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## Spatialities of globalisation

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**Abstract.** The focus of this paper is on the theorisation of the spatialities of globalisation. I seek to shift the emphasis away from the currently dominant discourse of scalar and territorial relativisation, towards relational processes and network forms of organisation that defy a linear distinction between place and space. I stress the importance of actor networks of varying length and duration as well as the world of practices as the central components of a topographical understanding of globalisation. What this might mean in terms of a theorisation of place is illustrated through a discussion of the geography of the urban economy and a discussion of the politics of place.

### Introduction

In this paper I focus on the spatiality of globalisation, which I take to signify:

“the stretching and deepening of social relations and institutions across space and time such that, on the one hand, day-to-day activities are increasingly influenced by events happening on the other side of the globe and, on the other hand, the practices and decisions of local groups can have significant global reverberations” (Held, 1995, page 20).

Globalisation, thus defined, is centrally about the spatiality of contemporary social organisation, about meanings of place and space associated with intensified world-level forces (for example, through transnational corporations and banks, global consumption norms, world ideologies, international authority structures) and raised global connectivity (for example, through flows of people, goods, ideas, and information aided by rapid transport and communications technologies). David Held et al (1999, page 16) are right to stress that globalisation is a:

“process which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions—assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity, and impact—generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power.”

The processes associated with globalisation mark a new ontology of place/space relations that needs to be theorised, and that compels us to think “seriously about space, about the spatiality of the social, about territories and their delimitations” (Therborn, 1998, page 7).

But this is where the problem begins. There is no consensus in social theory about what to say about this spatiality. Goran Therborn, echoing many world systems thinkers and neo-Gramscians, sees a “flattening of social processes” (page 7), linked to the global spread of hegemonic social practices (such as the triumph of capitalism and/or neoliberalism on a global scale, or the Americanisation of culture). But he also identifies another spatiality: the “world as an arena where nationally determined actors meet, interact, and influence each other” (page 9). Anthony Giddens (1990) has taken this idea of connectivity much further, to argue that so mutually constituted are near and far relations that any conceptualisation of place or locale as ‘in here’ happenings and space as ‘out there’ happenings is no longer tenable. A similar sense of place as

the site of intersection of cosmopolitan influences and flows is particularly pronounced in anthropological, postcolonial, and some geographical (especially Doreen Massey's) studies of the cultural 'spatiality' of globalisation. But then, in contrast, Jan Aart Scholte (2000), echoing many commentators who note the rise of a 'borderless world' or the annihilation of place by telemediated space, emphasises deterritorialisation as the distinctive spatiality of contemporary globalisation:

“‘global’ relations are social connections in which territorial location, territorial distance and territorial borders do not have a determining influence. In global space ‘place’ is not territorially fixed, territorial distance is covered in effectively no time, and territorial frontiers present no particular impediment” (page 179).

There are probably many other takes on the theme. All I wish to highlight at this stage is that underlying the debate on the meaning and implications of globalisation, are some fundamental questions about the spatial ontology of contemporary social organisation. In this paper I want to return to the core of ontological debate in geography, namely the nature of place/space relations, but now in the context of what might be described as the rise of routinised 'action at a distance' and global connectivity or flow. This return has been prompted by recent interpretations, by political economists in particular, of globalisation as the proliferation or relativisation of spatial scales: the nesting of local scales of organisation and action within national, international, and transnational ones, and the politics of interscalar contestation (Jessop, 2000). I want to offer a different interpretation, one which emphasises a topology marked by overlapping near–far relations and organisational connections that are not reducible to scalar spaces. The tone of my offering is to signal the possibility of a different insight (not a superior one) to scalar thinking.

I want to contrast the scalar or territorial logic with the topological or relational logic through a discussion of the implications of globalisation on the constitution of place. In the first part of the paper I claim that those using the scalar logic continue to see places as sites of geographically proximate links or as territorial units. In the second part I draw on the example of contemporary urbanity, and conceptualise places as sites in networked or virtual (in the sense of immanent forces, rather than digital space) spaces of organisation: as placements of practices of varied geographical stretch. I argue that, with a heterotopic understanding of place, we cannot assume that local happenings or geographies are ontologically separable from those 'out there'. I illustrate this idea of being in place through an analysis of what we make of local economic life under globalisation.

### Scalar shifts

In an incisive and thoughtful recent survey, Sallie Marston (2000) has noted that spatial scales—from home and locality to city, region, nation, and continent—have no pre-given or fixed ontological status, but are socially produced and continually transformed by the imperatives of capitalism, and the resulting struggles and conflicts. In a similar vein, Eric Swyngedouw (1997, page 140) has claimed that a perspective which views social life as process-based has to reject an ontology of the 'local' or the 'global' as predefined, for assigning:

“motive, force, and action to pre-given geographical configurations and their interaction rather than to the struggles between individuals and social groups though whose actions scales and their nested articulations become produced as temporary standoffs in a perpetual transformative sociospatial power struggle.”

Territories and scales are produced, and their production is contested. This is to recognise the “historicity of spatiality” (Agnew, 1999, page 504): the changes over time in the “geographical embeddedness of power relationships” (page 512). So, for

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example, John Agnew sees the present as a jostle between historically layered models of spatial power (such as dynastic communities, state–military territorial units, centres and peripheries in an international economic system, nodal centres within an integrated world society).

With a historicised sense of scale, contemporary globalisation might be interpreted as a spatial process elevating the tension between territorial relationships (for example, citizenship or property rights acquired through the nation-state) and transterritorial developments (such as the rise of globally mobile elites and global property rights). Indeed, for Bob Jessop (2000, page 341), globalisation as a particular kind of socio-spatial process signifies the “creation and/or restructuring of scale as a social relation”. It involves time–space distanciation, that is, “the stretching of social relations over time and space... so that relations can be controlled or coordinated over longer periods of time... and over longer distances”, as well as time–space compression, that is, “the intensification of ‘discrete’ events in real time and/or the increased velocity of material and immaterial flows over a given distance” (page 340). The combined outcome is a proliferation of scales and scalar complexity, rather than any simple replacement of national scales by a global scale of action. What results is a new jostling between spatialities, which include international capital flows, regional economic blocs, virtual regions, the spaces of transnational corporations, global norms and standards, new localisms, tribalisms, and resurgent nationalisms, and so on. Jessop’s list covers the varied spatialities associated with time–space compression and distanciation.

Elsewhere in political geography heat has been generated by an interpretation of globalisation as the reorganisation or relativisation of scale. Neil Brenner (1999), for example, has argued that the “post-1970s wave of globalisation has significantly decentred the role of the national scale as a self-enclosed container of socio-economic relations”, such that we are witnessing a “re-scaling of territoriality” which includes the increased “importance of both sub- and supranational forms of territorial organisation” (page 435). Similarly Swyngedouw (1997) has used the term ‘glocalisation’ to indicate that globalisation represents the breakdown and reconstitution of spatial scales; producing a new “politics of scale” involving clashes of scale and contested boundaries. Globalisation is seen to multiply and relativise geographical scales of social organisation linked to the changing spatial requirements of the latest phase of capitalist development. These are not seen as mutually exclusive or parallel scalar configurations, but as intersecting and overlapping scales, leading to the restructuring of places as territories as they engage in the multiscale processes and politics.

My worry with the scalar interpretation of the geography of globalisation—one which, to be clear, is not shared by all the commentators cited thus far—has to do with the possibility that the very ontology of place and territoriality itself is becoming altered by the rise of world-scale processes and transnational connectivity. The language of spatial change remains that of assuming organisation along scalar and territorial lines: reterritorialisation follows deterritorialisation, and spatial scales are relativised under globalisation. Sites such as cities and nations continue to exist as territorial units, now with different external orientations (for example, as sites in global production networks, or places dependent upon international investment or competitiveness) and different scalar involvement (for example, national welfare policies, continental trade agreements, global environmental regulations, local tax regimes). Little concession is made to the possibility that traditional demarcations between spatial and territorial forms of organisation might be blurring or moving like a line in shifting sand. As Marston (2000) asks in her review of the literature on scale, why is it not possible to think of scale in relational terms, rather like the registers of different musical scales, instead of in relativist terms? In the latter, global

connectivity is seen as leading to the nesting of territories, made up primarily of 'in-here' relations, into multiple scales of 'out-there' relations. This is evidenced in Brenner's work (2000, page 368), when he chooses to interpret Henri Lefebvre's (1991) interpretation of capitalist urbanisation as the crossing of spaces by myriad currents, networks, and circuits, as a matter of 'interscalar relations' and the 'mutual imbrication' of scales.

One stark example of a territorial or scalar reading of globalisation is Kevin Cox's (1998) work on localities, which he sees as particular sorts of spaces of association and political formation in a multiscale world. Cox claims that the spaces of dependence, or localised connections within a locality, define "our sense of significance", whereas the spaces of engagement within global relationships threaten place-specific "essential interests":

"Spaces of dependence are defined by those more-or-less localized relations upon which we depend for the realization of essential interests and for which there is no substitute elsewhere; they define place-specific conditions for our material well being and our sense of significance. These spaces are inserted in broader sets of relationships of a more global character and these constantly threaten to undermine or dissolve them.... In so doing they construct a different form of space which I call here a space of engagement: the space in which the politics of securing a space of dependence unfolds" (Cox, 1998, page 2; cited in Marston, 2000, page 226).

In this account localised relations are posed as distinguishable from global relations, and somehow more authentic and politically progressive: the local can be mobilised to resist the global. Although Cox is clearly right to note that local societies continue to retain political potential in an age of allegedly globalised power, his distinction between the 'local' and the 'global' as separate scalar fields remains problematic in my view.

To follow Cox's approach would mean, for example, that we should judge the diaspora connections of ethnic minorities or cosmopolitans in a locality to be less significant or progressive than the daily contact to be found among local residents. Surely a key aspect of the transnationalisation of local relations is that we can no longer make an easy distinction between local and global geographies? How localised or global, for example, are the associational politics of worker, immigrant, and NGO (nongovernmental organisation) groups campaigning for local recognition but relying on international financial and other support networks? Or what makes everyday practices and customs grounded in local encounters and traditions any more 'essential' than nonlocal practices and customs? Cox's desire to see places as territorial units of local relations, counterposed to a space of global relations, can lead to a politics of place in which relations within localities are cast as good and felt, separate from bad and remote external happenings. This opposition, in my view, stems from the scalar ontological separation of place (read as in here and intimate) from space (read as out there and intrusive).

Peter Taylor's (1999) recent attempt to conceptualise place and space in nonscalar terms helps us to get around this particular ontological straightjacket. Following the pioneering work of the humanist Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), Taylor claims that both terms should be used to identify human activity at all geographical scales—local, national, and global—but that the terms are distinct in other ways, and are always in dialectical tension with each other. Taylor defines space in modernity as the realm of abstract principles, rules, rationality, science, administration, bureaucracy, and institutions. He judges it to be politically disabling. In contrast he sees place as the substantive, politically enabling, lived realm involving intimacy, experience, belonging, feelings. The two are said to always exist in tension with each other. For example, the abstract

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realm of the state, combined with the felt realm of the nation, has yielded the nation-state, in which “sovereign territory has been merged with sacred homeland to convert a space into the place” (page 14). Similarly, Taylor sees the modern home as one converting the space of the household into a place, and the technosocial space of the one-world (capitalist) system as one becoming a place through developments such as the rise of a global consciousness (for example, global ecological fallibility).

Taylor offers a very distinctive use of the terms space and place, counterposing the abstract (disenabling) from the lived (enabling). It could be argued that the spaces of science and technology, for example, R&D laboratories or domesticated science, are as lived and ‘enabling’ as more obviously emotional sites. Why, for that matter, choose the labels of space and place to distinguish between the abstract and the lived? What I find helpful in Taylor’s reasoning, however, is his rebuttal of space and place as separate geographical sites or realms, thus allowing the ontological presence of both the proximate and the remote at the same geographical level (for example, the recognition of systemic rationality or state-sponsored science in the home, or the proximate warmth or odium of nationalist sentiment or universal causes).

In the next section I pursue this kind of reasoning, but hold on to the geographical connotations of the terms space and place, rather too quickly jettisoned by Taylor. I want to retain a geographical imaginary because I consider the reconfiguration of the spatiality of social relations a central aspect of contemporary globalisation, and a central determinant of what goes on in places (localities, cities, regions), how places coalesce or not as entities, how social relations in places are constructed, and how the politics of place matter. I want to acknowledge that place matters, but less as a bounded or (multi)scalar unit.

### **Topologies of practice**

For some time now in human geography, notably through the writings of Doreen Massey, David Harvey, and Nigel Thrift, space, place, and time have come to be seen in relational terms, as: co-constituted, folded together, produced through practices, situated, multiple, and mobile. I take this to imply a reading of spatiality in nonlinear, nonscalar terms, a readiness to accept geographies and temporalities as they are produced through practices and relations of different spatial stretch and duration. I take it to suggest a topological sense of space and place, a sense of geographies constituted through the folds, undulations, and overlaps that natural and social practices normally assume, without any a priori assumption of geographies of relations nested in territorial or geometric space.

This sense, to be clear, is not a matter of assuming an amorphous and evanescent world geography of incessant fluidity and mobility, assuming that all that is solid has melted into air. It is not about claiming, for instance, that globalisation represents the dematerialisation of life owing to the rise of the knowledge economy and informatics, or the displacement of a space of places by a space of flows, or the speeding up of change. It is more about claiming, first, that the materiality of everyday life is constituted through a very large number of spaces—discursive, emotional, affiliational, physical, natural, organisational, technological, and institutional; second, that these spaces are also recursive spaces, that is, the carriers of organisation, stability, continuity, and change; third, that the geography of these spaces is not reducible to planar (single or multi) or distance-based considerations; and, fourth, that “space is also a doing, that it does not pre-exist its doing, and that its doing is the articulation of relational performances” (Rose, 1999, page 248).

Is it not this kind of sensibility that explains the interest of geographers in recent years in what Thrift has chosen to describe as “non-representational theory” (1996; 2000)?

For Thrift, this is thought to be anchored in an “ontology in which the world is made up of billions of ... encounters ... consisting of multitudinous paths which intersect” (1999, page 302), and a “situated epistemology which recognizes very strong limits on what can be known and how we can know it” (page 303) owing to the multiplicity of ways of being and knowing. I do not wish to go into the details of this excursion here, simply to highlight some of the strands of a sociology of practices which inform a topological reading of contemporary globalisation.

One strand, perhaps the most well known in geography, is actor-network theory (ANT), which is concerned with the topology of relational networks—defined as enrolments of humans and nonhumans with significant agency and purpose. Out of ANT emerges a particular understanding of space, as Jonathan Murdoch (1998, page 361) summarises:

“Firstly, although networks are forged for a whole variety of purposes, they are always a means upon acting *upon* space ... and it is the sets of associations which define and constitute spatial qualities. Space, although partly physical, is therefore wholly relational. Secondly, spaces are arranged so that certain types of action can be conducted. Thus, the action in actor-networks configures space. Thirdly, these actions, and the relations through which they are conducted, are ‘grounded’; they never shift registers or scales but remain firmly within networks. This last point has been well made by Latour who, in his general campaign against dualistic forms of thinking, suggests that we refrain from any shift in scale, between say the ‘global’ and the ‘local’; rather, we should simply follow the networks wherever they may lead” (emphasis in original).

For Sarah Whatmore (1999) “The analytical device of the network, freighted with the hybrid, collective and corporeal properties”, “betokens a shift in analytical emphasis from reiterating fixed surfaces to tracing points of connection and lines of flow”, and recognising that the spatial “boundaries and contours that mark the social landscape”, “inhere in a host of socio-technical practices—such as property, sovereignty, and identity—that are always in the making, not in some a priori order of things” (page 31).

Networks, to push the argument further, make space not only through the properties of presence, but also through those of absence. As Thrift (2000) puts it, “as practice always generates the ghostly correlates of unactualised possibles, so space–times are always accompanied by their phantoms” (page 222). This is because, as he explains, first, “nearly all spaces bear the freight of their past”; second, “because as many space–times have become increasingly strung out across the globe, so the sense of the faraway as near has been able to become increasingly prevalent”; third, “because space–times ... generate many of the unactualised possibles” (for example, network traces even when they fail); and, fourth, “because space–times are nearly always approximate and these approximations, close-to but not-quites, can linger as all sorts of clues to a story that never quite happened” (page 222).

Another strand of nonrepresentational theory is the emphasis on the centrality of the world of practices, and, in turn, of practical ways of knowing: “a means of *valuing* and *working with*, everyday practical *activities* as they occur” (Thrift, 2000, page 216, emphasis in original). For Thrift this is a line of thinking that incorporates Wittgenstein’s desire to grasp the mystery of appearances as they unfold in front of us and in the uses of language; Heidegger’s stress on the activation of time and space conjointly through dwelling; Deleuze’s wonder at the libidinous, performative, and novelty-generating potentialities of social life notwithstanding the crushing weight of modernity; and de Certeau’s and Lefebvre’s understandings of place based on the everyday sociology of life. Intellectual grasp, in this context, comes through “practical knowing”

(Thrift, 2000, page 222), through following networks, connections, surprises, absences, and above all, through disclosure (of what lies before us), and incomplete knowledge; not through any discovery of essences, totalities, and rational orders. The surface is not superficial, and at the same time knowing is practical, and always partial.

Where does all of this leave us on the spatiality of globalisation? Let me try to answer this question by focusing on how we might conceptualise place/space relations. First, and paradoxically, we might begin to think of places in nonterritorial terms, as nodes in relational settings, and as a site of situated practices (of presence and absence). This can mean two things. The first is an idea of places “as dynamic, as taking shape only in their passing” (Thrift, 1999, page 310), and therefore as a site of transitory practices and never preordained. This, for me, really knocks the idea of places as essentialised entities.

Second, and more challenging, it signals an analytical emphasis on the *placement of practices* (in contrast to the ideas of place as context or setting) through the folding of things into the human world, notably the “innumerable interactions between things and bodies which are placed at particular locations” (Thrift, 1999, page 312); the varied ways in which the senses come to be embodied in different places, and how people in these places walk, talk, act in particular ways; and the very real action of memory on what goes on in places, where “reminders of remainders may only leave the faintest of traces, but they still testify to the fire” (page 315). Places now can be seen as the embodiment of virtual or immanent forces, and as the temporary spatiotemporalisation of associational networks of different length and duration [especially if globalisation itself is seen as “a contingent and ever-shifting mesh of interactive processes” (Olds and Yeung, 1999, page 535)].

Such an alternative ontology supports Massey’s (1994) invocation for a “global sense of place”, based on the study of the manifold relations of time and space which cross a locality to produce it as a place. In her schema the character of cities, regions, and nations as places has far less to do with territorial properties (such as localised linkage, local identity and identification, scalar politics, and governance) than with the effects of spatial and temporal exposure and connectivity (such as continual and open-ended change, juxtaposition of difference, overlap of networks of different global connections). Two of Massey’s now famous examples of *all* places constituted as “open, porous, hybrid” (1999, page 21) are Mexico City, with its varied architectures revealing layers of global Spanish and Indian Historical connections, and Kilburn High Road in London, with its juxtaposition of English, Irish, and Indian diaspora lifestyles and connections.

Significantly, though, for Massey (2000), “the multiplicity of histories that is the spatial” (page 231) permeates movement in space too; it does not simply mark the footprints found in a situated place. For her, even the simple car journey, for example, is an expression of the “simultaneity of trajectories”, rather than a crossing of a surface space: a simultaneity composed of the practices and thoughts of those travelling, the histories of the places crossed, and the trajectories of the places left—now different without you. The spatial—placed, stretched, or in movement—is a trajectory, “the sphere of the juxtaposition, or co-existence, of distinct narratives” (Massey, 1999, page 21). How does contemporary globalisation fit into this picture? Massey explains:

“... globalisation, imagined through the lens of this conceptualisation of space – time, the globalisation we are facing now, is a thoroughgoing, world-wide, restructuring of those space – times, along particular lines. It is a remaking of those, inherited but always temporary and provisional, spaces, places, cultures which are themselves the hybrid products of previous restructurings” (1999, page 23).

I take this emphasis on trajectory and on globalisation as the restructuring of space–times as an exhortation to see place/spaces as mobile and intersecting trajectories, in the context of new terms of intersection and movement—notably compression and distanciation. Contemporary globalisation, thus, might not mean more of global exposure or spatial stretching, and the subjugation of place properties to globally constituted networks or to the speeding up of time. Instead, it might simply signal the rise of new spatiotemporalities affecting what goes on in places. These include new patterns of cultural hybridisation related to the rise of global consumption and mobility, the potential of ‘action at a distance’ owing to the possibilities offered by new communications networks, the influence of globally orchestrated actor networks and organisational spaces, the growth of new global ideologies and movements (such as neoliberalism, green politics, new social movements).

We could, thus, see localities as the sites of intersection and juxtaposition of new spatiotemporalities with older ones, so that places—all places, not just the cosmopolitan ones—

“... may be imagined as particular articulations of these social relations, including local relations ‘within’ the place and those many connections which stretch beyond it. And all of these embedded in complex, layered, histories. This is place as open, porous, hybrid—this is *place as meeting place* ... . This is a notion of place where specificity (local uniqueness or sense of place) derives not from some mythical internal roots nor from a history of relative isolation—now to be disrupted by globalisation—but precisely from the absolute particularity of the mixtures of influences found together there” (Massey, 1999, page 22, emphasis in original).

We now have an ontology that disrupts the traditional distinction between place and space as in-here versus out-there boundaries. And we now have an idea of place making, through the myriad network practices and memorialisations that mark the sites we choose to call places. In the next two sections I illustrate the implications of such a sense of place by focusing first on the geography of the urban economy and second on questions concerning the politics of place.

### **Cities in a distanciated economy**

In economic geography the logic of seeing the world in terms of territorial scales and boundaries has given rise to an interpretation of transnational phenomena such as global informatics, international production and finance, and the power of international organisations, as matters of the shifting boundary between a territorial inside and a territorial outside. Such thinking has become all powerful in urban and regional geography, and invokes worrying or reassuring imaginaries of places as territorial economic spaces, in contrast with the global as the realm of distanciated links, fast flows, and world-scale processes. Whereas the pessimists prophesise the loss of local economic integrity and autonomy under the pressure of transnational geographies, the optimists rush around looking for localised economic spaces in order to argue that cities and regions find their competitive advantage in the virtues of face-to-face contact and trust, local know-how, local clustering.

The idea of the global economy as a string of place-based economies has gained considerable ground in recent years. The resilience or resurgence of spatial clustering—to be found in the concentrations of know-how and capacity in global cities, industrial districts, technopoles—is cited as evidence of the continuing powers of spatial proximity and interiority, against the economics of space and distance. The argument posed is that in the global age, locally embeddedness still counts as a source of economic dynamism and competitiveness because spatial proximity encourages trust and reflexivity, reduces transaction and communication costs, facilitates technological and knowledge

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spillover, and offers specialised services and institutions to the business and professional communities (Audretsch, 1998; Glaeser, 1998; Krugman, 1991; Maskell et al, 1998). Some go so far as to suggest that the rise of the knowledge economy—centred around know-how, learning, and creativity—is privileging a return to place, more accurately a return to cities, as the sources of its vital human and physical resources. The physical, educational, research, and cultural fabric of upmarket inner-city locations is seen to fashion and support the creative and professional energies and personal networks of knowledge workers and knowledge entrepreneurs (Knight, 1996; Leadbeater, 1999). This new literature, in contrast to the literature on clusters, does acknowledge the global circuitry of the knowledge economy (for example, business travel, distance-working, Internet communication, and global media corporations), but it remains in little doubt that parts of some cities—with their special powers of place—are the forcing houses within these circuits.

In contrast, a sense of place that sees cities as a site of network practices might offer a very different reading of the spatiality of the urban economy. It sees the city as a nexus of economic practices that does not return the urban as a place of localised transactions and/or a localised source of economic competitiveness. Let me illustrate this point through a discussion of 'urban placement' in two network spaces—cyberspace and corporate networks.

The geography of cyberspace provides a good example with which to question the distinction between an alleged real world of (local) direct contact and a virtual, telemediated world. As Robert Kitchin (1998, page 387) argues, "whilst information on-line might seem geographically dislocated, information is only as useful as the locale within which the body resides", and in any case, "cyberspace depends on real-world spatial fixity—the points of access, the physically and materiality of wires." Consequently, there is a continuity of communication in geographical space and place, such that, as Stephen Graham summarises, "power to function economically and link socially increasingly relies on constructed, place-based material spaces intimately woven into complex telematics infrastructures linking them to other places and spaces" (1998, page 175). Similarly, in the realm of everyday contact there is an unbroken line of communication linking physical and human technologies; a line of varying geographical reach, mobilised to source information, strike a deal, exchange knowledge, and so on. The different realms of communication do not offer different social worlds; as Graham argues, "there is not one single, unified cyberspace; rather there are multiple, heterogeneous networks, within which telecommunications and information technologies become closely enrolled with human actors, and with other technologies, into systems of sociotechnical relations across space" (1998, page 178). This is precisely why the speeding up of time within communications networks should not be read as the speeding up of people and their lifestyles (Thrift, 1996).

With such a focus on linked communications architectures, it is hard to find a privileged economic role for spatial proximity. First, copresence or agglomeration need not imply association and interaction, for firms can mobilise a variety of contact networks to establish economic links with firms, markets, and institutions located elsewhere nationally and internationally. The near immediacy of distanced communications networks enables economies of association to be established without the need for spatial propinquity. The city thus conceptualised is no longer a bounded, but spatially stretched economic sphere. Second, spatially proximate interactions, where they appear, need not privilege particular types of economic transactions such as those based on trust, reciprocity, and reflexivity through physical interaction. Intimacy may be achieved through the frequent and regular contacts enabled by the distanced networks of communication and travel (how else do transnational firms, institutions, and social

movements work?) as well as the unbroken interplay between face-to-face and telemediated contact. The city is therefore not a place of unique or systemic transactional assets. Third, the agglomeration in some parts of some cities of large volumes of specialised inputs—from knowledgeable and creative people and clusters of inter-related industries, to sites of R&D, corporate power, public bureaucracy, and business services—no longer implies increasing local returns (as theorised by agglomeration economists). These sources of economic dynamism (which may well draw on local resources, such as schools and colleges, leisure amenities, transport hubs) are nested into economic networks which stretch beyond the city (from transnational production networks and national or international supply chains, to global market relations).

This brings me to my second example. How can we privilege local clustering and the economics of spatial proximity, knowing as much as we do about the secular growth of industrial organisation through nonterritorial forms such as varied combinations of corporate hierarchy, networking, and control; the enrolment of related economic interests in purposeful actor networks; the codification of economic practices through rules and standards; the regulation of economic certainty through the state, bureaucracy, and associations? Can propinquity be taken to mean spatial proximity against this back cloth? Surely not. This would be to miss the point that part of the history of industrial organisation has been the attempt to tame the market by ordering certainty via the institutionalisation of economic life. This has involved, partly through the codification of information and knowledge, the construction of a ubiquitous economic space, such that firms no longer need to rely on face-to-face contact and local knowledge for market opportunities. It has also involved the routinisation of once largely local proximity into relational and institutional vicinity through corporate and associational enrolment, and through ‘visibility’, trust, and emotional closeness enabled by virtual and physical connectivity. Finally, it has involved the deterritorialisation of economic space through its incorporation into actor networks of one sort or another, each with its own mobile geography of organisation, enrolment, and (ghostly) presence.

This is why we now think of firms as a “constellation of network relations” (Yeung, 2000). Large firms, in particular, incorporate or orchestrate entire social worlds of production, trade, organisation, negotiation, and power play. Their reach is located in a very particular kind of economic space, one that is not reducible to the powers of place. Their space, as Henry Yeung (2000) notes:

“can include localised spaces (e.g. financial districts in global cities) and inter-urban spaces (e.g. webs of financial institutions and the business media that bind together global cities). The firm is made up of social actors engaged in relational networks within a variety of ‘spaces’. The analytical lens we adopt can thus vary widely. It may be geographical, it may be sectoral, and it may be organisational. It may be a combination of these” (page 26).

Firms have become circulatory networks, and no attempt to theorise the economic geography of cities can afford to ignore this ontology of circulation. For example, flow and mobility are increasingly assumed into the system, with elaborate schemes in place to ensure the rapid transfer of people, goods, money, and information around the world. How else do we explain the rise and routinisation of business travel? How else do we explain the central role that distribution and logistics now play in the organisation of economic activity? The availability of regional warehouse complexes, rapid access to transport routes, the location of major logistics companies or their distribution centres, and proximity to retail or commercial outlets which can distribute goods ordered via the Internet have become key components of location decisions.

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What can we claim for cities as economic sites in this context? Primarily that they are circulatory sites, not islands of economic competitiveness or knowledge formation. In one city an airport or restaurant might be implicated as the site for international meetings, whereas in another city the financial district might be drawn in as a source of global money. Somewhere else a production facility might link up workers commuting from the urban periphery to supply chains drawing in cities thousands of miles away. Other cities may be key nodes for distribution outlets and logistics management. Cities as network sites are points of translation and transmission in the economy of distanced organisation and flow. And this includes their role in knowledge networks. Firms now routinely manage distributed knowledge through the use of sophisticated centralised computer systems; corporate training programmes; databases, archives, and other means of coding and storing knowledge; knowledge managers and brokers, as well as corporate away days and meetings; and the circulation of staff along the supply chain. The corporate tools of knowledge management have exploded in order to make the most of both tacit and codified knowledge for competitive advantage. In this context the recent fashion in economic geography to theorise localised transactions as the source of bounded tacit knowledge, and global networks as the space of codified knowledge, makes little sense.

The language of nested scales and territorial boundaries cuts out much of the topology of economic circulation and network folding outlined above. This is why I prefer to interpret economic activity in places as site practices which may or may not reinforce local connections. A global sense of place does not allow us to start by assuming that cities and regions are localised economic systems, now facing perforation (or even consolidation) through their integration into a wider territorial space. Instead it posits local economic activity as part of, and inseparable from, proximate and distanced transactions, and assumes that whatever counts as the local is the product of varied spatial practices (Amin and Thrift, 2002). So, for instance, whereas a scalar or territorial logic might concern itself with the economic implications of weakening local ties or local autonomy as a result of globalisation, a relational logic would focus on how local (as opposed to localised) presence might generate local economic spin-offs.

### **Conclusion: politics in place**

In this paper I have made a case for a nonscalar or topological interpretation of contemporary globalisation. My principal claim has been that the growing routinisation of global network practices—manifest through mobility and connectivity—signals a perforation of scalar and territorial forms of social organisation. This subverts any ontology of territorial containment and scalar nesting, as well as traditional spatial distinctions between the local as near, everyday, and ‘ours’, and the global as distant, institutionalised, or ‘theirs’. Thus I do not see globalisation in terms of a shift in the balance of power between different spatial scales, or in terms of a deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of social organisation. Instead I see it as an energised network space marked by, first, the intensification of mixture and connectivity as more and more things become interdependent (in associative links and exclusions); second, the combination of multiple spatialities of organisation and praxis as action and belonging at a distance become possible; and third, the erosion of the ontological distinction between place and space as ‘placement’ in multiple geographies of belonging becomes possible. Therefore, places are more than what they contain, and what happens in them is more than the sum of localised practices and powers, and actions at other ‘spatial scales’.

This is not to deny the continuing existence and relevance of scalar practices and institutions. Those concerned with the politics of regulation and governance associated with globalisation are right to note the very real and felt contest of jurisdiction and control between local, national, and global state and nonstate organisations. They are right to stress that globalisation—however intended—has unleashed a rigorous restructuring of the rationale and spaces of formal politics (Kelly, 1999; MacLeod, 2000), including the rise of new forms of economic and political regionalism, experiments to regulate a new global regime of capitalist accumulation, the reorientation of the state towards the imperatives of global competitiveness (under the pressure of neoliberalism), the decentring of some national state activities ‘downwards’ to subnational institutions, ‘upwards’ to international organisations, and ‘outwards’ to nonstate organisations. All of these aspects do represent a politics mobilised around redrawn institutional boundaries and fixities, including scalar ones. And yes, of course, it matters whether national and local governments are losing their autonomy to secure the interests of particular peoples and places, as they are forced to reckon with international and transnational organisations and new governmentalities such as the market ideology—all with much wider spatial reach and interest. It does matter whether local empowerment through regionalism can be harnessed to economic security provided through local or redistributed resources.

My aim has not been to question scalar politics, but scalar reasoning that precludes other interpretative and political possibilities. I have wanted to show how the very terminology of territorial scales and boundaries, caught up in oppositions of place and space, proximity and distance, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, scaling and rescaling, is challenged by globalisation. My belief is that a topological understanding of globalisation, one which centres on a contoured geography of practices, nudges our understanding of spatial politics in new directions. For, as John Allen (1999) puts it:

“The key issue to note ... is that by slipping into the assumption that power is an attribute, a property, a possession—in short, is something separate from what it can do—it becomes a matter of relative ease to talk about centralized powers and distributed capabilities. In adopting such a spatial vocabulary, however, it is less well understood that much of what happens *in between* and why it happens tends to fall out of the frame of enquiry” (page 198, emphasis in original).

In the context of my concerns I take the ‘in between’ to mean recognising the relevance of practices of power, and nonscalar configurations, in the constitution of spatial politics. Let me illustrate this point by contrasting scalar and virtual or relational thinking on the changing nature of urban politics. My aim is not to put back everything in urban life that exists beyond formal political institutions. Instead, I want to focus on how each perspective speculates on the changing relationship between place and active citizenship.

Territorial or scalar thinking—when it does not anticipate the loss of the urban as a political space under the barrage of national and global institutions and movements—sees cities and regions as performing a kind of place-based politics. This could be a tribal politics of resistance, as implied by Cox through his claims of local authenticity and identification. It could be a formative politics, based on participation in local struggles and campaigns, read by some as the “militant particularisms” which feed into more universal demands (Harvey, 2000). It could be a politics of lifestyle, based on strong feelings about local consumption and social reproduction issues. It could be a new, experimental politics, forged around the diverse social and cultural voices gathered in the city (Sandercock, 1998). It could be a civic politics based on tolerance and intermingling in the public spaces of the city (Sennett, 1977).

In short, a distinctive politics of place based on the powers of proximity/particularity in a world of displaced and multiscalar happenings and power geometries.

There is, however, a nonterritorial way of viewing place politics in an age of global connectivity. Instead of seeing local political activity as unique, places might be seen as the sites which juxtapose the varied politics—local, national, and global—that we find today. What matters is this juxtaposition. This forces, for instance, recognition of actor participation in nonlocal political activity. To return to the urban example, as Saskia Sassen (1999) puts it, if globalisation involves the urbanisation of a world capitalist class (at least in some global cities), as well as people and cultures from different parts of the world, it also generates the possibility of claims in the city which are at once local, national, and transnational in orientation—for example, business leaders campaigning against the local homeless, national government tax policies, or international trade agreements; ethnic minorities campaigning against local racism, but aided by the support of national antiracist groups, and international diaspora organisations; office workers gathered together with other groups outside the municipal offices protesting against local closures, but also linked up with workers and unions elsewhere through Internet discussions of world trade barrier removals. From this perspective the city is no longer a site of place politics, but a place of engagement in plural politics and multiple spatialities of involvement.

Why does this shift in emphasis from the politics *of* place to politics *in* place matter? Because, it marks the need to see political activity in places as plural, open, and contested (Amin, Massey, and Thrift, 2000). I conclude with three observations. First, the juxtaposition of difference in close spatial proximity generates political challenges, such as the contest between the business community and the homeless over the spaces of the city, or the competing demands of different classes, social and ethnic groups over the city's cultural resources. There is no automatic intimacy, or consensus, here against a perceived global intrusion. Second, the idea of politics in place marks a significant change in the nature of contemporary politics, from one based on participation in singular, all-encompassing, political institutions and movements, to another one based on participation in multiple causes and multiple networks of affiliation, and resulting in people bearing multiple political identities as well as new ones. It recognises a cosmopolitan politics that features at all spatial scales of organisation and activity (Soja, 2000). Third, however, such a politics remains open-ended and highly dependent upon cultural context and the balance of power for its outcomes; resulting not in a formative place politics of militant particularisms, but a cosmopolitan politics that is xenophobic and reactionary here, progressive and hybrid there, tolerant or particularly militant elsewhere.

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