

Chapter 15

Analytic Borderlands: Economy and Culture in the Global City

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What happens to place in a global economy? And how is globalization inscribed – in the spaces of the economy and of culture, in built form, and generally in space? I want to use these questions to argue that the dominant narrative about economic globalization is a narrative of eviction because its key concepts – globalization, information economy, and telematics – all suggest that place no longer matters. And they suggest that the type of place represented by major cities may have become obsolete from the perspective of the economy, particularly for the leading industries, as these have the best access to, and are the most advanced users of, telematics. It is an account that privileges the capability for global transmission over the concentrations of built infrastructure that makes transmission possible, that privileges information outputs over the work of producing those outputs, from specialists to secretaries, and the new transnational corporate culture over the multiplicity of cultural environments, including reterritorialized immigrant cultures, within which many of the “other” jobs of the global information economy take place.

The overall effect is to lose the place-boundedness of significant components of the global information economy. This loss entails the eviction of a whole array of activities and types of workers from the account about the process of globalization which, I argue, are as much a part of it as is international finance. And evicting these activities and workers excludes the variety of cultural contexts within which they exist, a cultural diversity that is as much a presence in processes of globalization as is the new international corporate culture. The terrain within which the dominant account represents economic globalization captures only a fraction of the actual economic operations involved. It reconstitutes large portions of the city’s economy in “cultural” terms – the spaces of the amalgamated other, the “other” as culture. My purpose (Sassen 2000a; 1998) is to reframe the terrain of the economy, incorporating as an integral part the discontinuity between what is represented as economic and what is represented as cultural in the broad sense of the term – the “center” as

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economy and the “other” as culture. In so doing I reconstitute “the” economy as a multiplicity of economies with distinct organizational patterns. It also invites a rereading of the notion of a unitary economic system, a notion central to mainstream economic thought and encapsulated in the notion of “the” economy.

Recovering Place

How do we reintroduce place in economic analysis? And secondly, how do we construct a new narrative about economic globalization, one which includes rather than evicts all the spatial, economic, and cultural elements that are part of the global economy as it is constituted in cities? For me as a political economist, addressing these issues has meant working in several systems of representation and constructing spaces of intersection. There are analytic moments when two systems of representation intersect. Such analytic moments are easily experienced as spaces of silence, of absence. One challenge is to see what happens in those spaces, what operations (analytic, of power, of meaning) take place there.

One version of these spaces of intersection is what I have called analytic borderlands. Why borderlands? Because they are spaces that are constituted in terms of discontinuities; in them discontinuities are given a terrain rather than reduced to a dividing line. Much of my work on economic globalization and cities has focused on these discontinuities and has sought to reconstitute them analytically as borderlands rather than dividing lines. This produces a terrain within which these discontinuities can be reconstituted in terms of economic operations whose properties are not merely a function of the spaces on each side (i.e. a reduction to the condition of dividing line) but also, and most centrally, of the discontinuity itself, the argument being that discontinuities are an integral part, a component, of the economic system.

Methodologically, the construction of these analytic borderlands pivots on what I call circuits for the distribution and installation of economic operations. These circuits allow me to follow economic activities into areas that escape the increasingly narrow borders of mainstream representations of “the” economy and to negotiate the crossing of discontinuous spaces. Further, these circuits give us one possible representation of the materialization of global economic activity in a place.

These are the instruments through which I want to reread the city’s economy in a way that recovers organizational, spatial, and cultural dimensions that are now lost in the dominant representation of that economy. I do this in three sections. The first is a brief discussion as to why cities are useful arenas within which to explore the limitations of this mainstream narrative. Secondly, I explain why crucial aspects of the most advanced sectors of the economy are place-bound, a fact disregarded in the mainstream account of the information economy, and especially its global dimension. Why does this matter? Because recovering place in the analyses of the economy, particularly place as constituted in major cities, allows us to see the multiplicity of economies and work cultures in which the global information economy is embedded. It also allows us to recover the concrete, localized processes through which globalization exists and to argue that much of the multiculturalism in large cities is as much a part of globalization as is international finance. The third section examines how space is inscribed in the urban economy, and particularly how the spaces of corporate culture, which are a representation of the space of power in today’s cities, are actually

contested spaces. The overall purpose is to bring these various elements together in an effort to move from an economic narrative of eviction to one of inclusion.

Why Focus on Cities in This Inquiry?

These questions can be usefully explored in large cities such as New York and Los Angeles, Paris and Amsterdam, or many other major Western European cities, for at least two reasons. First, cities are the sites for concrete operations of the economy. For now we can distinguish two forms of this. One is about economic globalization and place. Cities are strategic places which concentrate command functions, global markets, and, I add, production sites for the new, advanced information industries. The other form through which this concreteness can be captured is by an examination of the day-to-day work in the leading economic complex, finance and specialized services. Such an examination makes it clear that a large share of the jobs involved in finance, for example, are lowly paid clerical and manual jobs, many held by women and migrants. These types of workers and jobs do not fit the dominant representation of what the premier economic complex of our era is about.

Secondly, the city concentrates diversity. Its spaces are inscribed with the dominant corporate culture but also with multiple other cultures and identities. The slippage is evident: the dominant culture can encompass only part of the city. And while corporate power inscribes noncorporate cultures and identities with “otherness,” thereby devaluing them, these are present everywhere. This presence is especially strong in our major Western cities which also have the largest concentrations of corporate power. We see here an interesting correspondence between great concentrations of corporate power and large concentrations of “others.” It invites us to see that globalization is not only constituted in terms of capital and the new international corporate culture (international finance, telecommunications, information flows) but also in terms of people and noncorporate cultures. There is a whole infrastructure of low-wage, nonprofessional jobs and activities that constitute a crucial part of the so-called corporate economy.

I now want to move to a rather straightforward account of the distinct ways in which place, and particularly the type of place represented by large cities, matters in today’s global economy.

Place in the Global Economy

We can begin this inquiry by asking whether an economic system characterized by pronounced concentration of ownership and control can have a space economy that lacks points of intense agglomeration. Elsewhere (2000a) I have argued at great length that the territorial dispersal of economic activity made possible by global telecommunications creates a need for expanded central control functions – if this dispersal is to occur under conditions of continued economic concentration. Globalization has engendered a new logic for agglomeration, a new spatial dynamic between dispersal and centralization. The neutralization of distance through telematics has as its correlate a new type of central place.

One way of capturing this is through the image of cities as *command centers* in a global economic system. The notion of command centers is actually one that lacks

much content. In the specialized literature it is usually thought of in terms of the power and global reach of large corporations. I have sought to give it content, to capture the "production" of global command functions, the work of global control and management. Focusing on production rather than simply on the awesome power of large corporations and banks brings into view the wide array of economic activities, many outside the corporation, necessary to produce and reproduce that power. An exclusive focus on the power of corporations and banks would leave out a number of issues concerning the social, economic, and spatial impacts of these activities on the cities where they are located.

The domestic and international dispersal of loci of growth and the internationalization of finance bring to the fore questions concerning the incorporation of such growth into the profit-generating processes that contribute to economic concentration. That is to say, while in principle the territorial decentralization of economic activity could have been accompanied by a corresponding decentralization in ownership and hence in the appropriation of profits, there has been little movement in that direction. Though large firms have increased their subcontracting to smaller firms and many national firms in the newly industrializing countries have grown rapidly, this form of growth is ultimately part of a chain in which a limited number of corporations continue to control the end product and to reap the profits associated with selling on the world market. Even industrial homeworkers in remote rural areas are now part of that chain.

This is not only evident with firms, it is also evident with places. Thus, the internationalization and expansion of finance has brought growth to a large number of smaller financial markets, a growth which has fed the expansion of the global industry. But top-level control and management of the industry have become concentrated in a few leading financial centers, especially New York, London, Tokyo, Frankfurt, Paris, and other such cities. These account for a disproportionate share of all financial transactions and one that has grown rapidly since the early 1980s.

The fundamental dynamic posited here is that the more globalized the economy becomes the higher the agglomeration of central functions in global cities. The extremely high densities evident in the downtown districts of these cities are the spatial expression of this logic. The widely accepted notion that agglomeration has become obsolete when global telecommunication advances should allow for maximum dispersal, is only partly correct. It is, I argue, precisely the opposite in some of the leading sectors: because of the territorial dispersal facilitated by telecommunication advances, agglomeration of centralizing activities has expanded immensely. This is not a mere continuation of old patterns of agglomeration but, one could posit, a new logic for agglomeration.

Information technologies are yet another factor contributing to the new logic for agglomeration. These technologies make possible the geographic dispersal *and* simultaneous integration of many activities. But the distinct conditions under which such facilities are available have promoted centralization of the most skilled users in the most advanced telecommunications centers. Even though a few newer urban centers have built complex telecommunications facilities, entry costs are increasingly high, and there is a tendency for telecommunications to be developed in conjunction with major users, which are typically firms with large national and global markets (Castells 1989; Graham 2000). Indeed there is a close relationship

between the growth of international markets for finance and trade, the tendency for major firms to concentrate in major cities, and the development of telecommunications infrastructures in such cities. Firms with global markets or global production processes require advanced telecommunications facilities. And the acceleration of the financial markets and their internationalization make access to advanced telecommunications facilities essential. The main demand for telecommunication services comes from information-intensive industries which, in turn, tend to locate in major cities which have such facilities.

Besides being command points, I see two additional ways in which major cities are strategic places in the global economy. One is as production sites for finance and specialized services, and the other as transnational marketplaces for these products.

Production sites

Centralized control and management over a geographically dispersed array of plants, offices, and service outlets does not come about inevitably as part of a "world system." It requires the development of a vast range of highly specialized services and of top-level management and control functions. These constitute the components for "global control capability" (Sassen 2000a).

By focusing on the production of this capability, I am seeking to displace the focus of attention from the familiar issue of the power of large corporations over governments and economies; or the issue of supracorporate concentration of power through interlocking directorates or organizations such as the IMF. I want to focus on an aspect that has received less attention, what could be referred to as the *practice* of global control: the work of producing and reproducing the organization and management of a global production system and a global marketplace for finance, both under conditions of economic concentration. This allows me to focus on the infrastructure of jobs involved in this production. Furthermore, while it is typical to think of finance and specialized services as a matter of expertise rather than production, the elaboration of, for example, a financial instrument requires inputs from law, accounting, advertising. There is a production complex in the advanced service economy that benefits from agglomeration. In addition, the actual production process includes a variety of workers and firms that are not usually thought of as being part of the information economy.

The growth of advanced services for firms along with their particular characteristics of production helps to explain the centralization of management and servicing functions that fueled the economic boom of the 1980s in cities such as New York, London, Tokyo, Amsterdam, Toronto, and so on. The face-to-face explanation needs to be refined in several ways. Advanced services are mostly services for firms; unlike other types of services, they are not dependent on vicinity to the consumers served. Rather, economies occur in such specialized firms when they locate close to others that produce key inputs or whose proximity makes possible joint production of certain service offerings. Moreover, concentration arises out of the needs and expectations of the people likely to be employed in these new high-skill jobs. They are attracted to the amenities and lifestyles that large urban centers can offer. The accounting firm can service its clients at a distance, but the production of its service benefits from proximity to specialists of various kinds, lawyers, financial experts, programmers. In this sense then, one can speak of *production sites*.

Transnational marketplaces

Globalization does not *only* consist of instantaneous transmission around the globe; much of it takes place in markets and a key part of even the most digitalized market is likely to be located in a particular place. Cities are the location for many of the transactions in global markets for finance and specialized services. These are markets where firms, governments, and individuals from all around the world can engage in transactions that often bypass the “host” country.

Multisite forms of organization in manufacturing, services, and banking have created an expanded demand for a wide range of specialized service activities to manage and control global networks of factories, service outlets, and branch offices. While to some extent these activities can be carried out in-house, a large share is not. High levels of specialization, the possibility of externalizing the production of some of these services, and the growing demand by large and small firms and by governments, are all conditions that have both resulted from, and made possible, the development of a market for freestanding service firms that produce components for “global control capability.” This in turn means that not only large but also small firms can buy components of that capability, such as management consulting or international legal advice. And so can firms and governments from anywhere in the world. In brief, while the large corporation is undoubtedly a key agent inducing the development of this capability and is its prime beneficiary, it is not the sole user.

In brief, this focus on the *work* behind command functions, on *production* in the finance and services complex, and on *marketplaces* has the effect of incorporating the material facilities underlying globalization and the whole infrastructure of jobs typically not marked as belonging to the corporate sector of the economy: besides the already mentioned work of secretaries and cleaners, there are the truckers who deliver the software, the variety of technicians, and repair workers, all the jobs having to do with the maintenance, painting, renovation of the buildings where it all is housed.

This can lead to the recognition that there are multiple economies involved in constituting the global information economy. It allows for a valorization of types of activities, workers, and firms that have never been installed in the “center” of the economy or have been evicted from that center in the restructuring of the 1980s and have therefore been devalorized in a system that overvalorizes the “center.” Globalization can, then, be seen as a process that involves several economies and work cultures. Yet it is in terms of the corporate economy and the new transnational corporate culture that economic globalization is represented. How can we expand the terrain for this representation to incorporate these conditions? And how can we make a new reading of the locations where corporate power is now installed, a reading that captures the noncorporate presences in those same sites?

Globalization and Inscription

Once we have recovered the centrality of place and of the multiple work cultures within which economic operations are embedded, we are still left confronting a highly restricted terrain for the inscription of economic globalization. Sennett (1992: 36) observes that “the space of authority in Western culture has evolved as a space of

precision.” And Giddens notes the centrality of “expertise” in today’s society, with the corresponding transfer of authority and trust to expert systems (Giddens 1991: 88–91). Corporate culture is one representation of precision and expertise. Its space has become one of the main spaces of authority in today’s cities. The dense concentrations of tall buildings in major downtowns or in the new “edge” cities are the site for corporate culture – though as I will argue later they are also the site for other forms of inhabitation, but these have been made invisible. The vertical grid of the corporate tower is imbued with the same neutrality and rationality attributed to the horizontal grid of American cities. Much has been said about the Protestant ethic as the culture through which the economic operations of capitalism are constituted in the daily life of people. Sennett (1992: 46–62) opens up a whole new dimension both on the Protestant ethic and on the American city by suggesting that what is experienced as a form of rational urban organization, the grid, is actually a far more charged event. It is the representation in urban design of a Protestant language of self and space becoming a modern form of power (Sennett 1992: 55).

We can recognize that the neutralization of place brought about by the modern grid contains an aspiration to a modern space of precision. This same aspiration is evident in the self-inscription of corporate business culture as neutral, as ordered by technology, economic efficiency, rationality. This is put in contrast to what is thought of as the culture of small businesses, or, even more so, ethnic enterprises. Each of these is a partial representation, in one case of the city, in the other of the economy.

The dominant narrative presents the economy as ordered by technical and efficiency principles, and in that sense as neutral. The emergence and consolidation of corporate power appears, then, as an inevitable form that economic growth takes under these ordering principles. The impressive engineering and architectural output evident in the tall corporate towers that dominate our downtowns are a physical embodiment of these principles. And the corporate culture that inhabits these towers and inscribes them is the organizational and behavioral correlate to these ordering principles. Authority is thereby “divorced from community” (Sennett 1991: 37). “The visual forms of legibility in urban designs or space no longer suggest much about subjective life . . .” (1992: 37).

We can easily recognize that both the neutralization of place through the grid in its aspiration to a modern space of precision, *and* the self-inscription of corporate culture as neutral, as ordered by technology and efficiency, are partial representations of the city and of the economy. This inscription needs to be produced and reproduced, and it can never be complete because of all the other presences in the city which are inscribed in urban space. The *representation* of the city contained in the dominant economic narrative can exclude large portions of the lived city and reconstitute them as some amalgamated “other.” The lived city contains multiple spatialities and identities, many indeed articulated and very much a part of the economy, but represented as superfluous, anachronistic, or marginal. Through immigration, for instance, a proliferation of, in their origin, highly localized cultures have now become presences in many large cities, cities whose elites think of themselves as cosmopolitan, that is, transcending any locality. An immense array of cultures from around the world, each rooted in a particular country or village, are now reterritorialized in a few single places, places such as New York, Los Angeles,

Paris, London, and most recently Tokyo. Re-territorialized “cultures” are not the same as cosmopolitanism (Sassen 1998: chapter one). Subjective life is installed in a multiplicity of subjectivities, and this undermines the representation of the advanced modern economy as a space of neutrality, the neutrality that comes from technology and efficiency, the ordering principles of a modern economy.

The space of the amalgamated other is constituted as a devalued, downgraded space in the dominant economic narrative: social and physical decay, a burden. In today’s New York or Los Angeles, this is the space of the immigrant community, of the black ghetto, and increasingly of the old manufacturing district. In its most extreme version it is the space of the “underclass, full of welfare mothers and drug addicts.”

Corporate culture collapses differences, some minute, some sharp, among the different sociocultural contexts into one amorphous otherness, an otherness that has no place in the economy, that holds the low-wage jobs that are, supposedly, only marginally attached to the economy. It therewith reproduces the devaluing of those jobs and of those who hold the jobs. By leaving out these articulations, by restricting the referent to the centrally placed sectors of the economy, the dominant economic narrative can present the economy as containing a higher-order unity. The corporate economy evicts these other economies and its workers from economic representation, and the corporate culture represents them as the other. What is not installed in a corporate center is devalued or will tend to be devalued. And what occupies the corporate building in noncorporate ways is made invisible. The fact that most of the people working in the corporate city during the day are low-paid secretaries, mostly women, many immigrant or, in US cities, African-American women, is not included in the representation of the corporate economy or corporate culture. And the fact that at night a whole other workforce installs itself in these spaces, including the offices of the chief executives, and inscribes the space with a whole different culture (manual labor, often music, lunchbreaks at midnight) is an invisible event.

In this sense, corporate architecture assumes a whole new meaning beyond the question of the economy of offices and real-estate development. The built forms of the corporate economy are representative of its “neutrality” – of being driven by technology and efficiency. Corporate architectural spatiality is one specific form assumed by the circulation of power in the economy, and specifically in the corporate economy. Wigley (1992: 327) notes that the house is not innocent of the violence inside it. And we now have an excellent literature showing how the design of different types of buildings – homes, factories, “public” lobbies – is shaped not only by cultural values and social norms, but also by matters of power in its many instantiations.

The supposedly “rational” organization of office space illustrates certain aspects of Foucault’s microtechnologies of power (Rakatsky 1992). But the changes in the details of inhabitation – institutional practices, the types and contents of buildings – indicate there is no univocal relation between these and built form. I agree with Rakatsky’s observation that the play of ideologies in architectural form is complex. And I would add that this conception is essential if we are to allow for politics and agency in the built environment. Yes, in some sense, buildings are frozen in time. But they can be reinscribed. The only way we can think of these towers now is as corporate, *if* located downtown (and as failed public housing project if they are in

poor ghettos). Can we reinscribe these corporate towers in ways that recover the fact that they are also the workplace of a large noncorporate workforce?

Another dimension along which to explore some of these issues is the question of the body. The body is citified, urbanized as a distinctively metropolitan body (Grosz 1992: 241). The particular geographical, architectural, municipal arrangements constituting a city are particular ingredients in the social constitution of the body; Grosz adds that they are by no means the most important ones. She argues that the structure and particularity of the family and neighborhoods are more influential, though the structure of the city is also contained therein. "The city orients perception insofar as it helps to produce specific conceptions of spatiality" (1992: 250). The city contributes to the organization of family life, of worklife insofar as it contains a distribution in space of the specific locations for each activity; similarly, architectural spatiality can be seen as one particular component in this broader process of the organization of space. I would add to this that the structure, spatiality, and concrete localization of the economy are also influential. In these many ways the city is an active force that "leaves its traces on the subject's corporeality."

But it is citified in diverse ways: it is inscribed by the many sociocultural environments present in the city and it, in turn, inscribes these. There are two forms in which this weaves itself into the space of the economy. One is that these diverse ways in which the body is inscribed by the diverse sociocultural contexts that exist in the city works as a mechanism for segmenting and, in the end, for devaluing, and it does so in very concrete ways. For example, research by the anthropologist Philippe Bourgois (1996) shows us the case of an 18-year-old Puerto Rican from East Harlem who gets a job as a clerical attendant in an office in downtown Manhattan. He tells us that walking over to the copying machine, past all the secretaries, is humiliating. The way he walks, the way he is dressed, the way he moves present him to the office staff secretaries and managers as someone from the ghetto. Someone who "doesn't know the proper ways."

The other way in which this diversity weaves itself into the space of the economy is that it reenters the space of the dominant economic sector as merchandise and as marketing. Of interest here is Stuart Hall's observation that contemporary global culture is different from earlier imperial cultures: it is absorptive, a continuously changing terrain that incorporates the new cultural elements whenever it can. In the earlier period, Hall (1991) argues, the culture of the empire, epitomized by Englishness, was exclusionary, seeking always to reproduce its difference. At the same time today's global culture cannot absorb everything, it is always a terrain for contestation, and its edges are certainly always in flux. The process of absorption can never be complete.

One question is whether the argument developed earlier regarding the neutralization of space brought about by the grid, and the system of values it entails or seeks to produce in space, also occurs with cultural globalization. As with the grid, "global" culture never fully succeeds in this neutralization; yet absorption does alter the "other" that is absorbed. An interesting issue here that emerges out of my work on the urban economy is whether at some point all the "others" (at its most extreme, the informal economy) carry enough weight to transform the center. In the case of culture one can see that the absorption of multiple cultural elements, along with the cultural politics so evident in large cities, have transformed global culture. Yet it

is still centered in the West, its technologies, its images, as Hall argues. Thus absorbed the other cultures are neutralized. And yet . . . they are also present. We can perhaps see this most clearly in urban space, where multiple other work cultures, cultural environments, and culturally inscribed bodies increasingly inhabit a built environment that has its origins visibly in the corporate culture lying behind the grid. Here again, I ask, at what point does the “curve effect,” as social scientists would put it, take hold and bring the center down.

In conclusion, we cannot restrict our account of the global information economy to global *transmissions* and information *outputs*. Likewise, we cannot restrict our representations of economic globalization to the new transnational corporate culture and the corporate towers it inhabits. Globalization is a contradictory space; it is characterized by contestation, internal differentiation, continuous border crossings. The global city is emblematic of this condition. In seeking to show that (a) these types of cities are strategic to economic globalization because they are command points, global marketplaces, and production sites for the information economy, and (b) that many of the devalued sectors of the urban economy actually fulfill crucial functions for the center, I try to recover the importance of cities precisely in a globalized economic system and thereby to make a countervailing argument. It is all the intermediary sectors of the economy (such as routine office work, headquarters that are not geared to the world markets; the variety of services demanded by the largely suburbanized middle class) and of the urban population (i.e. the middle class) that can leave and have left cities. The two sectors that have remained, the center and the “other” find in the city the strategic terrain for their operations.

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