

# 1 Location and Movement



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# 1.1 CENTRALITY

Centrality has always been a concept that has fascinated urban geographers. Just as metropolitan city-regions developed in the post-war period in ways unrecognisable from the early industrial city, so urban geography developed as a discipline (Wheeler, 2005). The arrival of the early mainframe computers in the 1960s gave birth to the 'science' of spatial analysis, where the powerful statistical tools afforded by the new technology saw a growing passion for quantifying everything about urban life – demographic trends, migration movements, housing markets, journey-to-work trips and so on (Barnes, 2003). In its earliest manifestations, such as the Central Place Theory of Walter Christaller, or the concentric-zonal, sectoral and multiple nuclei models of Ernest Burgess, Homer Hoyt and Harris and Ullman respectively, who each argued that cities had a discernible internal structure, (see figure's 1.1.1 and 3.1.1) usually based upon access to markets and a tendency for activities to cluster in central places.

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The power of most cities has tended to emerge due to locational advantage of some sort. From the simplest forms of exchange, when peasant farmers literally brought their produce from the fields into the densest point of interaction – giving us market towns – the significance of central places to surrounding territories began to be asserted. As cities grew in complexity, the major civic institutions, from seats of government to religious buildings, would also come to dominate these points of convergence. Large central squares or open spaces reflected the importance of collective gatherings in city life, such as Tiananmen Square in Beijing through to the Zócalo in Mexico City, the Piazza Navona in Rome through to Trafalgar Square in London. These manifestations of bustling centrality appeared to obey a gravitational pull. In certain extreme cases, such as Madrid and Brasilia, new capital cities were located at the central point of national territory for the most rational form of centralized governance. However, that urban structure was more often than not a process driven by social class and governmental power (especially in colonial cities, where 'enlightened' town planning created monumental squares, grandiose government buildings and wide boulevards) tended to escape these modellers.

Perhaps the exemplar of centrality is a city's central business district. As the likes of Fogelson (2001) have described, American 'downtowns' have always been highly contested spaces, given the land values associated with

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being at the centre of transactional density (transport hubs, retail markets, office buildings, theatres, etc.). Groups of landowners began to tussle over building heights, subways and streetcars from the earliest periods of the modern city. Business groups have long been aware of the reduced transaction costs involved in concentrating business activities, most notably the minimisation of travel time when moving between clients. By the late nineteenth century, technological change had hastened the development of skyscrapers in business districts, much to the chagrin of those sections of the middle classes whose views were obscured by the new high-rises, as well as existing landowners whose property values were undermined by the sudden onslaught of new built space.



**Figure 1.1** 'Downtown Chicago has been a laboratory for urban geographers'

The cause of such conflicts has a simple economic logic:

All functions occupying space within the CBD have in common the need for centrality and their ability to purchase accessible locations. Within the CBD there are diversities which are revealed by the distinctive functional

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districts and by the individual locational qualities of specific functions ... The retail trade quarter is often referred to as the node and is usually on the most central space; the office quarter is well-marked and may have sub-sections such as financial or legal districts. Besides these horizontal divisions, there are distinctive vertical variations in the distribution of functions; the ground-floors of multi-storey buildings are occupied by activities with the greatest centrality needs. (Herbert, 1972: 90)

However, with increased dispersal and stretching out of economic relations, renting or owning an office or shop in the historically central location began to decline in importance. The question of 'central to what' became more important. In the 1930s and 1940s United States, for example, inner areas became challenged by suburban business districts, made possible by 'streetcar suburbs' and a burgeoning mortgage industry. The sight of boarded up shops and theatres became commonplace and a growing fear of downtown became internalised within social discourse. As Robert Beauregard argues in his important book *Voices of Decline* (1993):

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The city is used rhetorically to frame the precariousness of existence in a modern world, with urban decline serving as a symbolic cover for more wide-ranging fears and anxieties. In this role, urban decline discursively precedes the city's deteriorating conditions and its bleak future. The genesis of the discourse is not the entrenchment of poverty, the spreading of blight, the fiscal weakness of city governments, and the ghettoization of African-Americans, but society's deepening contradictions. To this extent, the discourse functions to site decline in the cities. It provides a spatial fix for our more generalized insecurities and complaints, thereby minimizing their evolution into a more radical critique of American society. (Beauregard, 1993: 6)

The iconic case is probably that of Times Square, in the heart of Manhattan, which has acted as a barometer of American attitudes towards urban decline and inner city living (Reichl, 1999; Sagalyn, 2001). Thus, central business districts are crucial attributes in the governance of territory, and agglomeration, creativity and control are key themes in understanding the significance of centrality in the contemporary metropolis.

However, commentators are now increasingly thinking through models of growth that reflect a sharply changing set of metropolitan dynamics. Journalistic forays into these new landscapes revealed some fascinating stories. Garreau's popular *Edge City: Life on the New Frontier* (1991), collected a series of anecdotal accounts of social aspiration, fear of crime, complex family commuting patterns and dislike for 'tax and spend' local

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government. Joel Kotkin's *The new Geography* (2001) told a similar story a decade later, in the aftermath of the dot.com boom that did so much to reshape workplace and living patterns for high-tech employees. Urban theorists have not always been so interested in these landscapes, although Soja's (2000) *Postmetropolis* attempts to pull together patterns of deconcentration and recentralisation. This disrupts the conventional image of the city: as Soja (2000: 242) continues, 'the densest urban cores in places like New York are becoming much less dense, while the low-rise almost suburban-looking cores in places like Los Angeles are reaching urban densities equal to Manhattan'. These fragmented, decentred cities pose numerous problems for analysts. One major issue is that of definition: the following terms all connote differing versions and visions of post-metropolitan life: suburbia; cyburbia; edge city; autopia; non-place. Each implies a shift away from classical or even modern conceptions of the city, symbolized by the cathedral and the city square.

These metropolitan landscapes reflect the importance of speed to the constitution of city life (Hubbard and Lilley 2004). The arrival of high-speed inner-city motorways and freeways has been a dominant feature of post-war urbanism, shifting residents' perceptions of the city. This often resulted in the displacement of long-established – and usually working class-communities, as in Berman's (1982) poignant recollection of the destruction of his childhood beneath the path of the Cross-Bronx Expressway in 1950s New York. Thus, the rhythmic nature of urban **public space** is important, not least in terms of how the needs of various users drawn to central places are resolved, planned for and regulated. The reclamation of human-scale streetscapes as a focus of collective memory in the urban arena has been an important trend (Hebbert, 2005). However, for the vast majority of cities, be it Beijing, Buenos Aires or Glasgow, the historic core remains a 'niche' within a broader city-region economy, with its specialised urban functions such as government offices, department stores, opera houses etc.

This has had an epistemological dimension too, challenging the often taken for granted notion of the 'city' as a coherent whole. For Amin and Thrift (2002: 8),

The city's boundaries have become far too permeable and stretched, both geographically and socially, for it to be theorized as a whole. The city has no completeness, no centre, no fixed parts. Instead, it is an amalgam of often disjointed processes and social heterogeneity, a place of near and far connections, a concatenation of rhythms; always edging in new directions.

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This ‘anything goes’ approach is exciting, but threatens to rattle itself to pieces if taken too far.

### The return to the centre: revalorising the ‘zone-in-transition’

As described in the entry on **global cities**, major CBD office districts have become paramount in servicing the global economy. For Saskia Sassen,

At the global level, a key dynamic explaining the place of major cities in the world economy is that they concentrate the infrastructure and the servicing that produced a capability for global control. The latter is essential if geographic dispersal of economic activity – whether factories, offices, or financial markets – is to take place under continued concentration of ownership and profit appropriation. (Sassen, 1995: 63).

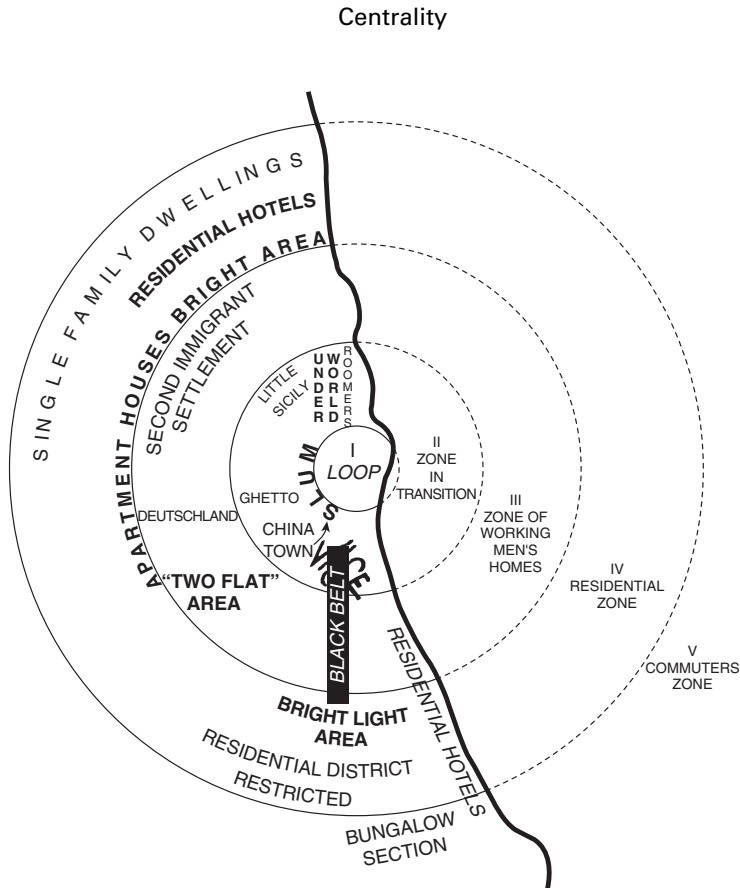
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Such concentrations have placed huge pressures on the existing urban fabric. This is particularly marked in cities with architecturally or physically distinguished cores. It is impossible to generalise about this. Cities as diverse as London, Barcelona and Rome have each retained vibrant central cities for a number of reasons (e.g., Herzog, 2006).

However, a key theme of locational theory was that of the ‘zone-in-transition’, a term coined by Ernest Burgess in his concentric ring model (see **diagram**). This term

applies to that part of the central city which is contiguous with the CBD, is characterised by ageing structures and derives many of its features from the fact that it has served as a buffer zone between the CBD and the more stable residential districts of the city. (Herbert, 1972: 105).

Once dismissed as zones of small industry, poor quality environments and inferior accessibility, such areas have become highly sought after or ‘revalorised’ in the post-industrial city. A fundamental aspect of the revival of downtowns was their re-use as a *residential* neighbourhood, as social groups of varying degrees of affluence populated central cities. A key part of this rediscovery of downtown is the growing demand for inner-city residences, charted by theorists of gentrification (e.g., Ley 1996; Smith 1996). Allen (2007), reporting on research carried out in Manchester, England, identifies three principal groups that have (re)colonised these areas for different reasons. First, there are the



**Figure 1.1.1** Burgess' Model of Centrality

'counter-cultural' users, often associated with the city's nightlife. On the one hand, there is a 'creative class' of fashion designers, artists and architects; on the other, there is the gay and lesbian community, who have often carved out 'gay villages' in neglected corners of the city. Second, there are the 'successful agers', those who had raised families in suburbs and who had moved back to the downtown to enjoy its cultural facilities of restaurants and the arts. Third, there are 'city-centre tourists', those with a short-term aim of living in cities to enjoy the experience, but with a longer goal of moving to the suburbs. Each of these groups has different levels of cultural skill or capital, social networks and hobbies, and housing histories. But what united them was an interest in the city as a playground, a resource to be enjoyed. As Slater (2006: 738) argues, this has been mirrored in a shift in the focus

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of gentrification research: 'The perception [of gentrification] is no longer about rent increases, landlord harassment and working-class displacement, but rather street-level spectacles, trendy bars and cafes, iPods, social diversity and funky clothing outlets'.

The economic recovery of central business districts has led to some critics arguing that city centres are now dominated by suburban 'family' values. The density of city life and the vibrant socialities it affords retains a powerful hold over planners and policy-makers. Jane Jacobs' 1961 classic *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, with its famous Manhattan-based 'sidewalk ballet' of dense sociality and pedestrian based 'street life', has influenced generations of well-meaning place-makers. It is ironic, then, that critics are now debating *The Suburbanization of New York* (2007), a collection of polemical essays about the future of what the editors claim to be 'the quintessential city: culturally, ethnically, and economically mixed, exciting and chaotic, elusive and spontaneous, sophisticated and endlessly creative' (Hammett and Hammett, 2007: 19). This city is seen to be under attack, a battery of writers asserted, by a combination of gentrification, in-town shopping malls, franchised national chain retail, festival marketplaces and Starbucks (M.D. Smith, 1996). Urban theory is notorious for being built upon a few unique cases and it is prudent to be cautious about the replicability of New York's experience. But many of the ideas raised above – of elite power in the centre, of the revitalisation, rejuvenation, renaissance of cities, of demographic 'invasions' by different social groups – can be traced out in slightly different forms in cities around the world during the 1980s and 1990s.

As noted, the revival of downtowns as a residential environment was driven by 'counter-cultural' or 'bohemian' social groups (Zukin, 1995). In cities such as New York, artists had gradually been rediscovering the warehouses and lofts of the industrial inner-city, drawn by cheap rents and raw, flexible industrial-sized floorplates. These partially remade city centres became more attractive to white collar workers, and – along with interventionist policing – downtowns became gentrified. This was given an academic rationale with the publication of Richard Florida's (2002) book *The Rise of the Creative Class* which became a near-instant hit with policy-makers internationally, welcoming of the message that successful regional economies had large numbers of bohemians, or 'artistically creative people' (p. 333), such as artists, designers or musicians. Increasingly, cities around the world have bought into the heavily marketed creative cities policy formula,



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consciously branding themselves as buzzing, creative metropolises (Rantisi and Leslie, 2006). Reinvestment in the built environment is a key issue here. Conservation, anti-congestion measures and a reaction to modernist comprehensive redevelopment have reinforced and preserved the desirability and quality of life in old city centres (While, 2006). This has met with some criticism, however. On the one hand, the speed of transfer of this policy message has been attacked for its unrealistic assumptions (Peck, 2005). Furthermore, while some policymakers have seen night-time economy sectors as being 'a postmodern panacea of creativity', Hollands and Chatterton (2003) argue that this is a sector dominated by corporate entertainment companies that force out smaller operators: 'City centre nightlife', they suggest, 'is far from a level playing field and left to the market, many smaller-scale, locally-based nightlife producers are closed down, pushed to the margins, or simply bought out' (p. 380).

### Is centrality still important in cities?

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To conclude, the city centre, downtown or urban core has a very strong presence within popular urban imaginaries. In one sense, developments in technology and the continuing desire to escape the congestion of central cities would still seem to render the need for centrality as illogical. Graham and Marvin (2001: 116–7) argue that in an informational age

networked urban cores ... tend ... to be physically or technologically obsolescent, requiring significant and costly retrofitting. To the municipal jurisdictions in old urban cores, securing the financial and technological expertise to update infrastructure, whilst also facing the fiscal and social crises surrounding deindustrialisation and social polarisation, poses enormous challenges.

Yet the very problems of downtowns – of their age and apparent lack of suitability for contemporary living – are also their greatest advantages.

This is a simplified story, applicable primarily to US downtowns. Yet there has been a renewed interest in city centres in recent years in cities worldwide. Even the 'shock' cities of China are now increasingly interested in historic preservation and the adaptive re-use of existing

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buildings. A number of important processes are involved here: a complex interplay of restated civic identity with the privatisation of city services; a re-found interest in density and tall buildings; the space conflicts of pedestrianism and automobility; the return of residential living in downtowns and city centres; and a strong policy turn towards embracing 'playfulness' and creativity.

### KEY POINTS

- Central business districts have been an important part of traditional approaches to urban geography, as seen in models of urban structure and theories of location.
- There are subtle differences within such central areas, between high-rise office clusters, 'zones of transition' between service and manufacturing neighbourhoods, retail streets and apartment blocks.
- The 1980s witnessed the beginnings of a rediscovery of city centre living, characterised by apartment living and new social groups adding to a so-called 'urban renaissance'. However, critics have pointed to processes of displacement and gentrification, and the power of property developers and corporate leisure groups in shaping urban politics downtown.

### FURTHER READING

There are a lot of good social histories of downtown and city centre living. Along with the work discussed above, Paul Groth's (1994) book, *Living Downtown: The History of Residential Hotels in the United States* gives a fascinating insight to the culture of the rooming house that once predominated many American cities. See also Cocks' (2001) book, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850–1915*, which shows the longevity of popular desire to visit central cities for leisure. For an interesting perspective on the changing nature of office space in CBDs, see O'Neill and McGuirk's (2003) paper, 'Reconfiguring the CBD: work and discourses of design in Sydney's office space',

## Mobility

# 1.2 MOBILITY

Cities buzz with movement. The flow of traffic, the back and forth of commuter trains, the screech of trams, the pulsing of millions of phone calls through copper and fibre optic cables, the step, step, step, of thousands upon thousands of people going about their business, the sway of bodies moving to a popular song in a late night bar or club. And this is to say nothing of the flow of food, drink, water and other provisions that provide cities with the basics of life. Nor of the counter movement of solid and liquid wastes that the modern cities produce each day. In fact, once you start thinking about cities as entities that are constantly in movement, the list of things that this movement – this mobility – includes is near to unending.

## Quantitative geography and transport geography

A central problem facing contemporary urban geography – and indeed the social sciences more generally – is how this buzz of movement should be accounted for. Of course, in all sorts of ways urban geography has been concerned with mobility from its conception. In the 1920s and 1930s the leading figures of the Chicago School of urban sociologists argued that a key element defining the emerging American industrial metropolis was its fluidity. Drawing inspiration from the German social philosopher Georg Simmel, the Chicago School emphasised how the life of the modern metropolis was defined in all sorts of ways by the circulation of people and information within *and* beyond the metropolis. Louis Wirth analysed the ways in which the urban dweller was defined through their mobility, adopting a range of different roles as they passed through the different parts of the city. Robert Park (see **community**) studied the ways the newspaper channelled the flow of information through the metropolis. In detailed case studies of the hobo, immigrant communities and itinerant communities of association like the taxi dance halls, the Chicago School spent a great deal of effort attempting to understand marginal groups whose character was defined to a great extent by their fluidity. Indeed, Ernest Burgess (in Sheller and Urry, 2000: 740) argued that mobility ‘was perhaps the best index of the state of metabolism of the city. Mobility may be thought of in more than a fanciful sense, as the “pulse of the community”’.

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A similar concern with movement can be found in the work of many of the pioneers of the quantitative revolution that swept through human geography – and with it urban geography – in the late 1950s and 1960s (see Ullman, 1957; Webber, 1964; Berry, 1973). One of the key concerns of quantitative geography was how distance and patterns of connection – road and rail networks, telecommunication systems and so on – influenced the amount of movement that occurred between different places. In particular, influential strands of quantitative geography focussed upon how the constraints imposed by transportation – both monetary (it requires resources to move things from one place to another) and temporal (moving across space takes time) – structured the economic dynamics of economic development. Quantitative geographers developed a range of analytical models from simple locational analysis and gravity models, to linear programming and factor and network analysis to explore these spatio-temporal dynamics. And, they demonstrated that taking into account both the fact that economic activity had a geographic location, and that this activity is dependent upon the complex spatial-temporal coordination of labour, materials and energy, profoundly altered social science's understanding of how economies function.

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Given the importance of transport to much of this quantitative work it is not surprising that in the 1960s and 1970s transport geography, or transportation geography, emerged into one of the central sub-disciplines within human geography (see Eliot Hurst, 1974; Hoyle and Knowles, 1992). And, as transport geography grew in significance within the discipline, the methods and techniques that it had developed simultaneously became influential in urban planning, urban design, and other areas of urban management.

### The mobility paradigm

Nonetheless, for all the success of quantitative transport geography, conceptually it offers a quite narrow interpretation of what the movement that animates cities is about. As Jean-Paul Rodrigue (Rodrigue et al., 2006: 5) and his colleagues write in *The Geography of Transportation Systems*, transport geography can be defined as being:

concerned about movements of freight, people and information. It seeks to link spatial constraints and attributes with the origin, the destination, the extent, the nature and the purpose of movement.

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This implicitly leaves out a great deal of movement that takes places within cities. It makes no mention of the circulation of water and waste upon which cities depend (see **infrastructure**). It does not take any account of the movement of non-human habitants of cities, plants, wildlife, pets, livestock, etc. (see **nature**) that are such an integral part of what cities are. Nor does it allow much space to think about all the movement that takes place in cities not oriented towards travelling from one destination to another; the pleasures of street cruising and hanging out in cars, Sunday strolls, dog walking or jogging, to name just a few examples. Put another way, transport geography is simply about getting from A to B, it is not about the journey (the movement) itself; it is oriented towards the narrowly instrumental. As such, the purely quantitative accounts favoured by transport geography tend to freeze the movement they are describing, reducing it to an abstract vector between two points.

That transport geography should frame movement in such a way is not inherent to the nature of the sub-discipline. As David Keeling (2007: 218) notes:

Transportation is quintessentially geographic, so it seems surprising that anxiety still exists about whether transport geographers have strayed from the core theories and methodologies of geography. Have transport geographers lost touch with the core principles of their discipline in order to make their research more relevant to others? Are they stuck in the narrow confines of network structures and flows, unable to explicate the multiple ways that transportation shapes human activity across the globe?

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Of course, it should be stressed that within the remit of transport geography the ways quantitative accounts flatten the experience of movement is not necessarily a problem. If the aim of transport geography is simply to describe movement within a defined transportation system and consider ways the efficiency (in terms of overall cost, average journey time, etc.) of this system might be improved, then focusing on the instrumental dimensions of transport is more than adequate. But, if our aim is to account for the buzz of movement mentioned in the introduction then there is a need to go beyond the boundaries of transport geography and the tools of quantitative analysis.

This is what the mobility research paradigm (Sheller and Urry, 2006) that has emerged in the past decade out of the work of a diverse range of social scientists interested in mobility and movement of all kinds

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seeks to do. Recognising – as transport geography did, as too in their limited way the Chicago School did – the centrality of mobility to the construction of contemporary industrial and post-industrial societies, a diverse collective of human geographers, sociologists and other social scientists have been attempting to undertake a thorough redefinition of what social science research should involve and what it should focus on. Extending, and radicalising, the insights, of quantitative geography that patterns of connection and movement define (or perhaps more accurately, *construct*) our social worlds in all sorts of fundamental ways, mobility theorists argue that social theory should start from the premise that the world is defined by movement and fluidity not by stasis and structure (see Thrift, 1993; Urry, 2000; Amin and Thrift, 2002; Sheller and Urry, 2004; Sheller and Urry, 2006; Cresswell, 2006). In the words of Mimi Sheller and John Urry (2006: 208),

the social sciences have ... failed to examine how the spatialities of social life presuppose (and frequently involve conflict over) both the actual and the imagined movement of people from place to place, person to person, event to event. Travel [and movement] has been seen as a black box, a neutral set of technologies and processes predominately permitting forms of economic, social, and political life that are seen as explicable in terms of other more powerful processes. ... [A]ccounting for mobilities in the fullest sense challenges social science to change both the objects of its inquiries and methods of its research.

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### Automobility and other mobilities

That sounds very abstract. And in many ways it is. Nonetheless, the sense of what Sheller and Urry (2006) are arguing for can be illustrated through the example of the automobile. One of the definitive objects of contemporary industrial society, the automobile is a mode of personal transportation, a signifier of status, an aesthetic statement, a symbol of individual freedom and the ultimate consumption good, as well as being a ubiquitous presence in contemporary cities (Sachs, 1984; Miller, 2001; Wollen and Kerr, 2002). Indeed, the philosopher Roland Barthes (1972: 88) went so far as to claim that:

cars today are almost the exact equivalent of the great Gothic cathedrals ... the supreme creation of an era, conceived with passion by unknown artists, and consumed in image if not in usage by a whole population which appropriates them as a purely magical object.

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**Figure 1.2** 'Automobility'

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But the automobile is also rather more than just a technological object, or a symbol of a certain kind of society. In a very real sense the automobile defines the patterns of social organisation and interaction that characterise contemporary urban life: the automobile has become in a quite concrete sense a whole way of life.

And, yet, the social sciences, from urban geography, through to sociology and even urban studies, has failed, as Sheller and Urry (2006: 209) write:

to consider the overwhelming impact of the automobile in transforming the time-space 'scapes' of the modern urban/suburban dweller. Industrial sociology, consumption studies, transportation studies and urban analyses have each been largely static, failing to consider how the car reconfigures urban life, with novel ways of dwelling, travelling, and socialising in and through an automobilised time-space.

What is more, the more one thinks about the place of the automobile and the mobility it affords, the more all embracing its presence

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appears, the more it appears to 'unfold a specific pattern of domination' (Heidegger, in Sheller and Urry, 2000: 737):

Automobility impacts not only on local public spaces and opportunities for coming together, but also on the formation of gendered subjectivities, familial and social networks, spatially segregated urban neighbourhoods, national images and aspirations to modernity, and global relations ranging from transnational migration to terrorism and oil wars.

To take the *automobilisation* of urban life seriously, therefore, requires the recognition that the success of the automobile is based on the intricate network of relationships that the automobile draws around it.

The most obvious dimension of drawing together is the infrastructural ecology that the automobile is dependent upon: wide smooth roads, gas stations, automobile repair shops, car dealerships, parking lots and buildings, traffic control systems, auto recovery companies, to name just a few obvious examples. There is another, equally intricate, socio-legal ecology of insurance companies, government statutes, local by-laws, accident claims companies, traffic police, parking wardens, that has grown up to regulate, order and, where necessary, discipline the masses of cars (or to be more accurate, car-human hybrids) that populate contemporary cities (see Beckman, 2001; Jain, 2004; Latham and McCormack, 2004; Merriman, 2007; Dodge and Kitchin, 2007). On a more affective level, the automobile has become profoundly implicated in people's emotional lives in all sorts of ways. Jack Katz (1999) has written about the distinctive forms of affective attachment that drivers in Los Angeles have developed for their cars. To disrespect someone's road space is to disrespect in some very real sense their personal space. While, to take another example, Robyn Dowling has described how for many suburban women car ownership has not only become pivotal to the way they manage the daily working and childcare routines: the car and its interior space have come to embody the sense of care and love mothers have for their children. They come to embody a widely recognised element of 'good mothering' (Dowling, 2000: 352; see also Law, 1999).

Of course, the automobile is by no means the sole armature of mobility in the contemporary world. Peter Adey (2007), Tim Cresswell (2006), and Martin Dodge and Rob Kitchen (2004) have described the ways that air travel has become an increasingly pervasive element of urban life, generating a novel range of new spatial-temporalities.



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Indeed, in all sorts of ways airports with their hotels, offices, mass-transportation systems and shopping malls, are coming to resemble mini-cities. And other writers have shown how the mobility inherent in practices such as mass tourism (Sheller and Urry, 2004), transmigration (Conradson and Latham, 2005a, 2007), the use of mobile telephony (Katz and Aakhus, 2002), or the internet (Wellman, 1998; Wellman and Haythornthwaite, 2002), structure contemporary urban life in all sorts of interesting ways. And all this is to say nothing of the phenomenal movement of goods, commodities and information that globalised cities both organise and are dependent upon (see Appadurai, 1996; Castells, 1997; Amin and Thrift, 2002). In fact, the more one looks, the more one finds the potential to understand all urban phenomenon as in some sense mobile.

### Central propositions of the mobility paradigm

The central point of the mobility paradigm is that it is both possible and productive to interpret cities as organised through multiple forms of movement, rhythms and speeds. And while things like automobiles, motorways, airplanes and airports are the most obvious dimensions of the 'mobility turn', the real challenge of the mobility paradigm is its demand to 'open up all sites, and places, and materialities to the mobilities that are already always coursing through them' (Sheller and Urry, 2006: 209). The question, then, is what exactly does that mean for how urban geography should research cities? One way to answer this question would be simply to continue to list all the ways that cities are defined through mobility. Another way to address this is to draw up a list of general conceptual propositions that define the new mobility paradigm as a way of thinking about the social world. So, at the risk of over-simplification, we can summarise the mobility paradigm into eight key propositions:

- 1 The world is defined by motion and fluidity, not primarily by stasis.
- 2 The world is made up of a heterogeneous multitude of time-spaces.
- 3 The social sciences need to become post-humanist. The social is made up of non-human *and* human actants.
- 4 Social theory/social science needs to move beyond the nation state. That is to say, social theory should not be based on the assumption that the nation state is the natural home of society.

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- 5 To understand society, social scientists need to focus on social practice.
- 6 To understand society, social scientists need to focus not just on rationality, but also on the affective dimensions of life.
- 7 Society needs to be understood through and through as socio-technical. The world of technology is not something outside of 'the social'. It is implicated fundamentally in the social world's unfolding.
- 8 The principle task of social theory as a kind of metaphor making. The kinds of metaphors used to describe reality come, in all sorts of ways, to define this reality. Metaphors also delimit how we understand problems. So in place of metaphors like structure, agency, etc., mobility research is organised around metaphors of flow, fluidity, network, scapes and complexity.

Exactly where the mobility paradigm's conceptual propositions will take urban research is unclear. The turn towards mobility within the social sciences in general – and urban geography in particular – is still relatively recent, and the mobility paradigm remains a diffuse and rapidly evolving intellectual movement. Nonetheless, in prompting urban geographers to re-consider such fundamental notions as **community** (what does it mean when community is mediated through the mobilities of the automobile, or telephone, or internet?), or conceptions of public-ness and **public space** (has the automobile's domination of the urban street killed public space, or transformed it creating a new public of automobility?), and in bringing in all sorts of neglected and overlooked aspects of urban life to researchers' attention (the centrality of all sorts of **infrastructures** to the smooth functioning of cities, the diverse socialities associated with movement, the ways mobility shapes peoples' mental map of a city), the mobility paradigm has helped to re-energise and reanimate, urban geography.

### KEY POINTS

- Movement is one of the defining elements of urban life.
- Quantitative urban geography and transport geography provided one of the earliest and most intellectually adventurous approaches to studying cities and mobility.
- Quantitative transport geography, for all its strengths, provides only a relatively narrow, instrumentally oriented, account of the movement that structures city life.

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- The mobility paradigm is an interdisciplinary collective of researchers attempting to reconfigure the social sciences (including human geography) through placing movement and mobility at the centre of the social science's definition of society.
- Automobility offers an exemplary case study of what the mobility paradigm involves. It shows that the automobile is more than just a technological object – it is in a very real sense 'a whole way of life'.
- Rather than being defined by specific themes or research objects, the mobility paradigm is better thought of as a connected series of pre-suppositions about how to approach social scientific research.

### FURTHER READING

Tim Cresswell (2006) *On the Move: Mobility in the Western World* is an engaging and thought-provoking study of the place of mobility in western society by one of human geography's most prominent theorists of mobility. John Urry's (2000) *Sociology Beyond Society: Mobilities for the 21st Century* offers a programmatic statement of what a 'mobile' social science involves. Despite what the title might suggest, the book is as much about a human geography of mobility as it is about a sociology of mobility. Mike Featherstone, Nigel Thrift and John Urry's (2005) edited collection *Automobilities* is a compelling collection of essays exploring the role of the automobile in contemporary society.

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# 1.3 GLOBAL CITIES

The growth of globalisation as a field of research has been felt across many of the social sciences, from economics to anthropology to urban planning and – given its intrinsic spatiality – it has been a major pre-occupation of human geographers. Yet the nature of this beast has been difficult to pin down, particularly when it is applied to the study of cities. Generally speaking, there are two schools of thought on the

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nature of global cities. On the one hand, there is a model based upon scale, network and hierarchy. This has been seen as based upon a static, fixed notion of the world, where cities can be identified as a single entity, then categorised, compared, contrasted and debated. The other school of thought sees globalisation as a process, disputes an easy identification of cities as objects and emphasises flows and movements between actors operating in the spatial formations that we know as cities. This division has been debated vigorously within geography and other disciplines, and the discussion that follows is an inevitably brief attempt to chart out some of its contours.

### From world city to global city

Although theorists such as Peter Hall (1966) and Jean Gottmann (1957) had provided a significant overview of the growing power of major cities, the emergence of world and global cities as a self-knowing concept is usually dated to the research agenda set out by John Friedmann and Goetz Wolff (1982), in an article published in the *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, which remains one of the key arenas for debates around the topic. Their argument brought together a number of 'macro' theories which aimed to explain globalisation, such as political economy and world systems approaches, and provided a succinct overview of the structural forces that were, they argued, placing cities – understood as expanded metropolitan city-regions – at the centre of economic dynamism, rather than the apparently declining centrally-coordinated economies of nation-states. Their agenda centred around the importance of cities as 'command and control' centres, clustering together the decision-makers of the transnational corporations that were exerting an ever-increasing grip on the world economy. Their argument set out a series of key restructuring processes – economic, social, physical, political – which are often difficult to disentangle, yet which taken together suggested a near-total transformation of how cities are theorised. Interestingly, the case study that inspired Friedmann and Wolff was Los Angeles, a spatial formation characterised by key post-industrial economic sectors such as military technology and film production. LA's predominance in these new theoretical debates – developed by others such as Ed Soja, Jennifer Wolch, Allen Scott, and Mike Davis – has remained controversial, critics pointing to the specificities rather than its archetypical characteristics. This point is revisited below.

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Friedmann followed this agenda with 'The world city hypothesis' (1986), and by the late 1980s regional development theorists, urban planners, sociologists and geographers were deepening its theoretical complexity and empirical resonance. However, perhaps the key event in shifting from the 'world' city was the sociologist Saskia Sassen's *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (1991), which, as the title implies, shifted concern to the three key cities as the apex of the increasingly financialised world economy of the 1980s. The novel aspect of Sassen's argument was that the mere possession of corporate headquarters was not enough for cities to dominate in the global economy. Rather, it was the cluster of interacting producer services firms that gave cities their ability to influence global flows. In addition, Sassen suggested that 'the difference between the classic concept of the world city and the global city model is one of level of generality and historical specificity. The world city concept has a certain kind of timelessness attached to it where the global city model marks a specific socio-spatial historical phase' (2001: 349). Thus, while world cities could be identified from at least the rise of world imperialism, Paris, London and Lisbon being major command and control centres in earlier centuries, Sassen was charting the specific locus of her chosen three global cities in terms of their power in shaping or coordinating the world economy of the 1980s and 1990s. The concept of global city was thus seized upon by policy-makers, business and academia alike, as it arrived at a moment when globalisation had firmly arrived on the agenda as a vital area of study.

The global cities agenda had reached such intensity by the mid-2000s that a major international publisher, Routledge, had commissioned a 'Global Cities Reader' running to 50 extracts from a wide range of perspectives (Brenner and Keil, 2006). Scholarly debate on the area had expanded into fields of representation, cultural identity, and the nature of the concept as a geographical problematic, as well as quantitative empirical testing, which reflected its purchase among scholars, not only those working in the field of the urban. In the remainder of this discussion, several of these areas are briefly addressed: the development of the global cities agenda on the basis of empirical mapping; the physical transformation of cities associated with the concept; critiques of the concept on the basis of its geographical prejudice; the emergence of 'global city' as a public discourse used by agents such as politicians and economic planners; and the widening of the concept with its explicit application fields such as disease, religion and fashion that are not primarily associated with economic

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organisation. Elsewhere in this book we discuss how the cognate fields of **transnationalism** and **mobilities** have developed and deepened understandings of distanced social identities and material and embodied travel.

### Cities and global economies

In an attempt to deepen understanding of the specific, measurable activities that link cities together in a global economy, a significant research network emerged around the Globalisation and World Cities (GaWC) cluster at Loughborough University in the late 1990s in the UK. As Beaverstock, Smith and Taylor (2000) have argued, a new 'metageography' of inter-city flow can now be identified and mapped. This entailed a categorisation of cities based on their relative connectivity, measured in material terms by data on internet connections, airline passenger traffic and office location patterns, particularly in advanced producer services such as law, accountancy, advertising and finance. As they argue:

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World cities are not eliminating the power of states, they are part of a global restructuring which is 'rescaling' power relations, in which states will change and adapt ... The 'renegotiations' going on between London's world role and the nation's economy, between New York's world role and the U.S. economy, and with all world cities and their encompassing territorial 'home' economies, are part of a broader change affecting the balance between networks and territories in the global space-economy. (Beaverstock et al., 2000: 132)

Thus, a sense emerges here that such cities are no longer articulated towards leading their national economies, that they are agents of themselves coordinating flows that will possibly bypass and probably even 'leak' from, the national economy in a number of ways.

This shift has been accompanied by a retheorisation of how cities are imagined. Amin (2002), seeking to make sense of the distancing of economic transactions (in other words, the stretching of social interaction over many miles and continents), poses two viewpoints as to how cities can be understood. First, they can be seen as 'a string of place-based economies' (p. 392), a set of bounded territories which can be literally measured, for example in square footage. In contrast, Amin sees cities 'as a site of network practices' by which he means that the city is a 'nexus of economic practices that does not return the urban as a place of localised transactions'

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(p. 393). In this view, 'the city thus conceptualised is no longer a bounded, but spatially stretched economic sphere' (p. 393). Amin's argument is thus based upon a finely grained distinction as to how we see cities: not, as he puts it, 'islands of economic competitiveness or knowledge formation', but rather as 'circulatory sites', restless and unstable (p. 395). Thus we cannot *assume* that cities are cohesive entities. As with Sassen's intimation about the importance of producer service firms (such as PriceWaterhouseCoopers, for example), it may well be the transnational firm and its organisational linkages that define a city's cohesion.

Whichever side one takes on this debate, it should be stressed that despite the abstract diagrams or tables that identify these global cities, there are specific clusters or sites where interactions (often face-to-face and embodied) take place. Here we can see the significance of fixity and locational specificity as opposed to pure flow. This has often been related to the nature of office markets in such cities, characterised by the popularity of high-rise buildings and the tendency for advanced producer services – such as law, accountancy, insurance, architecture and advertising – to cluster around major commercial sites, thus intensifying inter-firm interactions. This has reached such an intensity that the design of both interiors and exteriors (O'Neill and McGuirk, 2003; McNeill, 2007) of office buildings is given great importance, with elite architectural firms competing fiercely for such commissions as the Swiss Re tower in London. Furthermore, the social practices that these buildings house have been the subject of some fascinating research, such as on gendered work practices in investment banks (McDowell, 1997), elite social networks such as expatriate clubs (Beaverstock, 2002), and the spatialisation of money and finance (Leyshon and Thrift, 1997).

## Global city discourses

There is another way of considering this, which is to see global cities as self-generating discourses. Influenced by the broad sweep of post-structuralism through geography and sociology, academics began to take greater care in how apparently neutral concepts influence real social action. In other words, once mayors, policy consultants, firm strategists, academics, journalists and others involved in knowledge circuitry agree upon the idea of a 'global city', then the term acquires a practical significance. Policymakers identify 'globally competitive' sectors; land use planning decisions are driven by a 'global' agenda; the fear of

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foreign competitors can be raised as a means of justifying controversial policy options. Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London, (2000–2008) has constantly emphasised the need for skyscraper office buildings because of the imagined challenge from Paris and Frankfurt, for example. As Machimura (1998) has described, Tokyo's city government rescripted the city (and its land use planning) to allow it to host and connect with global flows, using a homogenised language (perhaps emerging from a largely uncharted discourse provided by global consultancy firms) (see also McNeill et al., 2005 on Sydney; Paul, 2004 on Montreal).

A further issue is that while these small areas of capital accumulation – we could call them footprints – may have huge impacts on surrounding housing and labour markets, it is nonetheless true that the excessive focus on financial clusters may divert attention from mundane, but in aggregate terms significant, economic zones such as small businesses, distribution parks, informal economies of unpaid or semi-legal work, or even criminal economies. This is particularly important when considering the importance of underdeveloped cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America, which may plug into global economic flows in less spectacular ways (Sidaway and Power, 1995; Shatkin, 1998; Simone, 2004).

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### **Disease, religion, fashion, art**

However, it should be noted that an over-concentration on financial services may obscure the many other relationships that bind cities, or sites within cities, together. To illustrate this, consider the following four areas: disease, religion, art and fashion. The global geographies of disease were illustrated with the sudden explosion of the SARS epidemic in 2003, a 'transmission chain' that linked rural China with Urban Canada. As Harris Ali and Keil (2006) have shown 'the disease originated in rural southern China, then moving to major cities in China via live animal markets, eventually to find its way to the major global city of Hong Kong, which then served as an important interchange site for its global spread' (p. 500). The peculiar geography of SARS – with a concentration of clusters in Southeast Asia but with an outlier in Toronto – highlights the increasing trade and travel links between Chinese cities and the primate Canadian metropolis. As Harris Ali and Keil continue, while European port cities were always significant transmission points for disease in the pre-modern and modern periods, the contemporary situation has aided the spread of epidemics. This is for two



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reasons: first, 'the incubation period for many viruses and bacteria is much shorter than the travel time for transcontinental aircraft trips ... those affected are very likely to be asymptomatic during their trip and upon arrival in their destination' (p. 492); second, 'the routes through which pathogens can enter the populations of cities have multiplied' (p. 492) due to global city networks.

It is now well-established that religion is a great shaper of the world, that the 'world religions', particularly those of Islam and Christianity, have very significant effects on the social practices, cultural values and legal norms of nation-states. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, which is probably the world's largest institution in terms of practising members, is very reliant on the territorial power base and mythologisation of Rome as a direct lineage to Christ on earth. This has a huge impact on the everyday practices within the secular city, along with its urban politics (McNeill, 2003b). In the extended social and cultural networks found in most major cities, religious institutions have key functions in providing a focus for diaspora groups. The mythic, essentialised nature of sacred Rome mobilises hundreds of thousands of visitors and pilgrims; this aspect is in turn relational in that it ties Rome into networks of faith communities in all parts of the world; and it then requires the institutionalisation and regulation of these networks in a way that must balance sacred claims to space with the secular rights of Roman and Italian citizens. Similarly, the construction of religious buildings such as mosques – and local responses to these events – reveal deep-seated cultural identities and anxieties which both feed from and structure national imaginaries (Dunn, 2005).

A further example is that of fashion, and particularly that of high fashion. As with religion, certain key cities have historically dominated this movement, as Gilbert (2006: 20) describes:

The growth and systematization of European imperialism was an important phase in the development of fashion's world cities ... London and Paris came to be understood as sites of both innovation and of fashion authority. This worked through the actual export of clothes and designs, but also through the symbolic projection of these cities as avatars of fashionable modernity.

In a similar way, London emerged as a major world centre for modern art in the 1990s. For While (2003),

the business of buying and selling Western high art is dominated by New York, Paris and London, as well as a number of second-order international

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nodes such as Los Angeles, Tokyo, Zurich, Milan and Dusseldorf ... the key international cities have become the home of the most influential international dealers, auction houses, critics and galleries, and act as magnets for aspiring artists and dealers, who in turn further enrich the creative milieu of art schools, galleries and cultural quarters. (p. 253–4)

What these two sectors have in common is the transmission of cultural values, where the evolution of complex systems of art and fashion appreciation has become housed in the major institutions of certain world cities.

It should be said that each of these fora for cultural exchange are partially constituted by the material infrastructures that sustain them. Whether this be the human or animal carriers of disease, the rocky pilgrim routes of the Middle Ages or the charter flights that transport adherents to Mecca or Rome, the globalisation of architects and their designs (McNeill, 2008), or the networks of art auctions and fashion magazines that sustain and transmit cultural artefacts, the material nature of this connectivity is very important (see **materiality**).

## 42 Positionality

Finally, a powerful critique of the global cities literature has emerged from geographers charting the global South. Writers such as Robinson (2002), Gandy (2005a), and Simone (2004) have argued that urban theory-building has ignored the specific conditions of African cities, or – worse still – have even exoticised their urban experience. For Robinson, the problem lies in the division between economic and urban geography as disciplines that focus on advanced capitalist economies, and development geography as focusing on less developed countries:

In the same way, then, that global and world city approaches ascribe the characteristics of only parts of cities to the whole city through the process of categorization, mega-city and developmentalist approaches extend to the entire city the imagination of those parts which are lacking in all sorts of facilities and services. (Robinson, 2002: 540)

The effect of this, for Robinson, is to pathologise such cities as being poor, and requiring external help, ignoring the potential to redistribute wealth (which is concentrated in certain zones within African cities) internally within cities. As Shatkin (1998) has argued, seeing certain cities and nation-states as being irrelevant to global cities research due

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to very low levels of foreign direct investment is to ignore the increasing integration of cities such as Phnom Penh or Nairobi within the world economy.

Theorising global cities is thus a major issue within contemporary social sciences. The quantitative analysis of major data-sets which show degrees of inter-connection and the magnitude of inter-city flows of anything from people to food have made a major contribution to our understanding of the globalised urban economy. However, the broader remit that an urban cultural perspective brings serves to deconstruct the categories used to make knowledge claims, challenge the over-emphasis on certain cities as being foundational in world city analysis and to bring non-economistic indicators into the theoretical armature of urban geographers.

### KEY POINTS

- The debate has often been focused around economic globalisation, potentially neglecting the importance of cities as importing and exporting artefacts in fields such as fashion, art, architecture and religion.
- Critics have suggested that the global city term focuses attention on key financial centres, to the neglect of underdeveloped, yet incredibly populous, urban areas around the world.
- The terminology used in the debate is fundamental. It is not clear that 'city' is an appropriate term with which to frame the debate, with many theorists preferring to speak of 'sites' of networked activity.

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### FURTHER READING

There are two edited collections that cover the field in considerable depth: Knox and Taylor's *World Cities in a World-System* (1995) and Allen Scott's *Global City-Regions* (2002). Jenny Robinson's (2006) *Ordinary Cities: Between Modernity and Development* provides a much-needed bridge between the global cities literature and theoretical perspectives drawn from development geography.

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# 1.4 TRANSNATIONAL URBANISM

Transnational urbanism is a term originally coined by the American anthropologist Michael Peter Smith (2001, 2002, 2005a). It is an attempt to think through the ways in which cities are evermore defined by all sorts of connections to faraway places. More specifically, it is an attempt to think systematically about the ways such long distance – often trans-border – connections are increasingly organised through people leading lives that are lived in ‘two places at once’, lived both “here *and* there” (Smith, 2005b: 82, *emphasis added*). This fact of lives lived in two places at once is significant for at least two reasons. First, social relationships that are routinely stretched over long distances place into question in all sorts of ways how social researchers should understand the ‘there-ness’ of social interaction. Second, the spatially distributed agency implicit in such geographically stretched networks of relationship raises questions about the nature and role of cities as nodes of concentrated interaction. If a great deal of the interaction taking place within cities is in fact organised through relationships from elsewhere, what does this do to established notions of cities as privileged central places? Does it mean that the nodality of cities no longer matters? Or that it matters less than it has in the past? And if it matters less, what does this do to established ways of understanding cities? Does it mean that they are redundant? Or just that they need a little rethinking? The concept of transnational urbanism is an attempt to place these issues of spatial distancing at the centre of how cities should be understood. Rather than thinking about cities as principally contained – and indeed easily located – sites, transnational urbanism suggests that urban theory needs from the very start to recognise that cities are constituted through often extraordinarily complex time-space entanglements – entanglements in which the notion of what is ‘near’ and what is ‘far’ is often very much less than self evident.

## Transnationalism and the transnational

Although used as early as 1916 by the American essayist Randolph Bourne, the term transnationalism as currently understood has its

## Transnational Urbanism

origins in work in international relations and economics in the 1960s (Bourne, 1916; Keohane and Nye, 1971). Scholars in these fields used the term transnational to refer to institutions and forms of relationship that spanned national borders and in some way transcended the national. It was not until the 1990s, however, that the term transnational – and the related noun transnationalism – gained genuinely widespread currency. A range of scholars working in anthropology (Sutton, 1987; Glick-Schiller et al., 1992; 1995; Smith, 1994; Hannerz, 1996), sociology (Levitt, 1994; Portes, 1996), human geography (Mitchell, 1997), literary studies (Tölölyan, 1991, 1996) and elsewhere began arguing that the concept of the transnational offered a productive way both for addressing the ways in which the world was becoming increasingly globally interconnected, while at the same time acknowledging that the nation state still remained an important part of this globalising world. As Smith (2001: 3) writes:

... Globalization discourses ... often explicitly assume the growing insignificance of national borders, boundaries and identities. In contrast, transnationalist discourse insists on the continuing significance of borders, state politics, and national identities even as these are often transgressed by transnational communication circuits and social practices.

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In particular, much work on transnationalism came to focus on what Nina Glick-Schiller, Linda Basch and Cristina Blanc-Szanton (1995: 48) called 'transmigrants'. Transmigrants are international migrants who – in contrast to earlier patterns of migration, 'live dual lives: speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders' (Portes et al., 1999: 217).

This pattern of transnational migration is a phenomenon that has historical precedents. Far from being a 'melting pot', for example, late nineteenth and early twentieth century American society was much more a mosaic of lingering national and ethnic affiliations. (This, in fact, was the topic of Bourne's 1916 essay, just as it was the focus of much of the Chicago School's research). Nonetheless, students of contemporary transnational migration argue that contemporary forms of migration are in important ways qualitatively different from earlier patterns. This is for three reasons. First, the kinds of connection possible in the contemporary 'transnational moment' (Tölölyan, 1991: 5) are profoundly different to those available to previous generations of migrants. Technologies like cable and satellite television, long distance telephony, jet aircraft – to say nothing of the internet – allow a quality

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and immediacy of interaction that simply was not possible with earlier technologies. Second, the intensity and duration of the level of connection is much greater than previously. It is not just that long distance communication and transportation has gotten faster. The cost of maintaining links between a migrant's old and new homes has fallen precipitously over recent decades. This allows even the poorest and most socially disadvantaged to be involved in circuits of transnational exchange that previously would have only been the preserve of elites. Third, contemporary migration is taking place at a time when many migrants not only come from countries with a well developed national identity but also with a well defined desire to maintain that sense of identification. Thus, many migrants *despite* migrating are prepared to actively defend their own national identity in the face of efforts by receiving country governments to assimilate them into the host culture (Glick-Shiller et al., 1995; Portes et al., 1999).

### **Transnational cities, transnational social morphologies**

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What does all this mean for how contemporary cities should be understood? Well, according to Smith (2001) and other scholars of transnationalism the emergence of complex networks of transmigration matters for how cities should be understood for at least three reasons:

- 1 It matters because cities are where the great majority of contemporary migrants live.
- 2 It matters because the presence of transmigrants profoundly shapes the dynamics of much contemporary urban life. They influence labour markets, politics, the nature of a city's international connections, to say nothing of its cultural and public life.
- 3 It matters because cities are the central 'sites for concentrating the social, physical, and human capital used to forge other types of [transnational] socio-economic and political projects across borders' (Smith, 2005a: 7).

Taken together, these three factors point to an emergent transnational urbanism, an urbanism that is constituted through the interaction of a complex – and interlinked – range of what Steven Vertovec (1999) calls 'transnational social morphologies'. The key dimensions of this

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transnational urbanism can be summarised under three general headings: transnational social fields; transnational economies; and transnational political formations.

### Transnational Social Fields

Perhaps the most striking dimension of the phenomenon on transmigration is the degree to which it has become possible for people to construct remarkably dense and complex kin and friendship networks across what for an outsider appear impossibly large distances. Thus, Glick Shiller et al., (1995: 54) describe the case of a family from the Caribbean island of St Vincent where:

Two daughters, who could not find employment in St. Vincent ... migrated to the U.S. as domestic workers to gain income to support family members in Saint Vincent and contribute to building a cement block family home. Two brothers, who also could not find work locally, migrated to Trinidad as a skilled automobile mechanic and construction worker. The wife of one of the brothers later joined her husband's sisters in New York, where she too became a live-in domestic worker. The mother remained behind in St. Vincent to care for her son's two small children and oversee the construction of the family home.

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This pattern of interlinked family movement is characteristic of many relatively impoverished 'transnational' or 'translocal' migrants. Transmigrants improvise family structures that stretch across often multiple national boundaries, balancing off as best as they can the different economic, social and legal possibilities presented by different places. So, while St Vincent does not offer sufficient economic opportunities for the economically active members of the family described above, it does offer a base from which the family's children can be cared for while their parents work outside of St Vincent. And while New York may only offer a precarious living for the women of this family, and little chance of permanent settlement, it does at least offer American wage levels and payment in American dollars.

But these transnational networks take in more than just families. As the sociologist Peggy Levitt (2001) has shown, they also incorporate whole neighbourhoods and in the case of the 'sending' country often whole towns and villages. And, it is not just poor people from less-developed countries implicated in the construction of these transnational social fields. At the other end of the social scale Leslie Sklair (2001) has documented the emergence of a 'transnational

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capitalist class', who are the managers and controllers of the contemporary global economic system. Despite their power, even this group cannot fully escape the costs of frequent long-distance movement. They too have to find ways of aligning the demands of their often highly mobile lifestyles with those of family life. Indeed, as Aihwa Ong (1999; see also Mitchell, 1995; Olds and Yeung, 1999) has shown in her research on Overseas Chinese entrepreneurs, the development and sustenance of often intricate transnational family networks have become a key dimension of many Overseas Chinese business ventures. In a similar vein, Johanna Waters (2005, 2006) has mapped the transnational strategies that professional upper-middle class Hong Kong Chinese families employ to gain maximum educational advantage for their children – sending their children to costly overseas English language universities in Canada, the UK and the US. Together such transnational strategies have generated a rich new typology of social forms – astronaut fathers and families, parachute kids, satellite children – as family heads try and manoeuvre their family resources across international borders to best advantage.

### 48 Transnational Economies

To speak of a transnational capitalist class is to point to how transnational social fields are intimately intertwined with the economics of the global economy. Now in Smith's (1998, 2001) account of transnational urbanism the global economy per se has a limited role. As he points out, many of the international flows of capital that are reshaping supposedly iconic global cities like Los Angeles are in fact far from global. Rather, such flows tend to trace out a more restricted trans-regional structure. Downtown Los Angeles has been rebuilt over the past couple of decades with money from Japan, Hong Kong and the Middle East; not money from just anywhere. But this is not to say in a more general sense that the criss-crossing flows of international commerce have not profoundly reshaped certain areas of cities. In most large cities it is possible to trace out an infrastructure of elite transnational mobility afforded through things like 'hotels, airports, and similar institutions', which, as the anthropologist Ulf Hannerz puts it, 'are intensely involved in mobility and the encounters of various kinds of mobile people' (Hannerz, 1998: 239).

Spaces like airports and hotels *are* important in the emergence of a transnational urbanism (see **mobility**), but Smith (2005a: 9) is also



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right to ask researchers to look beyond 'the hypermobility of key sites' such as these in trying to understand transnational urbanism. So, for example, and moving away from the built form of the city, Phil Crang, Claire Dwyer and Peter Jackson (2003; Crang and Dwyer, 2002) have traced the transnational circuits through which ethnic entrepreneurs bring together, interpret and reinterpret products and materials from their different 'home' cultures to develop new styles of fashion, ways of eating and more. What is significant about these transnational entrepreneurial networks is how they sit between two or more places and how they reach out beyond the world of the transmigrant into 'mainstream' urban culture.

Of course, there are more prosaic dimensions to this transnational entrepreneurialism. There are the legions of transmigrant entrepreneurs who provide the everyday services and products that migrant communities rely upon, the everyday; infrastructure that sustains and supports the transnational social fields discussed previously – the grocery and international phone stores, the internet cafes and travel agents, the money exchange services, the foreign language newspapers, to name just a few examples (Levitt, 1994; 2001; Smith, 2001; Friesen et al., 2005). Nor should we forget the profound transformation of existing urban neighbourhoods that the presence of large numbers of transmigrants brings with it. Writers like Mike Davis (2000), Michael Dear (2000; Dear et al., 1999), and Margaret Crawford (1999) have documented how the 'Latinization' of cities in states like California, Texas and Florida, has re-enlivened the public culture of cities as diverse as Los Angeles, San Diego, Miami and Houston, not least through the presence of large numbers of street vendors, yard markets, home based businesses like barbers, or second hand clothing stores, and other novel 'informal' economic strategies that migrants have brought with them.

Lastly, in focusing on transnational economies, we must not forget the importance of the labour that many transmigrants provide – this is after all the principal reason most migrants move in the first place. Migrant workers not only play a central role in the labour markets of many so-called global cities like New York, London, Singapore and Paris, they are also increasingly a crucial part of the economies of less globally prominent cities. As we have already observed, mobile, highly educated professionals – computer programmers, engineers, lawyers, financial and management experts, the cadres of Sklair's (2001) transnational capital class – play a key role in knitting together global supply chains (see Beaverstock, 2005). Equally, a whole range of other occupations from bus

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drivers, cleaners, nannies and gardeners, to nurses and nurse aides, to waitresses, cooks, dishwashers and security guards, to taxi drivers and construction workers are frequently dominated by migrant labour. While much of the emphasis in the current literature focuses on low paid and often unskilled workers – which certainly does constitute a very significant proportion of this non-elite migrant labour force – the significance of skilled and often highly educated people like teachers, or doctors, should not be overlooked (Sassen, 1988; Waldinger, 1999; Erhenreich and Hochschild, 2003; May et al., 2007; Datta et al., 2007; Conradson and Latham, 2005a).

### Transnational Political Formations

The final dimension of the emergent transnational urbanism highlighted by Smith is the political. One might think that transmigrants living between two different places would have little space for politics. If, in the famous words of the American congressman Tip O'Neill, 'All politics is local', one has to ask where is the 'local' in a life lived spanned between different places? It is precisely this question that makes the politics of transnationalism interesting – it is a politics that relocates the realities of political action, and places into question truisms such as O'Neill's statement.

It is possible to map out at least three modalities through which transnational political action is shaping contemporary cities. First, transmigrants, despite migration, often remain linked closely concerned with politics in their country of origins. At the most basic this might simply mean migration creates a pool of ex-patriot voters. However, in many cases it also involves the creation of political constituencies that have subtly different aspirations, claims, or hopes, than those in the 'homeland'. Perhaps the iconic image of this kind of transnational politics is that of the political exile or refugee who campaigns for freedom and democratic rights in her homeland. Yet, as Smith (2001; Smith and Bakker, 2005) has shown, by no means all diasporic political movements are of such a politically liberal nature. Indeed, one of the most interesting dimensions of many contemporary transnational political organisations is how many are directed at 'modernising' and 'marketising' their homeland societies. In any case, what matters for the city in which trans-migrants have made their home, is that much of the political action concerned with the trans-migrants' original home actually takes place within, and circulates around, the migrants' new home city (Appadurai, 1996).

## Transnational Urbanism

A second modality of transnational politics involves states seeking to enlist their diasporic communities into the process of national, regional and even local economic development. Such 'diaspora strategies' (Larner, 2007: 332) have been employed by states as diverse as India, Honduras, Mexico, Ireland and New Zealand with the intention of mobilising a nation's (and in some cases a region, or city, or village's) non-resident citizens (and also often overseas born co-ethnics) in aid of national economic development. These strategies reconfigure the spatial reach of the state in all sorts of interesting ways. They also create sets of institutional interdependencies that weave the spatiality of a nation's transnational diaspora into its existing territorial structure. Which brings us to the third modality through which transnational political action is reshaping cities. This is the way in which the circulation of people, ideas, information, money and goods that accompanies the emergence of transnational social morphologies alters the horizons of possibility in the places that it encompasses. The vision of moving somewhere else, or back to some place, or an experience of a certain kind of life, or even the idea of a certain life, in many instances profoundly alters the shape and dynamics of a place's political culture. Thus, to take one small example, in the Pacific Kingdom of Tonga overseas educated Tongans have taken the lead in calling for greater democracy in the kingdom. But in November 2006 when pro-democracy activists took to the streets of the capital Nuku'alofa their protests rapidly descended into a chaos of arson and looting as gangs of youths, many of whom had grown up in Auckland, Sydney, or Salt Lake City and been sent back to Tonga by their families to protect them from lives of delinquency, took things into their own hands. It is just such strange and sometimes disturbing phenomenon that transnational urbanism seeks to make sense of.

### KEY POINTS

- Cities are defined in all sorts of ways by their connections with distant places.
- Globalisation is not just the product of large, powerful and highly visible actors; disadvantaged and seemingly powerless individuals and groups also produce it from below.
- Transnationalism is a concept that seeks to make globalisation conceptually manageable. It focuses on the concrete practices that allow

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social, economic and political relationships to be stretched across national borders.

- Trans-migrants of all social backgrounds construct intricate social, economic and political networks that knit together places over often very substantial distances.
- These transnational social morphologies profoundly shape the dynamics of the cities that they encompass.

### FURTHER READING

Michael Peter Smith's (2001) *Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization* provides a comprehensive overview of the key literatures on globalisation and cities, and provides a compelling argument for the need to study the transnational networks created by migrants. Peter Jackson, Phil Crang, and Claire Dwyer's (eds) (2004) *Transnational Spaces* is an excellent and wide ranging collection of essays that shows how geographers have used the concept of transnationalism. In 'Transnational urbanism: everyday practices and mobilities', a special edition of *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, David Conradson and Alan Latham (eds) (2005a) present a series of articles addressing the everyday practices through which transnational migrants organise their mobility. It includes a short introductory essay by Michael Peter Smith.