

RE-ASSEMBLING THE URBAN

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Abstract: In this essay, I engage the L.A.–Chicago debate by repositioning both area-specific constraints and visual orders as intermediary variables. This leads the discussion to two considerations that in turn reposition the meaning of the familiar differences attributed to Los Angeles and Chicago. First, a focus on the particular implications of translocal processes for an area allows us to establish that agglomeration and dispersal might both be part of a given firm's or sector's chain of operations and that they might be distributed across very different types of geographic areas. The main implication for a comparison of the L.A. and Chicago models is that it makes problematic the notion that geographic dispersal à la L.A. is the new spatial form corresponding to today's new economy, and agglomeration à la Chicago belongs to an earlier modernity. The second focus is on the limits of homogenization and convergence in urban landscapes as explanations in comparative studies. I recode these homogenized landscapes—the hyperspace of global business—as an infrastructure: they are necessary but indeterminate in that they can be used for different purposes. This shifts the emphasis to what *inhabits* that built environment. A key underlying economic dynamic I find in my research is that the global economy thrives on the specialized differences of countries, regions, and cities. But it does need homogenized standards (e.g., of production, of financial reporting, of accounting, and the like), and, I add, it also needs standardized built environments. [Key words: chain of operations, spatial distributions, visual orders, structural constraints.]

Periods of rapid transition have heuristic potentials. The velocity of change itself makes legible novel patterns. When the object of study is cities or, more generally, urban regions, legibility is even more pronounced insofar as the material reality of buildings, transport systems, and other components of spatial organization are on the surface, so to speak. Further, when rapid transformation happens simultaneously in several cities or urban regions with at least some comparable conditions, it also makes visible the diversity of spatial outcomes that may result from similar novel dynamics. That variability of spatial forms, given similar underlying dynamics, makes legible the fact of diverse constraints shaping the spatialization of such dynamics across different cities and urban regions. This essay examines the analytic implications of the variable ways in which a given underlying dynamic becomes legible as spatial form. But rather than comparing (putative) wholes, such as those represented by the Los Angeles (hereafter L.A.) model or the Chicago model, I am interested in disassembling these types of wholes into various components. Such a disassembling carries analytic consequences. This is more promising than a straight comparison of these two models if the aim is to understand how

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the urban is getting reassembled today. (See *City and Community*, 2002, for an introduction to the L.A.–Chicago debate.)

Focusing on the distinction between spatial form and underlying dynamic opens up the analysis to the intermediate variables through which they are articulated and contests the notion that spatial form is sufficient to understand the underlying dynamics. That is to say, diverse spatial outcomes may result from area-specific constraints (an intermediate variable) on the scaling and spatializing of the *same* particular dynamic rather than from some new intrinsic, postmodern urban form. Path-dependence eventually sets in, further confining the options for future spatial outcomes and potentially raising the divergence between two urbanized areas as a function of path-dependence rather than the underlying dynamics. Once a distinct spatial form is produced, even though conceivably stemming from a similar underlying dynamic, it will have its own effects on outcomes. This is perhaps best exemplified by the contrasting logics for real estate profitability evident in the original real estate development of Chicago and L.A.

An emphasis on intermediate variables questions the easy opposition of Chicago versus L.A. as models of urbanism representing, respectively, the old and the new economy, and more generally the old and the future phase in the evolution of urban form. One critical but easily overlooked variable when comparing formats such as the L.A. and Chicago models is the fact that complex translocal economic processes comprise diverse geographic moments, notably agglomeration and dispersal. We need to know where a particular area fits in such multi-sited processes. Just describing the spatial organization of an area does not allow us to get at such deeper economic dynamics. Areas with complex spatial organizations, such as those represented by the L.A. and the Chicago model, are likely to contain both sites of agglomeration and dispersal, including possibly the sites for a given firm or sector present in both areas. And they may contain predominantly one of those sites (for instance, dispersal in the L.A. region and agglomeration in Chicago), again including possibly the same firm or sector.

These types of analytic distinctions frame my examination of the L.A. and Chicago models. I organize my discussion in terms of the L.A. model's core proposition that it reflects the urban form of today's new economy (and more), whereas the Chicago model reflects that of an older economy. Given space limitations, I cannot do a parallel critique of the foundational propositions in the Chicago model, but I have done that elsewhere (Sassen, 2000). Further, rather than dealing with E. W. Burgess's concentric circles model (Park et al., 1925), I will confine the discussion to the centrality of agglomeration as an organizing dynamic in the Chicago model. Finally, in a tradeoff between detail and space, I will not be able to deal with the cultural and social issues raised respectively by the L.A. and the Chicago model, though they are important to both.

The first section focuses on the analytic implications of recognizing the presence of translocal processes in a city or urban region, and hence the need to understand which moment of that process corresponds to the area under examination—for instance, the moment of agglomeration or that of dispersal. Here we can think of spatial concentration and spatial dispersal as two extreme forms, with a whole range of intermediate forms. The second section examines the limits of homogenization and convergence of urban landscapes as indicators of the similarities and differences of the two areas under investigation. Similar-looking built environments may contain very different types of operations; alternatively, very different built environments may contain similar operations.

WHEN TRANSLOCAL PROCESSES SHAPE URBAN FORM

Translocal chains of operations are increasingly common for many firms and for entire economic sectors. Establishing which moment of that chain is located in a given area becomes important in the specification of that area. One set of familiar categories through which to establish this is agglomeration versus dispersal of a firm's operations, a distinction well attuned to the variables proponents of the L.A. model use in characterizing respectively the Chicago and L.A. models. Translocal processes are especially part of globalized firms and economic sectors, though I have found that they are also evident in firms that operate in national contexts. Since the L.A. model posits a new urban form arising out of novel dynamics, a focus on globalized firms and sectors is one way of getting at the question of novel dynamics and spatial form. We can think of global firms as an extreme case, a sort of natural experiment for exploring urban form and new economic dynamics.

The evidence shows that globalized firms and sectors contain both agglomeration and dispersal moments in their spatial organization. Dispersal might be at a regional, national and global level, and agglomerations might vary sharply in content as well as in the specifics of the corresponding spatial form—for instance, Chicago's financial center and L.A.'s Hollywood or Northern California's Silicon Valley. A focus on the presence of such translocal chains of operations helps us situate the specifics of a city, a metropolis, or an L.A.-type region in a far broader systemic condition, one that might include both points of sharp agglomeration and of sharp dispersal.

In my own research I found that the most globalized and innovative firms were characterized by the fact that agglomeration is itself a function of dispersal. That is to say, the more globalized and thus geographically dispersed a firm's operations, the more likely the presence of agglomeration economies in particular moments (the production of top-level headquarter functions) of that firm's chain of operations.² It became one of my core theses in specifying the global city model. For the purposes of this essay, it underlines the fact of a single dynamic with diverse spatializations (i.e., both agglomeration and dispersal). This is critical given the proposition in the L.A. model that metropolitan or regional spatial dispersal is the new, postmodern urban form that captures novel economic (and other) dynamics; in contrast Chicago-style agglomeration is then represented as belonging to an older economic phase—the modern city.

One way of specifying some of this empirically is to establish whether agglomeration economies, particularly as a function of the geographic dispersal of the operations of a firm or sector, matter for understanding the spatial organization of the L.A. region. That is to say, at least some of the spatial dispersal evident in the L.A. region may well be linked to points of agglomeration either in the same or another region—possibly including Chicago (!). I would add that we need the equivalent type of analysis for Chicago, both the city and the larger metro region, because the Chicago model is predicated on an

²And, indeed, certain very contemporary forms of dispersal are a function of particular capacities developed in settings marked by high agglomeration economies (exemplified by global cities). This spatial lens on a site is to be distinguished from the more common lens of a firm's or a market's perspective on its global spatial organization (e.g., Ernst, 2005).

older notion of agglomeration, one shaped by the weight of core inputs and by transport costs. The L.A. model according to Dear (2002) posits that agglomeration economies have ceased to be a locational determinant in the new economy and hence a marker of urban form (see also Dear and Flusty, 1998). However, the work on L.A. by Scott (Scott and Soja, 1996; Scott, 2001), Storper (1997), Christopherson (2005), Soja (2000), and others presents analyses that diverge to variable degrees from that of Dear.

To organize the argument one might posit as a hypothesis—possibly as a counterfactual—that the underlying new economic dynamic is the same in significant and indeed in growing segments of each region even as spatial form diverges. This would then engage the thesis that the L.A. model represents the spatializing of a new dynamic that makes itself legible in the Los Angeles landscape, and thus that the geographic dispersal at the heart of the L.A. model captures a whole new economic phase that is reshaping urban form. I counterpose the hypothesis that the more an urban region is being shaped by the new economic dynamics, the more spatial organization will involve agglomeration economies precisely as a function of geographic dispersal of economic activities under conditions of systemic integration—and it will do so whether the scale is regional, national, or global.

Although this is a type of agglomeration economy I found in my research on global cities, it can also be applied to national and regional scales, including megaregions (Goldfeld, 2007). Let me elaborate briefly on the hypothesis, alluded to earlier, that I derived from this finding, namely, that the greater the capabilities for geographic dispersal a firm can evince, the higher the agglomeration economies it is subject to in some of its components (Sassen, 2001; 2006a).³ It is the most specialized functions pertaining to the most globalized (i.e., geographically dispersed) firms that are subject to the highest agglomeration economies at specific sites of their space of operations. The complexity of the functions that need to be produced, the uncertainty of the markets such firms are involved in, and the growing importance of speed in all these transactions, is a mix of conditions that constitutes a new logic for agglomeration. It is not the logic posited in older models, in which weight and distance were seen to shape agglomeration outcomes. The mix of firms, talents, and expertise in a broad range of specialized fields makes a certain type of dense environment function as a strategic knowledge economy, wherein the whole is more than the sum of (even its finest) parts. I call this an *urban* knowledge economy, urban because it is more than the sum of the knowledge represented by the professional firms and professional experts. The city adds another dimension that can be thought of as the outcome of complexity—complexity of interactions among multiple components. Having access to this urban knowledge economy is a crucial asset for highly globalized sectors.

In my current research I have added yet another variable, *organizational complexity*, to explain the importance of such agglomerations for the most advanced sectors. It is the fact that organizational complexity allows firms to maximize the benefits they can derive from the new digital technologies, thereby further underlining the importance of agglomeration to the new economy (2005, 2006a). Further, the capabilities for global

³The preface to this second edition contains a brief explanation of the nine hypotheses that specify the global city model.

operation, coordination, and control contained in the new information technologies and in the power of transnational corporations need to be produced, serviced, “debugged” through specialized cultural work, and, ultimately, also designed and invented. By focusing on the production of these capabilities we add a neglected dimension to the familiar issue of the capacity of the new technologies to neutralize distance and place and to enable dispersal of just about all functions, as made emblematic in the L.A. model.

A second key dynamic that articulates dispersal and agglomeration is that the more headquarters actually buy some of their corporate functions from the specialized services sector rather than producing them in house, the greater their locational options become. Among these options is moving out of global cities and, more generically, out of agglomerations. This is an option precisely because of the existence of a networked specialized producer services sector (subject to agglomeration economies) that can increasingly handle some of the most complex global operations of firms and markets. Thus the headquarters that moves to a low-density, geographically dispersed area can easily be misinterpreted as not being subject to agglomeration economies when in fact it is, but indirectly—through the outsourcing of some of its most complex, highest-order headquarters functions to the specialized service sector in one or another global city.

A third key dynamic is that the more major corporate clients buy components of their top-level headquarters functions from the specialized corporate services sector, the higher the sensitivity to agglomeration economies of this sector. This sector needs to be a state-of-the-art, networked knowledge economy, capable of producing a global service and of absorbing the growing uncertainty and risks facing their corporate clients as these go global. It is precisely this specialized capability to handle the global operations of firms and markets, today increasingly embedded in the state-of-the-art service sector, that distinguishes the global city production function in my analysis. It is not the number *per se* of corporate headquarters of the biggest firms in the world, as is often suggested. Silicon Valley exhibits parallels to this. These are intense agglomerations that are very much part of the new economic phase, particularly its most advanced sectors. This contests the key proposition of the L.A. model on urban form and the new economy. But it does not contest the actual facts since the L.A. region contains several notable specialized agglomerations.

Interpreting what is novel about the Los Angeles region would then entail analytic rescalings that allow us to capture the possibility that some of L.A.’s spatially dispersed geography is actually articulated with sites evincing agglomeration economies, sites that might be within the L.A. region and/or beyond. I should add that in my reading, many of the density points in the L.A. region do not represent this type of agglomeration economies. For instance, the corporate office district in Orange County is more akin, though vaster, to an office park in metropolitan Chicago or New York. These evince *urbanization* economies—the advantages of sharing critical infrastructures and routine services as well as particular types of labor markets. But beyond that these firms do not need each other much, signaling few if any agglomeration economies. We might say the same thing about much of the residential and commercial real estate development sector, one that has historically thrived on dispersal, with urbanization economies perhaps one of the few disincentives to dispersal. In contrast, Hollywood, the L.A.–Long Beach Harbor economy, or Northern California’s Silicon Valley represent the new types of networked spatial forms

that bring high-level agglomeration economies to firms as a function of the added management complexities associated with the dispersal of a broad range of their operations.⁴

The available evidence, and there is plenty of it, indicates that key factors shaping the spatial organization of leading firms are operative in both the L.A. region and in older urban areas such as Chicago and New York. But it all looks so different. Upon closer examination we might also say that it is perhaps to some extent a question of coding. What is coded as multipolarity in the L.A. region gets coded in Chicago and New York as “relocation to the outer metropolitan area or beyond.” At the same time, dense concentrations of the most innovative and globalized sectors subject to agglomeration economies are present in L.A. as well as in Chicago and New York, but their contents are quite different. Diverse economic histories, path dependencies, and contents hamper the legibility of possible similarities in underlying dynamics (e.g., see Conzen, 2006, on historical trajectories of scaling in Chicago). Rescaling the Chicago area to incorporate the entire metropolis, and the Los Angeles region to include subregional micro-agglomerations, gets us only so far in analytically neutralizing the diverse histories and contents of each region. But it is essential work for specifying whether or not the new dynamics reshaping the urban condition necessarily spatialize according to the L.A. model—dispersal and multipolarity. Moving from the scale of the city to that of an urbanized region alters the analytics.

UNDERLYING DYNAMICS AND SPATIAL FORM

Comparative analyses rely on similarities and differences to make their point. How these are specified, then, is critical. When it comes to the urban, the visual order is easily one such specification. Contemporary urbanization is often seen as marked by a homogenizing of the urban landscape due to commercialization; this is especially so in the case of global cities and global regions due to the intensity and rapidity of urban reconstruction in such areas. The L.A. model of urbanization as specified by Dear has a far more explicit engagement with the visual order than the Chicago model, but also in the latter there is an implied visual order. Further, in the case of global city analyses, the velocity of changes in the urban landscape makes that visual order far more explicit even when not quite as dominant as in Dear’s L.A. model.

My key argument here is that the common notion of the homogenizing of the urban economic landscape misses a critical point. It misses, or obscures, the fact of the diversity of economic trajectories through which cities and regions become globalized, even when the final visual outcomes may look similar. Out of this surface analysis based on homogenized landscapes, comes a second possibly spurious inference, that similar visual landscapes are a function of convergence. Both propositions—that similar visual landscapes are indicators of similar economic dynamics and of convergence—may indeed capture various situations. But key conditions are not captured, and, in fact, are rendered invisible by such notions. Hence we cannot assume that such inferences from the visual order always hold. This then also problematizes the proposition that the L.A. model represents

⁴I should underline that there are also differences between New York and Chicago. The latter’s articulation with the global economy is still more mediated through manufacturing in the larger region. New York’s articulation with the global economy is largely through the export of specialized services and finance.

the new urban spatial form and, more specifically, visual order arising out of what are today's new dynamics, including prominently economic dynamics.

What led me to question the prevailing homogenization and convergence theses was the research comparing Chicago and New York. It is common to see Chicago as a late-comer to global city status because of its agro-industrial past. Why did it happen so late—almost 15 years later than in New York and London? It is easy to assume that Chicago had to overcome its agro-industrial past, which put it at a disadvantage compared to old trading and financial centers such as New York and London.

But I found that Chicago's past was not a disadvantage. It was one key source of its competitive advantage. The knowledge economy that developed to handle the needs of its agro-industrial regional economy gave Chicago a key component of its current specialized advantage in the global economy.⁵ While this is most visible and familiar in the fact of its preeminence as a futures market built on pork bellies, it also underlies other highly specialized components of its global city functions. The complexity, scale, and international character of its agro-industrial complex required highly specialized financial, accounting, and legal expertise, quite different from the expertise required to handle the sectors New York specialized in—service exports, finance on trade, and finance on finance. (For some initial elements see Greene et al., 2006; Madigan, 2004). Other sectors are, clearly, also critical to the advanced service economy of today's Chicago (Clark, 2003, 2006; Lloyd, 2005; Greene, 2006), which have developed as a result of this particular core knowledge economy (e.g., the expansion of professional firms and households, high-end components of the hotel and restaurant sector, and of the cultural sector).

The specialized economic histories of major cities and urban regions matter in today's global economy because there is a globally networked division of functions. This fact is easily obscured by the common emphasis on inter-city competition and by the standardization (no matter how good the architecture) of built environments. Because financial, legal, and accounting experts in Chicago had to address in good part the needs of the agro-industrial complex, the city today has a specialized advantage in producing certain types of financial, legal, and accounting instruments. But for this specialized advantage to materialize entails repositioning that past knowledge in a different set of economic circuits. It entails, then, disembedding that expertise from an agro-industrial economy and re-embedding it in a "knowledge" economy—that is to say, an economy where expertise can increasingly be commodified, function as a key input, and, thereby constitute a new type of intermediate economy (Sassen, 2001; Thrift, 2005). Having a past as a major agro-industrial complex makes that switch more difficult than a past as a trading and financial center. This, then, also partly explains Chicago's "lateness" in bringing about that switch. But that switch is not simply a matter of overcoming that past. It

⁵This brings to the fore the specialized division of functions in the global economy, one partly constituted and implemented through a proliferation of specialized cross-border city-networks. The critical mass of these networks has expanded to include about 40 major and minor global cities. There are many networks and different types of functions/positions for cities. Detecting this has required developing new methodologies (see the illuminating debate on questions of method between Taylor and Alderson/Beckfield, forthcoming in the *American Journal of Sociology*). The global network of cities is much more than just a set of cross-border flows connecting cities. It is a complex, highly specialized organizational infrastructure for the management and servicing of the leading economic sectors. GaWC (2006) provides data about multiple and diverse networks.

requires a new organizing logic that can bring new type of valence to the capabilities developed in an earlier era (Sassen, 2006b).⁶ It took making to execute the switch.

Recovering this specialized advantage linked to a city's specific economic history also brings to the fore a key argument made by Peter Taylor (2004; Taylor et al., 2004) about cities that derive their significance from their location in global networks rather than only position in a hierarchy. To recover this particular specialized advantage, one akin to a positional good, we need empirical research on the intersections of regional locations and functional activities (Taylor, 2004; Taylor et al., 2004). It also points to the fact that "the" global network comprises multiple, often specialized networks. I have found this to be the case with financial markets: once we disaggregate the global capital market into its multiple specialized financial markets, it becomes clear that there are several specific networks of cities in play. A city like Chicago dominates some of these financial circuits but is a fairly minor player in others. This opens up a whole research agenda that takes us beyond city rankings. The aim is to recover the more complex city networks that are a strategic infrastructure for the global operations of markets and firms, and on which a variety of other types of actors and networks (such as global civil society actors, alternative cultural circuits, transnational migration networks) can build, even as these also build their own distinct city networks (Sassen, 2006b).⁷

Through its particular type of past, Chicago illuminates aspects of global city formation that are far less legible in cities such as New York and London, which did have very large manufacturing components but were nonetheless dominated by predominantly trading and banking economies. Chicago's history points to the mistake of assuming that the characteristics of global cities correspond to those of such old trading and banking centers. A second issue raised by the Chicago case is that while there are a number of global cities today with heavy manufacturing origins, many once important manufacturing cities have not made the switch into a knowledge economy based on that older industrial past. Along with Chicago, Sao Paulo and Shanghai rank among today's major global cities with particularly strong histories in heavy manufacturing. But most once-important manufacturing cities, notably Detroit and the English manufacturing cities, have not undergone the type of switch we see in Chicago, Sao Paulo, and Shanghai. This points to the importance of thresholds in the scale and diversity of a city's manufacturing past to secure the components of knowledge production I identify in Chicago's case—specialized servicing capabilities that could be dislodged from the organizational logic of heavy manufacturing and re-lodged in the organizational logic of today's so-called knowledge economy.

The economic trajectory and switching illustrated by the case of Chicago contests the thesis of homogenization on two levels. One concerns what it takes to become part of

⁶In Sassen (2006b), I develop this notion in order to understand the formation of today's global economy as well as today's partial denationalizing of state capacities.

⁷Methodologically, this underlines the difference between studying a set of cities from a classical comparative approach and from a global approach. The issue of comparability in the latter is not standardizing in order to compare. It is, rather, tracking a given system or dynamic (e.g., a particular type of financial market) and its distinct incarnations (e.g., operations, institutional setting, accommodation with national laws and regulations) in different countries. Though there is some overlap with comparative analyses, a global approach entails different analytic categories, research techniques, and interpretation standards from those of classical comparative methods.

leading sectors. It is not simply a question of dropping that past and converge/homogenize on the headquarters–services–cultural sector axis. Critical is executing the switch described earlier—whatever might be the specifics of an area’s past. The other concerns the meaning of homogenized landscapes. It becomes critical to establish the particular specialized sectors that might inhabit that homogenized landscape. This qualifies the convergence thesis. There is a kind of convergence at an abstract systemic level, but at the concrete, material interface of the urban, the actual content of the specialized services that inhabit that built environment can vary sharply.

From here, then, my proposition that critical components of the homogenized/convergent urban landscape frequently presented as today’s quintessential urban visual order are actually more akin to an infrastructure *for* the advanced sectors. The critical question becomes what inhabits that “infrastructure.” Looking similar does not necessarily entail similar contents, circuits, and moments of a process. This illustrates the thesis that different dynamics can run through similar institutional and spatial forms, and vice versa.⁸ The substantive character of convergence in the global city model is not the visual landscape *per se* but its function as an infrastructure; and, above all, it is the development and partial importation of a set of specialized functions and the direct as well as indirect effects this may have on the larger city, including the visual landscape that functions as a necessary infrastructure—state-of-the-art office districts, commercial and housing areas, airports, and so on. This is yet another indicator of the growing distance between people and technical domains that is one of the features of some of the most developed economic sectors, even when these are the most demanding of talent. One does not preclude the other (Sassen, 2006b).

An important background structural trend evident in all reasonably working economies is the growing service intensity in the organization of all economic sectors, including rather standardized and often nonglobalized sectors. Whether in mining and agriculture, manufacturing, or service industries such as transport and health, more firms are buying more producer services. Some of this translates into a growing demand for producer services in global cities, but much of it translates into a demand for such services from regional centers, albeit often less complex and advanced versions of those services. The growth in the demand for producer services is then, in my analysis, a structural feature of advanced market economies. What globalization brings to this trend is a sharp increase in the demand for complexity and diversity of professional knowledge.⁹

⁸In Sassen (2006b) I posit a parallel argument for the liberal state as it is subjected to the forces of economic and political globalization. The outcome does not necessarily mean that these states lose their distinctiveness, but rather that they implement the necessary governance structures to accommodate global projects and that they do so through the specifics of their state organization.

⁹In developing the global city model, I posited that a critical indicator is the presence of a networked, specialized producer services complex capable of handling the global operations of firms and markets, whether national or foreign. Given measurement difficulties, a proxy for this networked sector is the incidence and mix of producer services in a city. This is frequently reduced to the share of producer services employment as the indicator of global city status. This is fine, though it needs empirical specification as to the quality and mix of the producer services industries. More problematic is to interpret a small share, or a declining share, or a falling growth rate, or a lower growth rate than in nonglobal cities, as an indicator of global city status decline or as signaling that the city in question is not a global city. Similarly problematic is a variant on this indicator based on the share a city has of national employment in producer services and whether it has grown or fallen; the notion here is that if a city such as New York or London loses share of national employment in producer services, it loses power.

It is this qualitative difference that leads to the heightened utility of spatial agglomeration in global cities compared to other types of urban areas. But the basic structural trend is present in both types of areas. It is then a mistake to assume, *ipso facto*, that the higher growth rates of producer services in urban areas other than global cities reflects decline and/or the departure of producer services from global cities. It is actually in good part the result of growth of these services throughout the national economy. The lower growth rates evident in global cities compared with other cities should not necessarily be interpreted as losses for the former, but rather as the latter entering this new structural phase of market economies.¹⁰ Looking at matters this way recodes some common interpretations of growth and decline.

The growth of this intermediate economy across diverse urban areas amounts to a kind of structural convergence that explains emergent spatial patterns even when the sectors thus serviced are radically different. A mining firm, a transport firm, and a software firm all need to buy legal and accounting services. To some extent these services may be produced in the same city and in similar built environments, even though they are feeding very different economic sectors of the larger economy.

What underlies this locational and spatial outcome is structural convergence: regardless of economic sector and geographic location, firms are buying more of these services. This convergence does filter through spatial organization and the visual order. It does account for key patterns evident in cities small and large, notably the growth of a new type of professional class of young urbanites and the associated high-income gentrification and growth of the cultural sector. What is problematic is the proposition that the L.A. model represents the spatial organization of the new economic phase. Very old economy sectors such as transport and mining are also feeding the growth of the intermediate economy. A descriptive representation of spatial organization (one which not all L.A. schoolers would accept, most notably Soja, [2000]) can do without these deeper structural facts—but the proposition that this is the spatial organization of the new economic phase cannot. Nor can such a proposition overlook the consequences of the multiplication of translocal processes and how this affects the meaning of local spatial form, as discussed in the first section of this essay.

CONCLUSION: REASSEMBLING URBAN FRAGMENTS INTO NOVEL FORMATS

Subjecting the Chicago and L.A. models to analytic disassembling unsettles key propositions of each model. Given space constraints, in this essay I used one of the major propositions of the L.A. model to organize my analysis. It is the claim that the L.A. model represents the spatial form of the new economy, and is therefore the urban form of the future. This claim asserts that the L.A. model is, thus, much more than the representation

¹⁰Thus the high growth rate of producer services in smaller cities as compared with global cities is not necessarily a function of relocations from global cities to better-priced locations, as a microeconomic explanation would have it. It is a function of the growing demand by firms in all sectors for producer services. When these services are for global firms and markets, their complexity is such that global cities are the best production sites. But when the demand is for fairly routine producer services, cities at various levels of the urban system can be adequate production sites. The current spatial organization of producer services reflects this spreading demand across economic sectors.

of one possible spatial form. I organized my discussion in terms of a series of analytic issues that can help us explore whether the current economic phase is one that produces L.A.-type regionalization and multipolarity and does not include the Chicago agglomeration model. My framing of the issues leads to an emphasis on the need for more analytical elaboration of these two models.

Given the organizing proposition of the L.A. model, one analytic pathway into these questions is to examine whether agglomeration might also be a feature of the Los Angeles region, and, more foundationally, a feature of the new economic phase, especially in its most advanced sectors. Therefore, we need to posit at least hypothetically that a core dynamic of the new economic phase as per the L.A. model spatializes its dispersal moment in the L.A. region and its agglomeration moment in Chicago or New York. The same process (of the new economy) may spatialize different moments of its trajectory in each, the city or the region. To specify each area we need to understand what moment of a firm's (or a sector's) chain of operations is actually located in a given space. A given area—whether city or region—can contain moments of agglomeration and moments of dispersal depending on the process one focuses on. This type of disassembling of an area's contents is one way of engaging the L.A. model given its emphasis on dispersal as the new spatial form versus agglomeration as the old urban form represented by the Chicago model. It also reduces the risk of reifying spatial form by positing a one-to-one relation between form and underlying dynamic.

Distinguishing (or recognizing) the agglomeration and dispersal moments of a firm's operations makes legible the diverse spatialities that might inhabit a given geographic terrain. But only some of these may be evident, or be captured in standardized interpretations. A full-blown Chicago model à la Burgess—one not universally admired—might indeed keep us from understanding that there are other dynamics at work, even in Chicago, producing spatialities that diverge from the Burgess model. Conversely, it is quite possible that there are spatialities in the L.A. region that respond to the Chicago model but are not easily recognizable given both the dominant spatial organization of the region and its now common representation oriented toward capturing precisely that dominant form.

Introducing the possibility that a given format—whether the Chicago model or the L.A. model—might be one moment of a multi-sited process, brings to the fore the question of the boundary. Rescaling can make legible, respectively, Chicago's regional dimension and L.A.'s subregional micro-agglomerations. Thus although Chicago thinks itself a city, critical components of its economy inhabit a larger metropolitan geographic terrain and constitute what have been designated as L.A.-type spatialities. And while L.A. thinks itself a vast region, critical components of its economy correspond to Chicago-type spatialities marked by concentration. Finally, if our concern is to capture the translocal processes within which both Chicago and Los Angeles are partial geographic moments, closure at a city or regional scale both become problematic, in turn making the distinction of city versus region somewhat less meaningful.

Turning to global economic processes, the specific contents of the global located in Chicago may diverge considerably from those of L.A., yet both may be part of new globalized sectors. A networked system is likely to contain multiple specialized differences, some of which might spatialize in similar ways while others might not. And agglomeration may be a critical variable in very diverse localities. The agglomeration of

specialized corporate services and highest-order corporate headquarters functions is the critical component of the economic production function of the global city, which is to be distinguished from the contents of the agglomeration function of Silicon Valley or Hollywood. All three are part of the global economy and exhibit a spatial form marked by agglomeration, but they have radically different contents and are located within very different global circuits. All three are also marked by dispersal of many of their operations. The interactions between their agglomeration and their dispersal moments can encompass one or all of three scalings—regional, national, and global. Closed formats such as those represented in the L.A. and Chicago models need more analytic elaboration in order to incorporate some aspects of these types of scalar interactions and spatial forms.

A refinement based on such scalar and formal interactions concerns the built environment of a region or city. One step here is to distinguish between the formal aspects of today's built environments for new economy sectors and the actual economic activities they contain. In the second section of the essay I argued that the emphasis on convergence and homogenization of these state-of-the-art built environments is misleading and that we need to specify in far greater detail what they contain. Similar-looking landscapes may contain very different types of operations and very different moments of a firm's multi-sited processes.

This type of elaboration also allows us to capture the ways in which the specialized economic history of an area can be critical to the development of its specialized advantage in the global economy (or state-of-the-art national economy). The specialized differences among cities within national economies and across international borders assume renewed value in today's advanced economic sectors. Under these conditions, convergence and homogenization of the built environment becomes an envelope, a standard applied to potentially very different economic contents.

I recode these homogenized landscapes—the hyperspace of global business—as an infrastructure: they are necessary but indeterminate in that they can be used for different purposes. This shifts the emphasis to what *inhabits* that built environment. A key underlying economic dynamic I find in my research is that the global economy thrives on the specialized differences of countries, regions, and cities. But it does need homogenized standards (e.g., of production, of financial reporting, of accounting), and, I add, it also needs standardized built environments that function as infrastructures that can accommodate all those highly specialized economic differences. The state-of-the-art built environment is akin to a globalization of standards.

These analytic disassemblings of possibly reified conceptual formats should help in moving us toward a deeper-level explanation of spatial organization, one that distinguishes genuinely novel spatial constraints and possibilities from inherited spatial differences that result from intervening variables having little to do with the actual dynamics at work. This would be an explanation that can encompass diverse spatial forms—from the wide-flung multipolarity of the Los Angeles region to the older central cities and metropolitan areas—as well as the diverse contents of similar spatial forms, from Hollywood and Silicon Valley to the financial districts of New York and Chicago. Herein lies an analytical and empirical project that reassembles the category of the urban.

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