

## TIME, SPACE, AND THEIR KNOWLEDGE: THE TIMES AND PLACE OF THE WORLD AND OTHER SYSTEMS

Göran Therborn

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# FESTSCHRIFT FOR IMMANUEL WALLERSTEIN PART I

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At two hours in length, Immanuel Wallerstein's Presidential Address to the XIVth World Congress of Sociology in Montreal on July 26, 1998, was almost as that of a Secretary General's Report. Although long, it nonetheless managed to spellbind a most undisciplined audience of innumerable factions through the speech's unique combination of audacity, erudition and circumspection. The theme and title were "The Heritage of Sociology, The Promise of Social Science." The address was the outgoing President's conclusion to a worldwide congressional discussion he had initiated; however, neither the heritage of sociology nor the promise of social science is a finite inquiry. My contribution here is thus meant to continue that debate.

Given the context, a brief personal note of introduction is in order. I belong to that group of Immanuel's admirers who see him more as a challenge than as the master of truth or as the leader of the Movement—a challenge in the form of mind-opening scholarship as well as daring questions and provocative statements. From the position of outsider, both in terms of scholarly collaboration as well as personal relations, there are two little pieces of firsthand testimony I would like convey here.

The first is that of Immanuel as the friendly, amiable colleague. We first met in 1974, when I looked him up at McGill in Montreal. This was (just) before the appearance of the first volume of the *Modern World-System*.

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Göran Therborn

Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences (SCASSS)

Götavägen 4

752 36 Uppsala

SWEDEN

<http://www.scasss.uu.se/>

[Goran.Therborn@scasss.uu.se](mailto:Goran.Therborn@scasss.uu.se)

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Immanuel Wallerstein to me then was the radical Africanist, Africa being a very important interest to me, particularly in the 1960s. What I remember from this encounter is the kindness and equality with which I was received, someone unknown to Immanuel, someone from far away who had just received his Ph.D. We talked about African prospects, and he told me about his new work with a self-confident modesty, very discreetly indicating the breaking of a new scholarly path. Later on, in the ISA context, I have noticed how he has kept this collegial stance (he probably would not mind having it called comradely) toward local and younger scholars, completely free from the far-from-uncommon effects of success: narcissism and arrogance.

In the International Sociological Association I also had the opportunity to observe and admire at close hand Immanuel, the indefatigable worker. Appearing everywhere, never (visibly) jet-lagged, with a firm grasp and leadership of organizational practicalities as well as constantly spawning new ideas and intellectual provocations, initiating conferences all over the world, communicating with the whole ISA membership, clearing Canadian visa hassles for sociologists from suspiciously poor countries, yet all the while writing new, fascinating lectures and papers. The source and the rationale of this vast amount of surplus labour put into the organization of the world's sociologists reconfirms the rationale for the heterodox affiliation with Marx, of which Immanuel Wallerstein's oeuvre is a major example.

#### THE MODERN WORLD SYSTEM AND ITS FUTURE

Provocative *and* open-minded originality are, to me, the central characteristics of Wallerstein's intellectual style. It is that style which inspires the reflections below, full of respect and admiration for a forceful, singular thinker.

The *Modern World-System* is not only the title of Immanuel Wallerstein's lasting contribution to social science. The three words also sum up both his own, and what he conceives of as others', most important challenges to the social sciences. Time, space, and knowledge connect Wallerstein's empirical work with his recent preoccupation with "unthinking" and reconstructing the social sciences. They also interrelate his analyses of the past with his recent "utopistics" and thinking about the future.

Each of these concepts refers, in fact, to a whole heap of issues still

largely unknown, uncharted and unassessed. Wallerstein has had the daring to poke into them, but fundamental questions remain open. The intention of this paper is to point to some of the latter, and to hint at possible alternative answers.

#### Modernities: Temporalities and Their Applications

In his Presidential Address to the ISA, Wallerstein underscored that "...time is at the center of most of the challenges [to the culture of sociology and to the social sciences today]."<sup>1</sup>

However, there are scholars' time and actors' time; Wallerstein is apparently only interested in the former. In his Address he refers to Braudel's four temporalities, all of which are temporalities of scholarship alone. Scholars' time refers to the way in which scholars—be they historians, social scientists or those engaged in some other branch of knowledge production—conceive of and use time in their studies. Actors' time, on the other hand, is the time orientation of all human actors, including, as a tiny minority of course, scholars. This neglect of actors' time, it may be argued, misses an important aspect of modernity and postmodernity.

There is one important strand of scholarship attempting to make actors' time orientation the defining characteristic of modernity. A three-fold change, from cyclical to linear time; a change from an orientation to the past as the repository of values, knowledge, and beauty manifested in supreme achievements, to expectations of the future, as something different from, and, at least potentially better than, the past. Thirdly, a new orientation towards a this-worldly future, not inscribed as the Paradise (or Hell) of the Sacred texts of the past.

In any theory of social action and of social systems, in any social or cultural history, such a 180 degree change of the positioning of actors should not be neglected—from looking back to the wisdom of ancestors and to the beauty of a past Golden Age, to looking forward to a horizon within our reach—thus far unattained—where something new might be constructed.

This temporal conception of modernity has one of its major fronts against modernization theories. It is free of the Euro- or US-centricity of defining modernity in terms of some Western European or North American institutions, allowing for trajectories and institutions of multiple modernities, and pushing conflict to the fore.

In this perspective it is possible, I have found, to discern four major routes to modernity by analyzing the positions of the forces for and against. In Europe, both sets of forces were endogenous, which meant that the European route to modernity was one of civil war, revolutions and religious wars and conflicts. In the New World of the Americas, the modern thrust developed among the settlers, asserting itself against a metropolitan pre-modernity overseas through wars of independence, and against local pre-modernities through genocide and violent marginalization.

In the colonial zone, from Northwestern Africa to Papua New Guinea, modernity arrived from the outside, from the barrels of guns. However, the distinctive basis of colonial modernity was that colonialism gradually came to provide a model of modernity to the colonized, which the latter made use of in their new struggles for national self-determination and democracy against the colonial powers. Finally, there were cases, from Japan to the Ottoman empire and its Turkish successor (in particular), of Externally Induced Modernization, of modern conceptions imported by a segment of the ruling elite threatened by seemingly superior foreign imperialist powers.

These four routes seem to have left lasting traces of social and cultural patterns, of people-elite and class relations, religion/secularization, national mythologies, collective identities, combinations of tradition and novelty, in institutions, normative patterns of behavior, rituals, and aesthetics, etc.<sup>2</sup>

A temporal conception of modernity also spares us a number of controversies over rationality. There is no longer any need of demonstrating a pre-modern irrationality or arationality. The modern time orientation implies a new rhetoric or argumentation in terms of means to ends in the future rather than in terms of experiences of the past. To call the former “reason” or rationality, and the latter “tradition” or prejudice, is part of the assertion of modernity, not of its analysis.

World-system analysis pays no attention to the temporal irruption of modernity, although Wallerstein himself has come to acknowledge the historical phenomenon of modernity in temporal terms.<sup>3</sup> Its “modern” world system is scholarly time; in fact, its timing seems little connected to the time of the historical actors. Only with the European Enlightenment and the French Revolution did a new actors’ temporal orientation emerge across several fields of thought, after some adumbrations in English 17<sup>th</sup> century natu-

ral science and in one current of French late 17<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics. Only in the course of the Revolution and its aftermath, for instance, did the notions of “revolution” and “reform” lose the retrospection of their Latin prefixes and come to refer to ways of opening doors to the future.<sup>4</sup>

The French Revolution was a watershed in temporal orientations, not only in Europe but also in Latin America and in the heartland of Islam. Wallerstein touches obliquely on the subject, but locates it, by and large, outside his own range of interest. “The [French] Revolution provided the needed shock to the modern world-system as a whole to bring the cultural-ideological sphere at last into line with the economic and political reality. The first centuries of the capitalist world-economy were lived largely within ‘feudal’ ideological clothes. This is neither anomalous nor unexpected. This sort of lag is normal and indeed structurally necessary.”<sup>5</sup>

No scholarly account is a full historical account. However, this neglect of actors’ time seems to have had two significant effects on Wallerstein’s work. First, it unnecessarily limits the scope and the analytical precision of world-systems analysis itself, which might very well, and to its own advantage, have accommodated a systematic attention to actors’ orientations. Temporality, and the complexity of temporalities beyond the old simple idea of cultural lag, might very well have been incorporated into the conception of the system, as one of its variable characteristics.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, it clearly restricts the relevance of Wallerstein’s diagnosis of current challenges to social science. In this context, his invocation of some (on this topic) abstruse arguments of Bruno Latour about the non-occurrence of modernity appears as an irrelevant digression, a *détour*.

From a temporal perspective, postmodernism signifies a disillusionment with the future. Again, as in regard to modernity, definitions and conceptions abound. However, rhetoric aside, it seems clear that a strict temporal perspective captures a core of postmodernism as the end of master narratives [of historical development], *avant-gardes*, linear time, and the predictability of the future. Because Wallerstein does not pay attention to the temporality of modernity, he can combine a strong, explicit sympathy for postmodernism with an unabated modernist orientation to the future and the foreseeable demise of the world system of capitalism.<sup>7</sup> But, in principle, if not necessarily in this context, I think he would agree that one neglects contradictions at one’s own peril.

**Table 1 – Major Modern Past-Future Contrasts**

The Past Was:	The Future Is:
Heteronomy, Oppression	<i>Emancipation, Liberation</i>
Poverty, Ignorance, Stagnation	<i>Progress, Evolution, Growth</i>
Different in its preconditions.	<i>Victory, successful survival.</i>

Nonetheless, postmodernism does constitute a significant challenge to social thought, scientific and otherwise. One way of grasping the meaning of this challenge is to compare it, not with caricatures or arbitrary critiques, but instead with the spectrum of modernist conceptions, right, left, and center. (See Table 1)

With regard to the future, there are three variants of modern conceptions that have been particularly important historically. In the postmodernist language of Lyotard and others, these are the grandest of the narratives of modernity.

The “future as emancipation” comprised Kantian Enlightenment, modernist nationalists, abolitionists, socialists, and a series of contemporary liberation movements, including Women’s Liberation and Gay Liberation. The “future as emancipation” has tended to be the futurist perspective of the modernist left.

The future as progress, evolution and growth was the dominant futurist position of modern science and of modern economic actors, be they capitalists, farmers, or workers. In a political spectrum defined largely by others, this was usually a center position, one of liberalism.

Rightwing modernism emerged later than the others. Its characteristic *Denkfigur* (figure of thought) has been the future victory or successful survival, alternatively defeat, decline, disappearance, in struggle, rivalry, or competition. Social Darwinism, inter-imperialist rivalry, and competitive nationalism gave rise to this somber rightwing modernism in the last quarter of the 19th century. It was part of the modern side of Fascism, after the defeat of which it has currently been sublimated into economics, particularly into neoliberal globalization. Inexorable global competition is replacing the inexorable struggle for *Lebensraum* (vital space) of the 1930s and early 1940s.

The “dark sides” of modernity derive basically from the intrinsically conflictual character of the latter, and not from any particular narrative thereof.

Everybody did not experience the past as oppression, ignorance and misery. Therefore, some—perhaps many—people did not see the present as necessitating liberation, illumination, advance. On the contrary, they may see the modernist projects as sacrilegious, blasphemous, depraved, incomprehensible, futile, repugnant, or simply disturbing and worrying.

Emancipation and progress not only have costs—of effort and struggle—but include self-undermining tendencies as well: issuing new denunciations and orders, demanding new acceptance, discipline, conformity. The latter may be handled with varying regard, tact, and success, though, and are by no means necessarily self-defeating.

The third major conception of modernity, viewing the present as struggle and the desirable future as victory, on the other hand, is rather self-fulfilling in its view of the present. Seeing the latter primarily as competition, rivalry, combat, means, by and large, to make it such. (Victory or success in this struggle is less self-fulfilling.)

### Social and Cognitive Space, and the Costs of Spatializing the Social

World-systems analysis has meant above all a fundamental spatial reorientation of social analysis. As such it has been eminently fruitful and justly successful. Through its system conception it has, until recently, avoided the current costs and dangers of spatialization of social discourse and of politics, which is nevertheless a current challenge to social science. “Globalization” is perhaps the most topical of this spatialization of the social, but there are also “Europeanism,” localism, and other forms. In Europe, there is the overriding political preoccupation with the smoothing of the expanse of the EU, the Single Market and the Monetary Union, and with its extension to the East. “Globalization” and “European integration” are both a function (*inter alia*) of modernity’s flight into space. “Localism” (a concentration on local contexts) local actors, local knowledge, local narratives have their postmodernist appeal as an alleged exit from modernity.

Space is an important social feature, and a concept often not taken seriously enough in social analysis. However, a spatialization of sociology, politics, economics and history also has its limitations and opportunity costs. There is a non-metaphorical flatness to its focus on horizontal relations. Vertical relations of domination, exploitation, hierarchy, power, their assertion and the resistance to them, slide out of focus. Space connects and dis-

connects. It does not confront social and cultural issues and problems. It may expand or contract, but it neither preserves nor transforms the quality of social and cultural patterns.

By way of its Marxian heritage, world-systems analysis has kept an eye on the contradictions and dialectical dynamics of world capitalism. But, perhaps as a result of its rather more critical than constructive thrust<sup>8</sup>, neither has it been very interested in the spatial complexity of the world. When the focus is mainly on the spatial location of centers of accumulation systems the effect is a relative neglect or systematic downplaying of other differences of capitalist development than the shift of spatial centers, say from Genoa and the Genoese diaspora to the United States.<sup>9</sup>

Recently, closely following the demise in the 1990s of the “capitalism versus socialism” discourse of the 1960s and 1970s, some world-systems theorists, but not Wallerstein, have turned the world system concept into a purely spatial category, flattening it out. Andre Gunder Frank has made this turn most dramatically, in his characteristic personal style of no-holds-barred iconoclasm. “...the categories of ‘capitalism’ and ‘feudalism’ and ‘socialism’... are really empty—that is, devoid of any real world meaning...” The only, current, reality for Frank is “universal history,” “the global economy,” and the “Five Thousand Year World System.”<sup>10</sup>

In the report on the social sciences by the Gulbenkian Commission chaired by Wallerstein, the traditionally “state-centric” nature of the social sciences is highlighted as a problem.<sup>11</sup> In the challenges of the ISA Presidential Address, space appears as an issue of “Eurocentrism” and in the form of a two contrasting civilizations conception of the world by Anwar Abdel-Malek in which civilizations are viewed fundamentally in terms of conceptions of time.<sup>12</sup>

Through Wallerstein’s generous presentation of Abdel-Malek we may catch a glimpse of actors’ time, but only implicitly and at the price of what appears to be an evaporation of space into time.

Another path well worth taking here may be to confront head-on *the variable geometry of social space*. Multidimensional network analysis seems to provide a useful analytical foundation. Economic exchanges and trade patterns, power relations, processes of cultural “hybridization” as well as culture areas and civilizations, can all be analyzed in networks terms, and as variables of extension and density, possibly overlapping and crisscrossing each

other. Stateness and globality, regions and localities can thus also be studied as variables across both time and space instead of being assumed to be fixed and exclusive entities.

But how far multidimensional network analysis will take us will depend crucially on how multidimensionality is handled and how the virtually unlimited variability of relations between actors’ networks and social systems is grasped. Basic issues are still clearly not disentangled here.<sup>13</sup>

There is already a considerable amount of scholarship of this orientation. But the classical heritage of social science has a bimodal structure centered on the two polarities of, on one hand, a spatially unspecified conception of “civilized” or “modern” society, and, on the other, a view of society and culture as delimited by nation-states, actual or aspiring. In the German discussion of the 19th and early 20th century (the time of Max Weber and before) the two alternatives were put as the “cosmopolitan” or “cosmopolitical” versus the “political.”<sup>14</sup> The predominant spatial conception of most social science still seems to be a linear continuum of world—and occasionally supranational—nation-state and locality, with the focus on one or the other, depending on their relative significance in the analysis. The bulk of the current globalization literature is in this vein.

### The States of Disciplines and Their Space

Disciplines may be seen as spatial organizations of knowledge production, not only in their different academic sites, but also in their division of areas of research and teaching. Wallerstein has challenged the existing disciplinary pattern of the social sciences in the strongest of terms as rationally indefensible and as obstacles to any sensible statement on their self-proclaimed fields. In large part, this critique of disciplines appears to follow from the world-systems perspective, which certainly has cut through prevailing disciplinary conventions. This also stems from world-systems analysis’ relative institutional success, providing it with a position of strength from which to “un-think” the historical legacy of social science.<sup>15</sup> Whether this is hubris or not, a question Wallerstein raises himself and answers negatively, I shall leave aside. Rather, I shall take it as a challenge, not to un-think but to rethink our inherited spatialization of knowledge production.

How shall we look at the disciplinary heritage? Why are the disciplines with us?

Rather than focus on its nineteenth century obsolescence, we may explore instead the historical contingency of the disciplinary division of labor and how it has changed both over time during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and across political—be they nations or sub-national—systems of education and research. The timing, sequence and the rationale of disciplinary establishments have varied enormously, as have their trajectories.

Sociology presents a good example. It was institutionalized as a discipline in two countries—the United States and France—in the first decade of this century, in Germany precariously in the 1920s, in Sweden after World War II. In Britain and many other countries, sociology only took off in the 1960s. In Germany, contemporary political science is regarded as younger than sociology; in many other countries a political discipline preceded sociology. Whereas early US sociology reproduced and mutated itself into grown-up adulthood and relative power and prestige, early French sociology declined, to the point of near extinction.<sup>16</sup>

Disciplines are in their little world rather similar to nation-states, as their timing, size, boundaries, and character are, of course, historically contingent. Both organizations tend to generate their founding and historical myths. Both claim contested sovereignty over a certain territory. Both fight wars of boundaries and of secession. Both have elaborate mechanisms and procedures for the production of organizational identity and loyalty, and both are also undercut or transcended by cross-boundary identities and loyalties.

However, in all this arbitrary variety there is a certain global directionality which has a largely 19<sup>th</sup> century origin—in the cases both of disciplines and nation-states—but which has proliferated in the second half, or even the last third, of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The UN currently recognizes 185 nation-states, equal in principle and similar as such. Similarly, most of the current social science disciplines may today be found, qua disciplines, in most countries, something which was less common fifty years ago, and rare a hundred or a hundred and fifty years ago.

Is this no more than a manifestation of mounting absurdity, of accumulating irrationality and obsolescence? Although we shouldn't dismiss this view *a priori*, I also do not believe that we should adopt it as our first hypothesis. I do not pretend to have the answer, but I find it a provocative and important question, and furthermore, one that Immanuel Wallerstein has

inspired us to ask. It refers us both to modernity's arrow of time and to the complexity and multidimensionality of social space.

Disciplines fulfill a number of valuable functions for their members. They provide passports, credentials of importance at the border of academia's interface with non-academia, especially to paymasters of salaries and research grants, as well as inside the academic system itself. Once established, they provide shelter, protection and opportunities for upward mobility to their citizens. They create communities of discourse and of collective identity by the elaborate socialization of their members.

Their definition, boundaries and construction do not reflect any ontological or epistemological necessity, but are historically contingent, variable, and in that sense, fundamentally arbitrary. Government policies, private donors, social movements, academic administrators, international role models and academic entrepreneurship have all contributed, and are continuously contributing, to the structures of disciplines.

Have the disciplinary structures of the social sciences become more arbitrary in recent decades? Are they more of an obstacle or nuisance to knowledge production than previously? There seem to me to be at least three reasons for doubting this contention.

First, some tendencies of social development tend to reinforce the inherited division of academic labour. The difference between disciplines of the past and of the present, for instance, has been reinforced by the enormous expansion of methods for studying specifically the present and the very recent past. The survey is the most spectacular, exploring people's opinions, living conditions and life course. Students of the present are hereby creating their own data on a massive scale. Furthermore, decision-makers and bureaucrats have, on the whole, become much more accessible to scholars than at the time of Weber and Durkheim.

Even apart from new methods and means of access, the institutionalization of public information production and gathering has widened the gap between the amount of data about the present and the past, a gap that is constantly widening.

In most social milieux of the world, there seems to have been a tendency during the twentieth century towards allocating less interest and/or weight to lessons of the past. At the turn of the last century, scholarship's orientation to the past was much more pronounced in the fields of politics, eco-

nomics and historiography. "Political Science," to the extent that it existed at all, was largely the history and theory of constitutional law and the heritage of European political philosophy. "Economics" was in most countries not differentiated from economic history and from legal history. Very much engaged in contemporary controversies as they might be, historians were preoccupied only with the more or less distant past. *Zeitgeschichte* or contemporary history is mainly a post-World War II phenomenon. Durkheim's *l'Année Sociologique* devoted a large amount of effort and space to review works of historiography in a number of fields, an orientation very different from today's *Contemporary Sociology*. On the other hand, social policy issues apart, the major social science journals a century ago had much less to say on contemporary society. You don't find out much about social and cultural patterns of the French Third Republic from Durkheim, or about those of the Wilhelmine Reich from Max Weber.

In this aspect of viewing the present above all in the light of the past and bringing lessons of the latter to predict the future, world-systems analysts constitute a noteworthy circle of dissent still holding high the banner of the historical argument. Arguing, for instance, that (interpretations of) 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century relations between capitalism and military state power provide the best available guide to what will happen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> Without any claim of competence whether this kind of historical argumentation is right or wrong, I think it is a minority view, clearly more so than it was, say, in the times of Spengler or Toynbee. This tendency is, of course, not necessarily irreversible, but so far it has been reinforcing rather than undermining the inherent disciplinary boundary between past and present.

Secondly, disciplines, like modern states, are not fixed and rigid territorial organizations which remain unchanged till they break or collapse. They are capable of internal change, even radical internal change. The way they are coping with the now glaringly obsolete division between Western and non-Western studies is a major example. On one hand, anthropologists and ethnographers are increasingly using their skills of close observation and applying their theorization of culture to contemporary Europe and North America, and to current processes of globalization. Economists of inflation, stabilization policies and growth apply their models and issue their recommendations to all corners of the world. Political scientists interested in issues of democracy, public bureaucracy and policy implementation are

increasingly plying their trade on all continents. Sociologists studying social values, social movements, social stratification or mass media reception, are no longer confined to North America and Western Europe. Big social science departments, (so far mostly in the US though) have started to recruit disciplinary scholars with special (non-American) area skills.

One of the safest bets about the future of social science is that Euro/US-centrism will decline, at least in the sense that knowledge of non-Western languages, cultures and societies among social scientists will grow vigorously and will bear upon future developments of conceptualization, methodology, and theorization. Less certain, however, is the spatial location of this less parochial knowledge production, and the spatial distribution of its accessibility.

It may become concentrated in the rich elite universities and research institutions of a handful of rich countries, the US above all. Or it may be spread amongst the peoples and the institutions of the world. As far as I can see, current tendencies are mainly going in the former direction, of institutional concentration, similar to the direction of natural science Nobel prizes after World War II. In other words, Eurocentrism and US-centrism appear to become far more a university and research resources problem, than a disciplinary one.

Thirdly, disciplinary sovereignty is neither absolute nor exclusive. The proliferation of disciplines has been accompanied by a growth of sub-disciplinary networks and identities, of inter-disciplinary travelling and networking, of cross-disciplinary journals, and by the growth of inter-disciplinary trade of methods and concepts. There is a proliferation of non-disciplinary organizations, NDOs. In this world of both *de jure* and *de facto* limited sovereignty, of dual citizenships and complex and partial loyalty patterns, the conventional state/market/society division of study is not necessarily even a nuisance. We may even discern, in the past half-century, some tendencies which rather seem to have contributed to the reproduction of the state/market/society convention.

The emergence of a constant stream of macroeconomic data (on growth and employment, for example), and the development of mathematical market modeling have provided "stronger" rationales for a discipline of economics. The growth of the state and the, less pronounced, growth of its visibility and accessibility, the spread of competitive elections and the rise

of survey methodology, have all stimulated the discipline of political science with a focus on policy and electoral studies. The growth of the welfare state brought the problematization of social conditions, full employment and workers' assertiveness brought industrial relations into widespread concern, the rise of mass leisure and entertainment meant a new social area, that of new subjects, e.g., women, ethnic groups, homosexuals. All of these highlighted new depths to formerly adult white male social science. These developments brought new interest to "society" as a field poorly covered by governments or markets. True, they have also spawned a number of non-disciplinary centers, institutes, and conferences. But the skills, and the academic passports, which disciplinary training have brought to these new NDOs have often been of value to the latter.

However, the inter-discipline system is likely to change in the new century, like almost everything else. On one hand, the identity of existing old disciplines is being undermined by their growth and by the widening specialization of their members, but without replacement by sufficiently strong identities for separatist disciplinary movements. On the other hand, the space of the social disciplines is, like before, dependent on that of the humanities and the natural sciences. Developments in them and perceptions of disciplinary developments by education and research politicians and administrators will crucially affect the future of the social disciplines.

In this situation, it seems to me the primary task is not to try to accelerate an undoing of the existing inter-disciplinary system, but to try to rethink and develop key concepts and modes of approaching and grasping the social world.

### Systems and Their Dynamics

System is a key concept of social analysis, and a particularly central one in Wallerstein's writings. His use of it, however, is both remarkable and curiously under-theorized.

It is remarkable in its claim to exclusivity and to exhaustiveness. "...the only real social systems are, on one the hand, those relatively small, highly autonomous subsistence economies, not part of some regular tribute-demanding system, and, on the other, world-systems. ...[T]hus far there have only existed two varieties of such world systems: world empires and 'world economy.'" There is, though, a "third possible form of world-system, a socialist world government."<sup>18</sup>

The author might now perhaps express himself somewhat differently, but he still emphasizes the key importance of the "unit of analysis" while making no explicit reformulations of the previous statement. Methodologically, the world-system is now characterized as an "historical system", explicitly seen as analogous to an "organism."<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, although the conceivability of "multiple kinds of social systems," which Wallerstein would prefer to call historical systems, is granted as a fundamental question, "our existing historical system (world-system)" is still a singular reality.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, this exclusive reality /historical organism is left under-specified and little theorized. The three volumes, so far, of *The Modern World-System* are mainly historical narratives with a bare minimum of systematic theoretical argumentation. This is apparently hardly a matter of style or the result of oversight. It seems, rather, to have been a deliberate choice. This is why he rejects the conventional label of his movement—"world systems theory"—insisting instead on "world systems analysis," viewing it as a "perspective" and a "critique."<sup>21</sup> "It is much too early to theorize in any serious way, and when we get to that point it is social science and not world-systems that we should be theorizing."<sup>21</sup>

The logic of the last part of that statement has escaped me, but let me point to some questions and issues about world and other systems that are emerging and calling for theoretical reflection and elucidation.

Hypothesizing the modern world-system as the only social system of the modern world means separating the analysis of the former from virtually all other social science. That approach functioned well for a critical movement well attuned to a powerful social movement, as the world-systems perspective was to the social movements of 1968. It would continue to function very well, if it were true that "the historical system in which we live is in terminal crisis."<sup>22</sup> Whether or not this is true, no one knows, and neither Wallerstein nor I is likely ever to find out, (as Wallerstein usually gives the current system at least another fifty years to live). The important thing, then, is what people believe is true. I don't think it is a very risky generalization to say that, by the end of the 1990s, fewer people believe they are living in the terminal crisis of world capitalism than in the 1970s, the end of the 1940s, the beginning of the 1930s, or in the industrialized world around the previous turn of the century.

In this context, new departures in the 1990s from the world-system

movement become symptomatic. Andre Gunder Frank's extension of *the world system* to a period of five thousand years and to the whole of "Afro-Eurasia" raises questions about the meaning, boundaries, and the possibly variable system-ness of social systems. Wallerstein acknowledges the point obliquely. "Everything that can be denoted as a system can be shown to be 'open' at some points of its perimeter. One can always take this opening and insist that the presumed system is really part of some larger system."<sup>23</sup> That should imply logically, that any given system may also be seen as a system of smaller systems, and that the boundaries of social systems are not empirically self-evident but theoretically problematic. But Wallerstein dismisses such issues as unimportant, and his basic problem with Frank's new view is that it impedes a negative vision of the historical record of capitalism.<sup>24</sup>

If systems are thus used as analytical tools for capturing complexity and variability, we may also grasp an important difference of system-ness brought to light by current developments of world capitalism and world culture. That is the difference between, on one hand, systems constituted by the interdependence and the interactions of exogenous actors, be they tribes, cities, states or whatever, and on the other hand, systems operating through actors formed by the system itself, such as corporations formed on global markets and cultural groups formed by global cultures. System-ness of endogenous or exogenous elements/actors is probably better seen as a continuum than as a dichotomy. But here my point is that the analysis of world systems is likely to benefit from a more analytical concept of system, of which the variability of system-ness is one aspect.

The modern world-system is both a capitalist economy and an interstate system. The dynamics of this system have not been very much elaborated, although states are "institutions of the system," and are, "...repsponding to the primacy of this capitalist drive."<sup>25</sup> Nor is the systemic dialectic very clear, although its existence is vigorously asserted. Indeed, Wallerstein makes it an ontological postulate: "Contradictions [distinct from conflicts] exist within all historical systems."<sup>26</sup> In the "terminal crisis" of the capitalist world-system, the weakening of states is argued to be the most important factor, as "capitalist producers need the states far more than do the workers." States, in turn are being weakened "because of the growing collapse of the ideology of liberalism", in turn due to disillusionment with the state's capacity for social reform.<sup>27</sup>

While the empirical argument about a fatal weakening of the repressive capacity of states may not convince everybody as it stands—to put it cautiously—the system dynamics driving the world-system to a fatal weakening of the state is not spelled out.

Discussions of the future prospects of world capitalism, and of any other social system, may profit from a distinction which Wallerstein has always refrained from making, one between system and contingency, but which Marx and many others have used. The outcome of a historical system would depend both on the dynamics of the system and on exogenous contingencies. But to the extent that the system concept has any explanatory power, such a distinction would make it easier to avoid confounding systemic problems and challenges with an insurmountable systemic crisis, always a very difficult and delicate task.

In the meantime, some world-system analysts, like Chase-Dunn and Frank, are abandoning any concern with any capitalist dynamic of the world-system. Wallerstein refers to their example as the nomothetic and the ideographic temptation, respectively. I think the most noteworthy aspect of their new departures is their common *spatialization of the social*, their flattening out of social dialectics. And I wonder whether that development has not been facilitated by Wallerstein's own unconscious attraction to his third "temptation," by the reification of the world-system-concept.<sup>28</sup>

The reliance of world-systems analysis on being in tune with the times seems now to be working rather in the direction of what Albert Bergesen has called a "post-Wallersteinian World Systems Theory," in which the prospect is no longer the transition from the capitalist world-system to a socialist world government, but the return of Asia to its centrality of the world.<sup>29</sup>

In this situation, I hope it is not too late to theorize in a serious way about world-systems, and about other social systems. Before that, it seems too difficult for the movement of world-system analysts to "lay...claims to formulating the central questions of the enterprise [of social science]."<sup>30</sup>

*Hier bricht dieses Manuscript ab*, but reflections on and debates with Immanuel Wallerstein, the perennial thought-provoker, will continue.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> I. Wallerstein, 'The Heritage of Sociology, the Promise of Social Science,' International Sociological Association 1998, p. 48-9. <http://fbc.binghamton.edu/iwpradfp.htm>

<sup>2</sup> See further, G. Therborn, 'The Right to Vote and the Four World Routes to/through Modernity,' in R. Torstendahl (ed.), *State Theory and State History*, London, Sage, 1992; *European Modernity and Beyond. The Trajectory of European Societies 1945-2000*, London, Sage, 1995, chs. 1-2; 'Modernities and Globalizations,' in B. Isenberg (ed.), *Sociology and Social Transformation*, Lund, Dept. of Sociology of Lund University, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> "Modernity as a central universalizing theme gives priority to newness, change, progress. Through the ages, the legitimacy of political systems had been derived from precisely the opposite principle, that of oldness, continuity, tradition." I. Wallerstein, *Geopolitics and Geoculture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 175.

<sup>4</sup> G. Therborn, 'Revolution and Reform: Reflections on Their Linkages Through the Great French Revolution,' in J. Bohlin et al. (eds.), *Sambällsvetenskap Ekonomi Historia*, Göteborg, Daidalos, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World System III: The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World Economy, 1730-1840s*. San Diego: Academic Press 1989, p. 111.

<sup>6</sup> Giovanni Arrighi seems to be suggesting something in this direction, although his hint of defining capitalism as "an interstitial formation of both pre-modern and modern times" is not (yet) clear in what is meant by "modern times;" G. Arrighi, 'The Rise of East Asia and the Withering Away of the Interstate System,' Fernand Braudel Center, State University of New York at Binghamton, 1995, <http://fbc.binghamton.edu/gaasa95.htm>

<sup>7</sup> True, that Wallerstein differs from most modernists in believing that modern history so far has been overwhelmingly negative. See, e.g., I. Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism*, London, Verso, 1983, pp. 101ff.

<sup>8</sup> I. Wallerstein, 'The Rise and Future Demise of World-System Analysis,' *Review XXI* (1998), pp. 108-9. <http://fbc.binghamton.edu/iwvsa-r&.htm>

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., G. Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century*, London, Verso, 1994.

<sup>10</sup> A.G. Frank, *ReOrient*, Berkeley, California University Press, 1998; quoted sentence on p. 337.

<sup>11</sup> I. Wallerstein et al., *Open the Social Sciences*. Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996

<sup>12</sup> A. Abdel-Malek, *Civilizations and Social Theory*, London, Macmillan, 1981.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Mann, for instance, once launched a research program of historical power networks analysis by arguing that "there is no social system", *The Sources of Social Power* vol. I, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 2. Christopher Chase-Dunn and Thomas D. Hall, 'Cross-World-System Comparisons,' in S. Sanderson (ed.), *Civilizations and World Systems*, London, Altamira Press, 1995, p. 109, on the other hand, define "world-systems" as "intersocietal networks of regularized and systemically important competitive and cooperative interaction", which seems to involve a circular argument about systemness. While systems of interaction of different scope are certainly very well worth studying, whether anything is gained net by treating them as analogous to the Wallersteinian world system is less clear, and whether a system conception of space is capable of grasping interesting complexities of social spatiality is far from obvious. Neither author appears to go very far in terms of the multidimensionality of networks, neither power nor trade (in prestige and in bulk goods), politico/military

competition, and information is clearly grasping the complexity of cultural space. I should add as a limitation of my own argument here, that I do not have the latest book by Chase-Dunn and Hall available at the time of writing, *Rise and Demise, Comparing World Systems*, Boulder CO, Westview Press, 1997.

<sup>14</sup> W. Hennis, 'A Science of Man: Max Weber and the Political Economy of the German Historical School,' in J. Kocka and J. Osterhammel (eds.), *Max Weber and His Contemporaries*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1987, pp. 32-3.

<sup>15</sup> I. Wallerstein, 'The Rise and Future Demise' op. cit. pp. 110-12.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. P. Wagner et al. (eds.), *Discourses on Society. The Shaping of Social Science Disciplines*, Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1991.

<sup>17</sup> G. Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century* op. cit. p.355. Cf. I. Wallerstein, *Utopistics: Or, Historical Choices of the Twenty-first Century*. New York: New Press, 1998. p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> I. Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* [1974], Text ed., New York, Academic Press, 1976, p. 230. Emphasis added.

<sup>19</sup> I. Wallerstein, 'Hold the Tiller Firm,' in Sanderson, *Civilizations and World Systems* op. cit., pp. 239-40.

<sup>20</sup> I. Wallerstein, 'The Rise and Future Demise of World-System Analysis,' op. cit. p. 111.

<sup>21</sup> I. Wallerstein, 'The Rise and Future Demise of World-System Analysis,' op. cit. p. 103.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 112.

<sup>23</sup> I. Wallerstein, 'Hold the Tiller Firm' op. cit. p. 244.

<sup>24</sup> Loc. Cit.

<sup>25</sup> I. Wallerstein, *Utopistics* op. cit. p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> I. Wallerstein, *Geopolitics and Geoculture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 105.

<sup>27</sup> I. Wallerstein, *Utopistics* op. cit. pp. 46 and 47, respectively. Cf. the similar, more elaborate argument in T. Hopkins and I Wallerstein et al., *The Age of Transition*, London, Zed books, 1997, pp. 221ff, 236ff.

<sup>28</sup> I. Wallerstein, 'Hold the Tiller Firm' op.cit. pp. 241-5.

<sup>29</sup> A. Bergesen, 'Let's Be Frank About World History,' in Sanderson op. cit., p.201. Wallerstein's confidence in being in pact with the times, and the importance of it, is expressed, e.g., in his 'The Rise and Future Demise.' op. cit. p. 112. A conquest of social science is one possible demise of world-systems analysis, another is its decline as a critical movement.

<sup>30</sup> I. Wallerstein, 'The Rise and the Future Demise.' op. cit., p. 111.