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Writing the city spatially[1]

Edward W. Soja

The centrality of cities to an understanding of historic societies is an assumption shared by most urbanists but it is scarcely evident in the work of other social analysts. It is still possible to write or compile contemporary histories that allot, at best, a chapter to urban phenomena. This may not be because the other social analysts are being obtuse but rather because urbanists have, in the main, not made an adequate case for that centrality. Among the few that have made such a case Edward Soja's work is particularly distinctive. As was noted in an earlier discussion of aspects of his work, Soja's trilogy - Postmodern Geographies (1989), Thirdspace(1996) and Postmetropolis(2000) - is 'an exciting enterprise, superbly written, showing great insight and increasing catholicity and generosity towards a wide range of work' (Catterall, 'It All Came Together in New York? Urban Studies and the Present Crisis', CITY, Vol.6, No.1, 2002). But it is more than that. It is a reconceptualisation of the field that puts it in touch with and contributes to the recasting of contemporary, transdisciplinary social analysis. It includes, as his personal introduction below to key aspects of his work indicates: a rejection of binary divisions that set, for example, Marxist and postmodern approaches apart; an emphasis on and exploration of the notion of synekism (the stimulus of urban agglomeration), and of the essential spatiality of urban phenomena; and - unexpectedly, for those still coming to terms with the spatial turn - a related reconsideration of urban history (including a prequel of 5,000 years added to, and necessitating the rethinking of the established account of, 'the Urban Revolution').

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I have been described as an urbanist, a strangely familiar word that is still underlined as unacceptable in most word-processing spellchecks. Urbanist is listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, but is defined either as an adherent of Pope Urban VI or as a nun of a branch of the Poor Clares who was a follower of Pope Urban IV. I think it is safe to say that I am neither. So what then is an urbanist? As far as I can tell, the term was first used by *Time Magazine* more than 20 years ago to refer to a specialist on cities. Unlike most ist-suffixed words, however, including the aforementioned Papal referents, urbanist did not necessarily mean an eager advocate of cities, for many so-called urbanists (Lewis Mumford comes to mind) actually dislike cities and write negatively about urban life. So the term has entered common usage as critically neutral. Anyone who writes specifically about cities can therefore be called an urbanist.

Over the past 20 years, however, cities and the practices of "writing the city" from multiple perspectives have been undergoing some dramatic changes. First of all, there has been an extraordinary diffusion of interest in cities affecting nearly every academic discipline. The field of urban studies today is broader than it ever has been, so that to an increasing degree we are all urbanists. Instigating this transdisciplinary diffusion has been a significant transformation, or restructuring, of the material world. It can be argued that over the past few decades, urban life has become almost completely globalized, as cities now extend their reach to the global

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scale in ways that have never before been imagined. Not only does most of the world's population, certainly more than three billion people, live in sizeable cities, but we are fast approaching a time when the majority will be living in 350 or so globalized city-regions of more than a million inhabitants. Exploring the nature and substance of "urban life in the era of globalization"—the overarching theme for the conference in Dublin, upon which this discussion is based—has become not just a field of specialized academic interest but an interpretive window on to every aspect of the contemporary human condition everywhere on earth.

Pushing urban globalization further has been the virtual completion of a process begun in the late 18th century, most noticeably just across the Irish Sea in the now ultra-hip postmetropolis of Manchester. Here was launched what I have called the Third Urban Revolution, marked by the inventive emergence of industrial capitalism, probably the most city-based and urban-generated mode of production the world has ever seen. Building on the stimulus of urban agglomeration (more on this later), the formation of *urban* industrial society—and I insist on this precession of the urban—sparked a new round of globalization organized by the capitalist nation-state but hinging upon expansive systems of cities that were the foundations, the manufactories, of advanced industrial society and culture. The world's first predominantly urbanized societies and economies took shape, initially in Britain, where the population shifted from being more than 80% rural in 1750 to being over 80% urban in 1900. This new kind of capitalist society, in which the vast majority of the population lived in cities and where the bulk of the social surplus sustaining society was generated in cities, began to spread to other regions.

This diffusion of definitively urban industrial capitalism was constrained significantly during the 19th and most of the 20th centuries by the construction, at the global scale, of a macro-spatial division of labour and power, what Immanuel Wallerstein termed a world system, that concentrated more advanced forms of industrial urbanism in what has familiarly been called the core countries or the First World, or more simply and geographically incorrect, the North. It has only been in the last three decades that industrial urbanism has begun to break through this Great Divide to any significant degree, creating newly industrialized spaces in places never so industrialized before (including this land of the so-called Celtic Tiger) and pushing at least the substructure of industrial urbanism as a way of life into every inhabited corner of the world, from the Amazon Basin to Antarctica. Just as we can all be called urbanists today, so too can it be said that, to a significant degree, everywhere on earth is now urbanized.

So then, what kind of urbanist do I consider myself to be? In what particular way do I write the city? I am, first of all, a critical urbanist, meaning that I am as much influenced by the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory as by the Chicago School of Urban Ecology. Like other critical thinkers, I seek knowledge that is not only accurate but also useful in changing the world for the better. I am also as much a regionalist as an urbanist. What I do can be described as critical studies of cities and regions, the subtitle of my recent book, *Postmetropolis* (Soja, 2000). Although I take the -ist suffix seriously and advocate the positive advantages of urbanism and regionalism, I focus my interpretive attention on the more negative effects of globalization and the New Economy of flexible capitalism, but with the optimism that these problems can be effectively addressed by concerted political action.

Am I then a Marxist urbanist as well? The answer is emphatically yes and no. I continue to be inspired by Marxism when trying to understand how contemporary urban life remains fundamentally capitalist, that is, when exploring the present in its stubborn continuity with the past. Insightful though this may be, however, it is not enough to make practical and theoretical sense of the

present, and also leads too quickly to unfulfillable yearnings for total revolution. I depart then from the urban Marxism advocated by such scholars as David Harvey primarily in stressing the importance of the here and now, what is new and different in the contemporary world, and in using this understanding to rethink and revise all established epistemologies, Marxism included. My approach to the current era of globalization, economic restructuring and innovative informational technologies thus does not begin and end with demonstrating how effectively Marx captured capitalism's essences and effects on urban life. I seek instead new and different opportunities to engage in social action and spatial praxis that is not aimed exclusively at transforming capitalism into socialism *tout court* but at maximizing the possibilities for a flexible and democratic socialism within existing capitalist societies.

What this represents is not a rejection of Marxism *per se* but a refusal of all categorical or exclusive forms of critical thinking, those that remain rigidly fixed on either/or dichotomies or binaries of the sort that insist that an unbending choice be made between capitalism versus socialism, capital versus labour, the bad and the good. I have no doubt which side I am on when forced to choose, but I choose sides in a more open and inclusive way, one that preserves the possibility of new strategies and coalitions and alliances, as well as deep changes in long-established methods of critical analysis. This rejection of binary logic is central to my critical studies of cities and regions, and leads me to another way to describe my work.

I consider myself to be among a rather small group of scholars who feel no qualms in being described as radical or critical postmodernists. I say a small group, for on the left as well as the right there has been an almost indestructible conviction that radical postmodernism is an oxymoron, an intolerable contradiction in terms. After all, it is argued, the postmodern condition, with its multiple announcements of deaths and triumphs, and its formidable increases in poverty and polarization, has clearly been dominated by conservative or, to use its contemporary re-baptism, neo-liberal forces and politics. Surely there is guilt by association? How could one be considered radical and progressive, yet also advocate a postmodern approach to studying the contemporary world? Does this not lead into the hands of the enemy, even if driven by good intentions?

I have spent much too much time and effort in the past to explain why this kind of guilt by association is absurdly oversimplified and misguided, rooted in a kind of mind-numbing essentialism. Yet it remains extraordinarily widespread in the academic world and popular media, even among some scholars who call themselves postmodernists. Much of this stereotypical view of postmodernism is rooted in the persistent power of binary logic, or what might be called the terrorism of the either/or. For the moment, however, let us just tentatively assume that a radical postmodernism can exist and perhaps even produce some new insights into urban life in an era of globalization. This raises still another question: what kind of radical or critical postmodernism do I choose to practise in writing the city?

Here my identity as a postmodern urbanist simultaneously narrows and widens, for I write about cities spatially. More specifically, I am an avowed spatialist, a determined advocate for the critical power of the spatial or geographical imagination. I see the city and urban life, today as well as over the entire 12,000 years of urban societal development, as generatively and causally spatial. To illustrate this comprehensive and assertive spatial perspective, I draw on the words of Henri Lefebvre, as I have often done before. Distinguishing himself from other philosophers and critical thinkers, as well as from others who write about cities, Lefebvre describes his lifework as revolving around space as both product and producer of social life.

> "Some chose other ways to thread through the complexities of the modern world, for example, through literature or the

> unconscious or language. I chose space . . . I dug deeply into the concept and tried to see all its implications." (Lefebvre, 1975, p. 218)

I too am not simply someone who uses a spatial perspective to write about cities, but I choose to put space first—before literature, or the unconscious, or discourse theory, or history, or historical materialism—as an encompassing viewpoint through which to make practical and theoretical sense of the complexities of the (post)modern world.

By choosing to write cities spatially, I am joined by an ever-widening circle of other scholars, for what I have described earlier as a growing interest in cities has necessarily built upon an even more pronounced and transdisciplinary "spatial turn". Never before have so many scholars from so many different fields of interest been so involved with interpreting what they study using a spatial perspective. But there are still very few who, like Lefebvre, put space first, that is, see all the complexities of human existence, especially cities, through assertively spatial lenses. Lacan, Derrida, Lyotard, Bourdieu, Baudrillard, Jameson, Harvey, Said, Bhabha, Sennett, Giddens, Sassen, Spivak, Appadurai, Wallerstein are all creative spatial thinkers, but none chooses space as their primary interpretive viewpoint.

I have spent the past 20 years trying to convince critical thinkers of every stripe to recognize the extraordinary power and insight of foregrounding space as a primary mode for interpreting the world. This has not been an easy task. Not only is spatial thinking unfamiliar to most scholars, an assertive and powerful historical perspective is still so solidly established among critical thinkers that it afforded little room for a perspective claiming equal interpretive insight. Given the continuing influence of binary logic and its insistence on the either/or, it was also difficult to avoid being seen as a spatial determinist, or as some Marxists called me, a spatial fetishist, trying to push aside all other modes of interpretation to establish the primacy of the spatial. Forced into an either/or choice, there was little chance that an emphasis on the spatiality of human life could compete with perspectives emphasizing life's historical and social dimensions, its historicality and sociality.

Cutting a long story short, the turn of the 20th century has seen the beginnings of a significant sea change in critical social thought, marked by a still incomplete rebalancing of the critical perspectives based on spatiality, historicality and sociality, or what in more dynamic terms can be described as the production of space, the making of history and the constitution of society, to use the key phrases of Lefebvre, Marx and Giddens (Soja, 1996). And as this "spatial turn" spreads to more and more fields of study, it is carrying with it a resurgence of interest in cities.

In an effort to summarize and move on in our exploration of how writing the city can contribute to an understanding of urban life in an era of globalization, I look back to three observations by Henri Lefebvre on the city and of urbanism as a way of life that I have used to introduce chapter 1 of *Postmetropolis* (Soja, 2000; see also Kofman and Lebas, 1996), entitled significantly enough "Putting Cities First". Behind each is a forceful demonstration of how a more comprehensive and generative spatial perspective is changing the way we write about cities.

> "The development of society is conceivable only in urban life, through the realization of urban society."

> "Until recently, theoretical thinking conceived the city as an entity, as an organism and a whole among others, and this in the best of cases when it was not being reduced to a partial phenomenon, to a secondary, elementary or accidental aspect, of evolution and history . . . a simple result [or outcome], a local effect reflecting purely and simply general history . . . [This view] did not contain theoretical knowledge of the city and did not lead to this knowledge; moreover [it] blocked the enquiry at a quite

> basic level . . . Only now are we beginning to grasp the *specificity* of the city."
>
> "The city is the outcome of a *synoecism*."

The first of these observations is the most comprehensive and the most demanding. It requires more than a tacit acceptance, a nod of agreement, for it calls for a radical shift in the historical and sociological imaginations that underpin the critical thinking found in all the social sciences and humanities. If human society, social relations, sociality itself can only be realized in urban life—in what one might call, building on Lefebvre's other observations, the spatial specificity and synoecism of the city—then surely writing the city spatially cannot remain simply a useful add-on, a flashy new interpretive approach, or a metaphorical gold mine. It must *take precedence* in writing the city, and, through the city, in making sense of globalization and other complexities of the contemporary world.

Putting cities first

Let me illustrate the potential of foregrounding a spatial perspective in writing the city by opening up some new meanings for an ancient Greek word that has remained almost entirely ignored by scholars for nearly 2000 years. The word is *synoikismos*, sometimes translated in English as synoecism, or as I prefer to spell and pronounce it, synekism. The root of this word is *oikos*, home or dwelling place, the same root that is found in economics (which started out simply as household management or home economics) and ecology, as well as *ecumene* and *ekistics*, a more recent term invented by the Greek urbanist Constantinos Doxiades for the study of all forms of human settlement. The suffix *mos* in synoikismos connotes the conditions arising from, while the prefix *syn* refers to being together. Synoikismos or synekism thus becomes definable as the conditions that derive from dwelling together in a particular home place or space.

Given its connotations of coming together to live interdependently and, I might add, efficiently and creatively, synoikismos is also used to refer to wedlock, the integral unity or "family" formed through marriage. The term survives in biology in several ways. According to the online *Dictionary of Difficult Words*, it can mean having male and female flowers in the same inflorescence, or an association of species to the benefit of at least one (but no harm to the others). Again, the connotation is a creative living together.

The most widely used application of the term, however, refers to the processes associated with the formation of the city-state or *polis*, another Greek word that virtually oozes with urban connotations. In this sense, synoikismos is the coming together or growing together—the wedding if you will—of proximate communities, neighbourhoods, villages, towns into a single urban political unit, an urban polity. The ancient Greek geohistorian Thucydides describes this process of societal consolidation and centralization in two ways, as a physical agglomeration of people and as a form of political unification, noting that these two forms of coming together do not always take place at the same time. Particularly important for Thucydides was the Great Synoikismos of the Athenian Polis, which took place around 900 BC, an event celebrated for two days every other year in the Hellenic calendar as Synoikia, commemorating the birth of the city-state and honouring the "city guardian".

Aristotle, however, provides the most elaborate theorization of synoikismos. He saw it as an active social and spatial process that involved political and cultural confederation around a distinctive territorial centre: a polis, or metropolis (literally "mother" city). This process carried with it the very essence of politics, a specifically urban politics involving the creation of a civil society, concepts of citizenship and democracy, family and identity, creativity and innovation, the foundations of city-based and city-generated civilization. Associated with this social and spatial

process are many other terms that help to distinguish between the urban dweller, or *polites*, a politically aware citizen, versus *idiotes*, the barbarian or rural resident, the source of Marx's often misunderstood political comment about the peasantry and the "idiocy of rural life". These extensions of synekism include such terms as police, policy, politeness, civility, urbanity. Writing the city for Aristotle thus begins with, and continues to develop from, this essential process of city-state formation.

In resurrecting and expanding upon this long-neglected concept, I enrich the Aristotelian meaning of synoikismos with an even more explicitly spatial interpretation, reflecting the remarkable resurgence of interest in critical spatial thinking that has been reaching into nearly every discipline over the past 10 years. In my more assertively spatial reformulation, synekism is no longer confined to the moment of city formation but is seen as a continuous and highly politicized process of urban growth and development, a dynamic process that provides a constantly evolving source of stimulating social synergy and is part of the very essence of urban life. Formulated in this way, synekism involves the creativity, innovation, territorial identity, political consciousness and societal development that arise from living together in dense and heterogeneous urban regions. It is in this sense that I define synekism as the *stimulus of urban agglomeration* and connect it directly to what can be described as the *spatial specificity of urbanism*—the real and imagined, material and symbolic, geographies or spatialities of urban life.

Some obvious questions come to mind. What exactly is meant by the stimulus of urban agglomeration? Given that we intuitively recognize that cities have always tended to be centres of innovation throughout human history, what is it in particular about spatial agglomeration or clustering that leads to new ideas and accelerates societal development? Just how significant is this specifically urban stimulus and synergy? Unfortunately, these are not easy questions to answer, for there is very little of a theoretical or interpretive nature written explicitly on the social and spatial dynamics of urban agglomeration. Indeed, it can be argued that Western social science and social theory has paid relatively little attention to the explanatory power that arises from the urbanization process, preferring to see cities as mere background or environment for social processes.

Perhaps the closest approximation to an explicit study of synekism is the literature on agglomeration economies, or as they are also called, external, locational or, most aptly, urbanization economies. This literature on agglomeration economies, especially as it has developed within the field of economic geography, has recently received renewed attention because of its usefulness in understanding the complex economic restructuring and globalization processes that have been reshaping the world over the past 30 years. I will return to this contemporary connection to urban life in an era of globalization later in my presentation. But first a quick look at the dynamics of agglomeration.

The basic notion of agglomeration economies builds on the savings in time and energy that derive from clustering things together rather than spreading them out. Clustering and nodality represent a fundamental and strategic human response to the friction of distance that affects all life on earth, even though the reasons for such behaviour often remain out of conscious awareness. We can all recognize how this saving of time and energy through propinquity operates in our individual daily lives, but agglomeration economies are also imbricated in larger social and historical processes in ways that have rarely been explored in detail.

Most pertinent to our current discussions, the savings in time and energy derived from agglomeration and the stimulating opportunities for creative endeavours that these savings provide are a vital part of the very nature of cities. Theoretically, human beings, families, households and all associated activities can be dispersed evenly or randomly over the landscape, with little or no clustering. But for

at least the past 12,000 years, human society has predominantly lived in nodal settlements or urban agglomerations of varying sizes, and this particular form of human settlement or built environment has always provided distinctive benefits—as well as costs, it should be added, for there are also important agglomeration diseconomies that periodically disrupt urban life. Just exactly how such savings in time and energy are actually translated into creativity and innovation is not well understood analytically, but again we can intuitively grasp the existence of some causal link between the two.

Rather than going further into the contingent linkages between agglomeration and innovation, however, let me turn the question around and approach it in a different way. Assuming for the moment that there exists a significant stimulus to creative innovation associated with cities and the specific geography of urbanism, why has there been so little written about synekism and related concepts in the social science literature, other than in the very minor branch of economics dealing with external economies? I speak specifically about the social sciences and social theory, liberal as well as Marxist, for I think it can be argued that the arts and literature have always been about synekism in one way or another, even if it is not explicitly acknowledged. I might also add, in honour of Dublin, the stimulating urban environment that provoked my discussion, that few have been better at helping us to understand synekism than James Joyce. But I digress.

Western social theory has not just ignored the causal or explanatory power of synekism, it has until very recently been notoriously anti-urban, in the sense of avoiding any specifically urban explanations of social phenomena and societal development. To be sure, it is widely (and almost unavoidably) acknowledged that things take place IN cities, but with a few prominent exceptions (the old Chicago School and the writings of Henri Lefebvre come immediately to mind), rarely have social theorists recognized that *cities in themselves have a causal impact on social life*, that the historical development of human societies does not just take place in cities but is also, in significant ways, generated FROM cities, and more specifically from the stimulus of urban agglomeration.

As Lefebvre asserted, the development of society is conceivable only in urban life, through the realization of urban society. Elsewhere he elaborates further, stating that all social relations remain abstract and unrealized until they are concretely expressed and materially and symbolically inscribed in lived space. Let us think about what these related assertions mean. As I read him, Lefebvre is saying that human society, indeed all forms of social relations and social life, originate, evolve, develop and change in the materially real and socially imagined context of cities. They do so through what he would call the social production of urban space, a continuous and contentious process that is filled with politics and ideology, creativity and destruction, and with the unpredictable interplay of space, knowledge and power—if you will allow me a little plug for Foucault's version of synekism.

For most social thinkers and theorists, without a significant and rigorous idea of the explanatory power of synekism or a clear and dynamic notion of the social production of urban space, such a statement rings either hollow or hyperbolic. Even followers of Lefebvre and Foucault pass it by with little more than a nod. How can fixed and dead urban geographies shape the dynamic development of social processes, social consciousness, social will? Isn't this just another form of environmental or geographical determinism, such as the one that eventually led to the decline of the Chicago School? This has been the prevailing view of both social scientists and scientific socialists, or Marxists, over the past century and a half, the very epitome of what I have described as both an anti-urban and an anti-spatial bias. But as I referred to earlier, something has been happening in the past 10 years that is leading to a transdisciplinary resurgence of interest in both cities and critical spatial thinking, an almost

simultaneous spatial and urban turn that is slowly leading to a major rethinking of canonical ideas in almost every field of endeavour, from archaeology and literary criticism to accounting and ethnography. With this increasing spatialization of all the human sciences, arguments about the explanatory power of synekism and the spatial specificity of urbanism have become more widely comprehensible and plausible.

To illustrate this turnabout in spatial thinking, let us take a new look at a book published in 1969 and written by that great urban iconoclast, Jane Jacobs. In *The Economy of Cities*, Jacobs presented a theorization of the city that resonates particularly well with the expanded notion of synekism. She defined the city as a settlement that consistently generates its economic growth from its own localized resources. This "spark of city economic life", as she called it, clearly revolves around the stimulus and social savings that arise from dwelling together in cities rather than in rural areas. Density and cultural heterogeneity are its primary triggers. Cities concentrate need, creating many challenges to social reproduction but at the same time providing greater incentives to address problems in new ways. Cities attract newcomers of all sorts, strangers, visitors and migrants, who often carry with them innovative ideas. With her characteristic terseness she concludes, "Without cities we would all be poor". In other words, we would still be hunters and gatherers.

In *The Economy of Cities*, Jacobs not only theorized about cities she forcefully applied her ideas to a major revisioning of the historical development of human societies. She did so by building on the work of the British archaeologist, James Mellaart, who had recently excavated what he called a Neolithic city in southern Anatolia at a place called *Çatal Hüyük* (alternatively, *Çatalhöyük*). Jacobs's argument about this Neolithic city—a complete oxymoron to nearly all archaeologists at the time—deserves some elaboration and, indeed, revival, for it, like so much innovative urban thinking in the 1960s and early 1970s, remained ignored and misunderstood for decades by other scholars oblivious to the explanatory power of synekism and the spatial specificity of urbanism.

Our look back begins with an 8500-year-old wall painting found *Çatal Hüyük*. The art history textbooks call it the first known landscape or "nature" painting, but far from being a depiction of nature what it depicts is a cityscape, a dense urban settlement nestled near an exploding red volcano, source of the volcanic glass obsidian that was a major resource for the hunting and gathering societies of the time. The texts would also say, with little attempt at explanation, that nothing quite like this panoramic and creatively perspectival cityscape painting would be found for another 7000 years. In its vivid portrayal of a revolutionary transformation of nature, a move from the raw to the cooked, so to speak, the wall painting symbolizes the first synekism. Recent archaeological excavations have supported the idea that here at *Çatal Hüyük* and elsewhere in the ring of highlands surrounding the Fertile Crescent there were established the world's first urban settlements or cities, predating by more than five millennia the rise of the city-states of Mesopotamia, the only Urban Revolution recognized by prehistorians and most archaeologists.

From present knowledge, *Çatal Hüyük* was the largest and most fully developed of these first cities, numbering at its peak as many as 12,000 inhabitants. In the first chapter of *The Economy of Cities*, in her version of what can be called putting cities first—an alternative title to my presentation today—Jacobs argued that the beginning of all societal development and especially the revolutionary transformation from hunting and gathering to agriculture and animal husbandry took place not only in, but because of, the creation of a distinctive human habitat, the city. Driving these developments in *Çatal Hüyük*, which also included the first known examples of metallurgy, weaving, crude pottery making, as well as that extraordinary self-conscious cityscape

painting and the very first hand-made mirror, both symbols of intentional self-reflection, was that self-generating developmental spark of urban economic life, the stimulus of urban agglomeration.

Not only was Jacobs turning conventional prehistorical wisdom on its head by stating that cities came before the so-called Agricultural Revolution, she extended her arguments about the explanatory power of urban agglomeration across history to the present. She asserted that every major innovation, every significant transformation in human society, came from the inherent synergies and creative time-saving efficiencies obtained through living in dense and focused urban settlements. It is worth repeating her wry comment, that without cities we would all be poor!

This may appear to some as merely recognizing that cities have always tended to be centres of innovation and creativity. But it is much more than this. It is a profound example of using urban spatiality to better understand the entire history of societal development and social change. It opens up these possibilities by identifying a specific dynamic force arising from the very nature—or essence—of cityness. When *The Economy of Cities* first appeared, its urban spatial assertiveness was either totally incomprehensible or else considered to be almost absurdly exaggerated. As with the work of Lefebvre and Foucault at about the same time, its deeper epistemological meaning would become clearer and more creatively challenging only in the 1990s, after the spatial turn created a wider and more receptive academic audience, comfortable with the assertion of a powerful and critical spatial perspective.

In the first three chapters of *Postmetropolis*, I build on these prescient scholars to reformulate the geohistory of cityspace around three distinct urban revolutions, each instigated (not entirely but significantly) by the innovative stimulus of urban agglomeration. The first began around 12,000 years ago, as we have already mentioned, and led to the first great transformation of human society, the Agricultural Revolution. In this fundamentally urban revolution, contrary to what most scholars have assumed, it was not the creation of a social surplus that made cities possible. It was the formation of cities that made possible the creation of a social surplus.

What has conventionally been considered the first round of city-formation, the rise of the city-states in the alluvial plains of the Tigris and Euphrates, can now be interpreted as a second Urban Revolution. Expressed most clearly in such places as Ur and Babylon, and later, after the Great *Synoikismos*, in classical Athens, it was an essentially political transformation leading to the formation of the first centralized states and empires, as well as the first prominent social class divisions, the accumulation of private property, and the development of slavery, bureaucracy, a military class and, in a marked turnaround from the first cities, the empowerment of patriarchy.

Five thousand years later, a third Urban Revolution began with the rise of what can be described as necessarily urban industrial capitalism, based in the creation of the world's first societies in which the majority of the population lived in sizeable cities. Industrialization brought with it the rapid growth of two, again distinctively urban-based, population groups, the urban proletariat and the urban bourgeoisie, antecedent descriptions that have largely disappeared in the vocabulary of anti-urban social science and scientific socialism. For the past two centuries or so, persistently urban industrial capitalism has gone through many rounds of crisis generated restructuring, each in part a response to a particular form of synekism that arose with the unprecedented concentration of the working class in the city core.

As Engels was the first to notice and write about, the tight agglomeration of workers in such cities as Manchester stimulated both class consciousness and class struggle, initiating significant reorganizations of urban spatiality to respond to urban unrest and to find new paths to national economic recovery and

expansion, among which, from the very beginning, were strategies of increasing globalization, the expansion of city activities and national capitalisms to the global scale. Skipping over a great deal of urban geohistory, we find ourselves today at the tail-end of the most recent, and one of the most transformative, of these restructuring and globalization periods. Let us look briefly at this most recent phase and the New Economies of flexible and globalized capitalism that have developed in its wake.

It is important to note, especially for those who persist in calling the present era post-industrial, that our understanding of these New Economies of flexible, global and, I might add, still urban and industrial capitalism, has been significantly advanced by a group of scholars, mainly geographers and regional planners, who have shaped a new field that can be broadly described as the critical study of cities and regions. This growing body of theoretical, empirical and applied research has not only put to the foreground a critical spatial perspective, it has also hinged upon a re-thinking of the powerful forces arising from synekism, the stimulus of urban and regional agglomeration. In such concepts as innovative milieux, regional innovation systems, industrial districts, economic clusters, regional worlds of production and the untraded interdependencies that arise from local conventions, once mechanical and severely limited theories of location and agglomeration have been opened up to much richer social and cultural as well as geopolitical and economic approaches. And it is perhaps no surprise to find that significant inspiration for many of the scholars working in this area can be traced back to Jane Jacobs's *The Economy of Cities* and its creative discussion of the self-generating and developmental spark of city economic life.

Thanks to the work of scholars such as David Harvey, the very origins of these economic restructuring and globalization processes have been rooted in the spatial specificities of urbanism. It was the social unrest exploding in the major cities of the world in the 1960s that announced the imminent end of the post-war boom in the advanced industrial countries, and the initiation of a period of experimental restructuring of national, regional and urban economies. As Harvey noted, these were at least in part urban spatial crises and they would engender a search for what he would so insightfully call a specifically spatial fix. This search for a spatial fix reflected a built-in need for capital, especially in times of crisis, to reorganize its specific geography and built environment in an effort to restore rising profits and economic expansion. It is just such a search for a radical reorganization of urban and regional space that drives the globalization process, especially with regard to industrial capital and financial investments. It is also a primary source for the development of what I have termed the postmetropolis and the postmetropolitan transition, processes that are still ongoing today all over the world

Whether seen through the concept of a spatial fix or not, the restructuring of the mass production-, mass consumption- and welfare state-based national capitalisms that led the post-war boom have come to be seen, more than in any similar period in the past, as a fundamentally spatial process. And the same was true for the emergence of the present-day New Economies of flexible and post-Fordist production; the expanded globalization of trade, investment, migration and culture; the rise of information-centred network societies, and the growing power of giant city-regions such as London, Tokyo and New York.

In contrast to the main emphases of the growing globalization literature and its close ties to notions of post-industrialism, the new geopolitical economists see the New Economy as still fundamentally industrial, arising from fundamental changes in the persistent interplay of urbanization and industrialization. The first impact

of economic restructuring was the rapid drying up of the old Fordist industrial nodes and regions as innovative milieu, triggering perhaps the most pronounced de-industrialization ever experienced in the advanced industrial countries. It was this decline that made many believe in the rise of post-industrial society, but so much more would follow to indicate otherwise.

De-industrialization came to be coupled with a recuperative re-industrialization of remarkable proportions, much of it concentrated in new industrial spaces, districts or clusters. These were often greenfield sites, not industrialized before, and ranged in size from whole countries—the so-called NICs or Newly Industrialized Countries (to which has recently been added the Irish Tiger)—to specialized industrial complexes and technopoles typically located in the once suburban rings of major metropolitan regions all over the world. What was happening here was a breakdown in Fordist agglomeration economies and synekism, and the creation of new and more flexibly specialized and information technology-stimulated innovative milieux. In some cases, these regenerative and synekistic clusters were located in revived old city centres (as with finance and the culture industries in London and New York). But most often, they developed as new centres in the urban periphery. In this they contributed significantly to a dramatic spatial re-organization of the modern metropolis arising in part from the urbanization of suburbia and the creation of much more polycentric city regions, expanding constellations of local synekisms.

The new urban form increasingly blurred the simple dualism that dominated the modern metropolis—the separation between a dense, heterogeneous and highly synekistic central city and the sleepy, homogeneous world of the suburbs. In its place, there has been developing a more multi-centred, networked, globalized and information-based City-Region, generating an explosion of new terms trying to describe its primary features: outer city, edge city, postsuburbia, technoburbs, silicon landscapes, technopoles, metroplex, exopolis. As the modern metropolis has been turning itself inside out in this urbanization of suburbia, there has also been in many cases a movement back into the central city, especially through the mass migration of people from what we used to call the Third World. This paradoxical peripheralization of the core has created the most culturally heterogeneous cities in history and, at the same time, contributed to intensified social polarization and inequalities of wealth and power based on class, race, ethnicity and immigrant status. Indeed, the increasing wealth gap between rich and poor has been perhaps the most insidious hallmark of this current period of urban restructuring.

Emerging from these changes, not surprisingly, has been a major restructuring of synekism. The notion that the stimulus of urban agglomeration would intensify simply with the growing size and density of a single city reached its limit with Fordism and the effects of the information and communications revolution. However, despite the predictions of some that agglomerations would lose their significant efficiencies in the new Information Era, with synekism being tossed on the heap with the end of geography and the death of the friction of distance, the stimulus of urban agglomeration persists but in a different form, organized as multiple nodes in regional networks. Large city-regions containing more than a million inhabitants have today become the major driving forces of the global economy. They have not only become the centres of innovation for capital, they are also becoming synekistic settings for the development of innovative practices for labour, especially in the massive concentrations of what today are called, in the USA, the immigrant working poor and the welfare-dependent underclass.

But here I am beginning to spin out into a much larger story, about the rise of new

urban spatial movements, about efforts to achieve greater spatial justice and regional democracy in the face of rising inequalities, and about the future of the postmetropolitan world. But I cannot follow up on these stories here. What I have tried to do in this essay is to convince those not familiar with the spatial turn and its more recent urban twist of the potential new insights they can generate. At the same time, I have tried to encourage those who believe they are already participating in the new geography, especially in writing the city, to expand the scope of their already fertile geographical imaginations by giving more attention to the explanatory power of urban spatiality and synekism. There may be no more appropriate and urgent moment than the present to develop such a critical urban and spatial consciousness, for more than ever before we are all urbanists now.

Note

1 Recomposed version of a Keynote Address given at an international conference on "Writing the City: Urban Life in the Era of Globalisation", 24–27 August 2001, Dublin Business School, School of Arts (LSB College), Dublin.

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