

Postmodern Geography

Theory and Praxis

Edited by Claudio Minca

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Shifting Cities

Giuseppe Dematteis

Introduction

In a world dominated and controlled by networks of interaction and global flows, many of the assumptions upon which the territorial conception of cities was founded are increasingly fading away. The emergence of a variety of novel political-economic and technological conditions are, similarly, forcing us to reconceptualize territories and cities in relatively new ways. Yet perhaps the greatest difference, the key break with the past, lies with the fact that while previously the city was thought of as a primary, taken-for-granted entity – stable in time – it can now only be envisioned as *one* possible, deliberate construction: a local geographical order born out of the turbulence of global flows and with which it must interact in order to continue to exist.

It is this basic assumption which will form the focus of the first section of this chapter. Section 2 will query the consequences of globalization on the spatial form of the city, on its representations and on interpretations of urban territoriality. An in-depth examination of these issues in the third section will allow me to advance the thesis that a postmodern geographical praxis necessitates a shift from a physicalist (causal) conception of space, typical of late nineteenth-century geography, to a conception of space as a logical-symbolic operator, suitable for interfacing creative and analytical thought. In the final section of the chapter, I will discuss the conditions for a postmodern geography able to represent and to plan for urban complexity, concluding that although the necessary epistemological conditions may exist, the greatest difficulties remain of a political nature. Not only; since the current hierarchical structure of power imposes (on a global scale) performative geographical representations of a hypermodern type, a true postmodern

geographical praxis is conceivable only in terms of resistance and conflict.

The Shift in the Urban Scene

In the first half of this century, the notion of global networks was essentially absent with discussion focusing, rather, on international relations and their cross-border traffic of people, goods, money, and information. Some of these phenomena were already 'global,' in the sense that they produced effects on a planetary scale, but this globality was limited and indirect. International networks were, in fact, constituted by preexisting territorial units: primarily nation-states, though also cities as well as other territorial subdivisions of the state structure. The public and private actors shaping then-transnational relations were rooted in these territorial bodies and this embeddedness was, in fact, a fundamental condition for the development of transnational operations. Networks were thus founded on and depended upon their respective territories and boundaries within which – and through which – state, regional, and local structures were controlled.

As long as the control and management of flows remained territorial, the networks could be governed in territorial fashion, even if with significant power differentials between strong and weak cities, small and large towns, rich and poor regions. When this was no longer possible, above all because of the increased mobility of capital and information (which enabled the reorganization of production and markets worldwide), the situation changed drastically. Relationships of interaction were established between increasingly autonomous networks and less and less sovereign territories, as neither was able to control the other.

With states and other territorial entities no longer controlling the incoming and outgoing 'immaterial' flows, the networks of these flows and of the transnational organizations that managed them would soon become deterritorialized and sovereign global entities themselves. Yet the global networks and their 'nodes' (companies, research centers, major financial corporations, etc.) could not operate without bonding with certain territories and cities. In fact, as theorists of flexible specialization, of the *milieux innovateurs*, and of comparative advantage have demonstrated, the outcomes of global competition continue to depend upon such bonds, even though these may be less stable than past notions of 'embeddedness.'

It should be noted, however (as critics of globalization have pointed out), that this continued dependence of networks on specific territories is valid only in general terms: only in select cases, such as that of the

'global cities,' can the location of the "nodes" of global networks (for example, major transnational corporations) in a given region or locality be considered necessary. It is much more common, in fact, for a large number of territories, all endowed with similar comparative advantages, to compete with each other to attract the same global investor.

The expansion of global networks has had substantial effects on the regional structuring (and destructuring) of territories. As local actors 'link into' global networks (to import and export goods, to attract investments, for the purposes of cultural exchange and promotion, etc.), they increasingly tend to make themselves functionally independent of the territorial entities of which they are formally a part. Today, for example, cities like Lille, Glasgow, or Barcelona operate as actors on the international scene without recourse to the mediation of their national governments – and sometimes even against the general interests represented by these same. This phenomenon is also observable at the microregional scale: when, for instance, a particularly enterprising neighborhood manages to obtain European structural funds to finance an urban recovery or improvement project, or in the case of a suburban town that offers transnational capital the best conditions for the location of a shopping center, a factory, a leisure park, and so on.

The overall result is a *fragmentation of territories* into autonomous functional units of various sizes, certain of these with explicit aspirations to political and administrative autonomy. In fact, each territorial fragment (city, region, neighborhood, small town, or aggregation of towns) which has successfully entered into global networks will likely follow a rather independent development path, bringing it increasingly 'closer' to other faraway places linked into the same global network, while 'distancing' it (by differentiating and disconnecting) both from contiguous portions of territory that do not host 'nodes' of global networks (or that host 'nodes' operating in different sectors) as well as from the territorial entities of a higher level to which they belong in functional or institutional terms.

This fragmentation, which heightens differences and imbalances at the microterritorial scale, also often translates into social fragmentation, in that within the various 'regions' it increases the divide between those social classes that are linked directly or indirectly into the global networks – and those excluded from them in terms of income, substantial rights, and opportunities. One result of this is the social polarization evident in many great metropolises; the source of conflicts apparently without solution.

This shift's geographical consequences are numerous. Above all, the global networks, now largely independent of the individual territories that generated them in years past and upon which they depended until

around the 1960s, are redrawing the planet's regional patterns and urban hierarchies. The sizes, geometries, characters, and dynamics of regional and urban spaces now derive largely from the interaction of the local systems with the networks that intersect them; networks which concentrate their operational and decision-making 'nodes' in a few dense areas such as major cities or metropolitan areas; that remain, for the time being, the only fixed points of a variable and relatively unstable territorial pattern.

Among them, it is the global cities that dominate. More than individual entities, however, such cities should be seen as a web of global networks through which the latter try to exercise social control on a planetary scale. The emergent urban hierarchy is no longer Christallerian, no longer based on territorial range (Conti, Dematteis, and Emanuel 1995). It is, rather, a hierarchy of networks, within which the relations between 'nodes' (the cities) not only do not depend on distance but are also, in fact, to a certain degree *interactive*. Local systems, as bearers of specific comparative advantages, can thus condition the choices of global organizations and resist their domination. If, then, global cities and networks (with their growing concentration of strong powers) can be envisioned as moving in a hypermodern direction, their interactive relationship with the local urban systems has a character of complexity that evokes a possible postmodern scenario.

The Shift in the Spatial Form of the City and the New Urban Territoriality

The twentieth century has witnessed frequent adaptations in the definition of the city to the accelerated variations in its form. Premodern *urbs-civitas* spatial coincidence models – still present in Weberian formulations – were followed by conurbation images, conceptualizations of the city-region and the urban field and, most recently, the notion of edge cities (Garreau 1991) – a spatial networking continuum around the scattered fragments of an exploded centrality (of which Los Angeles is certainly a prototype (Soja 1989)). Today's cities, in fact, can no longer be seen as stable, individual entities, made up of a physical 'body' (*urbs*) and an organizational 'mind' (*civitas*) which allows them to formulate strategic decisions and actions. This capacity, which in the past was considered a 'natural' attribute of cities, has now become something to be 'constructed.'

The recent changes in the spatial form of urban systems can be considered, in part, as simply the quantitative extension of previous suburbanization processes, albeit with a wider decentralization of

residential patterns and related services and infrastructures. Yet, in many ways, the recent urban expansion differs in significant fashion from simple urban sprawl or from the extension and merging of contiguous urban fringes. It is characterized, in fact, by a number of qualitative changes such as spatial fragmentation, less regular center-periphery gradients, the weakening of spatial hierarchies in outer suburban areas, and the rise of new centrality patterns (Berry and Kim 1993).

Traditional terms such as 'suburb,' 'rurban,' 'sprawl,' 'rural-urban fringe,' etc. are thus no longer appropriate to describe the new forms of outer urbanization, and even the classical concepts of the 'daily urban system,' 'metropolitan area,' 'city region,' etc. seem hard pressed to capture the complexity of the new urban systems. At the theoretical level, the challenge lies with the conceptualization of complex urban systems at various levels of their spatial organization: from local networks of individual actors linked by proximity relations to the networks of cities interacting in a space free from distance constraints.

The new functional, social, and physical forms of urbanization have been described in years past with concepts such as the French notion of *périurbanisation* or the American *urban field*: the former referring to the outer expansion of the city, the latter to the whole extended urban system resulting from it. The essence of the *périurbanisation* concept was perhaps best articulated by J. B. Racine (1967) as a form of urbanization separated from the traditional form of the city; current interpretations have focused, however, on the production of new urban spaces which do not directly depend on a random diffusive decentralization from a central core. In Italy, the *città diffusa* concept has been adopted to indicate the overcoming of the city as a simple nuclear or areal entity and the evolution from the sprawl of settlement patterns to a complex reticular model combining physical grid expansion and the spatial redistribution of specialized functions (Indovina 1990; Boeri, Lanzani, and Marini 1993).

At the scale of the whole urban system, we can find a similar idea echoed in Friedmann's concept of the *urban field* (Friedmann and Miller 1965; Friedmann 1978): a large territorial unit evolving towards a multicentered networked spatial pattern, in which the former core (the 'mother city') is losing its traditional dominance to become one of the specialized centers of the unit as a whole. At the national and continental scale, we can conceive of multiple urban fields which, increasingly, tend to engulf the entirety of the territory, thus eliminating non-urban space, the urban frontier, and, in the future, the possibility of any further spatial extension of urban units.

The analysis and governance of urban systems now articulated as new forms of continuous settlement networks is certainly a major theoretic-

cal and political challenge. For one, the urban field model that best anticipated many of the functional and social aspects of new urban structures, now appears ill-suited to grasp some of the essential features of these same. We should recall that the main political issue in the new processes of urbanization highlighted by Friedmann's analysis was the avoidance of 'collective disaster' resulting from an urban form determined by unrestrained consumer choice alone. Friedmann's proposed solution, in fact, was to turn the urban field into a regional urban community ('a true *civitas*') with a tiered hierarchy of four multipurpose government levels: neighborhood, district, regional (urban field), state. Yet the new urban structures are no longer characterized by evident, self-contained boundaries, thus undermining the rationale of Friedmann's model: the possibility of identifying a given territorial basis for the definition of extended urban communities as new forms of *civitas*.

The new extended urban systems seem, rather, to be a mesh of different spatial structures à *géométrie variable*, shaped by flows and connecting individual territorial units at different scales, both through proximity links as well as through long-distance ones. Simply put, the traditional *civitas* model, based on a taken-for-granted organic territorial social cohesion, no longer 'fits' the complex and extended social forms of today's urbanization. Even where the spread of the city maintains its distinctiveness, it is highly doubtful that the individual and collective actors that make it up constitute a cohesive group just because they live in the same place; in reality, each of these latter may hold a functional and identity membership in a number of supralocal networks of businesses, institutions, associations, and cooperative bodies. And it is these (most often global) networks which run through cities and connect their actors across distances, weakening the traditional bonds of internal cohesion founded on physical proximity.

Yet although the city-actor rooted in territory is no longer an *a priori* certainty, recent typological analyses (Cattan et al. 1994; Bagnasco and Le Galès 1997) do stress that many cities still continue (and perhaps now even more than before) to behave as collective actors in the now-global spaces of competition and cooperation. Recent transformations have not succeeded, therefore, in eliminating urban territoriality but have, rather, modified its nature: accentuating its role, shifting it from passive to dynamic, from the simple result of a long historical process to the product of local self-organization, from a utility value to be made use of in a limited geographical area to a sort of exchange value, from an 'asset' to be conserved to one of risk capital to be ventured in global competition.

As the stratified deposit of a natural and cultural heritage, the physical city and its territory no longer have a value in and of themselves

but, rather, for what they *become* in the valorization processes. The city as a local society is also no longer identifiable from its stable rooting in a given territorial milieu. It is, instead, a changeable, connective combination of actors, each operating as a 'node' of local and global networks: it is thanks to these actors that such networks come together, interact, and interconnect within the city. And it is for this reason that, in the virtual space of networks and flows, cities *continue* to exist as territorial 'bodies' and as social aggregations that play an essential role in the processes of globalization that seem destined to destroy their identities.

An important shift has occurred, however. The urban territorial milieu no longer offers the global network true *rooting* but, rather, mere *anchorages* (Weltz 1996). An urban milieu can therefore be defined or described only through the *effects* that it produces. It is only thus that we can explain the current leading role of cities, their character as attractors-connectors of global networks, as well as the formation of local social networks around projects geared to enhance the conditions and resources of the local context (Governa 1997).

The removal of obstacles and friction in the worldwide deployment of market forces does not, therefore, create *homogeneity* between territorial systems but, simply, multiplies the *connections* between them (Hannerz 1996). Territorial systems compete to seize these connections – in other words, to attract the 'nodes' of the global networks made up of the major public and private transnational organizations, financial markets and specialized services, scientific and technological cooperation, mass media, etc.

Globalization has thus transformed the conditions and resources specific¹ to the various urban and regional urban milieux into *competitive advantages*: it has made them emerge as powerful factors of local diversification. Within each city, local actors are thus induced to organize themselves, to forge new bonds so that the city becomes an attractor of global networks. For their part, such networks envision the anchorage of their 'nodes' in diversified local systems as a set of opportunities, capable of increasing their competitiveness on the global scale both for the possibility of exploiting the particular local resources and conditions in the multilocalized and flexible organization of production, as well as ensuring access to differentiated segments of demand, with return effects on product and organizational innovation. The hypermobile global economy thus works thanks to a wide range of resources which are deeply embedded in places (Sassen 1998).

The competition between cities engenders new forms of territoriality. If by territoriality we mean the symbolic, cognitive, and practical mediation that the material aspects of places and their milieux exercise on

social action (Raffestin 1981; Turco 1988), we should also distinguish between two of its forms. The traditional form, which we can define as *passive* or negative territoriality, concerns the demarcation and control of the territory (Sack 1986; Agnew 1987) and is also common to animal communities. The territoriality now stimulated by global competition is, instead, *active*, in that it consists in enhancing the conditions and potential resources of the various milieux in local development processes, i.e. by activating positive-sum games.

In fact, it is by acting on these 'territorialities' that local urban systems interact with the global system. Yet, as we have noted, such ungoverned interactions can produce territorial fragmentation and social polarization. Their 'governance' implies policies aimed at broadening the network participation of local actors and connecting together the various local urban systems through networks of cooperation. A truly postmodern city thus appears as a voluntary construction of the *civitas* in the face of the disappearance of the traditional *forma urbis* and the increasing tendency of global competition to fragment territories and societies. Such a construction must, necessarily, involve both local social networks and supralocal urban networks; it must create networks of cooperation without, however, expecting to eliminate competition or conflict.

The Shift in Geographical Images: From Causality to Metaphors

Such shifts in the spatial form also go along with accordant shifts in the geographical images of the city – and thus changes in its very meaning. There is a growing gap, however, between the new spatial form and current representations of urban processes. In fact, the paradigms of neoclassical (late nineteenth-century) geography, founded on causal relationships of physical proximity, are no longer capable of representing change due to long-distance virtual interactions. What is needed, then, is a new geographical praxis able to represent current hyperconnected, hypermodern urbanization and to plan for truly postmodern urban conditions.

A first step in this direction is to recognize that 'geographical space' is not a real entity, but a simple logical operator. In this way, what is commonly thought of as geographical (or 'spatial') causality becomes a simple semiological relationship, enabling us to put together a great variety of phenomena within a single metaphorical representation: in a sense, a weak version of the old notion of 'geographical synthesis.'

In the opening pages of *Economy and Society*, Max Weber notes that: "there are many different ways in which to try to define the city. All cities have in common just one thing: that each one is always a circumscribed settlement, at least relatively; it is an agglomeration, not one or more isolated buildings." For Marx and Engels, writing in *The German Ideology*, "the city is a concentration of population, means of production, capital, pleasure and needs, while the countryside makes the opposite emerge: isolation and separation." We could go on endlessly with similar citations; suffice it to say, however, that even those who do not conceive of the urban phenomenon as a geographical fact still adopt a conceptual category – the city – whose immediate referent is a physical and spatial entity. A geographical image is thus used to represent a set of facts that are of a historical, cultural, political, social, and economic nature.

It does not appear that such a dual meaning can be easily eliminated. The geographical concept of the city (its *immediate* or *literal* meaning) is certainly not the principal one. As a mental image it plays, in a certain way, the role of the 'signifier' with regard to the mediated or metaphorical signified (the city as a social fact) which is, certainly, its key connotation. But when we adopt the term 'city,' even if we only mean a set of social relations, we always and inevitably indicate, at the same time, a physical and spatial reality. A geographical distinction is thus made between urban and non-urban space; a correspondence established between the city sign and certain aspects of perceived reality.

The scarce attention paid to this semantic aspect has two principal consequences. The first is to confuse and conflate the two meanings of city, as though they were equivalent – while, as we have seen, the operation consists in representing an essentially social fact through *some* of its physical and spatial attributes. The second is to thus implicitly suggest that the relationship between the physical city and the urban social community is of a causal nature. In this way, a *semantic* relationship is transformed into an *ontological* relationship. What could, at most, be conceived as a hypothesis awaiting verification, is assumed as an evident fact. We should note here, however, that there are numerous other conceptual categories within which such a conflation also occurs: country, nation, center, periphery, marginality, etc. All categories endowed with a primarily geographical meaning that, however, recalls another, social, one and that, at the same time, denote certain physical and spatial entities that can be found in observed and observable reality.

In human geography (and in the social sciences more broadly), we often adopt metaphors of physical-spatial meanings in order to indicate phenomena of particular complexity, the field of which is neither described nor interpreted by a unified and universally accepted theory.

In such cases, mental images are adopted to depict concrete situations as a whole within which different facts are represented together in all their complexity.²

Geographical practice can thus give an important cognitive contribution if its descriptive categories can be linked to certain theoretical formulations. What is needed, then, are conceptual categories capable – through metaphorical inference – of systematically connecting geographical descriptions to various theoretical frameworks and thus of contributing to extending their experimental interpretation. This implies, of course, that we must give up the apparent scientificity of causal models based within pseudo-theories of objective geographical space in order to dedicate ourselves to the critical elaboration of the semantic and syntactical contents of geographical representation and to setting up the linguistic procedures necessary for the selection and communication of theoretically important empirical information.

The geographical practice that derives from this may be termed 'deconstructive,' in as much as it is critical of 'normal' geographical images – at the same time, however, it is also 'constructive' of representations that knowingly adopt the vast potential of analogical-metaphorical discourse (Dematteis 1997). If we limit ourselves to but decoding the unconscious metaphorical images of neoclassical geography – to then translate these same into the abstract conceptual categories of the social sciences – we deprive ourselves of the formidable heuristic tool of geography as a metaphorical interface between empirical observation and theory. In other words: playing by the rules of normal geography, though keeping firmly in mind that it is, in fact, a game, i.e. that the spaces we talk about are not the independent variables of a causal relationship, but *metaphors* which, by drawing upon the complexity of the world, allow for the falsification of theories – and thus their enrichment and critique.

A knowing use of geographical metaphors is not limited to the cognitive framework alone, however; it also speaks directly to very 'practical' considerations. Social relations between people, after all, take place through relationships with 'things,' so that (especially in human geography) the correspondence between physical-spatial relations and social relations is not purely metaphorical but is also, to a certain extent, quite real. This 'concreteness' of geographical images is of decisive importance at the pragmatic level. As I have tried to illustrate elsewhere (Dematteis 1985), the spatial metaphor can function as a self-realizing prediction. Geography thus represents (existing or possible) social relations through the 'evidence' of a reality observable by one and all. And since it is difficult if not impossible to refute what is represented with such evidence, geographical images are extremely persuasive, convinc-

ing us to adopt forms of social behavior which conform to the realities represented.

A Geographical Praxis to Deal with Urban Complexity

I believe that it makes sense to talk about the postmodern as, above all, a *method* (Dear 1986; Minca and Dear 1997). To my mind, it consists in not reducing complexity; a reduction which usually hinders us from dealing with 'reality' and its problems in adequate fashion. This is certainly the case of the city: today, an increasingly complex reality emerging from the interactions between deterritorialized global networks and local territorial systems, each operating according to different principles of order not reducible to a single higher rationality.

At the representational level, there persists the problem, however, of putting together two apparently contrasting spatial logics (though which are, in reality, inseparable): that of the 'horizontal relations' (or spatial interactions) which govern the virtual networks, and that of the 'vertical relations' which express the relations between local societies and their specific territorial milieux. The vision of space as an objective entity, typical of neoclassical geography, transforms this logical opposition into an *ontological exclusion* and resolves it by *separating* the two types of relations. Taken to its most extreme consequences, this simplifying trend produces two conflicting images of the world. One, made up exclusively of pure horizontal relations, writes the world as a network of interactions and flows not linked to particular places; disregarding any utility values or local languages that cannot be translated into exchange values or universal languages (Raffestin 1981). Such a geography can be termed hypermodern as it is particularly suited to representing the most evolved stages (and, perhaps, the very essence) of modern capitalism and the market economy as a system of free 'horizontal' relationships (Dematteis 1994). The second vision, on the other hand, eliminates horizontal relations at the expense of vertical ones, making everything dependent upon the specific features of places. Under the scientific guise of a pseudo-environmental determinism, it constitutes what is, at base, a nostalgic return to a premodern geography, typical of those precapitalist realities in which the local tends to represent particular utility values in the absence of a system of exchange based upon general equivalencies.

Yet if, instead, we consider networks and territories as *metaphors* which represent social relations, which represent relations with local milieux, then horizontal and vertical relations become simply a means of representing a *single* reality – viewed simultaneously from diverse

viewpoints, and maintaining its intrinsic complexity. The geographer can thus assume a critical and active attitude adopting, time after time, the most suitable means of constructing representations of this 'reality,' observing from varied perspectives, taking on a both global and local vision.³

Briefly, then: *premodern geographies* tend towards silence, embodying local meaning in its pure state; *hypermodern geographies* tend towards noise as global signifiers free of signifieds. The 'intermediate' modern phase appears to be a local which expands to encompass all other 'locals.' *Metaphorical geography*, on the other hand, represents the global as a plurality of 'locals': as its active, autonomous, and necessary components, with distinct properties and languages, not reducible to those of the global system. It thus maintains the possibility of connecting general signifiers to varied local signifieds – and, at the same time, of connecting such local signifieds to each other, with the global represented as a network of locals. We can term such a geography a *geography of complexity*: what perhaps distinguishes it best from other perspectives is the fact that the observer is included in the observation – and that it recognizes that visible maps cannot be traced unless the invisible maps which write the modalities of description are first explored (Olsson 1991).

It remains to be seen, however, whether such a geography is feasible at the epistemological and practical levels. From an epistemological point of view, it is based within what Bocchi and Cerruti (1985) have termed the complexity paradigm. In particular, the adoption of both global-external and local-internal points of view implies the possibility of representing both the networks and their individual (local) nodes as systems open to any type of exchange – though ones which are operationally closed, i.e. essentially self-referential as far as the rules of their internal workings are concerned, and thus self-governing, aimed essentially at reproducing their own identity (Maturana and Varela 1980; Dumochel and Dupuy 1983). As a consequence, local nodes are not simply 'parts' of the network (i.e. subsystems whose properties are reducible to those of the global system) – and the global network is not simply the sum of the local parts of which it is composed. Not only is the local unable to exist without the global, but the global, too, is also dependent upon the very functioning of the various local systems.

There remains, of course, the much more difficult practical problem of substituting hypermodern geographies with complex ones. The success of hypermodern geographies is certainly linked to the performative force of their representations. The emphasis placed upon global leveling conditions, upon the speed and inevitability of change, the

fragmentation of places and actors, upon the absence of local constraints and regulations, often translates into a *de facto* legitimization of today's dominant social and political order and, at the same time, into a program for an ever more capillary colonization of the planet, aimed at eliminating all forms of local resistance. In this fashion, any and all processes of contestation can be reduced to but one (global) component, with little probability of realization. However, there appears to be no existing project capable of rebalancing the lack of symmetry in social and cultural relationships between the global and local levels.

We can turn, for example, to the longstanding problem of territorial justice. In a geography that recognizes the complexity of the relationship between global networks and local nodes, local underdevelopment is seen, above all, as a defect of what Maturana and Varela (1980) call the 'structural coupling' of the two systems. This 'defect' makes it impossible to transform local values into values exchangeable within global networks; not because local values do not exist (as would appear when observing the system from the outside), but because the relationships framed by existing networks prevent local values from becoming the values of global exchange. The solution in this case is: "If a man is hungry, don't feed him fish, nor teach him how to fish, but exchange your fish for something else he can produce." Or rather: do not try to reduce the local to but one part of the (global) system, but allow it to participate in an autonomous fashion. This signifies considering that which is specific to the Other as something that we lack – and can benefit from. From this point of view, territorial equity becomes not simply equality or an elimination of difference but, rather, a *valorization of diversity*.

All this, of course, relies upon the possibility of reciprocal translation (or transcodification) of local languages, on their practical comprehension, and upon the possibility of sharing values produced in different contexts and within unique experiences; a possibility which presents a series of complex theoretical problems long debated also in the field of geographical studies.⁴ Theoretical quandaries which raise no less serious practical considerations. Why, in today's world, has it become not only difficult to appreciate (and therefore to desire) difference – but even to tolerate it? To consider this a problem that can be resolved at a purely pedagogical level would be to underestimate the dissymmetry of the 'power geometries' (Massey 1993) which prevent most local systems from taking an active part in the construction of (global) communication and exchange networks. At the global scale, in fact, representational spaces appear to be saturated by a single language and a dominant value system, which not only represents itself but also claims to represent all local realities as parts of its own 'self' in a relationship of

necessity/contingency. This sort of performative representation prevents local diversity from being recognized as such and thus reduces local systems' requests to but the right to self-representation in their own dialect. Such a representation, however, precludes the possibility of transcoding and, therefore, the possibility of participating within a global network of exchanges all the while conserving one's own local identity; of having such an identity fully recognized. And, as none of the solutions proposed in the field of geographical-territorial studies thus far appear totally convincing, the problem remains essentially open: presenting itself as the crucial question for a postmodern geographical praxis.

NOTES

- 1 'Specific' is intended here as that which is 'typical' of a given local urban system – that which confers it an advantage precisely because it is absent elsewhere or present in a very limited number of cases (for example, certain outstanding natural or historical/cultural conditions for tourism or the local accumulation of specific know-how in *milieux innovateurs*, etc.) Obviously, globalization also exploits nonspecific local resources (labor, primary resources, etc.) but in these cases the relationship with the global is one of dependency, local self-organization is not necessary, and the tendency is towards standardization (at least in the initial phases). Other authors, like Harvey (1993), though acknowledging the existence of processes of place construction assert, however, that globalization tends towards "cultural homogenization through diversification" in all cases.
- 2 This is certainly not the proper place to dissect in depth the epistemological aspects of the question, which I have examined elsewhere (Dematteis 1985). Suffice it to say that the approach can be traced back to the general scheme of abduction (Eco 1980b: 112ff.) and that it finds close parallels with the analogical use of the metaphor in the 'normal sciences,' with particular reference to the interpretations of M. B. Hesse (1970) and R. Boyd (1979). According to these authors, if we take proposition A' on system A (of, for example, social relations), then it is implicit in the metaphorical proposition B' (relating, for example, to B forms of 'geographical space') that between A and B there has to be some relation of analogy, similarity, or opposition – though not a relation of determination (such that A' can be deduced from B'), since if this were true, the metaphor would be immediately explicit and thus scientifically weak: that is, its analytical examination would not yield any new understanding. Rather, metaphor B' must imply a proposition (or set of propositions) M, which has relations of approximate equivalence (Hesse) or of partial denotation (Boyd) with A', comprehensible in intersubjective communication. It is in this zone of ambiguity that the metaphor functions as a model of analogical inference, capable of transfer-

ring to A ideas and implications normally associated with B (and vice versa), starting from a relation of analogy between A and B whose extension is originally only guessed but neither predictable nor describable with precision. According to R. Boyd (1979), in fact, the history of science presents numerous cases in which partially denoted terms have facilitated the discovery of new and significant features of the world.

- 3 The following refers back to my earlier essay "Global and Local Geographies" (Dematteis 1994)
- 4 See, among others, Mondada and Söderström (1991); Pred (1990).

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6

Adventures of a Barong: A Worm's-eye View of Global Formation

Steven Flusty

Globalization is a neologism that has become impossible to avoid. One finds it spilling from the lips of World Bank executives and Chiapan revolutionaries alike. The term's pervasiveness has rendered whatever it may refer to a likely causative suspect in occurrences that range from worldwide financial crises to neighborhood demographic change. But what is globalization?

Numerous theoretical formulations of globalization have emerged over the past decades. Some focus on the economics of international divisions of labor, others on worldwide sociological processes of cultural relativization, and yet others on representations of the world as a palimpsest. All these models of the global, whether foregrounding material, cultural, or discursive processes, demonstrate a privileging of structural levels of analysis. Even when academics undertake efforts to 'bring globalization down to earth,' such efforts commonly entail looking at gross aggregate data on migratory demographics, capital circulation, ethnonational composition, and the like. This perspective is predisposed to conceptualizing globalization as a system of higher-order processes. These processes are then deployed to account for the increasingly transnationalized and intercultural experiences, responses, and resistances of the quotidian. Viewed from such an elevated position, everyday occurrences become merely colorful anecdotes. The places in which the everyday occurs all too often become abstract surfaces, substrates that undergo (and resist) subordination to new transport and communication technologies.

Approaching globalization as a distinct object of study, a thing-in-itself that generates repercussions, is not inherently mistaken or without applicability. This perspective, however, conceals the extent to which globalization is em-placed, and the extent to which em-placed indi-