CHAPTER 5

Contemporary Grand Theories II

Neo-Marxian Theory
The Civilizing Process
The Colonization of the Lifeworld
The Juggernaut of Modernity
Summary
Suggested Readings

This chapter deals with four more important modern grand theories. We begin with neo-Marxian theory, which encompasses such a broad range of theories that we are able to focus on only two of its main varieties—critical theory and theories of the nature of space is the contemporary world. We then turn to grand theories closely associated with contemporary theorists—Norbert Elias's civilizing process, Jürgen Habermas's (a later critical theorist) colonization of the lifeworld, and Anthony Giddens's juggernaut of modernity. The theories covered here and in the previous chapter constitute only a small sample of the wide range of contemporary grand theories.

NEO-MARXIAN THEORY

Many theorists followed Marx and over the years took his theories in many different directions; there are a number of neo-Marxian theories. It is worth noting that not all neo-Marxian theories offer grand narratives, but several, including the two to be discussed here, do closely follow Marx in the sense of offering theories of great sweep.

Critical Theory and the Emergence of the Culture Industry

Critical theory was founded in 1923 at the Institute of Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany. However, in the 1930s the Institute was taken over by the Nazis and the theorists associated with it were forced to flee, many of them to the United States. Many of critical theory's most important ideas were formulated

in the United States, but with the end of World War II many of its practitioners gradually returned to Germany.

As the name suggests, the critical theorists were social (and intellectual) critics. In this they were following Marx, who was a critic of capitalism. The focus of Marx's work was on the economy because in the era in which he lived (the height of the Industrial Revolution) the economy was of overwhelming importance. However, critical theory is based on the idea that in the half century or so between Marx's *Capital* and the heyday of the critical school, capitalism had undergone a dramatic change. The most important aspect of society was in the process of shifting from the economy to the culture; people were more and more likely to be controlled by the culture rather than the economy. Thus, the critical school had to focus its critical gaze not on the economy (where Marx and many of his followers, even to this day, concentrated), but rather on the culture.

Marx, and those who followed immediately in his wake, tended to think of culture, along with the state, as a **superstructure** erected on an economic **base.** In other words, the economy is of prime importance and everything else in society is based on it. The capitalist economy was seen as especially powerful and it played a central role in determining and controlling culture and the state. Both tended to be seen as mechanisms manipulated by the capitalists in order to further their own economic interests. What the critical theorists argued was that culture, as well as those who lead and control it, has achieved significant autonomy from the capitalists. In this and in their focus on the culture industry, the critical theorists took a position radically different from virtually all Marxists who had come before them.

Culture At the most general level, the critical theorists were most concerned with what they called the **culture industry** and its increasing domination of society in general and of individuals in particular. The critical theorists were sensitized to the rise of what has come to be called **mass culture.** In their day, the major disseminators of culture to the masses were newspapers, magazines, and the relatively new movies and radio broadcasts. Those media continue to be important today, but we now have newer and far more powerful disseminators of mass culture, most notably television and the Internet. Although it is clear that if the critical theorists were right in their day to be interested in the culture industry, there is far more reason to be concerned with it today.

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superstructure To Marx, secondary social phenomena, like the state and culture, that are erected on an economic base that serves to define them. Most extremely, the economy determines the superstructure.

base To Marx, the economy, which conditions, if not determines, the nature of everything else in society.

culture industry To the critical theorists, industries such as movies and radio that were serving to make culture a more important factor in society than the economy.

mass culture The culture (e.g., radio quiz shows) that had been made available to, and popular among, the masses.

Why were the critical theorists so concerned about culture? For one thing, the impact of culture is more pervasive than that of work. Work largely affects people while they are on the job, but the impact of culture is felt around-the-clock, seven days a week. Another reason is that culture's impact is far more insidious—gradually working its way into people's consciousness and altering the way they think, feel, and act. Third, at work people know that they are being dominated. This is quite clear when they are given orders, when they are being forced to do certain things over and over again by technologies like the assembly line, and when they are laid off or fired. In the case of culture, control is largely invisible. In fact, people crave more and more mass culture (more radio and TV shows, and today, more time on the Internet) without realizing the way it exercises domination over them. In a sense, the critical theorists came to the realization that people had come to seek out their own domination.

Culture came to dominate people in various ways. The most important was what Marx called an opiate of the masses. Lulled into semiconsciousness by the culture industry, the proletariat would not be receptive to revolutionary messages. This was a very pleasant kind of control. Rather than being controlled at gun point, or by the whip, the masses were controlled in the 1930s, for example, by a steady diet of Hollywood B-movies that did not elevate their tastes, but reduced them to the lowest common denominator. In addition, there was the string of nightly radio programs with listeners tuned in for hours to low-brow comedies, dramas, and contests of one kind or another. Radio also served to bring mass sports into people's homes so that additional hours could be spent listening to the exploits of one's favorite professional and college teams. People entertained for many hours a week were likely to lose whatever hostility they might have had to the capitalist system. Furthermore, the sheer amount of time listening to the radio or going to the movies, combined with the hours spent at work, left little time for revolutionary reading and thinking, let alone action.

Today, of course, other media play the central role in narcotizing the masses. Television is a key player, with endless soap operas during the day followed by one reality show after another at night. The latter are, at least for the moment, among the most watched programs on network television. Millions of viewers devote several hours a week to watching people compete with one another to win the money they need, without having to work for it or to be players in the capitalist economic system. Instead of rebelling against the capitalist system, viewers are left to daydream about what they would do with all that money.

But the culture industry of the 1930s, 1940s, and today has played a much more direct role in the maintenance of capitalism by turning more and more people into consumers. As mass consumers, people came to play another central role (the other was as worker) in the capitalist system. Their consumption served as an important motor of capitalist production. In the early 1900s that ultimate capitalist Henry Ford recognized this by paying his workers an adequate enough wage to buy his products as well as those of other capitalist enterprises. Of course, the key development was the growing magnitude and sophistication of the advertising industry. Radio was a wonderful new medium for advertising, while the mass magazines and newspapers (especially the tabloids) were a more traditional medium for advertisers. Spurred on by these advertisements, people spent more and more time shopping; once again, time was not being used to think about and undertake social revolution. Furthermore, the burgeoning needs of consumers meant that they had to work as much as they could, seek as much overtime as possible, and even work second jobs, in order to be able to afford all those goodies being advertised everywhere. Working not only further reduced the amount of time for revolutionary activities, but the additional time at work and the energy expended working meant that the proletariat had even less energy for revolution. They had just about enough strength left at the end of the workday or workweek to drag themselves home, switch on the radio, and doze off during lulls in the action.

If this was true of America in the 1930s, it is far more true of America in the early years of the 21st century. However, in the interim the culture industry has grown far more powerful and infinitely more sophisticated. Few of us switch on the radio at night, but virtually all of us turn on the television set, often for many hours. We still go the movies on occasion, but with the advent of DVDs and on-demand movies we no longer need to go out to see a movie. Magazines are more numerous and more spectacular than their predecessors. Newspapers are less prevalent, but those that remain are emulating *USA Today* and becoming more attractive and seductive. Then there are the home computer and the Internet. Although they are wonderful tools for education, most people use them for online social networking (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), entertainment (especially video games) and, increasingly, to shop 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Because shopping is the favorite leisure activity of Americans, they spend many long hours after work and on weekends at the shopping mall (or, at least they did before the onset of the recession which began in late 2007). Vacation is likely to be spent consuming services and goods in places like a Las Vegas casino-hotel, a cruise ship, or Disney World. Today's opiates are far more numerous, ever-present, and sophisticated than those the critical theorists were so concerned about. The tools at the disposal of advertisers are much more sophisticated and their ability to manipulate us into consuming is much greater. And there is infinitely more time available for shopping and many more venues, both real and virtual, in which we can do our shopping. All of this means, of course, that there is much less interest in and time for revolutionary thinking and action. In fact, there is virtually no sign in the contemporary United States of any interest in revolution. As the critical theorists might put it, people are too anesthetized by the mass media, too busy shopping and working to afford what they buy when they shop, to think very much about revolution, let alone to act on such thoughts.

It seems clear that an even better argument could be made today that the major source of domination over people is the culture and not the economic system. Work has come to play a less important role in people's lives, while culture, the consumption of it, and the wares associated with it have grown dramatically in importance. To put it succinctly, the shopping mall is now far more important than the factory (especially in developed nations such as the United States), and the fully enclosed shopping mall (which did not exist

Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979)
A Biographical Vignette

Herbert Marcuse was a member of the Critical School and a major contributor to critical theory. He became a major public intellectual in the United States and in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s because his ideas resonated well with the revolutionaries, especially students, who were protesting the Vietnam War and oppression in its various forms. Marcuse was a critic of repression wherever he found it, but especially in advanced capitalist society, and its negative effects on people. This theme is apparent in his best-known book, *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), published just before the advent of the revolutionary movements of the late 1960s and a powerful influence on them. Among other things, Marcuse singled out modern technology, especially television (were he alive today he might have said many of the same things about the computer and the Internet), for advances in repression, especially its ability to make repression seem so pleasant. Television, and other contemporary technologies, invade individuals and serve to whittle them down. As a result people become "one-dimensional." They become more-or-less what these repressive, but oh so pleasant, technologies tell them to be. In the process they lose a key dimension—the ability to think critically and negatively about many things, including the society and technologies that are repressing them. The answer, for Marcuse, is not the elimination of modern technologies (they are here to stay and will only increase), but the wresting of control of them away from oppressive forces and putting them in the hands of free people. Clearly, such a critique and political program were attractive to student (and other) radicals of the late 1960s and, to some, they remain attractive today in light of continuing advances in television technology and the development of new technologies (e.g., iPod, Xbox) that make repression even more ubiquitous and deeply implicated in our everyday lives.

during the heyday of the critical school) is one of the centers of contemporary mass culture. Inside a megamall like Mall of America, outside Minneapolis, is an amusement park; in addition, the mall encompasses shops that push the latest fashions, movie theaters, video rental stores, Walt Disney stores, play centers for children, fast-food and theme restaurants, educational centers, religious sites, and on and on. A visit to a shopping mall is a visit to many of the elements of contemporary mass culture. One rarely sees any revolutionary consciousness expressed, or revolutionary action undertaken, in a shopping mall.

Modern Technology Implicit in the critique of the culture industry is the critical school's attack on modern technology. Obviously, many of today's key elements of the culture industry—television, computers, the Internet—are the result of technological advances that occurred after the heyday of the critical school. But the critical school itself confronted new technologies (e.g., the radio) that it saw as creating major problems for, and sources of control over, people.

Rather than being controlled by people, these technologies controlled people. However, the main thrust of the work of the critical school was to argue that it was not technology per se that was the problem, but the way technology was deployed and employed in capitalism. Thus, the capitalists used technology to control people, deaden their critical capacities, and greatly limit their ability to revolt against this inherently exploitative system. Critical theorists believed that in another economic system, say, socialism, technology could be used to make people more conscious, more critical, and resistant to exploitative systems like capitalism. Thus, instead of offering mediocre programs designed mainly to help sell things, radio programs could be truly stimulating and educational.

Focusing on the role of technology, one critical theorist, Herbert Marcuse, argued that it was being used to create what he called a **one-dimensional society.** In an ideal world Marcuse, like Marx and many other Marxists, saw a dialectical relationship between people and the larger structures, like technology, that they created. In other words, people should be fulfilling their needs and expressing their abilities as they create, employ, and alter technologies. In this way, both people and technology would flourish. However, in capitalism this is transformed into a one-sided relationship. People create technology, but it is owned and controlled by the capitalists and it is used by them to their own advantage to control and exploit workers. Thus, instead of expressing themselves through the use of technology, people are impoverished by the control exerted over them by technology. Individuality is suppressed as everyone conforms to the demands of technology. Gradually, individual freedom and creativity dwindle away into nothingness. As a result, people lose the capacity to think critically and negatively not only about technology but the society that controls and oppresses them. Without that ability, people are unable to revolt against and overthrow the capitalist system. The answer to this problem from Marcuse's perspective is the creation of a society in which people (i.e., the proletariat) control technology rather than being controlled by it.

The technologies employed by the capitalists, such as the assembly line, tend to be highly rationalized; this fact relates to another central concern of the critical theorists. Strongly influenced not only by Karl Marx but also Max Weber, they tended to argue that society was growing increasingly rationalized. Like Weber, some of them even came to see that increasing rationalization, rather than capitalism, was the central problem of their day. This rationalization undergirded not only the technologies being put into place but also the culture industry; both were growing increasingly rationalized.

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one-dimensional society To Herbert Marcuse, the breakdown in the dialectical relationship between people and the larger structures so that people are largely controlled by such structures. Lost is the ability of people to create and to be actively involved in those structures. Gradually, individual freedom and creativity dwindle away into nothingness, and people lose the capacity to think critically and negatively about the structures that control and oppress them.

In their view, increasing rationality tends to lead to **technocratic thinking.** That is, people grow concerned with being efficient, with simply finding the best means to an end without reflecting on either the means or the end. An example is the Nazis associated with the concentration camps (given their origins in Germany, many observers feel that the critical theorists anticipated the horrors associated with Nazism), who focused all of their attention and energies on the goal of killing the greatest number of Jews using the most efficient means (e.g., the gas chambers) possible. Such thinking serves the interests of those in power.

In the case of capitalism, both the capitalists and the proletariat were dominated by this kind of thinking. However, the critical theorists were most interested in and concerned about the proletariat. For example, an assembly line worker is led, even forced, to concentrate on working as efficiently as possible. The continual pressure of the assembly line leaves workers little or no time to reflect on how they are doing the work and how tiring and debilitating it is to do one thing over and over. Furthermore, it leaves them even less time and energy to think about the ends of the production process, say, the automobiles that roll off the assembly line and the fact that they kill and maim many thousands of people each year, pollute the air, use up valuable natural resources, and so on.

What is lost in the process is the alternative to technocratic thinking, **reason,** which assesses means to ends in terms of ultimate human values such as justice, freedom, and happiness. Reason, to critical thinkers, is the hope for humanity. Auschwitz, for example, was a very rational place, but it was certainly not reasonable. If the Nazis had employed reason rather than technocratic thinking, the Holocaust would never have occurred because the actions associated with it flew in the face of all human values. Much the same could be said of capitalism: It is very rational but not very reasonable. To the critical theorists the hope for society was the creation of a society dominated by reason rather than technocratic thinking, where human values take precedence over efficiency.

In other words, despite the seeming rationality of capitalism, it is a system rife with irrationality. This is the notion of the **irrationality of rationality;** rational systems inevitably spawn a series of irrationalities. In the rational world of capitalism, it is irrational that such a system is destructive of individuals and their needs and abilities; that technology makes them one-dimensional; that the culture industry controls them rather than helping them to express their finest aspirations and abilities; and that despite the existence of more than sufficient wealth, many people remain impoverished, repressed, exploited, and unable to fulfill themselves.

technocratic thinking Concern with being efficient, with simply finding the best means to an end without reflecting on either the means or the end.

reason People assess the choice of means to ends in terms of ultimate human values such as justice, freedom, and happiness.

irrationality of rationality The idea that rational systems inevitably spawn a series of irrationalities.

Key Concept

Knowledge Industry

Another sector of society that came under attack by the critical school was what they called the **knowledge industry.** Paralleling the idea of the culture industry, this term refers to those entities in society concerned with knowledge production and dissemination, especially research institutes and universities. Like the culture industry, these settings achieved a large measure of autonomy within society, which allowed them to redefine themselves. Instead of serving the interests of society as a whole, they have come to focus on their own interests; this means that they are intent on expanding their influence over society. Research institutes help to turn out the technologies needed by the culture industry, the state, and the capitalists and, in so doing, help to strengthen their position in, and influence over, society. Universities come to serve a similar series of interests, but perhaps more importantly serve to foster technocratic thinking and, in the process, help to suppress reason. Universities are dominated by technocratic administrators who run the university much like any bureaucracy and who impose rules on professors and students alike. Furthermore, the universities become increasingly dominated, not by the liberal arts that might encourage reason, but by the business, professional, and technical schools that are dominated by technocratic thinking. Furthermore, instead of challenging students to think, universities become more like factories for the manufacture of hordes of students. The focus is not on making them reasonable human beings, but on processing as many students as possible in the most efficient way. Universities come to turn out students in much the same way that factories turn out automobiles or sausages.

Pessimism about the Future All of this, but especially the focus on increasing rationalization, leads the critical theorists, unlike Marx and most Marxists, to a very pessimistic view of the future. Instead of the overthrow of the capitalists by the proletariat, the critical theorists envision continued and expanding rationalization. This is true within the culture, technology, and the knowledge industry (see Key Concept box). However, each of these was likely not only to grow increasingly rational, but each was expected to grow more important in its own right. Thus, the future is seen as a kind of iron cage composed of increasingly rational cultural, technological, and educational systems that interpenetrate to control people and make them increasingly one-dimensional. This kind

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Contemporary Applications
From Web 1.0 to Web 2.0

Critical theorists tended to see technology as controlling individuals. However, a dramatic change has taken place on the Internet that has given much greater control to individuals. In its early years the Internet could be described as Web 1.0, but in recent years many examples of Web 2.0 have taken their place alongside continuing examples of Web 1.0. While Web 1.0 continues to exist on the Internet and to demonstrate technological control over individuals, the individual exercises far more power in Web 2.0.

Examples of Web 1.0 include:

- Switchboard.com and YellowPages.com, which dictate how users are supposed to find people and businesses through the framework of the sites.
- The Apple Store and other shopping sites that dictate the content and users' browsing (and shopping).
- Yahoo's website, which offers the user a preset set of options (although they can now be altered by the user).

On Web 1.0 sites, many opinions are presented, often by those who are, or at least claim to be, experts. For instance, the creators of Fodors.com use their own tastemakers to point tourists to various hotels, restaurants, activities, and so forth. (This site, like many associated originally with Web 1.0, now allows users to choose between the experts, *à la* Web 1.0, or to read community opinions, *à la* Web 2.0.) More general information is searched for on sites like about.com, whose creators employ "experts" to help users find information. The author of this volume is also Editor of the *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology Online* (www.sociologyencyclopediaonline.com/public/) where the reader finds almost 2000 entries written by experts in the field.

Web 2.0 accords far less power to the creators of these systems and much more to their users; Web 2.0 sites are, to a large extent, user-generated. In addition to the Web 1.0 experience of reading, browsing, and consuming online content, Web 2.0 also allows for writing and producing content. One way of describing this is to see the implosion of the consumer and the producer on Web 2.0 into the "prosumer" (see Key Concepts box in Chapter 9). Because of this user-generated content, sites on Web 2.0 are always in a state of flux.

of thinking has far more in common with the pessimistic views of Max Weber than the optimistic perspectives of Marx and most other neo-Marxists.

This kind of pessimistic thinking about the future did not endear the critical theorists to other Marxists. After all, Marxists were not supposed to be merely thinkers, but also people of action intent on relating their theories to revolutionary movements. The pessimism of the critical theorists seemed to foreclose the possibility of action, let alone revolution. The proletariat were left to await their inevitable fate—imprisonment in the iron cage of rationality being put in place by the various elements of the culture industry. From the point of view of the critical theorists, the masses did not view this as an unpleasant fate. In fact, the iron cage has been made as pleasant and comfortable as possible. It is

Contemporary Applications—Continued

Major examples of Web 2.0, and of the centrality of user-generation on them, include:

- Wikipedia, where users generate articles and constantly edit, update, and comment on them (compare to the *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology Online*);
- Facebook, MySpace and other social networking websites, where users create profiles composed of videos, photos, and text, interact with one another, and build communities;
- Second Life, where users create the characters, communities, and entire virtual environment;
- The blogosphere, blogs (web logs) and the comments on them;
- eBay and Craigslist, where consumers rather than retailers create the market;
- YouTube and Flickr, where mostly amateur photographers upload and download videos and photographs;
- Current TV, where viewers create much of the programming, submit it via the Internet, and decide which submissions are aired;
- Linux, a free, collaboratively-built open-source operating system, and open-source software applications;
- Amazon.com, whose consumers do all the work involved in ordering products and write the product reviews;
- The GeoWeb, which consists of online maps that users are increasingly creating and augmenting with Google, Microsoft, and Yahoo tools. Google Maps users, for example, can fix errors, add the locations of their businesses, upload photos, and blog about their experiences with, or reviews of, places on the map, thereby creating social communities.

This explosion of user-generated content has massively transformed the Internet. There has been dramatic shift from Web 1.0, where the user experience was best characterized as "looking stuff up" preset by others, to a Web 2.0 experience of production, networking, and collaborating. In contrast to thinking of the critical theorists, on Web 2.0 it is people who, to a large degree, are controlling the technology rather than being controlled by it.

nicely padded and furnished. It is loaded with amenities like *People* magazine and *USA Today*; labor-saving devices like dishwashers and microwave ovens; televisions, TiVos, DVDs, and all the tapes and disks one could ever want; computers with free and continuous access to video games, movies, Facebook, and shopping sites on the Internet, and so on. People have come to love their cages and they are eager to fill them with more of the goodies being churned out by the capitalist system. However, this situation is precisely the problem. In love with their cages and the consumer toys that crowd them, people see no need to revolt; indeed, they are no longer even able to see that there are such problems as exploitation and control. In the end, these attractive and pleasant methods of control are far more effective than the oppressive actions of the capitalists and their lackeys that characterized the early years of capitalism.

Neo-Marxian Spatial Analysis

There have been a number of notable contributions by neo-Marxian theorists to spatial analysis and to the role of space in the social world. And this is only part of a broader resurgence of interest in space in sociology and social theory.

A starting point for the growth in interest in space in neo-Marxian theory (and elsewhere) is the work of Michel Foucault (see Chapter 9), who pointed out that many theories, but especially Marxian theories, had emphasized time over space (e.g., the focus on Marxian theory in the historical transitions from feudalism to capitalism and ultimately to communism), viewing space as "dead" while time was seen as alive. The implication is that space should, along with time, be given its due in social analyses.

Henri Lefebvre on Space. It is Henri Lefebvre who did the pathbreaking work in the neo-Marxian theory of space. Lefebvre argues for the need for Marxian theory to shift its focus from things in space (for example, means of production such as factories) and the production that takes place there to the actual production of space itself. Marxian theory needs to broaden its concerns from capitalist industrial production to the way that a system reproduces itself in space. Space serves in various ways to reproduce the capitalist system, the class structure within that economic system, and so on. For example, the rich live in elegant gated communities while the poor live in slums far removed from those wealthy communities. Thus, any revolt against the capitalist system must concern itself not only with changing the structure of production, but also with restructuring space so that it reflects a more egalitarian class structure.

Lefebvre begins his analysis with **spatial practice,** which for him involves the actions (including and especially the actions of the masses) that produce and continually reproduce space. For example, by meekly remaining in their slums or accepting the fact that they may not enter rich gated communities, the poor reproduce those spatial arrangements on a daily basis.

Overlying and ultimately dominating spatial practice are **representations of space,** or space as it is conceived by societal elites such as urban planners and architects. Elites think of this as "true space" and it is used by them and others to achieve and maintain dominance. Thus, for example, urban planners and architects conceived the once popular program of "urban renewal" that was designed, theoretically, to tear down the dilapidated slum housing of the poor and replace it with far better and more modern housing. However, urban renewal came to be known as "urban removal." The poor were moved out to make room for new housing, but when that housing was built, it was more often for the middle and upper classes interested in gentrifying the city.

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Representations of space involve space as it is conceived by societal elites such as urban planners and architects; it overlies and ultimately dominates spatial practice.

Frequently, the poor had to move to new areas, often finding themselves in housing little, if at all, better than what they had left. They also were forced to adapt to new areas, communities, and neighbors. Thus, the "spatial practices" of the poor (e.g., where they lived and shopped) were radically altered by the "representations of space" of those who supported, created, and implemented urban renewal.

Representations of space are dominant not only over spatial practices but also over representational spaces. While representations of space are the creations of dominant groups, **representational spaces** are ideas about, representations of, space that flow from the lived experiences of people, especially from those who are poor, silent, underground, or clandestine. While, as we have seen, representations of space are considered "true space" by those in power, representations of space yield the "truth of space." That is, they reflect what "really" happens in lived experience rather than being an abstract truth created by someone such as an urban planner in order to achieve dominance. However, in the contemporary world, representational spaces like spatial practices, suffer because of the dominance of representations of space. In fact, representational space tends to become subordinated to, to get lost in, representations of space. Thus, a major problem for Lefebvre is the predominance of the representations of space of the "haves" over the spatial practices and silent representational spaces of the "have-nots." Furthermore, it is out of representational spaces that new and potentially revolutionary ideas flow, but if those spaces are subordinated and suppressed, how is the hegemony of elites ever to be contested, let alone threatened?

The preceding is a way of addressing space that emphasizes ideas and representations, but Lefebvre offers a second set of distinctions that addresses space in more material—and more optimistic—terms. Lefebvre begins with what he calls **absolute spaces,** or natural spaces (e.g., "green" areas) that are not colonized, rendered inauthentic, or smashed by elite economic and political forces. Lefebvre spends little time on absolute space; it serves as a basic assumption on which his other ideas are based. Just as Marx devoted most of his attention to critiquing capitalism, Lefebvre is interested in critically analyzing what he calls **abstract space,** which, like representations of space, is space from the point of view of a theoretician such as an urban planner or an architect. But abstract space is not just about ideas; it involves real, material spaces that actually

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replacc historical spaccs (which are erected on the base of absolute spaces). An example of an abstract space is a public housing project. Such a space is characterized largely by the absence of that which is associated with absolute space (trees, clean air, and so on). It is a dominated, occupied, controlled, authoritarian (even brutal and violent), and repressive space. Lefebvre emphasizes the role of the state, more than economic forces, in exercising power over abstract space, although that exercise of power is often hidden. Thus, abstract space can be seen, and is used, as a tool of power. That is, not only is power exercised in it, but the abstraction of space is itself a form of power. While those in power have always sought to control space, what is new here is that the ruling class uses abstract space as a tool to gain control over increasingly large spaces. While Lefebvre de-emphasizes economic factors and forces, he does recognize that power of and over abstract space does generate profit. That is, it is not just the factory that generates profits, but also the bus routes, railway lines, and highways that provide routes into the factory for raw materials and out of the factory for finished products. Further, elites gain from owning and speculating on property in areas in which the poor live.

As a good Marxian theorist, Lefebvre emphasizes contradictions. While abstract space serves to smother contradictions, it simultaneously generates them, including those that have the potential to tear apart such space, and the larger society. Although he wonders why people accept, and are silent about, the kind of control exerted over them by abstract spaces, they eventually will be spurred to action by these contradictions. Indeed, as in Marx's analysis of contradictions in capitalism, Lefebvre argues that the seeds of a new kind of space can be glimpsed within the contradictions of abstract space.

That new kind of space, the third of the types of space to be discussed here, is **differential space.** While abstract space (e.g., in public housing projects) seeks to control and homogenize everyone and everything, differential space accentuates difference and freedom from control. While abstract space breaks up the natural unity that exists in the world, differential space restores that unity. A differential space would, for example, be one where rich and poor live together, or one in which people are immersed in their natural environment (trees, clean air), rather than having it denied them.

Lefebvre argues that space can play a variety of roles in the socioeconomic world. First, it can be one of many forces of productions (other, more traditional such forces are factories, tools, and machines). For example, more farm land can be used to produce larger quantities of corn to be turned into ethanol to be used, instead of gasoline, to power automobiles. Second, space itself can be a vast commodity that is consumed for pleasure (as, for example, by a tourist visiting Disneyland), or it can be consumed productively (for example, the land on which a factory is built). Third, it is politically instrumental, facilitating control of the system (building roads to facilitate troop movements to put

Differential space. A hoped-for space that accentuates difference and freedom from control; it would restore the natural unity that is broken by abstract space.

down rebellions). Fourth, space underpins the reproduction of productive and property relations (for example, those expensive gated communities for the capitalists and slums for the poor). Fifth, space can take the form of a superstructure that, for example, seems neutral but conceals the economic base that gives rise to it and that is far from neutral. Thus, a highway system may seem neutral but really advantages capitalistic enterprises that are allowed to move raw materials and finished products easily and cheaply. Finally, there is always positive potential in space, such as the creation of truly human and creative works in it, as well as the possibility of reappropriating space on behalf of those who are being controlled and exploited.

The production of space occupies two positions in Lefebvre's work. First, as discussed above, it constitutes a new focus of analysis and critique. That is, our attention should shift from the means of production to the production of space. Second, Lefebvre puts this all in terms of a desired direction for social change. That is, we live in a world characterized by a particular mode of *production in space.* This is a world of domination in which control is exercised by the state, the capitalist, and the bourgeoisie. It is a closed, sterile world, one that is being emptied out of contents (e.g., highways replacing and destroying local communities).

Lefebvre argues that we need instead a world characterized by the *production of space* where, instead of domination, we would have a world in which appropriation is predominant. That is, in concert with others, people would work in and with space to produce what they need to survive and prosper. In other words, they modify natural space in order to serve their collective needs. Thus, Lefebvre's goal is the production of space that is a product and reflection of the human beings. It would be planet-wide space that would serve as the basis for transforming everyday life. Needless to say, state and private ownership of the means of production that control the mode of production would wither away under such a system. Thus, the production of space is not only Lefebvre's analytic focus but also his political objective in much the same way that communism is Marx's political goal.

David Harvey on Space. One aspect of David Harvey's complex body of work that is particularly relevant to this discussion of neo-Marxian theory is his analysis and critique of the geographical arguments made by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* (1868). Harvey sees what he calls the "spatial fix" as central to the argument made in the *Manifesto.* That is, the need to create ever-higher profits means that capitalist firms must, among other things, continually seek new geographic areas (and markets) to exploit *and* find more ways of exploiting more intensively the areas in which they already operate. While such geographical arguments occupy an important place in the *Manifesto,* they characteristically are subordinated, as Foucault argued, to a perspective that prioritizes time and history (e.g., the history of class struggles, especially proletariat vs. capitalists) at the expense of space and geography.

Harvey wants to see more attention paid to the way the world, including capitalism, is organized geographically. Thus, for example, it is not enough to

say that the state is controlled by the capitalists; the way a territorially defined state is organized and administered is also of great importance. For example, loosely connected provinces have to be brought together to form the nation. However, territories do not remain set in stone once they have been transformed into states. All sorts of things alter territorial configurations, including revolutions in transportation and communication, differences in resources, and the uneven outcomes of class struggle. Furthermore, boundaries between territories are always porous and products, money, and workers flow through them rather easily. Thus, territories are being redefined and reorganized continually, with the result that any model that envisions a final formation of the state on a territorial basis is overly simplistic. The implication is that we need to be attuned continuously to territorial changes in a world dominated by capitalism (as well as any other economic system).

Another of the spatial arguments made in the *Communist Manifesto* is that capitalism (e.g., its factories, offices) tends to become concentrated in the cities. This, in turn, leads to the concentration of the proletariat in those cities (they were formerly scattered throughout the countryside). Instead of conflict between isolated workers and capitalists, it becomes more likely that a collectivity of workers will confront capitalists, who are themselves now more likely to be organized into a collectivity. Thus, the nature and likelihood of class struggle is strongly affected by spatial changes.

There is much more to be said about the relationship between space and class struggle, and this is amply demonstrated in the more recent history of capitalism. For example, capitalists in the late nineteenth century dispersed factories from the cities to the suburbs and small towns in an effort, at least in part, to limit the concentration of workers and their power. And in the late twentieth century we witnessed the dispersal of factories to remote areas of the world in order not only to reduce labor costs, but as a further effort to weaken the proletariat and to strengthen the capitalists. Most generally, capitalism itself has grown ever-more widespread throughout the world; it has become increasingly global (see Chapter 10).

Harvey also points out that the *Manifesto* tended to focus on the urban proletariat and thereby largely ignored rural areas, as well as agricultural workers and peasants. Of course, the latter groups have over the years proved to be very active in revolutionary movements. Furthermore, Marx and Engels tended to homogenize the world's workers, to argue that they have no country and that national differences are disappearing in the development of a homogeneous proletariat. Harvey notes that not only do national (spatial) differences persist, but capitalism itself produces national (and other) differences among workers. In addition, labor plays a role here in sustaining spatial distinctions by, for example, using organizations based in given territories to mobilize workers and creating loyalties rooted in those places. Finally, Harvey notes the famous call in the *Manifesto* for workers of the world to unite and argues that given the increasingly global character of capitalism, such an exhortation is more relevant and more important than ever. An ever more global capitalism makes a reaction, even a revolution, against it increasingly likely to be global in scope.

Key Concept

The Modern World-System

Immanuel Wallerstein (1930–) chose a unit of analysis unlike those used by most Marxian thinkers. He did not look at workers, classes, or even states, because he found most of these too narrow for his purposes. Instead, he looked at a broad economic entity with a division of labor not circumscribed by political or cultural boundaries. He found that unit in his concept of the **world-system,** a largely self-contained social system with a set of boundaries and a definable life span (i.e., it does not last forever). It is composed internally of a variety of social structures and member groups. He viewed the system as being held together by a variety of forces in inherent tension. These forces always have the potential for tearing the system apart.

Wallerstein argued that thus far we have had only two types of world-systems: One was the world empire, of which ancient Rome was an example; the other is the modern capitalist world-economy. A world empire was based on political (and military) domination, whereas a capitalist world-economy relies on economic domination. A capitalist world-economy is seen as more stable than a world empire for several reasons. It has a broader base because it encompasses many states, and it has a built-in process of economic stabilization. The separate political entities within the capitalist world-economy absorb whatever losses occur, while economic gain is distributed to private hands. Wallerstein foresaw the possibility of a third world-system, a socialist world government. Whereas the capitalist world-economy separates the political from the economic sector, a socialist world-economy reintegrates them.

Within the capitalist world-economy, the **core** geographical area is dominant and exploits the rest of the system. The **periphery** consists of those areas that provide raw materials to the core and are heavily exploited by it. The **semiperiphery** is a residual category that encompasses a set of regions somewhere between the exploiting and the exploited. To Wallerstein the international division of exploitation is defined not by state borders but by the economic division of labor in the world.

In addition to critiquing the ideas of the *Communist Manifesto*, Harvey develops many of his own ideas under the heading of "spaces of hope." With this perspective, he wishes to counter what he perceives to be a pervasive pessimism among scholars today. He wants to acknowledge that there are spaces in which

world-system A broad economic entity with a division of labor that is not circumscribed by political or cultural boundaries. It is a social system, composed internally of a variety of social structures and member groups, that is largely self-contained, has a set of boundaries, and has a definable life span.

core The geographical area that dominates the capitalist world-economy and exploits the rest of the system.

periphery Those areas of the capitalist world-economy that provide raw materials to the core and are heavily exploited by it.

semiperiphery A residual category in the capitalist world-economy that encompasses a set of regions somewhere between the exploiting and the exploited.