

# Powerful Geographies: Spatial Shifts in the Architecture of Globalization

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## INTRODUCTION

Geographers, it could be argued, have a particular disadvantage when it comes to addressing a broad social science audience, namely that much of the readership already appears to have fairly well developed views on what space and place contribute to the institutional workings of something like power, especially in terms of its scope and reach. There are certain time-honoured traditions, for instance, which, it has been pointed out, have shaped spatial vocabularies, as for example in the case of state sovereignty where bounded territories and defined distances have long played a part in demarcating the jurisdictional limits of political authority (see Agnew, 1994, 1999, 2005; Biersteker and Weber, 1996; Ferguson, 2004; Hudson, 200x; Walker, 1993). In contrast, at the risk of caricature, a number of writers have tended to stress the constant mobility and flow of all things social – from people and ideas to goods and capital – as a counterweight to settled notions of any kind of authority or easy territorial fix (see, for instance, Appadurai, 1990; Castells, 1996, 2000; Kellner, 2002; Ohmae, 1991; Urry, 2000a, b).

More often than not, though, in response to the challenges of globalization, there appears to be an urge among writers of different hues and backgrounds to merge or piece together the two vocabularies: to hold in some sort of tension, for example, the territorial impulses of nation states and other embedded institutions with the more fluid, networked powers of business and other transnational actors (see, for instance, Held et al., 1999; Hirst, 2005; Mann, 2003; Rosenau, 2003; Taylor, 2004; Wolf, 2004). In this more ill-defined

landscape of power, scaled-up, territorial bodies may be tentatively fused with the more fluid, networked activities of economic corporations and social movements to provide what appears to be a more plausible account of the scope and reach of today's globalized actors. Such views of the characteristics of space and spatiality, more generally, broadly represent an attempt to come to terms with the changing dynamics of globalization, but in so doing, perhaps unwittingly, they tend to assume its geography rather than problematize it. In practice, it is assumed that the powerful geographies of the actors involved can be sketched against, what is often, in effect, a *given* global backdrop largely composed of territorial fixity and networked flows.

In this chapter, I want to pursue a different line of thought. The significance of wider geographies to how power exercises political, economic and cultural institutions, the manner in which events elsewhere are folded into the here and now, are part of a geographical reconfiguration of power that, arguably, the tension between fixity and flow strains to convey. Whilst it is not true to say that the fusion of two spatial vocabularies – territorial on the one hand, networked and fluid on the other – has led to a more impoverished understanding of power and its contemporary workings, it is true up to a point. Indeed, the idea that we can add together fragments of our contrasting experience of global change is particularly insensitive to recent spatial shifts in the architecture of globalization. It is as if our grasp of such shifts – the ways in which social proximities are established over physical distances, absent others interleaved with those present, the global folded into the local and, more straightforwardly, space compressed by time – has yet to catch up with our experience of them.

Without wishing to overstate the case, the urge to piece together what we know about territorial and network logics of power represents the limits of conventional geometric thinking about space and time. It pushes up against a *topological* world in which fixed distances and well-defined proximities are perhaps not the best indication of the powerful ties and relationships drawn between individuals, groups and organizations. Topological accounts disrupt our sense of what is near and what is far and loosen defined times and distances; in so doing they call into question the very idea that power may be simply distributed or extended over a given territory, or that it can be regarded as something which flows through extensive networks (Amin, 2002; Amin and Thrift, 2002; Allen, 2003; Gregory, 2004; Murdoch, 2006). Topological thinking suggests that individuals, groups and organizations may exercise power at-a-distance through a cross-cutting mix of distanced and proximate actions, often reaching out through a succession of mediated relationships or drawing distant others within close reach through the effective use of real-time connections (Allen, 2004). On this view, the so-called 'distant powers' of monolithic institutions or footloose corporations are rarely that, yet neither can the presence of a close and powerful body simply be assumed to deliver authority and control. Broadly speaking, power is more spatially ambiguous than is often recognized.

As I see it, there is no 'given' global backdrop against which the powerful geographies of institutions and governments may be sketched, but rather different groups, decision makers and organizations caught up in spatial and temporal arrangements that often combine anything from the erosion of choice, the manipulation of outcomes and the threat of coercion with the closure of possibilities, the assent of authority and the open-ended qualities of seduction and persuasion. It is often overlooked that power comes in more guises than simply domination and authority, and recent topological shifts in the architecture of globalization have arguably enabled corporate institutions and government bodies,

along with non-governmental organizations, to bridge the gap between here and there in ways which exhaust our geometric descriptions of them. Defined territories, mapped connections, measurable distances, and fixed geographical scales, to my mind, no longer capture much of the way in which power is exercised in an increasingly globalized world. In what follows, I first consider two recent attempts to capture what is distinctively new about power and globality: Ulrich Beck's *Power in the Global Age* (2005) and Saskia Sassen's *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (2006). Both practice a spatial sensibility that is not always present in globalization debates. Moreover, both recognize that a new geography of power is in the making, in which the global is instantiated in the national every bit as much as the national inhabits the global. It is at this point, however, that I wish to show how both push up against the *limits* of geometric thinking around territory, distance and geographical scale, with different abilities to see beyond it. After that, through a number of illustrations, I try to show what difference geography, or rather a topological appreciation of space and place, can make to our understanding of the workings of power in the present global era. More pointedly, I hope to show why geographers are more than simply cartographers of power, mapping already given global distributions of domination and authority.

### BECK'S HAZY SPACES OF POWER

Globalization, for Ulrich Beck, has brought forth new spaces and frameworks for acting, in which the old power-plays between territorially defined actors have given way to a more open-ended play for domination and authority between state, business and civil society actors who are no longer subject to the same boundaries as before. It is this latter group of actors who occupy the new, 'hazy power space of global domestic politics' (2005, xi) which, according to Beck, are already at work here and beyond anything that can be pinned down as either national or international. In *Power in the Global Age*, this geographically nebulous state of affairs has come about because capital in particular, in the shape of individual companies, finance houses and commercial entities, under an emergent neo-liberal regime is said to have broken out of the confines of the zero-sum power game set up by the old nation-state international institutional order. In its place, a new deterritorialized game of power politics has taken shape where the enhanced mobility of business and capital is said to give it an edge over territorially bound states.

#### **Meta-power**

Under this new game of power politics, globalization, above all, has set in train a means for brokering power which has altered its conventional bases. For Beck, the new power struggle has led to a renegotiation of the very boundaries, rules and territories upon which it is taking place – a game which *goes beyond* the old territorial, institutional rules: a meta-power game.

*A meta-power game* is in progress in the relationship between global business and the state, a power struggle in which the balance of power and the rules of power governing the national and international system of states are being radically changed and rewritten. It is the world of business in particular that has developed such meta-power by breaking out of the cage of the territorial nation-state-organized power

game and mastering new strategies of power in the digital domain in contrast to territorially rooted states. (2005: 52)

The basis of global business' meta-power is taken to be its mobility and extensive networked capabilities; its ability to take advantage of space-shrinking telecommunications technologies to exploit opportunities wherever and whenever they arise. Beck refers to this ability as a form of 'translegal' or transnational domination, whereby corporate actors do not so much act above the law or authority of nation states as act alongside them in their domestic sphere, influencing the rules and regulations by which economic activity is conducted. In one sense, corporations make their 'own' law through deterritorialized forms of private authority relating to contracts, labour standards, international arbitration and such. The extensive, diffuse power of global business actors enables them to 'threaten' states through their non-involvement, rather than their direct engagement. The possibility of exit, investment and finance moving to territories where authority and regulation works in their global interests, underpins their meta-power (see also Beck, 2001).

Whilst there is nothing especially new about the mobile and footloose characteristics of business and capital, what today is distinctive about their actions for Beck is the fact that they inhabit an arena of 'global domestic politics' – where the mutually exclusive distinctions between the national and the international no longer apply. A form of 'transnational politics' is said to apply where 'nation state politics becomes the site where transnational politics is worked out' (2005: 113). Global business actors, according to Beck, are able to influence the outcome of political decisions taken by governments so that their economic interests are prioritized over others. This is not domination in the 'old' sense of command and control, but rather domination through market usurpation: leaving governments little choice but to go along with the rhythms of deterritorialized global markets.

States and global business are not the only actors engaged in this new transnational politics, however. Beck also considers a variety of actors drawn from civil society, in particular NGOs and social movements engaged in environmental, human rights and consumer campaigns, for example, which are able to effectively mobilize across international borders to realize their goals. Strategic in the sense that they are able to raise public awareness around issues that are packaged as universal and for the 'good of all', such civil society groups are able to exert influence in the domestic sphere of nation states previously held to be beyond outside interference. Leaving to one side the actual success of much transnational activism, the networking abilities of such groups to mobilize around and indeed construct the 'common good' underpins their meta-power, according to Beck. It is this cosmopolitan quality that legitimizes their right to politically interfere in the domestic affairs of states, as for example in respect of the demands of human rights activists or the environmental movement.

The sweep of the analysis, if at times a little over-generalized when it comes down to the actors involved and their powers, does nonetheless point to the increasing interpenetration of somewhat previously discrete national and international spaces. Governments too, often in tandem with NGOs or other forms of civil society protest, can also be seen to exert influence beyond their own borders as they also, in Beck's terms, learn to master the rules of the new meta-game of world politics. Instead of the old zero-sum game of power played out within the borders of the national, he sees the emergence of a more cosmopolitan, positive-sum game between states, business and civil society where no single group of players can realize

their goals in isolation from the other. They are all dependent on the powers of each being exercised in such a way that their particular, often material, interests may be realized.

It takes the authority of states to achieve the NGO's goal of establishing a world order based on civil society, for they are the ones who can give this order a legally and politically binding shape. A plural global area is inconceivable without the existence of strong, active states. Even the strategies of capital that are only pursuing their economic interests, remain ultimately dependent both on states and on civil society's moral pronouncements – this is the only way the cultural and political preconditions for the investment freedom they enjoy can be guaranteed. The gap between the *proponents* of the different camps is indeed closing in this general mêlée of mutual instrumentalization. (2005: 288–289)

In a world of transnational politics, the interests of a highly mobile business community may have the edge over that of territorially rooted states, but both have much to gain by pursuing their own goals in tandem. Moreover, according to Beck, all those involved may enhance their power in the process; states may recapture some of their independence, for example, despite gains made by business and capital, and NGOs may find themselves in alliance with either governments or corporations to push forward specific 'universal' agendas around labour and environmental responsibilities, for instance. On this view, the competitive and conflictual nature of power which arises from one side subjecting another to its instrumental will is less on show than the notion of power as a potential force for integration and enablement at the global scale.

What enables Beck to make this observation, however, that there is more to be gained by the actors involved from exercising power *with* rather than *over* others, is the belief that we are witnessing the formation of a dense 'network of transnational interdependencies' between state, business and civil society actors (2005: xv). In short, the trajectories of these different groups on the global stage are thought to be locked together in such a way that collaboration and domination start to resemble two sides of the same coin.

### ***The limits of geometric description***

If this is so, however, the kind of complex cross-cutting arrangements that Beck is at pains to convey where the global is instantiated in the national world are often lost in a vocabulary of close-knit networks, global interdependencies and defined territories. The unsettled nature of the new power formations, the reference to 'hazy power spaces' and the acknowledgement that the 'national' and the 'international' are not mutually exclusive domains, suggest that the spatial trappings of Euclidian geometry may not be the appropriate vehicle to capture the new geography of power that is taking shape. The interpenetration of the national and the global, rather than described as 'hazy' in outline, would perhaps be better understood, I would have thought, if some form of spatial topology were at the heart of the analysis. Although Beck does acknowledge in passing that many 'contacts between different locations in the world are established in the immediate present' and that the distinction between 'here and there' is losing its constitutive meaning in the power-plays between nation-state and global business (2005, 139), the logic of the analysis is not followed through to the point where a topological approach suggests itself.

Whilst it is not necessary to endorse oversimplistic versions of the world getting smaller, the use of real-time technologies to create a simultaneous presence in a variety of global settings is only one way in which our sense of space and time has been jolted, and powerful relationships refashioned to take account of the fact that proximity and distance now play

across one another in diverse ways. Likewise, the ‘lifting out’ and ‘re-embedding’ of aspects of social life, where events elsewhere are folded into the here and now, has the potential to alter how we see the actors of transnational social movements or the cross-border workings of corporate organizations. Power plays are not simply enacted over flat territories, across defined distances and measured connections, but knowing that is not the same thing as being able to articulate or conceptualize it. As indeed Beck’s account of ‘hazy spaces’ reminds us.

It is not simply the rigidity of our geometric descriptions that is at stake, however. A topological appreciation of power in a global age might also have revealed a richer, more varied account of power as it is currently practised between agencies and institutions; that is, over and above that of domination and authority. If there is a new geography of power in the making, then such equally rigid characterisations of the exercise of power may also be open to question. Before we turn to that, however, I want to consider a further attempt to pin down what is new about power and globality which also pushes up against the limits of geometric thinking, but does so in a way that leaves us with a less nebulous geography than Beck, although with much the same restricted sense of the different registers of power in play today.

### **SASSEN’S OVERLAPPING GEOGRAPHY OF POWER**

Early on in *Territory, Authority, Rights: From Medieval to Global Assemblages*, Saskia Sassen makes the exacting point that globalization, in its current manifestation and shape, cannot be adequately grasped through the notion of growing interdependence and the formation of global systems. She makes the point forcefully because she wants to convey what Beck fails to grasp: namely, that there is more to the interpenetration of the national and the global than a web of connections between diverse actors. There is the overlapping *mix of spaces and times* to consider too. If this sounds geographically cryptic, what she means by this is that when the global is conceived as something that is ‘lodged’ in the national, rather than as an external force acting upon it, we also have to consider the *interaction* of the often quite different time frames and spatial orders of the actors involved. As, for Sassen, the contours of a new geography of power arise out of such interactions, it is important to be clear about what is at issue.

#### ***Assemblages of power***

Like Beck, Sassen refuses to polarize the domains of the national and the global, and both represent the national setting as the site within which the forces of globalization are played out. Instead of the ‘hazy’ power space of global domestic politics, however, Sassen is altogether more precise in identifying the emergence of what she refers to as a new *spatio-temporal assemblage*. By this, she has in mind a novel configuration of territory, authority and rights that combines older elements of the legal and bureaucratic system of governance, for example, with new economic capabilities and norms. Part private, part public, with bits and pieces of institutional authority, legal rights and territorial infrastructure, the emergent assemblage which is neither national nor global represents an unstable power formation in the making. It is unstable not only because different economic, political and legal elements

may co-exist in novel arrangements, but also because such elements may operate according to a different temporal rhythm and institutional pace which come together in both enabling and contested ways. In short, the mix of time-spaces embedded in the material practices of the different actors and agencies involved – state authorities and jurisdictional agencies, corporate firms and supranational institutions, civil society movements and transnational activists – may work to disassemble and reassemble elements of territorial exclusivity, public authority and civil rights, for instance, in ways that found a new kind of organizing logic and a new, refashioned geography of power.

Notwithstanding Sassen's tendency to be over-schematic in her analysis and rather short on substantive detail outside of the United States, the sense in which power and globality have demonstrated a more cross cutting nature since the 1980s is, for her, evident from the altered nature of state power. In opposition to arguments which stress the loss of state authority in the wake of deregulation, privatization or the enhanced mobility of capital, Sassen emphasizes the active role of the state in regulating its own withdrawal *and* setting up new frameworks of authority through which the globalization of economic and other activities is fostered. The shift of functions to the private sector and the development of new forms of private authority governing such things as property rights, commercial arbitration, contractual agreements and cross-border transactions are geared not towards national but transnational agendas. A redistribution of power within the state is said to have taken place, where a number of public and quasi-public authorities start to function as the institutional home for powerful, transnational actors and global markets.

The capacity to privatize and denationalize is predicated on changes in specific components of territory, authority, and rights as these have been constituted historically in the national state. The new privatized institutional order for governing the corporate global economy has governance capabilities and a type of specialized and partial narrative authority. That is to say, we see an emergent new normativity that has incorporated elements of what was once state authority. At the same time, once constituted, this new normativity of the world of private power installs itself in the public realm where it reappears as public policy...In so doing, these state institutions reorient their particular policy work or, more broadly, state agendas toward the requirements of the global economy. (2006: 412)

More pointedly for Sassen, this disembedding of state functions and the growing authority of non-state actors in the public realm opens up spaces within the formerly exclusive territory of nation states where global firms are subject to extraterritorial forms of authority. Parts of global cities such as New York and London, for example, where financial and corporate actors are said to operate in an accelerated time-space, are seen to be detached, in partial and variable ways, from the geographically circumscribed authority of the state. This, however, is not a geography where some parts of national territory hover or float above it, autonomous from the reach of the state, but rather that such economic spaces remain firmly embedded in national territories, yet subject to wider geographical authorities when it comes down to regulation and control. Whilst states remain the final authority over their expansive territories, the prevalence of such authority should not, as Sassen notes, be confused with dominance. On this understanding, states are both confronted by and are part of a new geography of power that does *not* have territorial exclusivity as its defining characteristic.

Business and global corporations, as part of the world of private power, benefit from the shifts in authority to non-state actors within the public realm, but as in Beck's analysis there is something of a positive-sum game involved. The actual balance of power rests

with the new business interests, especially those corporate economic actors involved in global markets and highly digitized sectors such as banking and finance, yet for Sassen that advantage comes less from their potential hypermobility and more from their ability to insert themselves inside the national state as part of a quasi-global regime of flexibility and openness. Such firms and financial networks may operate according to a heightened spatial and temporal order quite different from much of the surrounding economy or, indeed, polity, but to do so they require an active state to relinquish its territorial hold on authority for the benefit of all, realized in the form of privatized growth and efficiency.

Sassen is clear that the new space-shrinking digital technologies can translate into additional power on the part of capital in its negotiations with governments, more through embedded practices than anything technical, but she is equally clear that such electronic networks only work if they have a territorial base. Near instantaneous transmissions across financial networks, for example, are only possible if supported by state-of-the-art environments and vast concentrations of not-so-mobile infrastructure. The new information and communications technologies may be global in scope, but they are not postnational; rather they are part of new assemblages of power that have reconfigured state territory and authority, not displaced it. The stress upon *fixity* is critical for Sassen – that people, institutions and agencies are place-based – for it dovetails with her previous argument (Sassen, 1991) that global cities are precisely the kind of economic spaces which operate globally inside the national. Only this time around, the analysis is taken a step further by referring to powerful global cities as constituting a distinct kind of non-geographical territory operating largely according to their own distinctive rhythms and spatial practices.

The kind of global cities that Sassen has in mind are not the large, cosmopolitan or diverse, complex ‘ordinary cities’ of the less developed world (see Robinson, 2006) which preoccupy much postcolonial analysis, but the few cities with the capabilities to ‘run’ the economic networks through their concentration of resources and expertise. New York, Tokyo and London are the obvious main contenders, as part of a wider global network of financial centres, but they are less in evidence here than the fact that such centres represent part of a novel geography of authority comprised of territories *without* geographical borders.

If the global network of financial centres has led to a greater concentration of power in selective cities with capital markets, Sassen, like Beck, also notes an opposing trend: the greater distribution of power within global civil society facilitated by transnational activist networks. Again the evidence is largely limited to human rights and other social justice movements, but her claim is that the new web-based, digital technologies have enabled local actors – and she stresses their local base – to bypass national state authorities by gaining direct access to other local actors in the same country or across borders. The multiplication of local transactions laterally through global networks has enabled transnational solidarities and alliances to form which are able to contest or ‘jump’ the territorial, jurisdictional authority of states and their legal constraints. In a loose parallel to the unbound geography of authority thought to be enjoyed by global financial centres, local activists are said to inhabit ‘microenvironments with global span’ (2006: 387), that are neither explicitly national nor global, but rather assemblages of each. As with global cities, these emergent global publics are said to operate with temporal and spatial horizons that sit uneasily alongside the slower, more bureaucratic time-spaces exercised routinely by a significant number of public authorities.

### ***The limits of territorial thinking***

What is clear about the thrust of Sassen's account of the new geography of power is that territorial thinking and, more broadly, a conception of globalization as growing interdependence, fails to capture the spatial and temporal dynamics of power in play. The mix of spaces and times that inhabit the national setting are, for her, at the heart of a new overlapping geography of power within which different actors jostle, co-exist and interrupt one another to gain advantage. Globalization itself is reshaping much of the regulatory landscape but not in defined territorial ways where authority is divided neatly along geographical lines. Rather, in the complex institutional assemblages that she envisages, authority becomes detached from territory as corporate and transnational logics circulate through the national frame and emerge as domestic policy. From one angle, this may look like the blurred, 'hazy space' of global domestic politics, where it is often hard to discern the fluid interactions involved, but from where Sassen stands such detachment and re-embedding of authority makes perfect sense if it is understood in non-territorial terms.

Such an understanding, however, requires that we suspend belief in the assumption that state power and authority are extensive with the borders of the nation, as well as capable of uncomplicated geographical reach. The detachment of authority from territory also brings into question the idea that borders are always at the *edges* of any given territory. For Sassen, this is patently not the case and she goes further to argue that borders are not so much redrawn as re-embedded *within* the national geography, in line with the form of authority under consideration (see also Sassen, 2000). The cross-cutting spaces of business, corporations, NGOs, public agencies and solidarity movements, and their different spatial and temporal rhythms, produce territorial detachments of a kind barely conceivable in terms of exclusive geometric spaces.

... this detachment today assumes two forms broadly speaking. One is that the border is embedded in the product, the person, and the instrument: a mobile agent endogenizes critical features of the border. The other is that there are multiple locations for the border, whether inside firms or in long transnational chains of locations that can move deep inside national territorial and institutional domains. Global cities account for a disproportionate concentration of such border locations; the latter are mostly institutional locations that assume a territorial correlate, for example, the large concentration of international banking facilities in New York City. Institutional locations in principle need not have territorial correlates. (2006: 416)

Overlapping geographies of power, where rule-making authorities are detached from territories and bordered within firms and transnational organizations, take us a long way from simple territorial logics. They push up against a world of exclusive spaces, defined networked connections and fixed geographical scales to suggest an altogether different geography from the conventional global backdrop. In common with Beck, Sassen considers the global to be instantiated in the national every bit as much as the national inhabits the global, but unlike Beck she problematizes the geography of the national rather than assume its familiar co-ordinates. As such, she reaches the limits of geometric thinking around territory, distance and space; but in terms of sketching a new geography of power in the making, her focus upon nationalizing the global, so to speak, leads her towards a place-based account of disaggregated authority. Whilst the territorial geography of the national is problematized, the networked geography of the global largely escapes scrutiny. Extensive reach, proximity and presence are taken as givens, as if they make little or no difference

to the exercise of power at-a-distance. The 'work' of the network, as Bruno Latour (1987, 1999, 2005) continually reminds us, more or less eludes her.

To be fair, Sassen recognizes that supranational networks, in particular digital networks, have the ability to destabilize existing hierarchies of geographical scale; but her concern is with the new types of territory that they may bring about, not with the potential transformation of powerful relationships within the networks or their mediation through those physically distant in space and time. The 'lifting out' and 're-embedding' of authority that she has in mind seems to occur within national settings, not between them, or between different time periods. A topological understanding of the spatial shifts that characterize the current phase of globalization would problematize what happens in between 'here and there', as much as the capabilities of the different actors 'lodged' in the nation state. It would also enable us to see more than a reworked geography of authority, and perhaps bring into view the practices of arms length manipulation or extensive inducement deployed by corporations and NGOs alike, for instance, which arguably have been made easier by the topological shifts in the architecture of globalization.

### **DISTANT PROXIMITIES OF POWER**

Both Beck and Sassen are acutely aware of the unsettled nature of the power formations they seek to describe, and Sassen more than Beck is aware that globalization – as a reworking of spatial and temporal dynamics – lies behind much of the inconstant landscape. Where Beck tends to conflate the dynamics of globalization with the capabilities of the actors involved, so for example speed and mobility become attributes of capital and business, Sassen grasps the fact that a reworking of space and time has taken place which is *separate* from the networked 'logic' of capital or the changing functions of the state. When Beck talks about the 'new asymmetry between rooted and winged forms of power that facilitates the unwarlike conquests of global business' (2005: 73), he treats the machinery of the state as largely fixed and capital as essentially mobile. He may not wish to convey this asymmetry in quite such a stereotypical fashion, but in doing so he makes it that much harder to consider the spatial shifts that have altered the architecture of globalization.

As I see it, such topological shifts have made possible a blend of more proximate and far-reaching *practices of power* that have effectively changed the relationships between corporate institutions and government bodies, non-governmental organizations and supranational agencies, transnational actors and jurisdictional agencies. It is not so much about which actors have become more or less mobile, more or less networked, as how certain practices of proximity and reach have enabled a broad range of actors and institutions to make their presence felt in ways hitherto largely unrecognized. The so-called hazy, cross-cutting, overlapping spaces of power that have apparently colonised the national setting may be better understood through a topological rather than a geometric lens. In much conventional geometric thinking about time and space, distances more often than not are there to be overcome, territories are made 'porous' and global scales are 'jumped' by powerful actors (see, for instance, Brenner, 2004; Smith, 2004; Swyngedouw, 2000). In a topological world, in contrast, the distanced relationships, direct ties and real-time connections of the powerful and not so powerful actors come to the fore.

### ***Powers of reach***

A key part of Sassen's novel geography of authority in global cities like London and New York is the co-existence of different financial, corporate and government actors operating within different spatial and temporal frameworks. The combination of old and new forms of governance, authority and rights that is said to restructure the balance of power between the different interests is one that works itself out *in situ*; that is, there is little sense that events or actors distant in space and time are part of the equation. It would be odd, however, if that were the case and indeed that the powerful interplay between economic and political agencies was not, in some way, mediated by those physically absent, as well as by those present in place. Financial and corporate business, regardless of their headquartered location, for instance, are likely to be part of institutional arrangements which arguably mix *far-reaching* with more *proximate* modes, *circuitous* with more *immediate* styles of power, to establish and maintain an influential presence in one or more global cities.

Consider, for instance, the significant increase in private equity transactions around the globe since 2000, but especially in the US, Europe and Asia. Unlike the previous boom in private equity deals in the late 1980s, this time around the scope of transactions is global, effectively giving governments little choice but to engage in the process (Reserve Bank of Australia, 2007). The private equity business profits – from management fee income and a portion of the incremental gains realised – by buying publically traded companies, taking them into private hands, raising their operational performance and, after a brief period, typically three to five years, and selling them on at an appreciable profit (Freeman, 2005). A key feature of private equity firms is that they finance a high proportion of their purchases through a mix of debt and funds raised through institutional investors, in particular, banks, insurers, pension funds and various endowments and foundations. In turn, the equity risk attached to such ventures is often sold on by investors, multiplying the number of economic actors involved. For example, a private equity takeover of a major UK high street chain in 2007 led by US investors, KKR (Kohlberg Kravis Roberts), witnessed a catalogue of banks – Citigroup, Barclays Capital, Deutsche Bank, JPMorgan Cazenove, Bank of America, Royal Bank of Scotland, UniCredit and Merrill Lynch – involved in the syndication of risk and the debt financing arrangements for the purchase (*Financial Times*, 2007a). Consortia, trusts, joint partnerships are the norm in this type of high investment economic activity, with KKR involved with the world's largest private equity firm, Blackstone, in purchases worldwide, together with Europe's largest fund, CVC Capital Partners. The latter has offices spread across Europe and Asia, Blackstone has recently opened offices in London, Hamburg and Mumbai and KKR has backed acquisitions across Europe, Australia and Asia. Together, with other significant funds such as the Carlyle Group, Terra Firma, Texas Pacific, Permira and the Apollo Group, a complex geography of financial networking and investment has enabled the mobilization of funds over space to be used to acquire a range of domestic assets from catering outlets, water utilities and transport infrastructure to manufacturing, drug and healthcare companies. The ability to manage and control funds at a distance in this way is a form of distanced power, in Anthony Giddens' (1984) sense of the term, but it is the *reach* into homely domestic spaces which gives this type of capital its powerful presence.

Much of what private equity groups do involves little more than long-established financial engineering, using debt to lever up profitable returns, rather than the techniques of anything

resembling 'fast capitalism'. Practically, such groups act as intermediaries, folding in actors distant in space and time by enrolling them into financial arrangements that offer the inducement of substantial returns (Fenn, Liang and Prowse, 1995). The key to this arrangement, following Latour (1996), is the ability to 'hook up' others to the process of circulation, to draw others into the network of meanings in such a way that it extends and reproduces itself through spaces and time. As such, it involves a *mediated* exercise of power, where distances are bridged by the successive enrolment of actors to form something akin to a single will. Holding the arrangement together is a more tenuous affair than often understood, requiring powers of inducement and persuasion on the part of private equity firms, but what gives them their extensive reach inside domestic spaces, as Sassen perceptively observed, is the ability to work through institutional 'borders', at locations well within the national domain.

The consortia, and their allied banks, although made up of economic actors drawn from far and wide, are able to be more or less *present* in the here and now of western economies. The lifting out of economic relations from one context to another made possible by an extended circuit of institutional actors at a distance provides a kind of arm's length reach into national economies, but the ability to establish near instantaneous reach through a variety of telecommunication and media technologies also gives the consortia the added possibility of exercising an influential presence in real time. The point is less about speed and hypermobility as it is about the reduction of uncertainty and the leverage that co-presence can afford when structuring a deal and working with different interest groups and government bodies. Simultaneous exchange at ever greater distances has nothing to do with power moving faster, it is merely a medium that enables certain practices and not others, such as the inducement and persuasion of governments and shareholders that their interests are, for the present at least, best served by private equity deals (see Blackburn, 2006).

Government reaction to the increased number of private equity acquisitions in the UK for example, where the value of such deals exceeded 89 billion dollars in 2006 (Thomson Financial, 2007), has largely focussed on the perceived efficiency gains that private ownership can bring, tempered by a concern for potential job losses. When companies are taken out of public scrutiny and the short-term requirements of shareholder accountability, the potential efficiency gains realized through the restructuring of management and labour provide a strong inducement for public authorities to back the ownership changes, especially where they involve newly privatized setups as is the case with many infrastructure deals. In any such interplay of forces, however, where actors are mobilized and positioned through particular practices, the possibility of manipulation as much as inducement is always in play. The strong reaction from trades union bodies in the UK to increased private equity deals, for instance, has been to draw attention to the manipulative ploys exercised by private equity firms, where their excessive fees are concealed from view and potential returns exaggerated. If the erosion of job security that private deals foster is the price to be paid for greater economic efficiency, the trades unions have questioned whether the returns from the performance of private equity are in fact any higher over time than that of publically quoted companies (*Financial Times*, 2007b). Indeed, most studies suggest that the returns over time are roughly similar, although it is difficult to obtain an accurate picture (Samuelson, 2007).

In Beck's analysis, then, what may appear to be a positive-sum game between governments and global private equity consortiums, where the goals of both are realized in tandem,

may perhaps be better understood as an instance of ‘organizational outflanking’. In Michael Mann’s (1986) sense of this term, governments comply not because they perceive their interests to be shared but because they are so embedded in existing economic arrangements that they have little choice other than to go along with the private equity option – for the present, that is. Put another way, government bodies are outflanked by a form of global capital in this instance because the sheer scale of the private equity business holds the potential to ‘rejuvenate’ a large number of sizeable companies and, as such, cannot be simply sidelined. In the UK, the prospect of a more dynamic and efficient business sector gives private equity the edge over government, not the fact that the latter is believed to be territorially ‘rooted’ in its capabilities.

More to the point, in this scenario, inducement and manipulation can be seen to play across one another in an arrangement that involves far reaching powers intersecting with more proximate modes. As a cameo of the new geography of power in the making, private equity operates neither as a force external to the nation state nor one internal to its boundaries, but rather one with *powers of reach* that enable them to make themselves present in different economies through mediated and real time connections. Power may be believed to be seeping away from states, but public and private authorities are also part of a topological world that is shifting in terms of its global architecture. They too, through the newly privatized institutional order described by Sassen, are engaged *directly* with transnational institutions and their counterparts in other nation states. The changing relationship between government, business and civil society actors, the regulation and enforcement of standards that takes place between them in different national contexts, owes less in this respect to the assumed capabilities of each and rather more to the expanded workings and practices of power made possible by a shift in the spatial and temporal dynamics of globalization.

### ***Powers of connection***

It is not only the relationship between government and business that has taken particular twists and turns as a new geography of power is fashioned; NGOs, and civil society actors are also part of the topological equation. For Beck, as well as Sassen, the growth of social movements – networks of actors in environmental, feminist, human rights, labour and consumer alliances – have tilted the balance of power. The ability to mobilize across borders, to conduct transnational campaigns through extensive activist networks and to ‘jump’ the territorial, jurisdictional authority of states, has, it would appear, empowered many across the globe who previously found themselves constrained in some kind of zero-sum game (see, for example, Della Porta and Tarrow, 2005). Such empowerment, in part, is viewed as a product of newly forged connections: the ability to span the globe from a local base or to ‘jump’ from the local to the global and back again (McDonald, 2006). Obviously the new media and communications technologies have played a significant part in facilitating such networked mobilisations, but such connectivity in and of itself fails to capture quite how transnational activists have been able to exert an influence often way beyond their means. The power of connections amounts to more than just lines on a map and speaks to the ways in which NGOs and civil society campaigners have been able to make ‘publics’ *present* across a range of global social justice issues.

The mobilization of distant and dispersed ‘publics’ around issues of global justice and the ability to bring pressure to bear upon governments and corporations in various parts of

the world, but especially in the wealthier parts of Europe, Asia and the US, has been greatly enhanced by the topological shifts in global architecture. The ability, for instance, to link the actions of governments or corporations *directly* to the abuse of poor communities elsewhere in the world or to issues faced collectively such as climate change, ecological disasters, food risks and sweatshop exploitation, is, in practice, a topological tactic. The stress upon practice is deliberate, because the connections between citizen and environmental tragedy or between consumer and corporate exploitation on the far side of the globe have to be made – they are not given.

In many consumer campaigns, for example, civil society movements have been able to *draw closer* events such as sweatshop exploitation in far off locations by fixing directly upon company logos (in the case of sweatshop exploitation, Nike, Gap, Adidas, Puma and Reebok have all figured) and linking the actions of branded retailers directly to abuse overseas. In doing so, they established an immediate connection between exploitation ‘over there’ and corporate decisions ‘back home’. More pointedly, NGOs and campaigning groups were able effectively to erase from view the majority of global supply chain connections that separate factory workers from consumers: the buyers and suppliers, trading companies and sourcing agents, subcontractors and subassembly firms. In other words, they cut out the very agencies and ties which comprise much of the global market machinery that frequently passes for economic interdependence. The power of connection in this instance, therefore, derives from the ability of activists to dissolve, not traverse, the gap between ‘near’ and ‘far’ by lifting out exploitation and re-embedding it among those affluent consumers who benefit from it (see Allen, 2006).

Moreover, by framing the issue of sweatshop exploitation as one that involves us all, NGOs, like Oxfam and Christian Aid, used the fact of ‘connection’ to oblige consumers to take responsibility for events elsewhere. By virtue of being part of an economic system which reproduces exploitation, western consumers were made to feel responsible (but not to blame) for the harm and injustice meted out in their name on factory floors distant in both space and time (see Young, 2003, 2004). The success of this mediated exercise of power, whereby NGOs enrolled consumers to confront retail corporations directly with the consequences of their (indirect) actions, has however less to do with solidarities produced through the new telecommunications technologies and rather more to do with the ability of social movements to persuade, manipulate and influence action at-a-distance.

If folding in events directly from elsewhere is a key tactic adopted by transnational activists, the reaction of those targeted, corporations and government agencies in the main, has been to *distance* themselves from abuses elsewhere. The alliances between NGOs and states or business and civil society movements that Beck sees as critical to the realisation of mutual goals is exemplified by the forms of corporate responsibility recently adopted by many global companies operating in sensitive environmental and consumer-orientated fields (see Hartman et al., 2003). What may appear as an exercise of power with rather than over others, however, may from another angle look like a displacement of responsibility onto others, as liabilities are offset or obligations contracted out. In a topological world, the kind of connections which underpin economic interdependence can be stretched just as easily as they can be compressed or erased. The ability of corporations in particular to extend events in time and space, although another instance of distanced power, is one that involves the mobilization of resources to push events further away rather than draw them closer. The corporate codes of conduct and the extensive monitoring of overseas factory

outlets conducted by the retail giants was certainly seen in this light by the NGOs involved in the antisweatshop movement (see Jenkins, et al., 2002).

All of this, it seems to me, makes it difficult to convey the interplay of forces as merely one of domination, authority and resistance, whether seen as transnational or otherwise. Corporate business may attempt to dominate much of what happens elsewhere through their ability to close down choices and constrain possibilities, as often appears to be the case with overseas factories and global supply chains, but it can also be seen to engage in manipulation, persuasion and inducement every bit as much as NGOs and governments do. The ability to do so, on the part of all parties, is enhanced by the topological shifts that have given shape to globalization, although the different registers of power in play are not reducible to them.

Indeed, a topological appreciation of power in the contemporary global era would have drawn attention to the fact that neither social justice movements nor any other type of global actor actually 'jump' scale, they merely connect more or less directly with others elsewhere. Distanciated relationships, direct ties and real-time connections displace the notion of geometric scale and the idea that actors move up and down them, from the local to the global and back. When the global union, UNI, which draws its representation from 150 countries, used the 2007 Davos economic forum in Switzerland as the site from which to lobby against the 'corporate greed' of private equity firms, it did not 'jump' scale as much as make a direct connection to the world's media outlets. How successful it was in constructing a dispersed 'public' around its political goal is a debatable issue, but the intervention itself assumed a topological world as a matter of course; that is, something that has been with us for a while, even if not fully recognized.

## CONCLUSION

In making the case for a topological appreciation of the workings of power in the present global era, the sub text of my argument is the fact that the topological shifts that I have outlined are more widespread than many would appear to acknowledge. It is not that the use of real-time technologies to create a simultaneous presence in a variety of global settings is a particularly novel observation or that the compression of space by time is unknown by either Beck or Sassen. It is just that the label topological is rarely used to describe such spatial and temporal shifts. Why this should be so I am not quite sure, but it is evident to me that the writings of both Beck and Sassen do push up against the limits of geometric thinking around territory, distance and geographical scale. The loosening of defined distances and times that appears at various moments in their work, however, is not taken a step further and incorporated into their analyses of the reconfiguration of power and authority. Beck's hazy spaces of power remain that and Sassen's more insightful spatio-temporal assemblages of power only ever shape the domestic setting. The new geography of power that Sassen speaks about is not especially global.

The powerful geographies that I have sketched in the final section separate out the reworking of the spatial and temporal dynamics of globalization from the so-called territorial and mobile characteristics of states, civil society actors and the business world. In doing so, I believe that it becomes easier to grasp the difference that such dynamics make to the powers of reach and connection variously exercised by economic corporations,

government authorities and social movements. The ability to draw distant others within close reach or construct the close at hand at-a-distance are indicative of the cross-cutting mix of distanced and proximate actions that is central to an understanding of the global workings of power today. If little else, such a topology of power relations helps to show why a focus upon how power is exercised and practised can be more useful than one fixated on the territorial and networked capabilities of all those involved.

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