

Introduction

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We are currently experiencing a manifold crisis involving neoliberalism's breakdown, ecological collapse, and the exhaustion of the social and cultural formations that rose to dominance through the long duration of centrist liberalism. With accelerating environmental catastrophes, rising social inequality, escalating inter-imperialist competition and aggression, and the disintegration of fully employable work and reasoned public debate, the left needs new frameworks to explain society and culture and to respond to these entangled catastrophes.

World-systems perspectives that register the intertwining of ecological, labor, and cultural matters within capitalism can help fill this gap in progressive analysis. Accordingly, our overall aim in this book is to elaborate preexisting world-systems arguments, many of which are still largely unknown within literary and cultural studies, and then chart out fresh directions and new questions of inquiry.

While accepting Marx's writing on the processes of capitalism's endless search for endless accumulation, a world-systems approach adds three basic features to Marx.

First, a world-systems approach has a more complex way to consider the structuring of disempowerment as it replaces a twofold model of antagonism with a social geography of core, semiperiphery (we will explain why *zemiperiphery* is our preferred term for this feature), and periphery. This tripartite model can better handle the complexities of culture in the context

of decolonization, for instance, as it helps to explain how peripheralized local (or comprador) elites are linked to but also differ from metropolitan ones.

Second, a world-systems approach understands the intrinsic role of the unwaged within capital. This provides a framework within which to consider the intersection of class with (un- or poorly waged) gendered, racialized, and ethnicized forms of labor; the constitutive and continuing presence of extreme forms of oppression, such as slavery; as well as features of the environmental crisis. It also means the world-systems perspective is particularly well-placed to provide Marxism with an integral account of the rise of precarity in the neoliberal era.

Third, a world-systems approach understands capitalism's world market as shaped by boom/bust cycles over longer periods than Marx's preferred illustration of a ten-year business cycle. By handling longer durations of time, a world-systems approach can then look for analogous, but nonsequential moments through capitalism's periodicity. This allows for a new comparative approach to historical analysis that slices through time, but with a clear logistic or metric of comparison, unlike "deep time" approaches.

No satisfying account of left green issues can ultimately occur outside or in ignorance of world-systems approaches. A world-systems approach goes some way to overcoming the civilizational prejudices that the modern university reaffirms when it segments human knowledge into disciplinary fiefdoms, a division of intellectual labor that makes it easier to ignore the matter of capital and class altogether. The traditional disciplinary separation of studies of the market, the state, the environment, and culture from one another is untenable, and a new more integrated, transdisciplinary analysis is necessary to track the operations of contemporary capitalism. We use the term *tracking* in our title, thus, to emphasize our interest in using the rubrics of world-systems analysis to pursue a new approach to examining cultural forms and practices in relation to conditions of labor, state formation, social reproduction, and ecological change.

Wallerstein's suggestive concept of geoculture offers a starting point from which to track the relation between world capitalism and cultural forms and processes. For Wallerstein, geoculture is not "the superstructure of [the] world-economy," but rather its "underside"; it represents "the cultural framework within which the world-system operates" (1991c:11). However, this concept remains relatively undertheorized in Wallerstein's work, and it lacks a dedicated focus on questions of aesthetics and cultural expression.

Noting this deficiency, Stephen Shapiro has suggested that we replace the term *geoculture* with *world-culture*. World-culture signifies "the intersec-

tion between the desired social reproduction of class identities and relations, as the attempt to reinstall the order of one generation into the next, and the range of responses to the historical changes that are structurally and inescapably generated by capitalism's logistic" (2008:36; see also chapter 2 in this volume). Thus, world-culture should not be understood as representing some abstract notion of global culture or a transcendental aesthetic. Rather, it refers to the manifold and many-sided culture of the capitalist world-system. In analogy to the hyphenation of *world-system*, we use the hyphenated *world-culture* to indicate the relationality of cultural production within a world-system shaped by capitalist forces. Throughout this volume, we are interested in *all* the literary and cultural production produced within the singular, but radically uneven, world-system, not just those institutions or artifacts that transcend the frame of nationalist accounts.

To this conception of *world-culture* we add an understanding of the world-system as also a *world-ecology*, drawing on Jason W. Moore's work. Moore's original formulation of the term *world-ecology* arose directly out of his engagement with the world-systems approach. Although not the specific focus of Wallerstein's *The Modern World-System I* (1974), argues Moore, Wallerstein's suggestion that the rise of capitalism was predicated upon an "epochal" reorganization of world ecology" enabled the "explicit rendering of the dialectical connection between world-economy and world-ecology" (Moore 2003b:446). Moore contends that historical systems (such as capitalism, feudalism, or the slave-based societies of antiquity) may all be viewed as distinctive ways not just of organizing social relations, but of organizing the relations between human and extra-human natures: forms of civilizational environment-making.

In this reading, different civilizations are not sociocultural configurations apart from nature, but rather *civilizations-in-nature*: world-ecologies that intertwine power, nature, and production. They are symbolically reproduced and materially practiced. They are geographically bounded; civilizations are born in definite places through definite organizational revolutions amongst humans—irreducibly bundled with all manner of geobiospheric relations, cycles and conditions, interdependent with biophysical forces and all the extra-human forms of life in particular ecosystems and biomes. World-ecologies are also historically bounded; they emerge, develop, and in due course pass from the scene. Earlier world-ecologies *qua* civilizations have assumed noncapitalist forms, such as European feudalism or Asia's great agrarian empires, and those of the future might yet take postcapitalist forms. However, for Moore, the distinctiveness of the *capitalist* world-ecology can

be located “in the ways that it progressively deepens the world-historical character of microlevel socio-ecologies in the interests of the ceaseless accumulation of capital, which generates geometrically rising pressures for ceaseless global expansion. . . . With the rise of capitalism, local societies were not integrated only into a world capitalist system; more to the point, varied and heretofore largely isolated local and regional socio-ecological relations were incorporated into—and at the same moment became constituting agents of—a capitalist world-ecology” (2003b:447). Once established, this world-ecology develops through successive “ecological regimes” and “ecological revolutions.” Ecological regimes refer to those “relatively durable patterns of class structure, technological innovation and the development of productive forces” that historically stabilize different phases of extended accumulation (Moore 2010b:405). Ecological revolutions, meanwhile, refer to the “turbulent emergence of these provisionally stabilized processes and conditions” after accumulation crises in which the previously dominant ecological regime is no longer able to sustain the conditions for the expanded capitalization of surplus-value (Moore 2010b:392).

If the world-system is a world-ecology, therefore, then world-culture is also the manifold and many-sided culture of the transformations in human and extra-human natures through which capitalism develops. However, rather than only asking how we might relate culture *to* the world-system as world-ecology, we can go further to understand culture *as* ecology and ask: how are cultural processes, *as such*, constitutive of world-ecological patterns and processes? Such a question allows for a reformulation of cultural materialism’s basic premise—that culture, capital, and power form an organic whole. Thus, we imagine a world-historical mode of cultural analysis attentive to the role of symbolic forms in relation to capitalism’s successive world-ecological regimes. At the conclusion of his discussion of large-scale industry, Marx reminds us that its development “simultaneously undermin[es] the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker” (1977a:638). However, this development is not reducible to technology alone: “Machinery is no more an economic category than the bullock that drags the plow. Machinery is merely a productive force. The modern workshop . . . is a social production relation, an economic category” (Marx 1955:60). If the workshop is a kind of “economic” category, it is also an ecological one. It is equally a producer/product of capitalist nature, simultaneously human and extra-human, material and symbolic. As such, it reveals “the active relation of man to nature, the direct process of the production of his life . . . [T]hereby it also lays bare the process of the production of the social relations of his life, and of the *mental conceptions* that flow from those relations” (Marx 1977a:493;

emphasis added). It is the complex of processes and relations that Marx highlights here that guides our approach to world-systems, world-ecology, and world-culture. Thinking in systematically comparative terms about the co-constitutive relationship between cultural forms, capitalist accumulation, and ecological change, we aim to track those mental conceptions that both create and flow from socioecological relations.

Over the course of this volume, then, we expound on each of the key terms in our title—world-systems, world-ecology, and world-culture—by taking a critical approach to cultural studies that combines a world-historical perspective of the longer temporalities of capitalism's cycles, a world-ecological conceptualization of the environmental history of capitalist accumulation, and a reading practice attentive to the aesthetic mediation of the hierarchical differentiation and inequities of the world-system. As such, we bring together here a set of arguments, both exegetical and polemical, that we have individually and collectively been discussing in print form for many years in order to extend them further through collaborative multilogue.

In this vein, the following pages may also serve as an introduction to what we call “Warwick School” perspectives for literary and cultural studies. The Warwick School mainly, but not solely, comprises a constellation of scholars throughout the Republic of Ireland and the Four Nations of the United Kingdom, who have largely, but not exclusively, had some residence in the Department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at the University of Warwick. Yet this institutional connection has meaning only in the context of a shared perspective on an object of knowledge and approach, one that might be gauged against two prior other “schools”: the Frankfurt School and the Birmingham School. The Frankfurt School, known also by reference to a particular university even though its associates had various affiliations, has often been characterized by its members' attempts to consider Marxism alongside psychoanalytical considerations in order to better address the conditions of mass consumer capitalism (and its deployment of State violence) and the new culture industries of the twentieth century. The Birmingham School is associated with the now disbanded Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham in England. This group sought for a more active role for popular culture, wherein opposition to capitalism might happen as easily as passivity to its authoritarian tendencies. The Birmingham School relied less on Freud than on Gramsci and on semiotic theories of representation.

Inspired by the collaborative practices of these two other clusters of left commentary, the Warwick School combines rereadings of Marxist criticism with world-systems perspectives from Wallerstein and associates to consider

the role of labor divisions and commodity chains in the formation of cultural production. Just as a commodity is shaped by the complex entanglements of waged and partly or unwaged labor, so, too is a cultural commodity, like a novel or a poem. Particular attention is placed on cultural forms from zemiperipheral and postcolonial situations amid questions of ecological appropriation and exploitation.

One early manifestation of these concerns was *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (2015, which appeared under the collective authorship of the WReC (Warwick Research Collective). *Tracking Capital* can be usefully read alongside this prior monograph, but it does not require it, since here we seek to build on and elaborate some of the ideas that were only latent in that earlier work, including concerns with periodicity, registration, the zemiperiphery, commodity chains/frontiers, and world-ecology. Although we hope that each of the following three chapters are legible if read independently, we intend them to be read in succession and have ordered them in a loose sequence, proceeding from the more general to the particular—from the mapping of a theoretical architecture, through an account of methodology and genre, to practical analysis using a central concept.

Chapter 1 begins with a more extensive examination of foundational concepts of world-systems theory, including a detailed exegesis of Wallerstein's work, and moves to an elaboration of the importance of the "zemiperiphery" for cultural analysis more generally. Chapter 2 then moves to a closer examination of the methodological possibilities for a world-literary criticism informed by world-ecology and by way of demonstration of such a critical praxis, offers an extended consideration of forms and narrative structures adopted by totalizing fictions and poetry that set out to map planetary nature. Chapter 3 continues the focus on literary analysis from a world-ecology perspective, but delves deeper into the specific concepts of "commodity chains" and "commodity frontiers" and the particular possibilities they afford for comparing literary registrations of capitalism's environment-making dynamics. We see *Tracking Capital* as one of the many steps on the road to a better future and hope that it helps encourage you to join the journey.