7 World Cities, Capital and Communication
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The aim of this chapter is to illustrate and examine the ways in which the modern capitalist world order (CWO) is developing in its current phase of political, economic and social restructuring. The implications of these quantitative and qualitative transformations in the CWO are profound, and are of particular significance for any redefinition of the Third World in international relations (IR). My argument will be that while the categories of core and periphery are central to any political geography of the current CWO, the ways in which they have been developed in both Dependency Theory and World-Systems Theory are not sufficiently sensitive to the fluid and uneven nature of global development, broadly construed.

My intention in focusing upon the rise of ‘world cities’ is to illustrate what I see as the increasing complexity of the way in which core–periphery relations manifest themselves in the CWO. The crucial factor to be borne in mind here is that we are concerned with a CWO that is composed of complex and integrated levels of action, structure and change – in essence, a social totality.¹ I will turn to the importance of this for IR shortly. While the CWO is an integrated system connecting the economic, political and cultural-ideological levels, this chapter is expressly concerned with the global movement towards urbanisation, and in particular the rise of what are generally called ‘world cities’. These developments reflect the central role that revolutionary innovations in new information technology (NIT) have played, and continue to play, in the current wave of capitalist development.² In practice these trends have tended to lead to the increased spatial dispersal of production processes in the world economy and at the same time the centralisation of management and control, invariably from these world cities.³ As I will set out in this chapter, these transformations in the CWO have important implications for social and political change, continuity and conflict.

Underpinning these objectives is a concern with the relationship between the restructuring of the CWO and the spread of democracy
in international politics. The rise of world cities and the movement towards a social world that for the first time in human history will be largely urban rather than rural brings with it many sites of social and political conflict. Already there are numerous developments in world cities that indicate the varying forms of conflict that are likely to ensue as a result of this restructuring. Familiar themes from ‘the end of the Cold War’ have been both the triumph of capitalism and the alleged intrinsic link between capitalism and democracy. However, the uneven nature of the restructuring of the CWO illustrates that the link between capitalism and democracy is far more complex than this. Robert Dahl has illustrated that historically it is societies that are split by deep forms of social, economic and political inequality that are likely to lead towards conflict and increasingly authoritarian political practices. The balance between democracy and freedom is a fragile one, according to Dahl, and wide inequalities of private power will render, in practice, formal political freedoms increasingly empty. When seen in the context of the deepening forms of global inequality and exploitation that are accompanying the current phase of global social, economic and political restructuring we are left with a sombre portrait of the possibilities of democracy becoming substantively embedded in the CWO. In fact, as I will argue, the movement towards forms of procedural over substantive democracy is part and parcel of this process of restructuring at the level of the state in the CWO. World cities serve to illustrate this point as they become sites of increased social regulation on the part of public and private institutions. This is occurring as these world cities come to mirror the inequalities of social, economic and political power that are the defining features of the transformations in the current CWO. Indeed, it is the ensuing naturalisation of poverty and the denial of human needs that are primary sites of conflict in international relations. If substantive forms of democracy involving participation and the empowerment of ordinary citizens are to become embedded in the current restructuring of the CWO, then the world cities will become primary locations for such practices. As I shall illustrate in the course of this chapter, it is my contention that the current tendencies in the CWO are leading away from the likelihood of embedded substantive democracy. Before turning to the role of world cities in the CWO, I want to deal briefly with what I take to be most significant about globalisation for the current restructuring of world order.