were through with adding all the necessary qualifications, the real-world significance of 'globalization' had been so whittled away that it was hard to see on what grounds it was any longer being offered as the central orienting concept for contemporary analysis. '[I]n the contemporary period', they finally argued, 'processes of globalization are closely associated with, although by no means the sole cause of, a transformation or reconstitution of the powers of the modern nation-state' (1999, 436). Such a judicious conclusion seems unlikely to bear the weight of heavy claims for 'globalization'. Yet such claims were nonetheless apparently forthcoming in the same text: 'Globalization is an idea whose time has come…

at the dawn of a new millennium, globalization is a central driving force behind the rapid social, political and economic changes that are reshaping modern societies and world order…'; we are witness to 'the unfolding "global transformation"', and so on (1999, 1, 7, 31). Perhaps this was because the 'transformationalists', however much they criticized the 'hyperglobalists', had after all set off down the same road — endorsing 'globalization' as a central category of contemporary analysis, distilling the same spatio-temporal element as definitive,[7] and needing therefore to assert and reassert its significance even in the face of their own accumulating reservations. But those reservations, while allowing these writers to avoid the extreme conclusions of the 'hyperglobalists', only intensified the folly-like characteristics of the argument. And in fact they were not sufficient to release that argument from the key historical sociological assumption which, as we shall now discuss, was generating the problems.

The analysis of sovereignty to which Globalization Theory had tied itself was not new. Epitomised in the idea of a 'Westphalian System', it was taken over uncritically from the very tradition of orthodox international theory, which was now held to be outdated in the contemporary world. In this idea of the Westphalian System, the Globalization Theorists certainly found a vision of the past against which their image of a 'globalizing' present could be dramatically contrasted. After all, if one starts with a model of the international system defined by the political interaction of territorially defined entities — and especially if one takes this juridical model for an empirical description — then the enormous volume of transnational flows and interconnections today is bound to appear little short of revolutionary.

In historical sociological terms, however, the *mis*reading of modern sovereignty which the whole notion of a 'Westphalian System' involved was arguably of so fundamental a kind that the end result was the opposite of that desired: instead of allowing decisive confirmation of the existence and transformative scale of the phenomenon of 'globalization', this 'myth of 1648' (Teschke, 2003) condemned Globalization Theory to an endless *empirical* equivocation which complements and compounds the theoretical equivocation mentioned earlier.[8]

For no-one could deny that these transnational relations had a long history of their own, reaching back deep into the 'quintessentially territorialist' Westphalian era, and prompting Scholte, among others, to concede that 'globalization' had somehow 'made earlier appearances' on the historical stage (Scholte, 2000, 8, 57). But if so, why had it not transformed the Westphalian System *then*?

This problem could not be neutralized by asserting the quantitatively undeveloped scale of the 'earlier appearances'. Since the capitalist world economy has more or less doubled in size every 30–40 years since it first

emerged, it has always been possible to point to recent dramatic advances in scale and scope. Yet the same applies to the leading sovereign states themselves over the same period: they have also dramatically increased the scale and scope of their powers. The argument therefore had to turn on claims about changing *relative* increases of power across these two spheres, not *absolute* increases over time within either one of them. And here it ran into insuperable difficulties.

For there was in the 19th century one state, the British state, at the centre of a vast eruption of transnational relations, which made its own fate dramatically dependent on them through its unilateral declaration of free trade in 1846; and which actively fostered their expansion into a specifically 'non-territorial' informal empire alongside its more visible territorial empire of the time. And yet nobody, apparently, argues that this transnationalization of British society challenged the sovereignty or territoriality of the Victorian English state. And yet, if it did not, on what precise grounds should the continued expansion of transnational relations today be expected to undermine the sovereign form of the states-system? At this point, equivocation could become very intense: on the one hand, 'globalization… fundamentally changes the map of social relations… We no longer inhabit a territoria*list* world.' '…[A] large accumulation of data… suggests a significant trend away from territorialist social organization. …Evidence now abounds that contemporary globalization poses far-reaching challenges…' And yet, on the other hand, 'globalization has not displaced deeper social structures in relation to production… governance… community… and knowledge…'; indeed, '[m]uch more globalization — more than is in prospect for a long time to come — would need to take place before territorial space became irrelevant'; or even: 'globalization is not antithetical to territoriality' (Scholte, 2000, 61, 58, 8, 59–60, 60). In such phrases, the epochal predictions of Globalization Theory could suddenly dissolve in a sea of qualifications.

And once again, the problem raised by this equivocation was a truly basic one: either the accelerated rise of transnational relations was indeed of such a nature as ultimately to transgress and undermine the existing order of things — in which case it should have been possible to specify and project their transformative impact without excessive, retractive qualification; or, alternatively, it was all more complicated for some reason, in which case the original claim that 'globalization' embodied a 'fundamental' change would have had to be given up, and the 'mantle of a new paradigm' (Held and McGrew, 2000, 1) for social science would have had similarly to be discarded.

But there were always other possible explanations for this conundrum. What if the notion of an ultimately contradictory relationship between sovereignty and transnational relations, that *sine qua non* of Globalization Theory, was itself simply wrong?[9] Curiously enough, one does not have to look far to find a basis for such a view. The classical author most widely credited with having

'anticipated' the climax of 'globalization' itself is of course Karl Marx (Scholte, 2000, 96). Yet Marx's analysis of capitalism provides a powerful historical sociological argument for believing that modern political sovereignty is not just fully compatible with transnational social relations: in Marx's schema, modern political sovereignty is one of their key preconditions.

It may help at this point to clarify the argument of the last few pages, and to fix its direction for the remainder of this section. In the course of excavating an underlying assumption of Globalization Theory, we have been led onto the ground of historical sociology — the comparative study of the differing forms that human societies have taken in different times and places. There we have encountered an alternative, Marxian concept of sovereignty, apparently diametrically opposed in its implications to the Westphalian concept relied upon by Globalization Theory. It is on this ground therefore that we shall complete the theoretical part of this 'post mortem'. For, as we shall see, the liabilities incurred at this level provide a major part of the explanation for why Globalization Theory later met the fate that it did. If, as we earlier suggested, the subjective plausibility of 'globalization' during the 1990s was never matched by an equivalent theoretical coherence, this same plausibility also rested all along upon historical sociological assumptions that do not survive serious scrutiny. And in order to confirm this judgment, we must now direct our energies towards substantiating a simple claim: Marx's concept of sovereignty is consistent with the historical nature of international relations in both the 19th and the 21st centuries — indeed, it becomes progressively more consistent over this period, as capitalist society establishes and extends its sway in the world; meanwhile, the 'Westphalian' concept is consistent with this nature in neither period.

Let us begin then with the apparent paradox: how could the very thing which is supposed to be contradicted by transnational relations actually be their precondition? In order to answer this question, we must now set aside the deeply unsociological conception of a 'Westphalian System', and reground our understanding of sovereignty in the historical emergence of modern societies.[10] For one might even suggest that the conventional definition of modern sovereignty itself — internal political primacy and external political equality — can *only* make sense if it already tacitly presupposes a specifically capitalist redefinition of what the word 'political' means.[11]

What is it about 'politics' in capitalist society which makes it historically unique? In almost every other society in history, politics did not have the appearance of a self-contained realm of activity. It could not be visualized as a sphere unto itself, standing over and above a civil society made up of politically equal individuals, all subject to the same rule of law.[12] On the contrary, complex hierarchies of political inequality were the mechanisms by which society itself was organized, and through which the production and

distribution of wealth was orchestrated.[13] Marx described this in what must appear to us as a paradoxical phrase when he said that in feudalism 'the character of … civil society was *directly political*' (Marx, 1989, 123). And that in turn meant that there could be no real separation between 'state' and 'civil society', no real distinction between the public and the private (which is so central to our definition of politics today) and no withdrawal or abstraction of the state into an institutionally separate realm of 'politics'.

'The abstraction of the *political state*' — he therefore went on to say in 1843 — 'is a modern product.'[14] What makes it possible — in fact what generates it in this new form — is the replacement of relations of political inequality by a different kind of social mechanism for orchestrating the production and distribution of wealth. And here lies indeed something unique to capitalism as a kind of society. Here, for the first time in history, is a mode of large-scale social organization which does not require organized political inequality among its members — precisely because *its* mode of wealth creation and distribution is orchestrated through contractual relations of exchange among people who are legally and politically equal.

For Marx, together with most other classical social theorists, this development amounted to nothing less than a structural inversion of the relational architecture of human society: whereas formerly, access to wealth in things had been secured through hierarchies of direct control over persons ('relations of personal dependence'), now control over persons was orchestrated through (the exchange of) things: 'personal independence based on dependence mediated by things' (cited in Sayer, 1991, 13–14). The material life-process of society itself, whose changing social forms (according to Marx) underlay the varying historical types of social power, hereby lost its 'directly social' integument; now, bizarrely, it was submerged within and orchestrated through the movement of 'things' — whither, via a sociologically reformulated discourse of political economy, he therefore attempted to follow it.

This bizarre quality of modern social life was of course, not lost on other classical writers. '[M]aterial goods', wrote Max Weber (1984), surely aware of the literal impossibility of what he was saying, 'have gained an increasing and finally an inexorable power over the lives of men as at no previous period in history.' (1984, 181) Yet Marx alone constituted that paradox as the central object of his analysis, investigating how the particular relational form of this new society imparted to the movement of things a charge of strictly social determinations, the latter nonetheless appearing to their collective agents as (either intrinsic or accidental) properties of the things themselves. For Marx, therefore, the entire cultural universe of commodities, money and prices became a 'social hieroglyphic' (Marx, 1976, 167), the cognitively as well as socially alienated medium of social reproduction. His intellectual response to this — the social theory of value — was in this respect the supreme mark of an

'anti-economist': of someone who believed that what was already becoming naturalized as the subject matter of a distinct discipline of 'economics' needed instead to be recaptured, decoded and re-integrated into an historical sociological understanding of modern society. And such an understanding would have to include a re-interpretation of the very nature of 'the political' under these peculiar conditions. Before we arrive at that re-interpretation, however, there is a further dimension of the matter which we should briefly include at this point.

Tracing and comparing the varied relational constitution of different historical societies is only half the business, and half the promise, of historical sociology. For the word 'historical' contains not only the idea of particularity or specificity, but also that of existence, movement and change in time. Time is the necessary fourth dimension of sociological analysis, outside which the overall developmental shape of a given type of society, its historical movement, cannot be visualised, let alone explained. Yet how can a sociological method extend its reach into this fourth dimension in order to approach that doubly *historical* sociological analysis?

There are in fact only two ways. Either this developmental shape is already available for analysis because the historical movement of its existence is already completed in the past — as is the case with Ancient Rome or European Feudalism today; alternatively, where this does not apply because the society in question is still developing, a more restricted and even more hypothetical form of knowledge-production must be attempted. Having postulated the constitutive social relations of such a society, we must seek to identify abstractly in what ways their reproduction over time might give rise to developmental tendencies, organic to this kind of society — controlling our speculation, as best we can, by empirical reference to what we have of its history so far.

Marx's analysis of capitalist society, which included an attempt to derive such organic tendencies, was clearly an enterprise of this latter kind. What then did he identify as the organic tendencies of capitalist development, which he expected to govern the shape of its movement in historical time? Some of these, such as the periodic crises (through which capitalist society anarchically restructures itself when a given round of accumulation is exhausted) seem at first to have little connection with the concerns of Globalization Theory — though we shall discover differently later on. Others, however, and three in particular, have a more immediate descriptive affinity. Capitalist competition, thought Marx, would drive a tendency to indefinite geographical expansion of its social relations — the 'universalizing tendency of capital' (1973b, 540). This same process, he further reasoned, would also generate an accelerating process of technological development and change — a 'constant revolutionizing of production' (1973a, 70). And finally, as he already could witness in the spread of railways, telegraph and steam navigation, the ongoing combination of these

would tend to accelerate the means of communication and transport, leading to periodic bouts of time–space compression — 'the annihilation of space by time' (1973b, 539).

Thus, Marx identified an ever-rising scope and volume of transnational relations, along with a technologically orchestrated process of deepening spatio-temporal integration, as central to the very 'laws of motion' of capitalist development. All manner of factors might interrupt or constrain these tendencies. However, because they were rooted in its core relations, private property and wage labour, they would keep 'reasserting themselves', and on an ever greater scale, so long as those relations were reproduced over time. And yet at no point did Marx anticipate within this movement that fundamental change in the nature of the sovereign state which Globalization Theory would later attribute to the continuing operation of these same processes. Why not?

Here then we return to Marx's re-interpretation of modern politics. Capitalist society, as we earlier noted, rests upon an historically distinctive mechanism of wealth creation and distribution — one submerged within the contractual exchange of things among political equals. The generalizing of this mechanism across a whole society does not simply allow, it positively requires, the 'withdrawal' of the state from society, and its reconstitution as an 'external' enforcer of contracts and provider of the general conditions under which the new private sphere can flourish. In this respect, as Derek Sayer (1985, 230) observed, (sovereign) state-formation is integral to capitalist development — it is itself a dimension of what Marx termed 'so-called primitive accumulation' (Marx, 1976, 873–876). And in line with this, the historical process pictured in the *Communist Manifesto* is actually one of *simultaneous* 'transnationalisation' and national state-formation.

However, the image of 'withdrawal' is potentially misleading in one respect: considered from the point of view of the prior imbrication of politics and civil society, what might appear as a simple institutional relocation and concentration of political authority is in fact also a qualitative change in the very definition of 'the political' itself. For it empties that definition of many of the social processes that had previously been included in it, organized as they were by explicitly political means. Above all, whatever kind of power it is that people exercise over each other through the socially encoded movement of things, that kind of power is now defined as non-political. And this change in the content of politics underlies a corresponding change in the nature of geopolitics — the change which, *contra* Westphalia, is arguably foundational for the modern sovereign states-system.

Nicos Poulantzas once summed this up in a way which, though over-simplified, does enable us to grasp the essential point: '…these frontiers' he said, referring to the emergence of the sovereign state system, '…become

established as frontiers of the national territory only from the moment when capital and commodities are in a position to break through them' (1978, 106).

Whatever the crudeness of this formulation from an historical point of view, the underlying insight should not be discarded. For it provides an orienting point about which a much wider analysis of the historicity of geopolitical systems can be made to turn. Specifically, in precapitalist societies, because of the non-differentiation of the public and the private, the principal means of extending power externally lay via territorial expansion. Therefore, mutual recognition of fixed, sovereign borders *could* not be an organizational principle of geopolitics. And the history of precapitalist international relations is therefore predominantly the history of the expansion and collapse of territorial empires.

With the rise of capitalist society, however, and because of its differentiation of the public and the private, the social relations through which surplus extraction is organized can be extended outwards without political–territorial expansion. Mutual recognition of fixed, sovereign borders is therefore uniquely available as an organizational principle of capitalist geopolitics. And the history of capitalist International Relations is indeed broadly coterminous with the rise of the sovereign states system. But the crucial thing to see is that this is a recipe for *both* 'an enhanced territorial differentiation between states [and] an unprecedented porousness and interdependence' between them (Rosenberg, 1994a, 131). For the result of this structural differentiation is neither the increase nor the decrease of territoriality *per se*, but rather the emergence of two parallel, internally related, dimensions of social space: a public space of delimited territorial jurisdictions, and a private space of contractual material relations of production and exchange.

If there is an empire here, it is empire of a historically new kind. It is empire orchestrated through the depoliticised relations of civil society, and regulated politically through the interaction of legally equal sovereign states. It is, for want of a better term, the empire of civil society.

This historically unique differentiation of the public and the private is therefore the deep internal relation of capitalism and sovereignty. It is this which produces the surface appearance of a separation between the social phenomena we now call 'politics' and 'economics'; it is this which therefore *seems* to provide the continuing warrant for the 'near consensus' (Buzan and Little, 1999, 89) on the idea of a Westphalian System long after the social world of 17th century Absolutism has disappeared; it is this which has been reified by neorealist International Political Economy into an external relation of states and markets, such that sovereignty and transnational relations could be taken as the bearers of distinct and perhaps even conflicting sources of development.[15] And that in turn was the intellectual trap in which the empirical expectations of Globalization Theory became ever more deeply ensnared.

For, if Marx was right in his general argument about capitalist society, then the widening and deepening of transnational relations is a *normal* feature of capitalist development. Yet if he was also right about modern political sovereignty, then there is no reason in principle to suppose that any amount of widening and deepening spells the end of sovereignty — or even necessarily of its geopolitical offshoots, anarchy and the balance of power. And finally, if he was right about both, then we would actually have to turn the central empirical expectation of Globalization Theory, qualified or not, onto its head: in capitalism we have an historical form of society in which *uniquely* it becomes possible even for relations of production to extend across political borders precisely *without* diminishing the sovereign territoriality of the states involved.

This is why a British Foreign Secretary in 1820 could welcome the new sovereign independence of the Spanish colonies in America with the words: 'Spanish America is free; and, if we do not sadly misplay our hand, she is English' (Gallagher and Robinson, 1953, 8). It is how the postwar United States could exercise such enormous power at every level of the postwar international system without having a territorial empire.[16] And it is what makes sense of the otherwise paradoxical category of sovereignty in international relations. For how, in the real world, *can* 'internal primacy and external equality' be consistently asserted as the interactive principle among states which differ so vastly both in their command over their internal affairs and in the power they wield over each other? Where are the 'primacy' and 'equality' here? And what real significance can sovereignty have? The answer, we may now say, has the following elements. The political and territorial prerogatives of modern states can be asserted, and in an absolute degree which was denied to historical Absolutism itself, because their abstracted social form renders them in principle no bar to the accumulation of private power either within or across their borders. Yet sovereignty is no cipher. For the enduring political fragmentation which it sanctions, coupled with the absolute residual powers which it describes, together sustain as a distinctive feature of the social formation as a whole, that anarchical form of political regulation in which diplomacy, military force and the balance of power play their necessarily central roles.

Capitalist society, to be sure, did not create the historical condition of geopolitical fragmentation. This form of society emerged, like every other before it, in the context of existing divisions. And one cannot, it is true, derive any logical necessity of political fragmentation from Marx's general theory of capital (Lacher, 2002). But why should we wish to? The crucial point here, after all, is simply that the generalizing and maintenance of this capitalist form of sovereignty is the *condition* for the burgeoning of transnational relations; and therefore, there was never any consistent reason to suppose that their continued operation must at some point spell a shift in the very nature of

world politics through the demise of sovereignty, or political territoriality, or statehood in general. Capitalism, to repeat, did not invent the general fact of geopolitical fragmentation; but we should also add that, perhaps uniquely, it has no intrinsic need to overcome it in order to expand its own reach or further its development.

'As to the Emperor's schemes about Africa…', wrote Palmerston in 1857, pondering a French offer to acquiesce in a British occupation of Egypt: '…we don't want to have Egypt… We want to trade with Egypt and to travel through Egypt but we do not want the burthen of governing Egypt…' (Bourne, 1970, 333–334). 'By informal means where possible, by formal means where necessary…' (Gallagher and Robinson, 3): this was the new formula of 'universal empire', the pragmatic watchword of capitalist geopolitics in the face of a politically complex, culturally varied and unevenly developing world. And, as we shall confirm later on, it remains so today.

In these respects, then, what Derek Sayer once noted of Marx's view of the capitalist state can be extended to the states-system: it is 'oddly central and marginal' (1985, 242) at the same time. In his essay *On the Jewish Question*, Marx himself captured this duality in a passage to which we shall return at the climax of our analysis of the 1990s. 'The relationship of the political state to civil society', he wrote, 'is just as spiritual as the relationship of heaven to earth. The state stands in the same opposition to civil society and overcomes it in the same way as religion overcomes the restrictions of the profane world, i.e. it has to *acknowledge* it again, *reinstate* it and *allow itself to be dominated* by it' (Marx, 1975, 220, emphasis added).

This does not dissolve the practical tensions between a socially integrated world market and a politically fragmented state-system. But, arguably it does resolve the apparent paradox of modern state sovereignty. And it certainly would explain why the accumulating statistics of enmeshment mysteriously never did deliver the fundamental transformation of the nature of world politics which their measurement against the fictional 'Westphalian System' seemed to entail, and why therefore the intellectual phenomenon of the folly, which we earlier traced at the level of social theory, was bound to extend also to the empirical arguments of Globalization Theory.

In a remarkable instance of this, to be found in one of the more judicious treatments of the subject, Barry Buzan and Richard Little cited 'rather astonishing' figures suggesting that 'during the last 250 years, world trade has outperformed the growth in the human population by over 1,400 times and outperformed global GNP by 281 times'. And yet the authors' answer to the question of whether the 'Westphalian system' was finally being eroded and replaced was '[p]robably not yet…' — although the scale of the evidence of all kinds was sufficient 'to show that the question is worth asking' (1999, 93 and 100). Fair enough. The accumulating results of those organic tendencies of

capitalist development identified by Marx are indeed astonishing. Yet just how big do the statistics have to become before their continuing failure to deliver the system-change expected by Globalization Theory finally prompts an alternative question: perhaps the reason for that 'failure' lies after all not with their still insufficient size, in the 21st century or even in the 19th, but rather with the argument into which they are being inserted?

In conclusion, therefore, the concept of 'globalization' could not be rescued simply by introducing empirical qualifications, however extensive, or by abandoning a 'crude, zero-sum view of power' in general. In order to keep up with what was happening in the 1990s, what was actually needed was an historical sociological understanding of *capitalist* social power in particular. But this is precisely what could not be approached via a concept which, as noted earlier, did not specify any particular historical form of society. The attempt to proceed by refining that kind of concept, however ingeniously, was more likely in fact to lead in the opposite direction — as it did in the case of the 'transformationalists', who ended up with a definition so stripped of all historical specificity that it could be, and was, applied to the description of all manner of phenomena, extending back to the dawn of history itself.[17]

Historical Post Mortem

The theoretical criticisms outlined above remain incomplete without an alternative *historical* understanding of the empirical developments which, we have argued, Globalization Theory was doomed to misinterpret. As William Robinson put it: 'For all the critique of theoretical 'follies' there is clearly some new and crucial phenomenon out there that requires our theoretical attention. '[T]he gauntlet', he concluded, 'is before us' (Robinson, 2003, 360). Yet how should we take up this gauntlet?

It might at first seem that Marx's analysis of the 'abstracted' form of modern politics, coupled with his identification of the organic tendencies of capitalist development, would suffice to explain both why the historical expectation of Globalization Theory was mistaken, and why it could nonetheless take such a powerful hold on the popular imagination. For the phenomena dramatized in the term 'globalization' — geographical expansion, technological innovation and generalized time–space compression — are after all real, perennial features of capitalist development. If 'globalization' was a *Zeitgeist*, it was a distinctively capitalist one. It is therefore also understandable that so many writers have identified in Part I of the *Communist Manifesto* a kind of proto-theory of 'globalization' (Burnham, 1998; Bromley, 1999; Renton in Marx, 2001). A moment's methodological reflection, however, should suffice to show why our task cannot end here.

It may well be true that the tendencies identified by Marx have gone on asserting themselves throughout the period since he wrote — and did so especially dramatically during the 1990s. But the actual historical process cannot be understood simply by invoking such (abstract) dynamic tendencies. At the very least, we would need rather to examine their empirical interaction, in the concrete form which they then took, with the historically given circumstances of the time.

For this reason, there can be no unbroken line from theory, any theory, to historical explanation. Marx's theory of capitalist development cannot, for example, explain 'by itself' the 'New Imperialism' of the last quarter of the 19th century; after all, the causal tendencies that it identifies operated equally before and after that moment, in periods that witnessed quite different developments in the international sphere. A crucial term in the equation of historical explanation is still missing here: in order to reach down from any general theory into the empirical events that make up the historical process, we need to develop and apply an analytical category which operates at the mediating level of abstraction between these two. Without such a bridge, the view from above is crude and procrustean, and the view from below is either voluntaristic or is lost altogether, dissolved in an ocean of empirical particularities. As Michael Mann once pithily put it: 'Too much scholarly attention to the facts makes one blind; too much listening to the rhythms of theory and world history makes one deaf.' (1986, viii) Yet these two cannot simply be forced together, as is perhaps evidenced by the very limited results of repeated attempts to initiate a dialogue between the formal disciplines of International History and International Theory.[18] The contrasted idioms talk intelligently but unproductively past each other, without achieving that *histoire raisonnée* which ought to be the fruit of their dialogue. What is missing, once again, is the bridge between the two which neither on its own can provide. Indeed, in this respect, Held *et al.* (1999) are quite right to insist that 'in accounting for processes of social change, the language of causality cannot be the same as that of deductive scientific enquiry'. (1999, 436). Yet the central question this raises for historical sociology is surely not 'should we become empiricist historians or social theorists at this point?', but rather 'how can this methodological discontinuity between two equally necessary dimensions of explanation be mediated?'

In the Marxist tradition, the methodological discontinuity between general theory and empirical explanation finds expression in the distinction between the concepts of 'mode of production' and 'social formation'.[19] 'Mode of production' is the abstraction which delineates the social characteristics and tendential 'laws of motion' arising from a specific relational *form* of human society. Meanwhile, 'social formation' denotes the dynamic empirical totality of human and ecological relations that compose the developing historical *existence* of that society in both space and time — the 'real-world' object of the

analysis. And in that Marxist tradition, the bridge between these two is found in the methodological idea of the 'historical conjuncture'.

But we must be careful. For here a terminological overlap masks a real parting of the ways. Having recognized the same methodological discontinuity, Held *et al.* draw back from any attempt to bridge it. '[D]efinitive causal generalizations about socio-historical processes', they suggest, 'are inherently problematic' (1999, 436). And when they seek to explain the causal nexus at the centre of 'globalization', they therefore opt instead for an empirically open-ended re-assembly of multiple contingent sources of causality as the only safe form of procedure. It turns out then that one response to the intellectual impossibility of Globalization Theory becomes the abandonment of social theory *tout court*. And this in turn means that they themselves end by ruling out axiomatically the possibility of that 'cogent theory of globalization' for which they had apparently called at the start of the work. And yet in doing so, they too deploy a vocabulary of 'conjunctural analysis'. And because they present this as an *alternative* to any general theory of social development, rather than as a necessary moment of the latter's application, our own very different use of the term will require more than a cursory clarification.

The intellectual stakes involved in this exercise should be made clear at the start. At this point, we are about to initiate within our critique an attempt to meet the second of the three intellectual challenges that confront us in the aftermath of the 'age of globalization'. For even if Held *et al.* had not just given up the possibility of an *histoiré raisonnéé* of the 1990s, the intellectual gap left behind by the descent of the *Zeitgeist* would remain. In order to get to our alternative analysis of that decade, we would still have needed to reconstruct an alternative explanatory method. Nonetheless, the terms in which they stated their case should serve to put us on our mettle. Is it really true that a systematic understanding of the kind doubly promised by the discourse of historical sociology is impossible, due to the 'inherently problematic' nature of 'definitive causal generalizations'? Can, for example, Marx's sociological analysis of capitalism, coupled with the organic tendencies he derived from it, really find no safe purchase in the business of historical explanation? As these questions indicate, it is not only the method of historical explanation in general which is now at issue, but also the role that any social theory can play in such a method. And because the gap left by the *Zeitgeist* also embraces the further question of the place of international relations in historical explanation, we are going to have to answer three challenges in one go. That is to say, in order to re-interpret the 1990s, we will need a method of properly historical analysis, one which can safely re-incorporate and use the discourse of general social theory, and which is in addition suited to the specific subject matter of International Relations. This is what we will now try to construct via our discussion of 'conjunctural analysis'. The bridge is down: we must rebuild it ourselves.

The nature of conjunctural analysis

An *historical conjuncture* may be defined in the first instance as a space of time within which a particular combination (or conjunction) of causes exercises a predominant (causal and imaginative) influence over the course of events and the production of ideas. *Conjunctural phenomena* are those arising specifically from that dominant combination. They are not, as Gramsci at one point seems misleadingly to imply, necessarily superficial 'surface' or 'ephemeral' events or processes (1971, 177).[20] But they are temporally restricted (and causally contingent) in their direct operation to the period in which this combination of causes is working itself out. Like everything, they are 'of their time', and that time is conjunctural in its duration. Meanwhile, *conjunctural change* refers to developments, shifts, alterations and reconfigurations which, however dramatic or extensive they may be, nonetheless remain changes within the existing historical form of society, rather than marking a fundamental 'epochal' transformation in the nature of that society itself. And finally, *conjunctural analysis* is a form of historical explanation which seeks both to explain particular events and ideas, and to map the movement of a period as a whole, by relating them to the working out of a dominant combination of causes.

There is nothing distinctively Marxist — or even sociological — about the idea of conjunctural analysis in general. In its broadest definition, as the study of intersecting cycles of events, its roots stretch back to the efforts of ancient astronomers to map the overlapping orbits of the heavenly bodies, the better to predict their conjoint influence, whether meteorological or astrological, on human affairs. Its most extensive application in the modern social sciences lies in Economics — modelling the complex effects of intersecting business cycles of differing periodicity. In other disciplines, however, the concern with prediction usually falls away; and what remains is the notion that the analysis of concrete social reality requires attention to what might be called the differential temporalities at work in it.

In the field of Western historiography, perhaps the most famous formal statement of a conjunctural method in this sense can be found in the Preface to Fernand Braudel's (1972) two-volume study of *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*.[21] In order 'to encompass the history of the Mediterranean in its complex totality', Braudel proposed an analytical division of historical time into three 'planes' — geographical, social and individual.[22] Each of these planes encompassed a specific dimension of causal determination, each of which had in turn its own rhythm of slower or faster change; and analysis of their three-fold conjunction at any given point in their simultaneous but asynchronous development provided, for Braudel, the key to explaining the concrete events of diplomatic, or any other, history.[23]

Less well-known, Heinz Gollwitzer's (also non-Marxist) study of *Europe in the Age of Imperialism* illustrates a further dimension of conjunctural analysis — its use to identify and explore discrete *periods* of historical time. Although Gollwitzer uses different terminology, 'epoch' instead of 'conjuncture', the focus is the same: the recognition that specific periods can be delimited by their overall character, conjoined with an insistence on the need for careful deconstruction of the combinations of causes that temporarily infuse the historical process with a given 'epochal style'.

However, if the idea of conjunctural analysis itself is thus not distinctive to Marxism, there certainly is a distinctively Marxist form of conjunctural analysis with regard to modern world history. What makes it Marxist is the central explanatory role accorded to the organic tendencies of capitalist development as identified by Marx himself: namely its unique characteristics of geographical expansion, unending technological revolution, and alternating waves of accumulation and socio-economic crisis. And what makes it *conjunctural* is that these organic tendencies are twice historicized: first by identifying their concrete character at a given stage of their historical development;[24] and second, by locating their operation in the historically given circumstances of the time (which include, but are not exhausted by, the accumulating results of their own prior development).

In this way, a Marxist conjunctural analysis is open to — in fact rests upon the specification of — the changing forms and contingent interactions of the historical process, while remaining nonetheless anchored in a longer-term hypothesis about the general nature of that process in the modern epoch.

Thus, as we noted in the case of the New Imperialism, the fact that capitalist competition generates an organic tendency to endless expansion is not sufficient to explain why there was a sudden burst of colonial expansion in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. However, if we locate those events in the uneven historical process of European industrialisation, as a result of which Britain's longstanding lead was at this point coming under increased strain from late developers such as Germany and the United States; if we recall that this was also the period of the second industrial revolution which temporarily heightened geopolitical interest in the tropical sources of certain key raw materials; and if we add the onset of the Great Depression in 1873, which intensified domestic pressures and international protectionist competition at this critical moment, then we start to approach a more properly historical explanation of the causes of the New Imperialism (Hobsbawm, 1987, 34–83). No doubt, we would have to add many more elements in order to arrive at an adequate account. It is striking, however, that the three we have added so far are can all be derived by identifying the empirical correlates, at a given historical moment, of the abstract organic tendencies indicated by Marx's general theory. And in any case, the more elements we need to add, the more

this reinforces the basic point being made here — which is simply that explaining any phase in the history of capitalist development always requires an essentially *conjunctural* form of analysis. What applies to the 'age of imperialism' therefore also applies, as we shall later see, to the 'age of globalization'.

The further one reflects upon this, the more apparent becomes the methodological dependence of the general theory upon conjunctural concretization (no less at the very moment of its formulation than later on) in order for that general theory to play its role in social and historical explanation. Consider, for example, the simple theoretical claim that capitalist society has an inbuilt tendency to geographical expansion. Is this a 'short-cut' to historical explanation? Not in a conjunctural analysis. Rendered there as an historical premise, it confronts us instead with the fact that in the history of capitalism as a social formation, different parts of the world have been incorporated at different times. And that in turn means that in any given historical conjuncture, even the cultural composition and geographical scope of this social formation are different from what they were previously, radically altering the empirical coordinates of causal explanation. Similarly, a continuous process of scientific development implies an evolving and unpredictable historical sequence of new and different technologies which must be expected to revolutionise not only the means of production, but with them the means of international power — as well as sometimes re-orienting the geographical focus of geopolitical strategy and competition itself. And even recurrent cycles of boom and recession impact each time on a social formation which is characterised by a further evolved and historically unique mix of social, economic and geopolitical circumstances. In none of these cases, therefore, can the identification of an abstract 'organic tendency' contribute to historical explanation until it has been concretized for a given period. Correctly understood, the 'definitive causal generalisations' rejected by Held *et al.* are not *empirical* generalizations at all, but rather sociological abstractions. And with this realization, it is no longer their epistemological legitimacy which is at stake, but rather the question of how, and how not, to build them into a method of historical sociological explanation. What, then, happens when that goes wrong?

Exactly this methodological issue lay at the heart of Louis Althusser's philosophical and political struggle against 'economism' in Marxist thought. The 'simple contradiction' of capital and labour — the supposed intellectual guide and historical guarantee of Marxist political practice — was, he argued 'quite simply *abstract*', part of a wider abstraction, the capitalist mode of production, derived from the analysis of an empirical historical formation. In the lived reality of that formation, however, this 'contradiction is never simple, but always specified by the historically concrete forms and circumstances in

which it is exercised'. Indeed, 'the real [i.e. concrete historical] contradiction was so much one with its 'circumstances' that it was only discernible, identifiable and manipulable *through them and in them*.' This led Althusser to his famous conclusion that 'the apparently simple contradiction is *always overdetermined*' — meaning not that its identification as 'simple' by Marx was false, but rather that the categorical disjuncture between theoretical abstraction and historical process had to be registered. Otherwise, Marxist thought would be, and indeed had been, confronted with one 'exceptional situation' after another, in a perpetual deferment of its historical expectations and a repeated baffling of its attempted political agency. 'For, after all, *are we not always in exceptional situations?* …exceptions, but *with respect to what?* To nothing but the *abstract*, but comfortable and reassuring idea of a pure, simple 'dialectical' schema…' (Althusser, 1977, 98, 106, 98, 106, 104). Althusser, perhaps in part because he was a professional philosopher, did not find his way through to a usable historical method of conjunctural analysis. The language remained correspondingly over-complicated, even tortured, as it attempted to stretch a strictly philosophical set of categories across the newly re-opened breach between theoretical generality and historical particularity.[25] Yet Althusser was right about one thing. As Gramsci had earlier formulated the point, 'an inability to find the correct relation between what is organic and what is conjunctural… leads to presenting causes as immediately operative which in fact only operate indirectly', an abridgement of socio-political analysis which, in the case of Marxism, typically issued in 'an excess of 'economism'' (Gramsci, 1971, 178).

Still, as Gramsci also noted, the formulation of conjunctural method leads into reflection on 'a whole series of further principles of historical methodology' (1971, 177). And in this light three possible objections to the method we are proposing now need to be considered. These might be summarized as the problem of multifactorality, the problem of dynamic periodization and the problem of compositional focus. None of these is faced by Marxism alone. They must be addressed in any attempt to build an historical sociological method. To each of them, however, Marxism brings an answer of its own. And by working through these, we can forge the materials already recovered into that intellectual bridge which our alternative historical analysis of the 1990s will require.

First, then, it is an historiographical truism that *every* instant of an historical process is its own center of a potentially indefinite series of interacting causes; how, therefore, logically, can conjunctural analysis (which draws attention, among other things, precisely to this synthetic quality) be deployed without slipping into an explanatory infinite regress? The answer rests partly on another truism: every attempt at historical explanation presupposes that some causes are more significant than others in producing a given

outcome — otherwise, finite analysis would indeed be impossible. From the point of view of any given object of explanation, therefore, the infinitude of facts is also a receding horizon of causal significance; and it is therefore always both necessary and legitimate to exercise a limiting judgment about just how much has to be included in order that an explanatory argument may be sufficiently established. No theoretical fiat, Marxist or otherwise, can take the place of this intellectual judgment — which in turn can only be assessed by weighing its results against competing attempts to explain the same phenomena.

Yet this empirical open-endedness of the approach might seem in practice to make it indistinguishable from the straightforward 'multi-factor analysis', which has often been *counterposed* in historical and sociological writings to the supposed economic determinism of Marxism. But this is not the case. In the kind of conjunctural analysis being proposed here, the business of historical explanation always turns on the careful ordering of two specific, interdependent but analytically distinct orders of causality. There are the organic tendencies that are intrinsic to capitalist development, and which therefore extend across its entire history. And then there are the concrete forms which these take, and the empirical circumstances in which they operate, which are by contrast always particular to a given period of its development. Actual historical causes exist only at this second level — that of empirical events, where all explanation must begin and end, and from which the first level is a simplifying, historical sociological abstraction. As Althusser saw so well, if we mistake the abstraction for a direct source of empirical causes, then we turn it into a fundamentally unhistorical category which indeed would lead to 'economic determinism' in the pejorative sense of the term. But to counter that danger by asserting generalized multi-causality as a method of explanation simply abdicates the challenge of understanding the historical process as a whole. Thus, concretizing the abstraction via a reconstruction of the conjuncture need not dissolve a general theory into multi-factor indeterminacy; on the contrary, done well, it unlocks its potential for orienting real historical explanation.

This methodological fusion of long-term organic and short-term conjunctural dimensions also helps to mitigate a second problem with which the idea of conjunctural analysis might be associated — namely the fallacy of treating specific periods as if they really were separate from each other and encompassed sequences of events which were causally self-contained. In fact, of course, there is no such thing as a period whose roots do not reach back into an earlier time, and which does not, in time, itself become the process of growing over into its successor. The Ford Model-T went into production in 1905, nearly half a century before one could speak of an 'age of Fordism'; and the pattern of mass production and consumption to which it gave its name has

by no means disappeared with the rise of 'post-Fordist' economies. It might therefore seem that conjunctural analysis, far from bringing us closer to understanding the flow of events, merely distorts its character by freezing it into a disconnected series of rigid constellations. This problem of dynamic periodization, however, together with the careful consideration it requires, is once again not peculiar to Marxist thought, but rather generic to historical explanation *per se*.

When we look back over the last two hundred years of capitalist world development, we can see in retrospect that it has passed through a number of periods, in which, for example, the character of its international relations has differed, often quite radically, from one period to the next. Today we are living in the aftermath of one of these periods which we call the Cold War. Before the Cold War, there was an extended period of great power conflicts and international instability, stretching from 1914 to, say, 1947, which some historians call the era of General Crisis. The General Crisis was itself preceded by the so-called Age of Imperialism, whose onset is conventionally traced to the 1870s. And so on.

What is the intellectual standing of these 'periods'? Historians, of course, differ on how to date them and what to call them. Most, however, would agree that some kind of periodisation of this kind is intellectually necessary in order to grasp the changing contexts of social and political events — without which those events cannot be properly explained. 'The identification or designation of an epoch', says Gollwitzer (1969, 13) for this reason, 'can be counted as one of the historian's most important tasks'. Yet '[t]he difficulty [with such designations] lies in the complicated nature of each age, particularly in the overlapping of different phases.' Indeed, in the case with which Gollwitzer himself is concerned, '[t]he fact is that there are no caesuras and no revolutionary events which, so to speak, changed the scene completely and unequivocally overnight in favour of an imperialist epoch'. 'An effort of constructive experiment is therefore necessary to characterize an era'; for in fact '[t]he style of the epoch was evolved by the interplay of [a variety of] factors', and 'it all depends on recognizing when new characteristic tendencies [resulting from this interplay] begin to take over and when they again cease to dominate' (Gollwitzer, 1969, 13–16).

In other words, if and insofar as historians find it plausible to designate whole periods as having a particular quality to them — the age of revolutions, the age of imperialism and so on – then it seems equally plausible to suggest that this is because those spans of time recognizably encompass the working out of particular conjunctions of dominant influences and circumstances. For this reason, the conjunctural method can be applied to the 'inner movement' of whole periods (tracing the sequence of events through which the dominant combinations of causes were played out); and far from freezing those periods

into static constellations, it illuminates the process by which they grow into each other, while nonetheless explaining the distinctive causal context which each of them uniquely comprises. Conjunctural explanation may begin with descriptive markers — here the causal combination underlying 'imperialism' began 'to take over', and at this later point it 'ceased to dominate'. But in order for that opening 'effort of constructive experiment' to turn from descriptive delineation into historical explanation, it needs to give way to an account of how and why this particular combination first crystallized and was then re-dissolved. Tracing this process, resolving the initial descriptive definition of a period back into the flow of its constitutive events, is how the analysis proceeds. And the more closely it is traced, the more this works against the danger of temporal reification which is intrinsic to the necessary business of historical periodisation. The question then is not whether periodisation should be attempted, but rather how well it is done. It is indeed a practical challenge for the conjunctural analyst; but it is not a theoretical objection to the conjunctural method.

Once again, what an historical materialist analysis brings to this method is a set of broader orienting assumptions about the overall nature of the developmental process across a given epoch, assumptions that therefore also help to grasp the continuities across different periods. An historical conjuncture, in this perspective, is thus understood neither as a predetermined stage of development, which could be known in advance, nor an undetermined concatenation of events and personalities, which varies randomly from one situation to the next. Lenin's rigid teleology and the directionless indeterminacy of Held *et al.* are thus both, despite their common use of the term, one-sided conceptions of the conjunctural method, which fall short of realizing its potential. The one tries to derive almost everything from the abstract organic tendencies, while the other rests its account entirely on the contingent circumstances in which the latter operate.

Are we there yet? Almost, but not quite. For on the basis of what we have said so far, it could still be objected that a Marxist conjunctural analysis, despite all the references we have made to capitalist development, in fact provides by itself no common formula for constructing explanations at all. This is because the actual mix of elements required, and even the periodizing of their conjunction, necessarily varies according to what is being explained. And that in turn raises what we earlier called the problem of compositional focus. A brief example may help to illustrate its nature.

In a review of Marshall Berman's work, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, Perry Anderson mounted a conjunctural analysis of 'modernism' as an aesthetic movement. (Anderson, 1992) This analysis centred on what he termed the 'triangulation' of three 'principal coordinates': 'the codification of a highly formalized academicism in the visual and other arts' (which was itself reflective

of the cultural and political 'persistence of the old regime' in those European countries where modernism flourished); the subjective impact of the 'still incipient, hence essentially novel' technologies of the second industrial revolution; and the 'imaginative proximity of social revolution' arising from the confrontation of emerging labour movements with apparently superannuated monarchist political regimes (1992, 34). Now, by 1918, the prewar configuration of international relations had been irreversibly broken — by military exhaustion, imperial collapse, social revolution and the arrival of the United States as a world power. Not so, however, with the conjunctural 'coordinates' of modernism, whose operation had if anything been intensified and radicalized by these developments. These social and historical coordinates, in Anderson's account, persisted in Europe until they were themselves dissolved by the outcome of the Second World War — recurring thereafter in a variety of 'Third World' environments, whither the flourishing of the genre was now therefore geographically displaced.

And here lies the apparent problem. For, on the one hand, the temporal framing of this analysis *cuts across* two of the conjunctures mentioned earlier — those of imperialism and general crisis. And on the other hand, the substantive composition of the explanation clearly draws into the frame elements that were absent from the specification of those geopolitical conjunctures. It might therefore appear that this approach, far from resolving basic issues of method, actually re-opens them whenever it is applied.

And the suspicion has some justification. For there are indeed many different vantage points at which conjunctural analysis may be pursued. At one extreme lies the attempt to characterize an historical period as a whole, exploring how a dominant conjunction of causes found varied expression across a range of social, economic, political, scientific and cultural dimensions of social life, all of them thereby participating in a common 'epoch style'. This approach is exemplified in Eric Hobsbawm's (1962, 1975, 1987) study of the 'long 19th century' (divided into three conjunctures in the development of capitalism as a social formation), as well as in Michel Beaud's (1984) *A History of Capitalism 1500–1980*, and Gollwitzer's study of the age of imperialism. Meanwhile, towards the other extreme, (whose vanishing point is the conjunctural analysis of an individual event in all its concrete particularity), we find Anderson's discussion of 'modernism'.

Many other examples could be adduced to illustrate the same point: any specification of a conjuncture remains (like every other act of historical explanation) a selective abstraction from the lived historical process, either 'sideways' in the direction of a specific dimension of that process (e.g. artistic production) or 'upwards' to a level of generality at which all its dimensions are simultaneously visible, albeit from a greater distance (e.g. 'the age of revolution'). Yet this fact — that the compositional focii of these abstractions

vary in their content, while their time-spans may even cut across each other — would appear as a weakness only if we mistook the simplicity of each partial abstraction for a totalizing definition of the development of the whole. And in any case, Anderson's analysis visibly retains one very large thing in common with the approach we have been proposing: it operates by historicizing the organic tendencies of capitalist development for a given time and place, and then examining their interrelation (in the active production of cultural forms) with the empirically given circumstances of that 'place'. What has varied in fact is not the method itself, but rather the object of analysis through which the elements of the method are being refracted in order to be concretized.

And this point is worth thinking through properly, because it forces us to confront one last question which must be answered before we can proceed with our alternative historical analysis of the 1990s: namely, what is the specific compositional focus of a Marxist conjunctural analysis in the field of international relations? In some ways, the ongoing history of the international system is the most inclusive and superordinate of all levels. And yet, like every other vantage point, this is a specific point of view onto the historical process as a whole, which defines its own receding horizon of causal significance. Its empirical object may (uniquely in the social sciences) be the human world at its widest and highest levels of social organization. But not everything that happens in the world is equally relevant to an explanation of the course of international relations. How then should we fix its particular depth of field? The answer may be something like the following.

The geographical scope of capitalism has been trans-societal from the start. This simple fact means that its historical development as a social formation has always included a specifically geopolitical dimension, in which its overall reproduction and expansion have been managed via political relations between more or less independent authorities. As with the aesthetic dimension analysed by Anderson, neither the changing forms nor the constituent events of this geopolitical dimension can be understood in isolation from the ongoing history of the wider social formation — that totality of which it forms a part. Yet, like the aesthetic dimension in this way too, it also exhibits characteristics that are specific to it as a particular dimension of social life, and through which the elements of the method must therefore be refracted. 'Should it really matter so little…' asked Max Weber, 'that politics operates with very special means, namely, power backed up by *violence*?' (1948, 119) No, it should not. And when we add the other 'special' features of modern sovereignty such as law-making, the coordinated direction of social development through 'policy', the management of relations with the outside world and so on, the point becomes only stronger. Alas, Weber, for all his brilliance, then pushed this insight in the direction of a socially contentless theory of the political. And the ethical polemic of 'Politics as a Vocation' thereupon drove its analytical achievement awry. But this was not a necessary destination.

For to recognize what is specific to geopolitics does not rule out a more inclusive sociological explanation of geopolitical events and processes — any more than Anderson's equivalent recognition with regard to artistic production automatically reconstitutes the history of art as a 'purely aesthetic', self-contained field of development. In both cases, on the contrary, the recognition in question actually provides the final element of the conjunctural method, allowing concrete historical analysis in the given field to begin.

A Marxist conjunctural analysis of modern international relations therefore begins by taking up its vantage point at the level of the international itself. From this point of view it examines the historical development of capitalism as an expanding social formation, tracing the latter's impact on the course of events and changing socio-political configurations that compose the accumulating history of international relations in this epoch. It periodizes this history according to the dominant descriptive characteristics of international relations at given times — yielding geopolitical conjunctures whose temporal span may or may not correspond to those of other dimensions of social life. But it does not remain wholly at this geopolitical level in order to explain these conjunctures. Taking its cue instead from the 'organic tendencies' of capitalist development, as theorized by Marx, it works by identifying the concrete forms of the latter at a given point in their development, and tracing how their interaction with the inherited historical circumstances of that time give rise to the course of international affairs. In this way, it provides a bridge between social theory and empirical history at the level of international relations. And this, one is tempted to say, is what a Marxist historical sociology of international relations actually is.

Thus the intellectual bridge we have been working towards throughout this excursus should now be visible. Indeed, we are now in a position to replace our opening definition of 'historical conjuncture' with a more developed understanding based on the foregoing discussion. And although we have reached this point mostly through an engagement with Marxist thought on the matter, our new definition can and will be formulated in broader terms.

What then have we discovered? The key, it turns out, to the whole concept of 'historical conjuncture' lies in the way that it refers *both* to a dominant combination of causes *and* to the period characterized by the working out of that combination. This double meaning requires that its specification must look simultaneously inwards, to examine the detailed movement of a given period, and outwards, to locate that period in the longer historical process of which it forms a part. It therefore necessarily involves, and enables, both detailed empirical analysis and large-scale historical periodization.

It provides not an alternative to social theory, but rather the necessary medium through which the latter can be applied to the empirical data of history. Intervening at a level of abstraction between those two, it gives

concrete form to abstract 'organic tendencies' and explanatory order to the otherwise shapeless infinitude of empirical 'facts'. The exact compositional focus of a conjunctural analysis varies on the one hand according to the orienting assumptions of the general social theory being used, and on the other hand according to the nature what is being explained. Done badly, its results are as unsatisfying as those of any other failed explanation. Done well, however, its methodological fusion of theory and history should enable it to go further and deeper than other forms of explanation.

For its leading exponents within the Marxist tradition, the significance of conjunctural analysis was ultimately political: they hoped it would enable a clearer prosecution of a revolutionary struggle which they all, in different ways, came to recognize was fought out 'on the terrain of the conjunctural'. Whether *any* intellectual method can (as this hope requires) provide a key to 'the conjuncture of the present' (rather than those of the past) is a moot point. When Wright Mills (1959, 146) called for an orientation to 'the present as history', he cannot have meant that the tools of historiographical method could actually be applied to the present. Barraclough's (1964) idea of 'contemporary history' probably marks the limit of the epistemologically possible in this respect. Yet the often brilliant, if also fragmentary, reflections on historical method, which the Marxist tradition has produced, point to an intellectual significance for this analytical 'terrain of the conjunctural', which goes well beyond Marxist politics: conjunctural analysis, it turns out, is the ultimately decisive plane on which general theories of social development can be compared and assessed. For it is here, on this methodological bridge between theory and history, that we discover which ideas can inform convincing explanations of the historically real — and which cannot.

And this is what we shall next attempt to find out, focusing our method on the freshly vacated homeground of the *Zeitgeist* itself: the decade of the 1990s. We must return then to that key question raised in the Introduction to this article: What were the 1990s really about?

Nearly everyone agrees that the vectors of world politics in that decade were set by the intersection of two main processes — social change in the West and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the East. These processes were visible to all of us as we lived through them, and the argument which follows does not rest on any dramatic new empirical discoveries. However, the method of conjunctural analysis, coupled with the benefit of expanding hindsight, may now enable us to draw a new *conclusion* about that 'age of globalization' — what it really was, and why it was necessarily so short-lived.

In order to apply the method, we must begin by locating the 1990s in the longer-term history of the development of capitalism as an international social formation. We must then identify the dominant conjunction of causes that governed the course of international events in that decade. Having done that,

we must move in closer, and examine the inner movement of the conjuncture, in order to understand how the working out of this combination of causes first crystallized and then dissolved the *Zeitgeist* of 'globalization'. And finally, in the course of all this, we must also formulate the alternative overall interpretation of the 1990s, which makes those years comprehensible within a Marxist historical sociological framework.

'Social origins' of the conjuncture

In 1989, some two hundred years into its turbulent history, the international social formation of capitalism stood on the brink of a major conjunctural upheaval. Over the previous two centuries, via a mixture of informal penetration, colonial invasion and pre-emptive imitation, its geographical reach had expanded beyond that of any other geopolitical system in history. The original 'industrial revolution' which so amazed its contemporaries had long since opened out into a continuous process of technological advance, driven by the *perpetuum mobile* of capitalist competition. Viewed in unfolding retrospect, one wave of innovation had followed another, creating and satisfying new needs, multiplying the productivity of human labour, increasing the scale and speed of productive activity, shrinking the globe through periodic revolutions in the means of transport and communication, and increasing the international inequality between those regions where capitalist development had 'taken off' and those where it had not (Hobsbawm, 1987, 15). Periodic downswings, with their attendant socio-political crises, punctuated this history but never reversed it, taking their place alongside those other organic tendencies recurring across the overall historical trajectory of this social formation.

Viewed as a process of *international* expansion, however, the course of capitalist history showed no such unilinear trend. Impacting on a wider environment made up of many different kinds of human society at many different levels of development, capitalism did not, after all, expand evenly, creating 'a world in its own image'. Rather, the international imbalance of power, which it generated, confronted these other societies — European and non-European alike — with a 'whip of external necessity' (Trotsky, 1961, 5): industrialize fast, or face loss of independence. 'Industrialization', however, as its historical uniqueness to the capitalist epoch indicates, is not a socially neutral, technological choice, but rather an emergent *social* logic rooted in a specific (re)arrangement of human relations. And thus the existential threat posed by the whip of external necessity could not be met without fundamental 'domestic' social change. For existing elites in most 'late developing' states, therefore, the resultant dilemma was ineluctable. Unable to avoid the imperative of industrialization, but unwilling to dissolve the (non-capitalist)

basis of their own rule, they mobilized the power of the state to combine the one with the other, generating in each case an unstable sociological 'amalgam' (Trotsky, 1961, 25). As a result, the geographical expansion (and deepening integration) of capitalism as a social formation gave rise to an internal proliferation of socio-political difference, which overdetermined the precarious stability collectively orchestrated through its anarchical geopolitical form.

The secular process of competition between capitalist states has therefore from the start been embedded in a wider socio-historical process of what Leon Trotsky called 'uneven and combined development'.[26] In this process lay the international context of those varying class alliances and compromises so brilliantly elaborated by Barrington Moore (1967) into a comparative historical sociology of the differing forms and trajectories of modern state-formation. But to the extent that *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* remained a *comparative* study, it largely ignored the *interactive* dimension within which each of these alliances and compromises was simultaneously an international strategy for managing (or even a bid to reverse) the whip of external necessity.[27] And although this lacuna was partly corrected in the work of Theda Skocpol (1976, 1979), only Trotsky pushed the argument to the point of a radical unification of historical sociology and international history. For Trotsky had formulated the concept of 'combined development' in such a way as to focus in each case on both the unique internal sociology of the amalgam *and* the external (transnational and international) sinews of integration, which the amalgam simultaneously embodied. From this it followed that 'combined development' was a phenomenon not of individual societies alone, but of the evolving international social formation as a whole. And precisely because his original derivation of the concept was already based upon an interpolation of the problematic of the geopolitical into his sociology of capitalist development, its wider, more inclusive application could now uniquely avoid those two great pitfalls of historical sociology in international studies: the fallacy of the domestic analogy, and the proto-realist conception of the international as a source of variables external to the overall developmental process itself. Conceived in this way, the 'uneven and combined development' of capitalism as an expanding social formation therefore provides an historical sociological key to the 'social origins' of its international relations in successive phases of its development over time.

In short, when we refract the elements of the conjunctural method through the 'level' of geopolitics, we find that the abstract linear quality of the organic tendencies is interrupted — perhaps we should say 'overdetermined' — by the specifically international mechanism of their operation in the context of a plurality of societies. Conjunctures of capitalist *world* development must thus be theorized as conjunctures of this historical-international process of 'uneven and combined development'.[28]

As Trotsky noted — and Veblen (1964) (originally published in 1915) and Gerschenkron (1965) later agreed — there did also exist certain advantages to 'late industrialization': the simultaneous existence of more advanced capitalist societies elsewhere provided scientific knowledge, capital investment, organizational models and historical examples — not to mention export markets — none of which had been available to those states that had pioneered the process. And these could, even now, be more freely deployed in environments whose very 'backwardness' entailed no burden of prior, fixed-capital investment — enabling the widely noted phenomenon of developmental 'leap-frogging'. Unlike Trotsky, however, neither Veblen nor Gerschenkron sought to conceptualize the historical sociological process as a whole. They therefore did not grasp how even, or perhaps especially, for such states as Wilhelmine Germany or Meiji Japan which turned these opportunities into effective formulae of rapid industrialization, these 'advantages of backwardness' came with a heavy price. The national politics of combined development could break down under the intersecting effects of internal contradiction and external pressure — leading to wars, revolutions, or more commonly both.

Three times in the history of capitalist international relations, such events (albeit taking different forms) have, by involving a great power, been of sufficient magnitude to produce a major conjunctural reconfiguration of the international system as a whole:[29] the collapse of Bourbon Absolutism leading to the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars; the protracted crisis of the German state and its world wars in the first half of the 20th century; and the Bolshevik overthrow of Czarism, whose effects persisted — although in increasingly ossified form — up to 1989.

What then was the character of the international system, developing on the basis of this longer-term historical process, by the eve of the 1990s?

During the conjuncture, which followed the Second World War, its continuing evolution had been largely shaped by the dynamic interaction of three broad processes: the economic and political recovery of the Western (including Japanese) capitalist core under American occupation, protection and leadership; the sustained geopolitical and developmental challenge posed by the survival and wartime expansion of the Soviet system; and, managed within this context, the destabilizing international process of European colonial withdrawal and 'Third World' state formation. The first of these processes was institutionalized through the combination of military alliances with the so-called Bretton Woods system. The second provided an alternative model of rapid industrialization and source of geopolitical support (however intermittent) for anti-Western movements and revolutions, linking them thereby in turn with its overall developmental and strategic military competition with the US (the Cold War and the arms race). And it also

restricted the scope and operation of international organizations — either via the non-membership of anti-capitalist states (Bretton Woods) or, where this did not apply, via the consequent installation of its systemic antagonism within their inner workings (UN). Finally, decolonization gradually replaced the colonial empires with some one hundred new states — which became both objects of strategic rivalry between the 'superpowers', and simultaneously agents of a new variety of more or less viable strategies of transformative but contradictory 'combined development'. In most cases, the latter took the attempted form either of party-orchestrated state socialism or, more numerously, varying shades of patrimonially-orchestrated state capitalism — 'quasi-states' indeed, though perhaps in a fuller sociological sense than that intended by the originator of that term (Jackson, 1990).

The interaction of these three processes did much to define the distinctive international relations of the time. The existence of the Soviet threat played an important role in shaping the stability-oriented terms of Bretton Woods, as well as bolstering American pressure for the dismantling of the colonial empires. As a result, the ex-colonial states themselves emerged into an environment in which their domestic political economies were temporarily sheltered to an historically unusual degree from international economic pressures and shocks; and the various forms of state-orchestrated combined development, which evolved under the rubric of 'modernization', were indulged politically by the leading capitalist states, for whom the obstructing economic and political illiberalism of 'Third World' states was, again temporarily, secondary to the wider security issues of the Cold War. Of course, the processes of Cold War rivalry and decolonization could intersect in disastrous ways, as demonstrated by the catastrophe which engulfed Indo-China during this period. Even without this intersection, 'decolonization' was rarely a gift of the imperial powers, often being achieved only through costly, violent uprisings. Once independence had been gained, however, it was usually only when 'Third World' combined development broke down in ways which created an opening for Soviet 'expansionism' (Cuba, Nicaragua), or involved an economic nationalism that directly threatened substantial Western interests (Mossadeq, Allende), that the sheltering norm of 'national self-determination', was again violently ruptured.

Within this context, the organically reproduced tendencies of capitalist development continued to extend their sway. The world economy more than doubled in size in this period — as well as generating significant new geographical centres of industrial production. The social and demographic transformations produced by the operation of those tendencies passed a turning point of world-historic proportions, as the peasantry was for the first time reduced to a numerical minority of the world's population (Hobsbawm, 1994, 9). The continuing industrial revolution spread 'Fordist' patterns of mass

production, 'consumer society', and a 'communications revolution' (based on televisions, satellites and transistor radios) — the latter being promptly taken up by fashionable academics as evidence of a new epoch in human history, the emergence of a 'global village' and so on (McLuhan *et al.*, 1968). Geopolitically, however, these advances occurred within the framework noted above, a framework whose endurance over time increasingly obscured the temporary, conjunctural nature of its historical foundations.

Thus by the late 1970s the formal political equality of the states system, now asserted for the first time as a world-wide organizational principle, rested upon a large variety of interwoven patterns and levels of social development, grouped by a unique and temporary set of conjunctural circumstances into three 'worlds'; this combined development of the social formation as a whole was in turn organized geopolitically beneath a bipolar competition of social systems, led by two 'superpowers'; and it was dominated materially by the advanced capitalist core (which, despite growing problems of its own, had just recently emerged from the longest period of sustained growth in its history — 'the long boom').

By the early 1980s, as we shall see, Bretton Woods, the Cold War and decolonization had all more than run their course. Yet the international constellation, which their historical conjunction had shaped, was still largely in place. It was this constellation, together with the domestic arrangements and worldviews partly sustained by it, that was about to be swept away. And it was that dramatic event to which some of those who lived through it would give the misnomer of 'globalization'.

If this was the wider historical context of the 1990s, how did the two vectors of change in that decade — Western restructuring and Soviet collapse — intersect to produce the *Zeitgeist* of 'globalization'?

The social change in the West had been underway since at least the 1970s. It was given various names as its various parts unfolded: Thatcherism, monetarism, Reaganomics, neoliberalism, post-Fordism, deindustrialization and so on. But whatever we call it, we know that the hinge on which it ultimately turned was first the crisis and then the partial dismantling of the domestic and international architecture of the postwar settlement — conventionally referred to as Keynesianism and Bretton Woods respectively.[30]

Domestically, it was in the 1970s that the postwar boom gave way to prolonged stagflation, deepening fiscal problems and a rising tide of labour militancy across the leading Western societies. The quagmire was deepened by increased levels of public borrowing in the OECD countries, which heightened government exposure to the confidence of private capital without, however, achieving its desired (Keynesian) effect of stimulating renewed growth. By the early 1980s, this composite crisis had generated a wide spectrum of policy responses, ranging from the unsuccessful French attempt at reflation to the

right-wing Anglo-American counter-offensive, which was later to become ideologically dominant (Solomon, 1999). This counter-offensive was itself not uniform: the 'supply-side revolution' plus increased state (military) expenditures of 'Reaganomics' contrasted sharply with the balanced budgets of Thatcherism, its large-scale privatization of state-owned industries and above all the attempt to replace counter-cyclical state spending with deflationary 'monetarist' disciplines. The common links, however, were ultimately more significant: the attempted switch from progressive to regressive forms of taxation; political and legislative assaults on the power of organized labour; and a loud revival of Cold War rhetoric and policy. The economic remedies of Keynesianism had failed, and its corporatist politics would now be decisively rejected in the Anglo-Saxon countries: the crisis would be met instead by the determined reassertion of the prerogatives of private capital — in the workplace, in national economic policy and on the stage of world politics.

Internationally, the crunch had started even earlier. By 1961, the long-term US current account deficit, which provided liquidity to the 'Bretton Woods system', had already reached the predicted result of a 'dollar overhang' (the Triffin paradox). In the short term, this very phenomenon reflected the hegemonic role of the US currency in the system, and even enhanced it — creating a loop-hole in the network of capital controls which facilitated the business operations of American multinational corporations, and allowing the US economy to export domestic inflation to its re-emerging competitors.[31] In the longer term however, its indefinite expansion could not be sustained by any amount of Dollar 'seigniorage', especially once the international economic downturn set in. Eventually, and in that context, the longer term rebalancing of the world economy due to European and Japanese recovery combined with the spiralling costs of the Vietnam War to trigger the end of Dollar/gold convertibility in 1971. That event removed the anchor of the Bretton Woods system, launching a slow cascade of deregulation, which led within 2 years to a return to floating currencies (and a resultant ballooning of foreign exchange markets), and over a longer period to a wider relaxation of controls on the international movement of capital.[32] Keynes had famously declared his intention at Bretton Woods to bring about 'the euthanasia of the rentier'. Under American pressure, he had to settle for a tranquilizer;[33] and now, in the changed circumstances of the 1970s, the effects were wearing off.

Finally, each of these dimensions of the process, the domestic and the international, was exacerbated by the oil price shocks of the 1970s (which in turn also gave a further boost to the expansion of the international financial markets involved in recycling the 'petro-dollars'). And the international debt crisis, that followed hastened the transformation of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank into instruments by which the 'Thatcherite' policy

shifts in the West could be spread to indebted Third World states via the negotiation of programmes of stabilization and structural adjustment.

All this comprised a very uneven process — and one which remains incomplete even today. But it is worth recalling this slow disintegration of the postwar socio-economic settlement, because by the 1980s at the latest it had already visibly produced at least three major effects which would feed into the later 'age of globalization'.

First, it helped release manufacturing companies from the wasting assets of 'Fordist rustbelts', accelerating the development of a New International Division of Labour (Knox and Agnew, 1989, 31ff). A widely noted feature of the latter was the process by which, albeit to a limited extent, previously integrated production processes were being broken up and reconfigured or outsourced on a transnational level, allowing successful companies to outmanoeuvre competing producers and domestic labour forces alike. So, already in the 1980s, though hardly for the first time in the history of capitalist development,[34] the *national* architecture of the world economy seemed to be dissolving.

Second, the accumulated result of American deficits, floating currencies, rising OECD public debt and petrodollar recycling was a massive overall expansion in the activities of international financial markets. This in turn had generated enormous swarms of speculative capital feeding off the daily movement of exchange rates and bond issues, constraining the fiscal policies of governments through the latter's increased dependence on market confidence — a dependence dramatically illustrated by the turnaround in French economic policy in 1982. So, already in the 1980s, the sovereign state seemed, as more than one writer put it, to be 'hollowing out'.

And finally, the social disruptions that this change involved in the West — the break-up of stable patterns of employment and class identities, the growth of knowledge-intensive and service industries, the heightened vulnerability to deregulated capital flows — gave purchase to a rising academic literature of *postmodernity* with its focus on the dissolution of grand historical narratives, the intensified experience of the transient and the fragmentary in social life, and — already in the 1980s — that preoccupation with spatiotemporal phenonema (analysed at the time in Harvey, 1990), which would later be central to Globalization Theory.

However, all of these effects on their own did not give rise to the 'age of globalization'. And, on their own, it is questionable whether they would ever have produced the discourse of Globalization Theory.[35] So what was it which turned this gear change in Western capitalist development into a sudden spatial expansion which immediately demanded the word 'global'? What was the event which tipped the 'postmodern' era over into the 'age of globalization'? It was of course the temporal intersection of this 'rise of neoliberalism' by the collapse of

the Soviet Union. This collapse was itself partly hastened by the factors mentioned above, but it also added a new and decisive element. The collapse of the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991 created an enormous vacuum in the international system — a vacuum which was simultaneously geopolitical, social and ideological.

Geopolitically, it dissolved one pole of the pre-existing bipolar system, leaving numerous states with a hole at the centre of their foreign policies. Socially, it rendered definitively futureless the development strategies of many countries — not just those of Soviet client states, but also the many more which were premised in other ways on the political space created by the Cold War stand-off (within which, in turn, the permissive terms of Bretton Woods had been framed). And ideologically, the collapse of the Second World dealt a death blow to the idea of the Third World, not just in the obvious numerological sense but more profoundly by discrediting the whole notion of viable alternatives to, or even within, a capitalist developmental agenda.

None of these results was without a prehistory stretching back years if not decades. The socio-economic 'stagnation' of the Soviet Union, and its inability to respond to the gear-change in the West, were already manifest in the early 1980s, as the decrepit remnants of the old elite — Brezhnev, Chernenko, Andropov — filed rapidly and ineffectually out of the Kremlin. The institutionalized bipolarity of Détente (which reached its high point in the Helsinki Accords of 1975) had already long given way to the Reagan version of 'rollback' — with its low-intensity warfare, pursuit of nuclear 'escalation dominance' and its use of the 'star wars' threat to drag its opponent into a new and economically unaffordable round of strategic competition (Halliday, 1983, 1989). Foreign debt, failing domestic legitimacy and the international demise of Bretton Woods were already delivering their death blows to the 'statist' 'national road' of combined development, and its associated 'dependencia' worldview (Leys, 1996). Divided by uneven development (NICs, OPEC etc.) and defeated in its campaign for a New International Economic Order, 'Third Worldism' was already a spent force in world politics. In Mexico, in China, and even in Vietnam, 'marketization' had begun in earnest in the 1980s (Solomon, 1999).

Indeed, this extended inner recessional of the Cold War conjuncture may itself help to explain why the eventual end could take the form of such a sudden, rapid, thorough-going and many-sided collapse, and why it could occur without the major war which the 1980s had seemed so ominously to be preparing. For as we noted earlier, by the early 1980s all three of the processes whose conjunction had shaped the events of that era were fully played out — and yet the accoutrements, habits, military deployments and broad diplomatic structures of world politics, which their conjunction had produced remained in place, just, awaiting (as we now know) the final shock. 'What is the Cold War

now about?', asked E. P. Thompson in 1982, writing from inside this strange historical hiatus: 'It is about itself' (Thompson *et al.*, 1982, 332). What needs explaining therefore is not so much that the Cold War order eventually ended, but rather the suddenness of the event, the speed with which its effects coursed through the international system, and the almost instant replacement on the horizon of historical expectation of nuclear Armageddon by visions of socio-political convergence under the rapidly expanding umbrella of international organisations. To those 'who lived through part or all of the Cold War years, the sheer speed and drama with which the Cold War order collapsed remains a life-defining moment.' (Clark, 2001, v) And this speed itself owed something to the accumulated effects of the previous years: with little now left to slow the fall, the entire residual constellation of international alignments, identities, policy commitments and world-views could be suddenly dragged down by the long-prepared yet unpredictable implosion at its centre.

The 1990s therefore opened with a mutually reinforcing conjunction of a push and a pull. The push came from the accumulated momentum of restructuring in the West (which had already extended into 'neo-liberal' policy shifts within the International Financial Institutions). The pull came from the vacuum created by the Soviet Collapse. This is the dominant combination of causes that gives conjunctural definition to the 'age of globalization'. The vortex created by this combination provides the key to the world politics of the 1990s. And its heady swirl of transnational expansion, international re-organization and rapid socio-political change explains both the rise and the fall of Globalization Theory. How is this so?

Inside the vacuum

Extreme things happen inside vacuums.[36] And with the atmospheric pressure of the Cold War suddenly reduced to zero, extreme things now happened, had to happen, in the geopolitical vacuum of the 1990s. A partial register of the events that followed may serve as a reminder of the 'sheer speed and drama' involved.

In 1989–1990, divided Germany seized the opportunity to reunify, adding a sudden further stimulus to European integration as a means of reinforcing the ties of its post-Second World War realignment. India, having since independence relied on a close relationship with the Soviet Union, now tilted West: by November 1991, it was planning joint military exercises with the US Navy, and had already contracted an IMF loan bound to conditions of domestic economic deregulation. 'How the world is changing', commented *The Economist*: '…the Cold War is over, and India's traditional foreign policy is irrelevant' (The Economist, 1991). The case, however, was general. With the falling away of the conjunctural conditions which had brought it into existence,

the tripartite division of 'worlds' was dissolving. In 1992, all references to a planned economy were deleted from the Chinese Constitution, and the Chinese Communist Party declared its new doctrine that socialism and a market economy were compatible (Solomon, 1999, 131). By 1994, Mexico, long an archetype of the statist, import-substitutionist, national model of development, had capped a decade of attempted reforms with entry into NAFTA.

Elsewhere, with the external supports and restraints removed, and depending also on local circumstances, some states broke into pieces, (Russia, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Ethiopia), some imploded (Somalia, Afghanistan, Rwanda, Zaire), and some, (notably Iraq), tried to solve longer term internal problems through a previously unthinkable international adventurism. A small minority, (including Myanmar and North Korea), tried to cling on through intensified domestic coercion. But the vast majority of developing and/or formerly Soviet-oriented states tried — desperately or opportunistically — to trim their sails to the gales now blowing uncontrollably in from the West. How did they do this? And how, more generally, were the geopolitical, social and ideological dimensions of the vacuum filled?

In the run up to Operation Desert Storm in 1991, the international orientation of numerous states had changed virtually overnight, as previously anti-Western governments seized the opportunity of the Kuwaiti crisis to get on the right side of the new international balance of power. That, however, was the easy part.

Much harder for those who confronted it was the second dimension: how to absorb the shockwaves of international pressure for social change which increasingly resonated with dangerous internal pressures for political reform, due to the accumulating inner contradictions of combined development. (And it was not only Soviet-oriented states that would feel this pressure: the simultaneous collapse of communism as both a geopolitical and a social force also dissolved the category of authoritarian regimes who could present themselves as the West's bulwarks against communism either externally or internally.) Various routes emerged — all pointing ultimately in the same direction. Russia and Eastern Europe took the road of 'shock therapy'. Most political elites in the less developed world negotiated terms with the blueprint known as the 'Washington Consensus'. And most of the remainder produced their own cautious programmes of partial economic reform under authoritarian political regimes. At any rate, the Soviet collapse set the seal on a widening abandonment of the so-called 'national road' of state-led development, which had been linked to the ideology of Third Worldism during the Cold War. By 1992 it was already possible to speak of 'the triumph of neo-classical economics in the developing world'. 'With the possible exceptions of Cuba and North Korea', wrote Thomas Biersteker in that year, 'one is hard pressed to identify countries in the world where the movement is currently in the other direction' (Biersteker, 1992, 106–107).

And the short-term results were electrifying in their combination. Not since the Age of Imperialism — and probably not even then — had the capitalist world economy witnessed such a sudden and geographically vast 'opening up' of societies to its operations. It would be an exaggeration to say that the 'most immediate effect' of the Soviet collapse 'was to precipitate upwards of 3 billion people from the former Soviet Union, Central Europe, China and India onto a *world* labour market' (Story, 2002, 131). Policy-change is not a magic wand. Yet this *was* how it appeared at the time: 'reforms were taking place so extensively, and in so many countries, that investors found it easy to believe that it was a completely new world' (Krugman, 1995, 39). 'Washington Consensus' policies produced considerable, almost immediate, rewards in the form of short-term inflows of foreign capital, obscuring for a while their much less impressive record of generating actual growth (Krugman, 1995, 41).

In this context, the 1990s witnessed a more than six-fold rise in international flows of private finance (from $44 billion at the start of the decade to $256 billion by 1998) (Thomas, 1999, 235). And the sudden, wider opening up which this reflected could be seen in many other indicators too: 'From 1948 to 1997, 76 free trade agreements were created or modified, and more than half of these came into being after 1990' (Thomas, 1999, 234).

A 'completely new world': here was a subjective impression, which played an important role in the rising popular and academic appeal of the idea of 'globalization'. And this impression was fortified by a second feature of the overall process. Domestic policy changes, frequently in a context of developmental failure, produced an urgent need for political re-legitimation in the affected states. The pressure of the vacuum therefore also produced, on the surface of world politics, what looked like a spread of 'democratization'. It was thus in the early 1990s that Huntington's 'Third Wave' (originally composed by adding the emerging East European experiences to those of Southern Europe and Latin America in the 1980s), seemed to become an unstoppable 'global' process. It now extended its effects to Africa and beyond, (reaching an apogee in the 1994 dissolution of South African apartheid in the elections of that year) — and stimulating a revived debate in the field of international relations around the so-called 'Democratic Peace Thesis' (Brown *et al*., 1996). Indeed, by the end of the first half of the 1990s, nearly 100 countries were being defined as undergoing 'democratic transition' (Carothers, 2002, 6).

The excitement of the times, produced by this dramatic series of national socio-political changes, was further boosted by a simultaneous and equally rapid institutional reorganisation of the international economy, led by the industrialized countries.

The EU 'single market' came into existence in 1992, a further step in the construction of the 'post-modern' 'post-Westphalian' European space. The

following year saw the inaugural summit in Seattle of APEC. Within a year (1994) APEC was joined both by NAFTA and ASEAN — the latter simultaneously marking the first indigenous multilateral political organisation in Asia. Indeed, 1994 itself was something of an *annus mirabilis* in the institutional redefinition of the post-Cold War international economy. For this same year also saw both the conclusion of the Uruguay Round of the GATT and the transformation of the latter into the WTO. The WTO's expanding membership rapidly incorporated the bulk of the former communist countries — later climaxing in the accession of that country which had, since the very dawn of the capitalist world economy, arguably played the role of the ultimate prize and the most stubborn resistor: China.

Such were the processes by which, in a dazzling flurry of changes, the geopolitical and socio-economic vacuum was being filled. Meanwhile, the ideological vacuum was temporarily filled by an unstable mixture of three sets of ideas, each of which had a powerful temporary correspondence to these processes: multilateralism, democratization and human rights, and of course 'globalization'. Briefly, multilateralism provided an institutional framework for orchestrating the new order without the appearance (or burdens)[37] of a dictated peace — useful cover for Cold War victors and vanquished alike. Democratization and human rights gave it a practical as well as rhetorical language of legitimacy. And 'globalization' was the magic word which simultaneously naturalized and dramatized this tiger-leap of capitalist expansion, representing it as the unstoppable, uncontrollable climax of a universal human destiny. 'Quit the whining', advised Thomas Friedman, with an assurance which must have seemed more or less unanswerable at the time. 'Globalization isn't a choice' (Friedman, 1997).

'Globalization', in fact, was truly a word that seemed to unite in a single image all the different vectors of this decade of change. Not for nothing did this hazy spatial metaphor now become the *Zeitgeist* of the 1990s. For the torrent of events did seem to be converging in a common spatial register: expansion of social space through the opening up of closed societies; compression of geographical space through distance-transcending means of communication; merging of inter-societal space through deepening transnational interconnection; reconfiguration of geopolitical space through widespread diplomatic realignments; universalizing of legal space through assertions of international jurisdiction;[38] mixing up and hybridizing of cultural space through large-scale migration, even larger-scale mass tourism and the cultivation of new markets for 'world' music, 'world' food, 'world literature', 'world' cinema, etc.; unification of historical space via the dissolution of the three worlds of the Cold War era; and blurring of 'international' space, whether through the new structural role of international organizations, the increased visibility of non-state actors (NGOs and MNCs) or the assertion of ecosystem-wide 'planetary'

challenges — the three intermittently fused in single events such as the 1992 Rio 'Earth Summit'.

Expanded and compressed, merged and reconfigured, universalized and hybridized, blurred and unified: it was no great leap to reason from this experience that a 'far reaching change in the nature of social space' (Scholte, 2000, 46) was underway — and from there to the conclusion that this transformation was of epochal significance, and even that it had an emergent momentum of its own which was causally central to the worldwide upheaval of social change whose unfolding was charted from day to day in the world's media. And since this unfolding was in turn punctuated by awesome demonstrations of Leviathan humbled by financial markets — from the wrecking of the EMS near the start of the decade to the tearing apart of the East Asian 'miracle' toward its close — the final link (to the decline of sovereignty) was never far from the public mind. 'Globalization Vaults into Reality' was a front page headline in the *International Herald Tribune*, above a story which claimed to illustrate how the phenomenon had now emerged from the textbooks of academia to take hold on the real world (IHT, 1997).

Yet this impression was nothing but the empirical counterpart (and presumably also the ultimate source) of that disabling inversion of *explanans* and *explanandum*, which we earlier noted in our social theoretical analysis. For in fact, of course, all along, matters stood the other way about. It was the cascading social and political change, precipitated by the conjunction of capitalist deregulation with the Soviet collapse, which was producing the spatial effects. And in the longer historical view, the social and political change, geographically vast as it was, was clearly conjunctural, not epochal. No new form of society was emerging — rather, the organic tendencies of the old were now reasserting themselves, in a new situation, and on an historically unprecedented scale.

We already know, after all, that the rapid switching of diplomatic orientations was due overwhelmingly to the immediate pressures generated by the Soviet collapse. We also know that because this collapse marked the end not only of a geopolitical rivalry, but also of a contest of antagonistic social systems, diplomatic realignment would necessarily be accompanied by policy change — that is, by a greater or lesser 'opening up' of previously 'closed' societies to commercial penetration and integration. And because we know first that 'Structural Adjustment' brought the replacement of import substitution by export-led attempts at growth, and second that public flows of overseas development assistance dwindled by 40% over the same period (1990–1998) in which private international capital flows multiplied six-fold (Thomas, 1999, 235), we should not be surprised to find that the thickening sinews of this integration predominantly took the form of 'transnational' economic linkages. We therefore already have a conjunctural explanation for

the perceived phenomena of eroding spatial boundaries, a spurt of intensifying 'spatial' integration, the multiplication of 'transnational' forces and the ideological unification of 'historical space'.

Still, lest explanation be perceived as 'explaining away', we cannot leave it at that. For our earlier methodological reflections should now allow us to move onto a broader historical sociological plane of explanation. And we should be able, from that vantage point, to say something more both about the nature of the overall process at work, and about the particular historical significance of this conjunctural moment. What, we must ask, is the view from the bridge? And has it been worth the long labour of intellectual construction? To find out, we must now bring together the different historical and theoretical strands of our overall argument.

Globalization Theory was not, after all, wrong to sense that in some way the nature of the modern state in general was somehow caught in the very centre of the enormous transformative pressures of this decade. Without an adequate sociological understanding of this modern form of state, however, it simply could not coherently visualize the nature of the movement at work. On the one hand, the state seemed somehow to be everywhere on the retreat — unable to deliver on its accumulated domestic obligations, unable to withstand the force of international financial markets, giving up its prerogatives left, right and centre: to markets, to private corporations, to international organisations, to NGOs and to rights-bearing individuals. The belief that sovereignty must be on the wane in some fundamental way drew its empirical substantiation from the scale of this 'retreat'. On the other hand, by the end of the 1990s, the number of states in the world recognized as sovereign had actually increased — and there was no shortage of visible secessionist demands for even more sovereign states. Furthermore, all the expectations of 'global governance' seemed to have made no difference at all to the basic character of geopolitical competition and rivalry among the great powers themselves, let alone anywhere else. In the face of this paradox, Globalization Theorists collectively vacillated. The 'hyperglobalizers' foretold the obsolescence of sovereignty. The 'transformationalists' saw it refashioned in new ways and socialized within a wider, multi-level system of 'global governance'. Scholte, however — whose extreme equivocations surely mark him out as a 'transformationalist' — thought sovereignty already gone, rendering the word itself nugatory (2000, 138). Constrained, abolished, transformed in unprecedented ways — the confusion was intense, and, in fact, the answer lay in none of these directions.

For on the basis of our earlier discussion about sovereignty, the real nature of the movement in structural terms should now become clear. There was indeed, across the international social formation of capitalism, an attempted 'withdrawal of the state', initiated in the 1980s and pressed forward on a worldwide front in the 1990s. Yet far from marking a constraint, decline or

even novel transformation of sovereignty, this movement comprised a (re)assertion of the abstracted capitalist form of sovereignty in the classical Marxian sense — an attempted withdrawal, voluntary or otherwise, from the state's historically evolved entanglements with civil society in the varying forms of 'First World' social democracy, 'Second (and Third) World' state socialism, and 'Third World' patrimonial state capitalism.

Such a reassertion was, as we earlier saw, described by Marx as the recurrent imperative of an abstracted sovereign state in relation to its capitalist civil society: 'it has to *acknowledge* it again, *reinstate* it and *allow itself to be dominated* by it'. In the 1980s and 1990s, this reassertion co-incided with socio-economic deadlock in the First World, political collapse in the Second and, at the very least, extreme vulnerability to outside pressure in the Third. *All* the attributes of sovereignty therefore seemed to be shuddering at once, giving the appearance of a general crisis of sovereignty itself. And this appearance was further bolstered by the enormously increased use of international organizations, by the strong and the weak alike, to orchestrate, legitimate and coordinate the process. Yet when the shudder was over, the sovereign states were still there, and in even greater numbers. Not the state, but stat*ism* had been the actual target of the assault.

The result of this assault was uneven in the extreme. In not a single case did the sovereign state of Marx's abstraction cleanly emerge. For most, some modified, perhaps intensified variant of combined development was taking shape. Yet one thing had indeed changed quite decisively. The cold war international environment, with its partial, strategically induced tolerance for systematic deviation from the Marxian concept of sovereignty, was gone. The goals of the international organizations dominated by the Western capitalist states had shifted from a social democratic to a 'neo'-liberal register. And thus the international norm of sovereignty itself, after its Cold War conjunctural detour, had now reverted, at least temporarily, to something more like its classical liberal meaning — with uncertain implications for the future.

Befuddled by the lateral speed of this process as it accelerated to its climax under the pressure of the geopolitical vacuum of the 1990s, Globalization Theory had lost sight of this defining social structural content; and in a fatal (though doubtless unconscious), move, it had transferred the causal agency from the thing that was speeding to the idea of speed itself. Socially empty, spatio-temporal measures of 'extensivity', 'intensivity' 'velocity' and so on (Held *et al*, 1999, 15–16), thereupon became its necessary, and necessarily reifying, discursive categories. Rampant technological determinism was the ever-looming result, staved off but never extinguished by the perpetual equivocations of the 'folly'.

Still, if our general historical sociological perspective now allows us to recover this 'vertical' social-structural element of the movement, it is not

enough on its own. Simply replacing the 'lateral' with the 'vertical' would lose the latter's crucial *international* dimension, and condemn our argument to the 'reductionist' pitfall of the 'domestic analogy'. Furthermore, simply invoking the general, recurrent organic imperatives at work does not allow us to identify the specific historical significance of the 1990s in particular. What then to do? For to complete the view, we need a theoretical perspective which can visualize the vertical and the lateral as simultaneous dimensions of a moving historical whole. And we should not underestimate the intellectual scale of this requirement: it demands not just a truly historical and sociological theory, but one which in addition is neither reductionist in the direction of 'the domestic' nor reifying in its conception of 'the international'. Arguably, this demand has been the great stumbling block in the development of historical sociology in the field of international studies.

Fortunately, however, it does not ask of us anything which we do not already have. For this is exactly the potential achievement of Trotsky's theoretical innovations for this field. We now invoke these in order finally to locate the events of the 1990s in the longer historical movement of which they form a part. So far, we have viewed these events 'close-up' in the conjunctural temporality of *evenements;* and we have re-connected them speculatively to the abstract temporality of Marx's 'definitive causal generalizations about [capitalist] socio-historical processes'; we must now unite these two in a third, more inclusive temporality of historical explanation: the one defined by the overall historical development of capitalism as an (international) social formation. We must, that is, re-interpret the 1990s as a new chapter in the ongoing history of uneven and combined development. How do they reappear in *that* light?

As we earlier saw, the three 'worlds' constellation of the Cold War era had itself been produced by that wider process, which was initiated by the historical emergence of capitalist society, driven forward, at its broadest, by the organic tendencies identified by Marx — refracted through the outcomes of its distinctively international mechanism. The Soviet Union had been a gigantic emanation of this process, whose inter-societal pressures had produced that Czarist pattern of combined development which formed the archetype of Trotsky's analysis. In its moment of terminal crisis, Czarism was overthrown by a communist party bent on what Gramsci punningly called a 'revolution against Capital' — meaning an anti-capitalist revolution which also contradicted Marx's designation of advanced capitalism as the necessary site of socialist revolution. What became of it? For just over a decade, Bolshevism twisted and turned within the contradictions of its 'backward' socialist developmentalism. Eventually, it succumbed to a new and intensified form of combined development as its anti-capitalist ideology was fused with a programme of rapid, state-orchestrated and coerced industrialization: Stalinism

(Deutscher, 1959, 1963; Horowitz, 1969). For the remainder of its existence, however, the further evolution of the international system had itself a very particular 'combined' character. The social and geopolitical threat posed by this anti-capitalist model of industrialization first radicalized the interwar 'general crisis', feeding into the 'emergency politics' of fascism, was then temporarily submerged in the military alliance of the Second World War, and finally re-emerged in the postwar period on a new scale, in a new guise and with new international consequences.

It was at this historical point, chastened by the system-wide economic crisis of capitalism between the wars, confronted simultaneously by the military arrival of Stalinism in Central Europe and its ideological appeal within the weakened European empires, that the leading capitalist states embraced the many-sided compromise of the 'postwar settlement'. And it was this settlement, with its conjuncturally enhanced structures of national economic and political autonomy, which would later serve as the deceptive historical baseline against which Globalization Theory would measure its declarations of historical change, conflating its temporary conditions with the longer term of international history through the adoption of the myth of Westphalia. Viewed in *that* light, the transformations of the 1990s could indeed look like an expanding rupture with the past — but only the recent past.

Relocated in the longer-term process, and despite their unprecedented scale and empirically unique configuration, they turn out to be no such thing. On the contrary, what had actually happened was that the Soviet Union, whose continued existence was by the end of the 1980s almost the last thing holding the remnants of the postwar settlement in place, suddenly disappeared; and, via a combination of domestic and international pressures, the structural imperatives of capitalist society now therefore, and equally suddenly, caught up with a range of states which had been formed in an earlier historical conjuncture of the process — one which had temporarily shielded them from the full international and domestic force of those imperatives.

The international situation produced by this was certainly historically new. Yet it needed no new general theory in order to be comprehended. For what, after all, was it which had triggered this 'scrunching' of the social formation at this historical moment? Here all paths lead back to the same point. It was the downturn of the 1970s, and the failure of Keynesian policies to reverse it, which led to the neo-liberal revival in the West, which in turn spread through much of the Third World in the 1980s, such that when the Soviet Collapse came, so much else could come down with it. In this way, another one of Marx's organic tendencies of capitalist development — the tendency to recurrent social crisis produced by capitalism's way of restructuring when its existing regime of accumulation is exhausted — resurfaces at the causal centre of the *empirical* circumstances which eventually built up into the 'global'

denouement of the 1990s. As we saw earlier, the elements of this build-up were many sided — economic, social, political, cultural, diplomatic, military. And their context and conjunction were unique. But these considerations, as Althusser pointed out, do not dilute the significance or validity of the (abstract) organic tendency: they are the very elements of its empirical reality, which the abstraction exists to help identify and explain.

The outline of our alternative analysis of the 1990s is now therefore almost complete: in its own unique way, via the dispersed but cumulative operation of the organic tendencies of capitalist society, themselves scattered and regrouped through the uneven and combined development of the international social formation as a whole, the empire of civil society had struck back.

Still, in order for such an analysis to succeed, we must be able to show how the (abstractly identified) pressures conducing to this end were at one with the real-world interests of the actors through whose dilemmas, decisions and policies it actually came about. We must close, that is, any remaining perceived gap between the 'structural' nature of the explanation and the concrete 'agency' involved.

As we have already seen, many and varied were the social actors during this decade who encountered the (abstract) organic tendencies of capitalist society in the form of immediate practical imperatives: multinational corporations lured by opportunity and driven by competition to expand into newly available regions; debt-laden governments — North, South, East and West — driven by internal slowdown and external pressure to embrace 'neo-liberal' policy shifts; functionaries of international organisations for whom the advocacy of market solutions was now all but indistinguishable from 'problem solving' *per se* in their given area — whether that area was macro-economic stabilization and adjustment, or poverty alleviation, or democracy promotion. Yet dispersed and overdetermined as the multiple causality of the overall process might have been, it was not without attempted geopolitical direction. And from the point of view of international relations, our analysis would in fact be radically incomplete without mention of one key coordinating agency. '[H]e who does not want to speak about America', Perry Anderson would later comment, 'should be silent about globalization' (Anderson, 2001, 3). What, then, should we say of America?

Towards the end of the decade 'conservative' critics of the Clinton Administration increasingly accused it of having generated no consistent strategy — no 'Clinton Doctrine'. And when the intervention in Bosnia was later followed by the Kosovo conflict, it was the humanitarian justifications for these which eventually came to stand for such a doctrine. But this was misleading. As the editors of *Foreign Policy* pointed out in their valedictory of 2000, the grand strategy, which was to guide US foreign policy in this period, had been clearly enunciated within months of the start of the first

Administration (*Foreign Policy* 2000). '*The successor to a doctrine of containment',* declared the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs,

> must be a strategy of enlargement – enlargement of the world's free community of market democracies… [W]e have arrived neither at the end of history nor a clash of civilizations, but a moment of immense democratic and entrepreneurial opportunity. We must not waste it (Lake, 1993).

Commentators may disagree over the consistency and meaning of American support for democratisation (Cox *et al*., 2000); but it would be hard indeed to argue that the Clinton Administrations did not rise to the 'entrepreneurial' challenge. The National Security Council was joined by a new 'National Economic Council' in the White House; a 'war room' was set up within the Commerce Department; and by 2000 nearly 300 new trade agreements had been signed — breaking all previous records (Bureau of Public Affairs, 2001). The Clinton Administration also broke the record for the use of economic sanctions, as country after country felt the heat of the Special 301 legislation designed to pressure uncooperative trading partners. And throughout this period, the expanded activities of the IMF were conducted within the remit allowed by its one veto-carrying member. Holding a sole veto may not be quite the same as having one's own way all the time. But the Administration's killing off of proposals for a separate Asian Monetary Fund during the height of the East Asian Crisis gives some indication of the jealousy with which it guarded the power which its unique directive oversight of the IMF generated. Clinton was indeed 'the Globalization President' (*Foreign Policy* 2000). And what might have appeared as a welcome 'multilateralism' of his policies, was in fact a conjunctural symptom of the scale of the international opportunity, coupled with the shared interests of the industrialised states in opening up the rest of the world at this moment of its almost unparalleled weakness.[39]

In short, Friedman's claim that 'Globalization isn't a choice' was selectively true if it meant that weaker states would be temporarily unable to resist the combined market and diplomatic pressures for liberalization; it was even true if it meant that US policy was riding a wave of change which it could not fully control. Certainly, by contrast to the 1940s, the newly emerging economic architecture of the 1990s was not 'a politically deliberate creation. It emerged by default. Both directly, however, and by extending the agenda for the Bretton Woods institutions, the United States took advantage of it, and took what control it could' (Hawthorn, 1999, 155). Thus, for the leading capitalist state, in the context of the deeply asymmetrical international power relations of the decade, the promotion of that upheaval misnamed as 'globalization' was indeed the foreign policy of choice *par excellence*. 'By informal means where possible…' And during the 1990s, with political barriers to trade and speculative investment falling, and with so many states turning to Washington,

the pickings which could be anticipated through informal means were unusually rich: from the proliferating free trade agreements to the unprecedented terms of the WTO articles of agreement, to the $30 billion bonanza of the East Asian 'fire sale' (Thomas, 1999, 227), not to mention the expanding order books of US arms companies, as NATO candidate countries replaced unsuitable Soviet weaponry. Suitably amended, the campaign slogan of the 1992 Presidential election could equally, have stood for the 'missing' 'Clinton Doctrine': 'It's the [international] economy, stupid.' And so, for a while, it overwhelmingly appeared to be.

Thus the hour of 'globalization' as a popular *Zeitgeist* had now struck. It 'captured the public imagination, …[becoming] the leitmotif of our age' (Held and McGrew, 2000, 1). And for this reason the idea was taken up by a huge variety of actors pursuing a wide variety of purposes: corporate executives and neo-liberal governments, functionaries of International Organizations, some international lawyers and supportive legislators, and a multiplying host of activist NGOs — pro-human rights, anti-capitalist, pro-indigenous, anti-big business and many others. All of these actors sensed a momentum to the times, which they could harness to their different causes by capturing the definition of the *Zeitgeist*. And why not? All of them were certainly right to believe that moments of sudden opening up and political change do create opportunities to be grasped.

Just about the only people who really got it wrong were the Globalization Theorists. They ought to have been analysing the conjunctural character of this historical moment. But instead they swallowed its own ideological self-definition and mistook it for an epochal shift in the character of human society itself. And that was the one thing which, if the above analysis holds, was never actually on the cards. Because the speed and direction of change, which they extrapolated into the idea of a completed 'global' future, were in fact deceptive and temporary side effects of the dramatic but finite adjustments required to fill the vacuum. And, in any case, the inner movement of this historical conjuncture was only half done.

The waning of the conjuncture

As Gollwitzer noted, historical turning points can be difficult to pin-point with accuracy. But it does seem in retrospect that around the middle of the 1990s, the real-world conjuncture of forces, which had generated the *Zeitgeist* of 'globalization', began to wane. As Carothers noted, it was in the early 1990s that expectations of the Third Wave of democratization had peaked, and by 1996 Larry Diamond was asking 'Is the Third Wave Over?' (Diamond, 1996). Perhaps more than any other publication, it was Paul Krugman's article, 'Dutch Tulips and Emerging Markets' (Krugman, 1995) which had made the

term 'Washington Consensus' into a stock reference (somewhat to the irritation of its originator (Williamson, 2000). Yet that article itself, written soon after of the 1994 Mexican Peso crisis, already announced 'the beginning of the deflation of the Washington Consensus' (Krugman, 1995, 31). 'Globalization without cosmopolitanism', David Held would later write, in the aftermath of 9/11, 'could fail' (Held, 2001). From a writer for whom 'globalization' was tied to hopes of normative political reform of the international system, this expressed an understandable fear. Nonetheless, by then it was too late. For already, before September 2001, the *Zeitgeist* of 'globalization' had begun to evaporate. How and why had this occurred?

As we have argued, the frenzied changes of the early 1990s owed much of their speed to the immediate pressures generated by the vacuum. However, as the vacuum filled, and *because* it was filling, the *speed* of change necessarily slowed and its *direction* necessarily became less certain. It slowed because the most dramatic shifts of external alignment and internal policy were largely accomplished in the space of a few years. After all, how many times can whole regions of states abandon the same anti-Western policies due to the same Soviet Collapse? Almost by definition, just once. How many times do the same states have to sign up to the same international organization before that organization, say the WTO, exists as an international reality? (And how long must that organization exist before the spectacle it offers reverts from the 'global' event of initial convergence to the more familiar, and divisive, multiple pursuit of national interests)?[40] These are, almost by definition, one-off events. During the early 1990s, a remarkable number of them were crowded into a small space of time due to the conjunctural political pressures created by the vacuum. But they were finite in number, and each of them reduced that pressure further by accomplishing the adjustments and arrangements by which the vacuum was progressively filled.

At the same time, the *direction* of social changes became less certain because their initial momentum was increasingly overtaken by the very uneven results which they produced in the years which followed. By the start of the next decade, these uneven results had framed a very different context of policy decision-making. And increasingly, neither the results themselves, nor the policies confronting them, any longer resonated with the word 'global'.

The uneven results of expanded multilateralism produced a US administration, which flaunted its determination actively to obstruct any multilateral arrangement which did not serve its national interests. This was especially clear, as one would expect, in the military sphere, where the six major deployments of American power since 1989 traced a degenerative sequence, which tells its own story. In the Gulf Conflict of 1990–1991, the US-led intervention enjoyed full UN security Council backing.[41] The same applied initially to the intervention in Somalia, though this episode ended with

American forces plunging unsuccessfully into the conflict, a move at variance with their UN mandate. The eventual use of force in Bosnia brought to a conclusion a disastrous series of multilateral attempts at peacekeeping under UN auspices. And by the time of the next deployment, in Kosovo, not only had the Secretary General who argued for the creation of a UN standing army been removed under US pressure; but also, the Security Council itself had to be bypassed, leaving the interveners claiming alternative legitimation from the shrunken 'multilateralism' of NATO. The bitter recriminations over strategy among the allies themselves during this conflict surely played a role in the later American rejection of formal NATO partnership in the Afghan campaign. And when, finally, in 2002–2003, the Bush Administration turned again to its NATO allies for multilateral sanction, the result was instead a diplomatic crisis which threatened to split the alliance from top to bottom.

Meanwhile, the uneven results of two decades of Structural Adjustment Programmes dissolved the Washington Consensus (Thomas, 1999). As Krugman had predicted, the second half of the 1990s were 'a far more problematic period for global capitalism than the first' (Krugman, 1995, 31). By 1998, following the banking collapse of that year, Russia could no longer plausibly be regarded as 'in transition to a functioning market democracy' (Rutland, 1999, 183). The credibility of the IMF came under increasing pressure due to the still increasing indebtedness of those regions over which it exercised its starkest policy control. And in the East Asian crisis, its prescriptions came widely to be seen as accelerators of the crisis itself.

The uneven results of democratization gradually took the shine off that long procession of unprecedented national elections which occurred during the 1990s as one successor state after another jumped through the hoop of domestic and international relegitimation. The UN's attempt (1993) to install political democracy in Cambodia — the largest such operation in its history — was eventually overtaken by Hun Sen's coup of 1998. More generally, the 100-strong category of 'transitional states' had by the end of the decade fractured across a spectrum of disappointment: successful transitions to democracy were heavily outnumbered by states that had arrived instead at 'feckless pluralism' or 'authoritarian liberalism'. Reviewing their subsequent development in 2002, Thomas Carothers argued that the 'transition paradigm' had suffered a 'crash of assumptions', and should now be given up *tout court* (Carothers, 2002, 14). Even many of the leading capitalist states struggled with historically low levels of voter participation. And of course the decade closed with a US Presidential election which, whatever else may be said of it, threw a tawdry light on the substance of American democracy itself.

Interestingly, the economic and political 'transitions' appeared to have been most successful in the countries of Eastern Europe. Here, however, 'path-dependent variables' (history) plus the enormous attractive power and

discipline of EU and NATO candidate membership were arguably far more significant in producing this result than was the influence of any causes which could plausibly be described as 'global'.

The uneven results of attempts to forge a proto-universal legal jurisdiction generated an apparently accelerating process of compromise and retraction. Ten years on, the Belgian Government changed the 1993 law, which had empowered its courts to try cases of human rights violation committed by foreign nationals in other countries (IHT, 2003b). And of the 90 states that had ratified the 1998 Rome treaty establishing the International Criminal Court, over 50 had signed agreements not to surrender American nationals to the Court (Bindman, 2003).[42] Discourses of national security now increasingly trumped those of human rights in the legitimation of foreign policy. As an American official responsible for processing 'accused terrorists' in the Afghan War remarked: 'If you don't violate someone's human rights some of the time, you probably aren't doing your job' (IHT, 2002).

In this fading light of the 'age of globalization', a range of phenomena which had once seemed to portend epochal change now took on a more strictly conjunctural hue. After the East Asian crisis, 'APEC and ASEAN [were] left looking like fair-weather forums', with ASEAN's 'open regionalism model [being seen to have] made a virtue of political weakness' (Foot and Walter, 1999, 268, 261). The TRIPS agreement could now be seen in retrospect as 'the high water mark of 'hard law' for the commercial intellectual property agenda in a multilateral context' (Sell, 2002, 171). Even the internet, despite its continuing break-neck expansion, was understood to have left behind its 'wild west' phase, to which the most extreme prognostications could now be seen to have belonged:

> After the collapse of the dot.com gold rush… and after the evident fact of the persistence of most of institutions of governance that were supposedly threatened by these technologies… has come the recognition that there is little about the technology of the internet that presents genuinely new and distinctive challenges to regulation… (Perry 6, 2002, 145).

Meanwhile, a decade of 'global' pressure to reduce corporate taxation levels leading in turn to lower levels of domestic welfare spending — the anticipated rise of 'the competition state' — produced, apparently, reductions neither of aggregate corporate taxation nor of overall welfare spending in the OECD countries. Indeed, the real problems of welfare provision with which these countries continued to grapple seemed all along to have had more to do with persistently lower levels of domestic economic growth, coupled with changes in the demographic structures of these societies, than with any specifically international, let alone 'global', pressures (Weiss, 1999, 74–77).

In all these ways, and others besides, the multiple vectors of social change, which once appeared so vividly to converge on a 'global' future, now moved

apart again; and increasingly they revealed, in deepening retrospect, how fleeting (and misunderstood) were the historical conditions on whose basis that future was anticipated. This is how *Zeitgeister* meet their end. Giddens' claim that 'following the dissolving of the Cold War, most nations no longer have enemies' (Giddens, 1999, 18), was, as he acknowledged, already contentious when it was written. Two years later, in an international context traumatically reshaped by the official naming of enemy states as an 'axis of evil', it was not simply contentious: it was irrelevant.

Gradually, then, a new conjuncture was taking shape. It was certainly a conjuncture shaped through all those processes which people in the 1990s called 'globalization'. But it was also one for which the language of 'globalization' itself no longer provided an ideologically plausible guide. And since ideological plausibility was all that the idea of 'globalization' ever had going for it, we may indeed conclude that the 'age of globalization' came to an end at some point around the turn of the century.

To conclude this section, considered narrowly in terms of the strategic rivalry of states, the 1990s might indeed be seen as 'just another of modern history's shake-down cruise periods following a protracted passage of arms…' (Gray, 1999, 175). 'Cruising', however, hardly begins to capture the explosive, contradictory, but unmistakeably expansive thrust of events during the 1990s. Only by reinterpreting this decade as a conjunctural moment in the longer-term cumulative history of a specifically capitalist process of world development can we avoid answering the empty liberal fantasy of 'globalization' with the equally misleading 'realist' image of historically empty 'recurrence and repetition'. That, however, as we shall now recapitulate, was an intellectual possibility denied to Globalization Theory by the very nature of its foundational claims.

Conclusion

The 'double post mortem' proposed near the start of this article has turned out in fact to have three parts, corresponding to three interdependent levels of abstraction at which social enquiry may be pursued: general social theory, historical sociological identification of social structures and tendencies, and empirically oriented, conjunctural analysis of dynamic sequences of historical events. Considerable methodological reflection was needed in order to align these levels of abstraction in a coherent way. In combination, however, they should now enable us to grasp the scale of the intellectual problems intrinsic to Globalization Theory, as well as to make sense of its meteoric rise and fall.

The first level gave us the most general formula of the problem. To posit 'globalization' as an explanatory category must, the further it is pursued, lead to a conceptual inflation of space; the reificatory consequences of this can be avoided only by explicit qualification, to the point of implicit retraction. This

'folly'-like quality of the argumentation is raised to its highest pitch by explicit attempts to supply what ought to be its remedy — namely a (post-classical) regrounding of social theory itself in spatio-temporal categories. Since no-one found a way out of this trap, it seems reasonable to regard it as expressing an intellectual flaw of the most fundamental kind which was intrinsic to the enterprise of Globalization Theory *per se*. Its ultimate source, however, lay elsewhere.

At the second level, the historical sociological, we found the intellectual ambition of Globalization Theory translated into an empirical expectation (however qualified) of a fundamental transformation in the nature of international relations. Here the disconnection of 'globalization' from an analysis of the specific historical form of modern capitalist society allowed it to absorb the mythology of the 'Westphalian System'. On the one hand, this gave an apparent purchase to the argument: the territorial principle of sovereignty must be fundamentally overturned, or challenged, or at least transformed by the rise of non-territorial transnational relations. On the other hand, Globalization Theory supplied no analysis of the specifically capitalist differentiation of public and private forms of social power, together with its constitutive implications for the sovereign states-system; it therefore was unable to explain either why that system had not already been transformed by undeniable 'earlier appearances', or why the 'global transformation' was somehow not as unambiguous or obvious as it ought to be (given the sheer scale of the transnational forces whose mind-boggling statistics were continually but always inconclusively invoked). More qualifications followed, in the course of which it transpired that the strand of Globalization Theory which made the most qualifications had nonetheless designated its position with a term normally resonant with the most fundamental and decisive claims about social change: 'transformationalist'. The longer the argument, the taller the folly.

Finally, at the conjunctural historical level we reconsidered some of the main empirical events and processes that provided the historical context for the rise and fall of Globalization Theory. We found that during the 1990s a longer-term decomposition of the postwar settlement, domestic and international, intersected with the collapse of the Soviet Union to trigger a major and rapid restructuring of the international system. With the crisis of Keynesianism and Bretton Woods in the West, the floodgates holding back the expansion of speculative and transnational capital were gradually prized open. With the collapse of communism in the East, the flood-plain over which it could spread was suddenly extended. The conjunction of these two at the start of the decade lay behind the frenzied expansions, integrations, realignments and transformations that gave the period its overwhelming theme of spatial change, as the former members of the First, Second and Third Worlds — public and private alike — scrambled to adjust in the new environment, under the effective but

contingent and anarchic multilateralism orchestrated by the leading capitalist states. We also saw, however, that the method of conjunctural analysis allowed for a realignment of Marx's general theory of capitalist development with the uneven and combined character of its international history; and this opened the way to an alternative historical sociological analysis of the period, for which the term 'globalization' was intellectually redundant.

Still, here was a heady conjuncture indeed. One can readily see how and why such an idea rose to the level of a *Zeitgeist*. Yet as a causal process in its own right, 'globalization' had no momentum of its own. In fact, if the conjunctural analysis developed in this article is broadly correct, 'globalization' did not even exist.

So long as the conjunctural supports of the idea persisted, its ability to colonize all three levels of analysis seemed unstoppable — in the general social theories of Giddens, Bauman, Beck *et al*., in the historical sociological assays of the 'transformationalists', and in the journalistic fanfares of Thomas Friedman and others. As those supports were removed, however, by the continuation of the same historical process, its intellectual collapse was equally unstoppable. As the vacuum filled and the contraflow of empirical events at the conjunctural historical level quickened, the intuitive plausibility of the idea of 'globalization' for describing the present or the immediate past dissolved; once that occurred, things were bound to come unstuck at the second level, where its grip on the imagining of the immediate future would loosen too. And as soon as the impossible spatio-temporal arguments mounted at the higher theoretical level were no longer supported by the enormous suggestive power of the *Zeitgeist* wafting up from the levels of subjective experience below, then the force of the claims for 'globalization' as a new, alternative paradigm for social science would necessarily evaporate.

If this is what has now happened, then the cumulative retrospective judgment on the idea of 'globalization' at all three levels becomes ineluctable: quite simply, at every level, and but for the noise, there was 'no there there'. And the result of the conjunctural analysis therefore merges with those of the social theoretical and historical sociological sections before it in a common, combined conclusion to the overall post-mortem: Globalization Theory, deceased circa 2000. Cause of death: congenital misplaced concreteness, leading to terminal intellectual complications, compounded by sudden loss of life-supporting ideological plausibility.

In the tangled human way of things, this does not mean that everything written under the sign of 'globalization' was worthless — only that what was worthwhile was achieved in spite of this concept and not because of it. Indeed, one of the better International Relations textbooks produced during this period was an edited volume called *The Globalization of World Politics* (Baylis and Smith, 1997), a titular invitation which most of the contributors implicitly

but firmly declined in the practice of their analyses, to the considerable benefit of their readers. In some cases therefore, the folly could even act as a cover for the continuation *incognito* of balanced social scientific reflection. Only the coordinating discourse itself was necessarily empty — with the result that its most damaging effects were concentrated in the writings of those whose object was the refinement and dissemination of the idea itself.

* * *

The last paragraph of *The Follies of Globalisation Theory* asserted that 'the wild speculative debut of this discourse' could not 'go on for ever'. 'At some point', it continued, optimistically, 'the normal rules of intellectual coherence must reassert themselves.' And the book ended with the claim that 'when they do, the message for Globalization Theory will be the same as for every other grand theory which has strutted and turned on the stage of social science: substance, soon, or silence' (Rosenberg, 2000, 165).

'Strutting on the stage' echoed the well-known speech by Macbeth — challenging the Globalization Theorists, if they could, to escape the ultimate fate of 'signifying nothing'. But this challenge has itself now been overtaken by history. As public silence descends on the word, it is unclear how many of those to whom the idea of 'globalization' spoke so clearly in the 1990s will still be listening if the challenge is taken up. And if that last paragraph were to be rewritten today, the vigorous Shakespearian cadence would already have to be exchanged for one more appropriate to the times, perhaps one taken from the *Rubaiyat* of Omar Khayyam:

> Think, in this battered Caravanserai
> Whose Doorways are alternate Night and Day,
> How Sultan after Sultan with his Pomp
> Abode his Hour or two, and went his way.

Globalization Theory has had its hour or two, and ample indeed was its pomp. Perhaps it too will now, soon, go its way. Given the scale of intellectual and institutional investment in the term, this is unlikely to take the form of a sudden disappearance of 'globalization studies', whose expansion may even now be continuing. What one would rather expect is that this expansion will increasingly go along with an inner retreat from the forward positions of the argument: claims to explain the course of world politics will gradually give way to the thick descriptions of empirical specialization; and within those descriptions, the founding inversion of *explanans* and *explanandum* which launched the giddy trajectory of Globalization Theory will in practice be given up. 'Globalization' will become just another word for interdependence. Meanwhile, the potential contribution of International Relations to an historical sociological understanding of the contemporary world will remain

to be fully realized. For that task, however, as the methodological sections of this article have endeavoured to show, a more powerful set of intellectual resources than any supplied by Globalization Theory may already be to hand.

Notes

1 This article grew out of seminar presentations given at the Universities of Brighton and Sussex in November 2002. I am grateful to Gregory Elliott and especially to Chris Boyle for extremely helpful discussions during its composition. Insightful and very helpful responses to the full draft were also provided by Tamer Abdel-Kader, Simon Bromley, Paul Cammack, Mick Cox, Lee Evans, Alfredo Filho, Beate Jahn, John Kent, George Lawson, Kamran Matin, Robbie Shilliam, Rhona Sim, Neil Stammers, Benno Teschke, and Achin Vanaik. I thank Tony McGrew for the intellectual generosity he showed, despite our wide differences, in our discussions of this subject.

2 Since nothing remains forever the same, and short-term developments accumulate over time into fundamental changes, it is always true to say that 'a new form of human society is emerging'. The claim of Globalization Theory, however, was not of this order: it rested rather on the notion that a major turning point had been reached.

3 As Linda Weiss put it: 'As far as globalists (and indeed many of their sceptic critics…) are concerned… global and national are *conflicting* principles of organization… Most definitions presuppose this antinomy, and presumptions about globalization's policy impacts reinforce it' (Weiss 1999, 60).

4 This theme is elaborated and pursued in detail in Rosenberg (2000).

5 For an excellent anthology of these treatments, assembled in response to an earlier fetishising of space and time, exemplified in the writings of Marshall McLuhan, see Marx and Engels (1980).

6 I am grateful to Babak Bahador (2001) for alerting me to the need for this clarification.

7 See their definition of 'globalization' (1999, 15), to which they immediately added the following observation: 'Without reference to such expansive spatial connections, there can be no clear or coherent formulation of this term.' It will be noted that their definition follows to the letter the intellectual procedure described as generic in the foregoing discussion: it abstracts from any particular historical kind of society in order to draw out the specifically spatio-temporal resonance of the term; and it then focuses upon causal significance of the phenomenon of 'linking together and expanding' *per se*.

8 For historical sociological arguments against the designation of the modern international system as Westphalian, see Rosenberg (1994a, 135–139, 2000, 27–43). However, the definitive critique has now surely arrived in Teschke 2003.

9 This argument was brilliantly developed and illustrated at the level of state policies in the writings of Linda Weiss (1999). Ian Clark (1999) also repeatedly made similar objections.

10 Marx's analysis of the modern state in his early writings is lucidly explicated by Derek Sayer (1985, 1991). Other seminal expositions include Lucio Colletti (1975), and Ellen Meiksins Wood (1981). For applications of these to international theory, see Rosenberg (1994a, chapter 5; 2000, chapter 2).

11 In the real world, after all, the 'internal primacy' of the state is so unevenly realized that Jackson's 'quasi-states' (1990) form a majority; in addition, this same 'internal primacy' is routinely subordinated to vested minority interests in 'civil society'; meanwhile, states are patently not politically equal in their external relations. Where then is the sense in the conventional definition of sovereignty? This is the apparent contradiction which, it is argued below, can be resolved by historicizing the concept of 'the political'.

12 For an analysis of two apparent historical exceptions to this, see Rosenberg, (1994a, chapter 3).

13 For a very fine recent illustration of what this could mean in practice, see the empirical survey of the precapitalist structure of late-17th century Scottish society in Davidson (2003, chapter 1).
14 'The abstraction of the *state as such* belongs only to modern times, because the abstraction of private life belongs only to modern times. The abstraction of the *political state* is a modern product' (Marx, 1989, 116).
15 '…two opposed forms of social organization, the modern state and the market, have evolved together through recent centuries, and their mutual interactions have become increasingly crucial to the character and dynamics of international relations in our world… State and market, whatever their respective origins, have independent existences, have logics of their own, and interact with one another' (Gilpin, 1987, 4 and 10n).
16 Gareth Stedman Jones (1972) argued that American imperial power was distinguished from its European forebears by its 'non-territorial' and formally 'anti-colonial' character.
17 See, for example, the discussion of 'Premodern Globalization' in Held *et al.* (1999, 415ff).
18 See, for example, the special issue of *International Security* on this subject (Vol. 22 (1): Summer 1997).
19 This distinction, and its subsequent re-fusion in conjunctural historical analysis belongs to the historical materialist analysis of any social formation, not just that of capitalism. Perry Anderson (1974), for example, deploys this same method in his analysis of European Feudalism.
20 Dinstinguishing conjunctural from organic phenomena, Gramsci here suggested: 'Conjunctural phenomena too depend on organic movments to be sure, but they do not have any far-reaching historical significance…' Doubtless a different definition of 'conjunctural' is at work here. A very fine exposition of conjunctural method which avoids this problem can be found in the opening paragraphs of Halliday (1984).
21 In a broader sense, nearly all historians work with some kind of implied conjunctural method insofar as their explanations reconstruct the particular conjunction of different causes which intersected to produce a particular event or series of events. Often, however, this becomes explicit only the writing of 'general' history.
22 'Geographical time' charted the slow evolution of the human interaction with the natural world over long periods; 'social time' encompassed the rhythms of development, conflict and change rooted in particular societies or groups of societies; and 'individual time' was that temporality directly inhabited by human actors themselves in the flow of day-to-day events.
23 For a recent critique of this formulation of conjunctural analysis, see Teschke (2003).
24 For example, the changing geo-social scope of the social formation at different points in its expansion, the changing technological bases of production and social reproduction — water power, steam power, internal combustion, electricity, etc. — at different points in the continuation of the industrial revolution, and so on.
25 'The exception thus discovers in itself the rule, the rule of the rule, and the old 'exceptions' must be regarded as methodologically simple examples of the *new rule*' (Althusser, 1977, 106). The 'new rule' in question, namely that the mode of production has no 'pure' existence in empirical reality, is not really a rule at all. Its implication demands, in fact, a radical change of intellectual idiom at this point — a switch to historical research, and not the continuing promulgation of further rules of philosophical method. Perhaps this also accounts for the equally tortured — if intermittently brilliant — character of Poulantzas' discussion of the subject (1973, 93–97).
26 Principal original sources for this theory are found in Trotsky (1961, 1962, 1970, 1973). The major secondary treatments are by Deutscher (1954, 1959, 1963), Knei-Paz (1978), and Lowy (1981). Deutscher (1984) and Horowitz (1969) continued to apply the theory to the analysis of world development into the 1960s, while Lowy, in a different register, extended this application into detailed studies of combined development in Third-World countries.
27 Almost by definition, English state-formation was exceptional in this respect.
28 'Uneven and combined development' should be distinguished from the more widely used phrase 'combined and uneven development'. The latter invokes a general condition in which a range of

societies, at different levels of development, interact (or are 'combined') in a single geopolitical system. In some cases (e.g. Brett, 1985), it is then argued that this combination plays a role in the reproduction of unevenness among the participant societies (through the operation of system wide mechanisms of distribution or constraint). In others, 'combined and uneven development' is used to picture the co-existence of capitalist with non-capitalist societies, inviting analysis of the socio-political dynamics of a ''mixed-case' scenario' (Teschke, 2003, 249, 262ff). Each of these uses has its virtues. In neither, however, does Trotsky's original meaning, used in this article, emerge: namely that in the historical context of an emerging capitalist core, an *antecedent* unevenness of human social development becomes part of a causal mechanism of 'combined development', both within the non-capitalist societies affected, and as a feature of the expanding international system as a whole. In short, 'combined and uneven development' describes (without itself theorizing) a general situation, while 'uneven and combined development' denotes a specific causal sequence (unevenness leading to combined development), which it postulates as central to the overall shape of the modern historical process.

29 The Iranian revolution and the rise of political Islam provides an equivalent instance involving a regional power, the strategic significance of the region in question causing its effects to spill over into great power politics, with unpredictable consequences.

30 For a clear overview of this settlement, see Brett (1985, chapters 3–5). Strictly speaking, none of the three key institutions initialed at Bretton Woods in 1947 — the International Monetary Fund, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the International Trade Organization — was able to function in the role envisaged for it. Indeed, the last never came into existence. Nonetheless, an international financial and trade regime did emerge; based on the Dollar standard, and sanctioning tight controls over the international movement of capital, this regime shielded national economies from the effects of international competition and imbalances; and that in turn allowed governments to determine interest rates and to craft fiscal policies in the interests of domestic reconstruction and social stability, providing, temporarily, a framework within which international trade liberalization could be pursued via successive rounds of GATT negotiations. For useful discussions of the internal tensions and gradual subsequent dissolution of this regime, see Underhill (2002), and Story (2002).

31 The emergence of the 'Eurodollar market' was tolerated by the Bank of England for its boost to the international competitive advantage of the City of London. For a brief discussion, see R. Roberts (1999, chapters 1–2).

32 For a useful discussion, see Goodman and Pauly (2000).

33 Commenting on the outcome of the Bretton Woods conference, Bruce Moon (2002, 344) observes: 'If the profound threats of the 1940s made *some* institutional structure absolutely imperative, the American influence was responsible for its minimalist character'.

34 Reflecting an 'organic tendency' of capitalist development, this theme is of course perennial. See not only the Communist Manifesto, but also Bukharin's (1915) *Imperialism and World Economy*, with its long discussions of multinational corporations and international financial markets as the agencies through which a supranational 'world-economy' was coming into being.

35 Proto-conceptions of 'globalization' existed before the 1990s — for example, in the work of Robert Robertson (collected in Robertson, 1992) or the use of the term 'globalism' in some international relations writings. It was not these conceptions, however, that shot to prominence in the post-Cold War period.

36 The use of the term 'vacuum' here is metaphorical. It is meant to denote a situation in which a variety of interconnected public policies and private worldviews, which had already for some time yielded diminishing returns to their adherents, were suddenly rendered definitively untenable. Since states and individuals cannot go on without policies and worldviews of some kind, the sudden dereliction of the old generates, like a physical vacuum, an irresistible pressure for new contents, the identity of which, as with a physical vacuum, depends on the immediate

surroundings. In this case, those surroundings happened to be characterized by the abnormally high pressure of the Western neo-liberal crusade, a pressure which, since it was pushing in the same direction, effectively multiplied the forces generated by the vacuum itself. And this conjunctural intersection, I am arguing, is what explains the speed and direction of social, political and geopolitical change in the 1990s.

37 For example, using the IMF to steer Western economic relations with Russia allowed the US to retain a directive role while allowing others, in this case Germany, to supply the financial credit. By 1999 40% of Russia's $150b foreign debt was held in Germany (Rutland, 1999, 189ff).

38 These ranged in ambition from the modest but historically unprecedented outcome of the Pinochet affair, through the various international tribunals (former Yugoslavia, Rwanda) and the International Criminal Court (1998), to the more extreme case of Belgium's 1993 law empowering its courts to try human rights abuses committed by foreign nationals outside Belgium.

39 Arguably, it was this temporary and deceptive combination of circumstances that underlay the wider revival of liberal internationalism in this period, with its identification of 'multilateralism' as the means by which traditional power politics might be progressively transcended. This illusion was perspicaciously dissected by Chris Brown at the time (Brown, 1999, 47).

40 By 2002, for example, the US Government had 'filed fifteen WTO TRIPS complaints, more than all the other countries combined' — without, however, relenting on its simultaneous use of bilateral 'Special 301' economic sanctions, which many other governments had expected would disappear under the multilateral TRIPS regime. See Sell (2002, 177).

41 The expectations generated by this event concerning the possibilities of a multilateral collective security system were, it should be noted, expertly criticized at the time by Andrew Hurrell (1992).

42 Bindman notes that acting on these agreements could constitute a violation of international law for any state which has ratified the Rome Treaty. Whether the EU states supporting the Treaty were already themselves violating its spirit by negotiating partial immunity for their own nationals was unclear (IHT, 2003a).

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