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Regions in context: spatiality, periodicity, and the historical geography of the regional question

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Abstract. The regional question has emerged as an important theoretical and political issue over the past twenty years. Contemporaneously, established regional theories and planning doctrines have been seriously challenged and new approaches offered in their place. This paper is an examination of the recent development of regional political economy in four contexts: (1) the transformative retheorization of space and time currently taking place in social theory and philosophy, (2) the related reconceptualization of the nature and necessity of geographically uneven development, (3) the interpretation of uneven regional development within the historical geography of capitalism, and (4) the contemporary restructuring of spatial divisions of labor. These interrelated contexts form the basis for a reinterpretation of the regional question and an analysis of regional crisis and restructuring in the past and present.

Over the past twenty years, significant changes have been occurring in the patterns of uneven regional development that had become so firmly established within countries during the preceding century. In much the same way that concurrent developments within the global economy seem to be shattering the neat compartmentalization of First, Second, and Third Worlds and inducing claims for an emerging 'new international division of labor', the patterned mosaic of subnational regional differentiation has become more kaleidoscopic and complex, evoking a flood of catchphrases aimed at capturing the ostensibly new regional divisions of labor currently taking shape. In the United States of America, for example, the so-called 'power shift' from frostbelt to sunbelt has become the sweeping metaphor of the moment, enclosing and structuring public debate and scholarly research. Similarly, attention has been drawn to an emergent 'Third Italy' (Bagnasco, 1977) complicating the simple dualism that heretofore had defined the most classical 'North-South' model of uneven regional development; and to various 'role reversals' of regions in many other countries, as once prosperous industrial areas decline in tandem with rapid industrialization of formerly less developed regional peripheries.

As many have been arguing, the *regional question* has been placed on the contemporary political and theoretical agenda with unprecedented force and urgency, at just the moment when long-established planning doctrines, affirmed theories, and taken-for-granted political stances have fallen apart in the wake of a changing reality. Simultaneously, provocative new arguments and positions have appeared in an attempt to fill the widening void. Consider the following title phrases gleaned from recent publications: "Regions in crisis", "Capital versus the regions", "The regional problem", "Regions in question", "Regional wars for jobs and dollars", "The dialectic of region and class", "Regional analysis and the new international division of labor", "Regionalism and the capitalist state", "Global capitalism and regional decline", "In what sense a regional problem?", "Agropolitan regions", and "World city regions", "The North will rise again", "Regional development and the local community". Clearly something is astir, as alternative views jockey for position, each seeking an appropriate understanding of contemporary regional change.

In an earlier paper, I identified two broad interpretive perspectives on the regional question which seem to have consolidated out from the contemporary critiques of established regional development theory[1]. The first I called the *new territorialism* (Friedmann and Weaver, 1979; Stöhr and Taylor, 1981; Weaver, 1984) and criticized for its overly romantic and utopian presentation of regionalism, regional planning, and the territoriality of social life; and for its obfuscating interpretation of the history of capitalist development, the role of the state, and the nature of territorial politics. The second perspective, more explicitly materialist but still eclectic, is that of *regional political economy*, an extension and attempted synthesis of the neo-Marxist sociological and geographical critiques which had coalesced around specifically urban and international levels of analysis and formerly separate political economies. In opposition to the new territorialism, I attempted briefly to argue that regional political economy offers a more appropriate and insightful analysis of the regional question in precisely those key areas of common concern: the origins and politics of regionalism, the evolution of regional planning doctrines, the spatial and territorial contexts of social life and civil society, the unevenly developed and periodizable history and geography of capitalist development, the changing role of the state, and the linkages between the local, the urban, the regional, and the international.

Here I propose to elaborate further on these arguments by setting the current debates on the regional question into four linked contexts of reinterpretation[2]. Each taps a much larger literature which helps significantly to clarify many of the more controversial aspects of the 'new' regional political economy approach and to explain the current trajectories of regional change. These contexts situate the regional question in (1) the transformative retheorization of space and time currently taking place in social theory and philosophy, (2) the concurrent reconceptualization of the nature and necessity of geographically uneven development, (3) the periodicity of uneven regional development and regional restructuring in the historical geography of capitalism, and (4) the contemporary restructuring of 'spatial divisions of labor'.

Situating the regional question 1: the retheorization of spatiality

Interpretation of the contemporary regional restructuring process and of the regional question more generally, requires an understanding of the major changes which have been taking place in recent years in the retheorization of space in social theory and philosophy (Giddens, 1979; 1981; Gregory, 1978; Gregory and Urry, 1985; Soja, 1980; 1985, forthcoming). A far-reaching and transformative retheorization of the spatiality of social life—what Giddens has termed the 'space-time constitution' and 'structuration' of social practices—has been assertively placed at the generative source of social theory after nearly a century of conceptual mystification and benign neglect. This assertion of space in social theory has in turn created a radically altered interpretive framework for the study of regions and territories, a new theoretical 'setting' for the regional question.

The retheorization of spatiality springs primarily from a reconstructed *ontology* of human society, in which the formation of regions, the patterning of uneven regional development and regionalism, and the formulation of regional theory can be more clearly seen as part of an encompassing process of *the social production of space.*

[1] The paper, originally titled "Spatiality, politics, and the state", was presented at the regional meetings of the International Geographical Union in Rio de Janeiro in 1982 and published in the conference proceedings. Essentially the same paper was subsequently published under a new title, "Territorial idealism and the political economy of regional development" (Soja, 1983a).

[2] Parts of the discussion are derived from a paper presented in Greece at the Naxos Seminar on Urban and Regional Problems Associated with EEC Expansion (Soja, 1983b).

Concrete as well as concretizing, historically situated and politically charged, this spatial structuration of society gives an interpretive *specificity* to regions as part of a multilayered spatiality which ranges from the routinized activities of everyday life in an immediate built environment to the network of flows and productive forces shaping the global space economy. Subnational regions are thus among the many created and constitutive *locales* of social life, contingent upon social and historical processes while simultaneously formative of society and history.

Five key premises are central to the contemporary retheorization of spatiality, each making more explicit the fundamental interconnectedness of social and spatial relations and each impinging upon the conceptualization of the regional question. The first premise is an acknowledgement of the existential link between spatiality and human agency: *Being, consciousness, and action are necessarily and contingently spatial*, existing not simply 'in' space but 'of' space as well. To be alive intrinsically and inescapably involves participation in the social production of space, shaping and being shaped by a constantly evolving spatiality. This relation between spatiality and human agency is 'contingent' in the sense that one can be seen as external to the other, allowing for the possibility that individuals affect their spatiality and that spatiality affects individuals. But the relation is also *necessary* [see Sayer (1984), for a discussion of contingency and necessity in realist philosophy]. Spatiality is a presupposition of being, consciousness, and action; and these aspects of human agency cannot be defined or exist concretely without their embodiment in space, their emplacement: être-là, being-*there*.

This first premise attaches human agency to space and spatiality in much the same way that conventional ontologies relate being and time. The second identifies and makes explicit another meaning of this attachment: *Human beings make their own geography, just as they can be said to make their own history*, that is, purposefully but within a context of constraints (biophysical, experiential, and 'recursive', that is, derived from existing histories and geographies). This amended Marxian aphorism ties the individual to the societal and simultaneously implies that what is socially produced can be socially restructured and transformed. There are no permanent determinations, no unmodifiable contingencies, in the spatiality of social life.

A third premise follows: *Social and spatial relations are intercontingent and combined.* I attempted to capture this complex intertwining some years ago in the notion of a 'sociospatial dialectic' (Soja, 1980). Others have evoked the same premise in different ways. Gregory (1978), for example, urges that we recognize not only that social reproduction is a key moment in the formation of spatial structure but also that spatial structure is a critical moment in social reproduction. Poulantzas (1978) argues that spatial and temporal 'matrices' are both presupposition and embodiment of all social relations, an argument echoed by Giddens (1981) in defining space-time structuration as both medium and outcome of social practices. The social and the spatial can be separated to appreciate the results of their contingencies (as outcomes, one of the other), but they cannot be dichotomized into independent realities, each with their own laws of formation and transformation.

A fourth premise takes this sociospatial dialectic a step further: *The social production of space creates the material form of social relations, their concretization, specification, emplacement.* Social relations become concrete in their spatialization, their projection into concrete spatiality. Otherwise, they remain, as Lefebvre (1974) argues, 'pure' abstractions or representations. More than just reflections onto a spatial environment, the spatiality of social life is society materially constituted, although this striking realization is frequently buried under many layers of mystification which represent spatiality as something else. Stated differently, spatiality can be seen as a *social hieroglyphic* comparable with Marx's treatment of the commodity

form under capitalism. Behind and within what appears to be a thing-like collection of physical properties and attributes is hidden and obscured the fundamental structuration of social relations and social life.

Completing this sequence of premises is another generative source for the reconceptualization of space in social theory, the recognition that *the production and reproduction of the spatiality of social life is problematic.* It is marked by complexity, conflict, and contradiction, and is filled with politics and ideology. Far from being the outcome of mechanical, natural, or automatic processes, spatiality is a dynamic and competitive field of social action, ideological confrontation, political struggle, located ontologically and epistemologically at the center of social life both in theory and in practice. This problematic of spatiality has always existed, but over at least the past century of social 'science' and 'scientific' socialism, it has tended to remain outside our conscious awareness, relatively untheorized and latent, buried under multiple layers of mystification which have prevented the development of an appropriately materialist interpretation of spatiality and a political consciousness of the transformative power of what can be called collective spatial praxis.

Demystifying and politicizing the spatiality of social life is the critical nexus of the contemporary retheorization. It is also the foundation for a critical reinterpretation of the regional question when the demystification and politicization are made more 'conjunctural', that is, made more specific with regard to time and place, actual history and geography.

Situating the regional question 2: geographically uneven development

Here we move from ontological discussion to a specification of the regional question within the context of geographically uneven development in societies organized primarily around capitalist social relations, a context which itself is currently being reconceptualized in conjunctioin with the retheorization of spatiality (Carney et al, 1980; Harvey, 1982; Smith, 1985; Soja, 1984). Geographically uneven development (GUD) is an essential feature of capitalist spatiality, of what Poulantzas (1978) called the 'spatial matrix' of capitalism. Produced and reproduced at multiple scales, from the local to the global, GUD is inherent in the concretization of capitalist social relations both as medium and as outcome, as presupposition and as embodiment. Like spatiality itself, GUD has traditionally been interpreted as an external reflection of social forces, an illusive mirror of social action and the class struggle. It too is now being appropriately revealed and politicized in a reconstructed historical *and* geographical materialism.

The spatiality of social life, whether capitalist or not, is always unevenly developed, in that the particular attributes, relations, and locales which constitute it are never, in combination at least, distributed uniformly over geographical space, or, in that metaphor of spaceless social theory, piled together on the head of a pin. Were GUD *only* so 'incidental', however, its interpretation might plausibly be confined to encyclopedic description, taxonomic measurement, areal and temporal correlations, and utopian lamentations. Instead, the production and reproduction of GUD is *necessary* to the origins, development, and survival of capitalism and demands an interpretation which moves beyond its incidental expression. Stated most forcefully, Mandel (1976, page 43) has argued that geographically uneven development is "the very essence of capitalism, on the same level as the exploitation of labor by capital".

GUD as an outcome arises from specific features of capitalist spatiality which have only recently begun to be recognized and studied. Lefebvre (1980), for example, emphasizes the tendencies toward homogenization, fragmentation, and hierarchical structure in capitalist spatiality vis-à-vis other modes of production. Poulantzas (1978, page 64) presents a similar depiction of the spatial and temporal matrices of

capitalism:

> "At one and the same time presupposition of the relations of production and embodiment of the labor process, this framework consists in the organization of a continuous, homogeneous, cracked and fragmented space-time such as lies at the basis of Taylorism: a cross-ruled, segmented and cellular space ... and a linear, serial, repetitive and cumulative time ... oriented toward a finished product—namely, the space-time materialized *par excellence* in the production line."

He goes further (page 107) to capture some of the peculiar paradoxes embodied in the production of capitalist spatiality:

> "separation and division in order to unify; parcelling out in order to structure; atomization in order to encompass; segmentation in order to totalize; closure in order to homogenize; and individualization in order to obliterate difference and otherness."

GUD thus becomes part of the material framework of capitalism, linked directly to the labor process, to economic exploitation and political domination, to the accumulation process and attendant class struggles, to the making of concrete capitalist geography and history. Among the many aspects of GUD, three warrant particular attention here, for they effectively exemplify the new interpretations currently being explored: (1) the contradiction between equalization and differentiation in GUD; (2) the recognition of the geographical transfer of value; and (3) the specificity of core-periphery structures. Each bears directly on the regional question.

Simultaneous tendencies toward *equalization and differentiation* define GUD as both outcome and medium of capitalist historical development (Hadjimichalis, 1984; Soja, 1984). Restated, GUD can be seen to arise from the combination of two processes, one leading to increasing spatial differentiation in the various elements which make up capitalist production and consumption relations (for example, productivity of labor, rates of profit, organic composition of capital, investment expenditures, wages and incomes, etc); and the other to the spatial equalization, evening out, of the same elements in combination. Tendency and countertendency work simultaneously to create the specific forms and patterning of geographical unevenness between rural and urban areas, between subnational regions, and among nations, and in so doing build in a chronic tension to the development process, a problematic opposition specific to GUD.

In the traditional regional development literature, the question of whether capitalism is associated with increasing or decreasing 'regional inequalities' is usually treated categorically (yes or no) or in a simple temporal combination, rising in early stages of development, falling later. The complex interplay of equalization and differentiation presents no such simplistic determinations and forces interpretation to be *conjunctural*, to be related to specific time and place, to a more fluid and complex *regionalization* and *periodization* of capitalist development. Tendencies leading both to evenness and to unevenness always exist and they operate together to produce and reproduce a resultant outcome: GUD, omnipresent, subject to rigidification over long periods of time, yet always changeable, since it too is a social product.

The persistent interplay of spatial differentiation and equalization is vividly expressed in the progressive internationalization of capital. The geographical expansion of capitalism over the past four centuries has not been a simple process of homogenization, erasing precapitalist relations of production in its wake and substituting the pure relations of *Capital*, like molasses spreading on a plate. Instead, as many have described it, there has been a complex and conflict-filled process of articulation characterized both by disintegration and by preservation of noncapitalist societies, by homogenization and fragmentation, differentiation and equalization. The resulting patterns of uneven development define an evolving international division of labor, or,

perhaps more accurately, a sequence of international divisions of labor marked by periodic rounds of consolidation, crisis, and restructuring.

An homologous dynamic applies to the regional divisions of labor within countries. Consider, for example, the tense relations between differentiation and homogenization, regionalization and regionalism, that are expressed in Lipietz's (1980, page 74) observation on the role of the state in the manipulation of capitalist spatiality.

> "Faced with the uneven development of socio-economic regions, the state must take care to avoid sparking off the political or social struggles which would arise from too abrupt a dissolution or integration of archaic modes of production. This is what it does in a general fashion when it inhibits the process of articulation (protectionism) or when it intervenes promptly to remove social consequences (permanent displacement allowances). But as soon as internal and international evolution make it necessary, capitalist development assigns to the state the role of controlling and encouraging the establishment of a new inter-regional division of labor. This 'projected space' comes into more or less violent conflict with 'inherited space'."

Underlying the formation and reformation of these spatial divisions of labor is a system of 'flows' and 'stocks'—of labor power, fixed and circulating capital, technological and organizational skills—which works to concentrate and localize capitalist development unevenly over geographical space. Part of this system is a complex phenomenon which has only recently been explicitly recognized and rigorously explored as an aspect of an increasingly revealed spatiality of capitalist development: the *geographical transfer of value* (Emmanuel, 1972; Forbes and Rimmer, 1984; Hadjimichalis, 1984; Soja, 1984).

Once put into explicit focus, the geographical transfer of value seems exquisitely obvious, a straightforward derivation from the discussion of value transfer found in the third volume of *Capital*. Here Marx explained how the differentiation of firms, branches, and sectors of capitalist production (measured primarily in terms of productivity and the organic composition of capital), combined with the omnipresence of capitalist competition, leads to a transfer of value measured in socially necessary labor time. Thus, a high-efficiency firm, for example, will get more labor value in market exchange than that which is contained in its products, whereas for a firm with lower levels of efficiency and a smaller proportion of constant capital (smaller capital-labor ratio), less than proportionate value would be obtained.

Moving these firms, branches, sectors, and markets off the spaceless head of a pin and into a differentiated and unevenly developed spatiality opens up to view the geographical transfer of value carried in the networks of trade, money flows, labor migration, and technology exchange. This concrete redistributive mechanism arises from existing patterns of GUD, from the existence of areas of greater and lesser productivity, higher and lower capital-labor ratios in production, higher and lower rates of profit, and unequal wage rates and costs of living. Produced from GUD, the geographical transfer of value also plays an important role in producing and reproducing GUD at all its scales, from the local to the global. It is one of the specific and formative mechanisms shaping capitalist spatiality, still only partially understood and analytically controversial, but now at least exposed to view and emplaced in an appropriate theoretical and political context.

It is a short step from the geographical transfer of value to an interpretation of the origins and implications of *core and periphery* in capitalist development. The core-periphery structure can be described as a first-order patterning or outcome of GUD, a specific spatial configuration which arises from an historical tendency toward polarization and opposition in spatial divisions of labor and in the geographical intensity of capitalist development and underdevelopment. Nothing is permanently frozen in these core-periphery structures, except perhaps the fundamental opposition

and antagonism between labor and capital, the root source of the first-order patterning of the social and spatial structure of capitalism. In the contemporary retheorization of spatiality, core-periphery and bourgeoisie-proletariat are interpretable together as social products, intercontingent and combined. Core and periphery are thus material expressions of the social relations of capitalism, and their production and reproduction over time is filled with conflict, with politics and ideology, with social struggle.

This interpretation of core and periphery relations is still highly controversial, in part because of a continuing resistance to the assertion of space in the traditional fabric of historical materialist analysis, but also because of the failure of those who routinely use the terms to situate them appropriately in the theorization of capitalist spatiality and GUD (see Browett, 1984; and Smith, forthcoming). Some further elaboration is therefore necessary.

Core areas can be described as the primary locales of capitalist accumulation and control over the means of production. They arise in conjunction with a complex combination of locational advantages related to the tendency toward increasing concentration and centralization of capital; the efficiency of spatial agglomeration in the exercise of political power and social control; and a certain degree of cumulative causation in localizing accumulation derived from proximate production activities as well as from the productivity of more distant areas (that is, through geographical transfers of value). They are produced at many different scales and tend, for many different reasons, to be associated with high levels of urbanization. Indeed, Marx's interpretation of the city-countryside relation is a generalizable model for the formation of cores and peripheries in capitalist development.

Peripheralization is the necessary concomitant to the geographical centralization of core areas, just as proletarianization is concomitant with the existence of a class of capitalists. The theoretical and political significance of the core-periphery structure thus rests not in its superficial geometry but in the degree to which it is the material geographical expression of the fundamental class structure of capitalist society. This interpolation of social and spatial structure is no simple mapping of one onto the other, producing a neat division into bourgeois and proletarian regions. First of all, the hierarchical structure of capitalist spatiality contains cores and peripheries at different scales, all interrelated in ways we have just begun to understand (Smith, 1985). In addition, just as there are other definable classes and often blurred class boundaries which complicate the easy assignment of all individuals into the two preeminent class divisions of capitalism, so too is there a complication in the clear assignment of all geographical locales into either core or periphery.

Thus, there is no necessity that core and periphery be rigidly bounded or permanently fixed. Individuals in their lifetime can move from one class to another and back again, without destroying the antagonistic class structure of capitalist society. So too can areas and regions shift over time from core to periphery – and back again—without destroying the structural meaning of core-periphery relations in capitalist spatiality. What always exists is a partitioning of power and control over the production and allocation of surplus value that splits capitalist societies into two primary social and spatial divisions which express the relation between capital and labor that defines capitalism itself. There are many other divisions, there are complicating articulations with noncapitalist production systems, there are 'middle classes' and 'semiperipheries' which appear to mix features of both class divisions, there are other major sources of dominance and subordination (race, gender, age) which may either reinforce or cut across the capital-labor relation. A similar bifurcation in control over production and allocation of surpluses, with similar

cross-cutting cleavages from other sources, can also characterize existing socialist societies. But, insofar as capitalism continues to exist, there will remain an antagonistic opposition between labor and capital and between core and periphery.

Situating the regional question 3: the historical geography of capitalism

In the preceding discussion, I have attempted to set the regional question into the contemporary retheorization of spatiality and the associated reinterpretation of geographically uneven development. In such a setting, the regional question becomes part of a broader spatial problematic which is both ontological and abstract as well as conjunctural and concrete. In its concreteness, the regional question is directly linked to the complex processes and forms associated with the geographically uneven development of capitalism. Sharpening the focus a little further conjoins the regional question with the empirical history and geography of capitalist development and with a more specified spatial problematic, effectively described in the words of Harvey (1985, page 150):

> "Capitalist development must negotiate a knife-edge path between preserving the values of past commitments made at a particular place and time, or devaluing them to open up fresh room for accumulation. Capitalism perpetually strives, therefore, to create a social and physical landscape in its own image and requisite to its own needs at a particular point in time, only just as certainly to undermine, disrupt, and even destroy that landscape at a later point in time. The inner contradictions of capitalism are expressed through the restless formation and re-formation of geographical landscapes."

The social production and reproduction of capitalist spatiality—what Harvey calls "the formation and re-formation of geographical landscapes"—is a continuous process. This continuity, however, has been marked by an identifiable historical rhythm or periodicity arising in conjunction with the succession of major crises which have punctuated the history of capitalist development. Moreover, as Harvey (1982) has argued, capitalism has recurrently responded to its internal contradictions and crises with attempts to achieve a 'spatial fix', a major reconstitution and restructuring of capitalist spatiality designed to restore advantageous conditions, open new sources for accelerated accumulation, and reinforce control over labor and the labor process. During prolonged periods of deepening recession, expanding surpluses of unrealizable capital and unemployed labor, spatial restructuring has been accelerated both through geographical expansion (for example, the progressive extension onto a global scale of commodity trade and financial investments, the search for new markets, raw material sources, and labor supplies) and through the internal reconstruction of already existing capitalist spatiality and established patterns of GUD—an intensifying and extensifying spatial fix.

Amidst the many smaller perturbations and minor crises that have been so numerous throughout the history of capitalist development, four major and prolonged periods of crises and intense restructuring stand out so clearly that they demand particular attention. After the first identifiable 'overaccumulation' crisis to affect virtually all existing capitalist societies simultaneously, that which occurred in the 1820s, there were two turbulent decades of change which eventually set into place the comprehensive foundations of competitive industrial capitalism, including the firm establishment of accommodative bourgeois states. After the revolutionary year of 1848, industrial capitalism boomed, and over the next twenty years the rate of growth in world trade and industrial output in what were then the core countries grew more rapidly than ever before and probably ever since (Mandel, 1980). Capitalism survived its first prolonged crisis as it would again, through a successful intensification

(including enforced control over the working class) and extensification (opening massive new markets 'overseas').

Appropriate 'verification' cannot be provided here, but similar periods of crisis and restructuring, intensification and extensification, can be identified during the last three decades of the 19th century (considered at the time the 'Great Depression'); during the Great Depression of the 20th century to World War 2; and in the years following what Mandel presciently called the 'Second Slump', the deep worldwide recession of the early 1970s, continuing to the present. In each of the preceding crisis periods (and still ongoing in the current one), there occured pronounced changes in the social and spatial organization of capitalist societies which subsequently succeeded in restoring capitalist accumulation at a cost. Accompanying these changes, for example, were widespread destruction and devalorization of geographical landscapes through war, state planning, rebellion, technological change, and the intensified search for restorative superprofits. Reconstruction and reformation emerged simultaneously from similar influences to create altered landscapes which define an historical *sequence* of restructured capitalist spatialities in conjunction with a succession of distinguishable 'submodes' of capitalist production: competitive industrial and entrepreneurial capitalism prevailing before the end of the 19th century; corporate-monopoly capitalism and imperialism overlapping with it and remaining dominant through to World War 2; an increasingly state-managed welfare capitalism arising in the Great Depression and currently deep in crisis; and perhaps still another form (centered around global capital?) emerging phoenix-like at present.

Again, it is not possible to expand and elaborate this discussion here. What I wish to emphasize is the empirical and political relevance of this periodicity first to an analysis of the historical geography of capitalism and second to an understanding of the regional question and, in particular, the contemporary regional restructuring process. There is a growing literature which, with increasing effectiveness, traces the patterns of *urban* restructuring accordant with the broad periodization defined above (Soja et al, 1983). Application to regional development and restructuring is less extensive and derives primarily from the work of Mandel (1975; 1976; 1980; but see also O'Keefe, 1984).

Mandel's 'long-wave' interpretation of the regional question springs from his assertion that "the whole capitalist system appears as a hierarchical structure of different levels of productivity, and as the uneven development of states, regions, branches of industry and firms, unleashed by the quest for superprofits" (Mandel, 1975, page 102). This search for superprofits (that is, greater than the average for all capital) centers around three major sources, each existing throughout the history of capitalist development and underdevelopment, but each achieving particular prominence during different historical periods. During what he calls the age of 'freely competitive capitalism' (up to the end of the 19th century) the predominant form of combined and uneven development was *regional*, based upon the geographical juxtaposition of industry and agriculture within the core capitalist countries. Industrial capital and production were concentrated and localized in only a few territorial complexes, surrounded by rings of agrarian regions serving to supply raw materials and food, markets for industrial consumer goods, and reservoirs of cheap labor.

This distinctive regional division of labor was consolidated through the formation of integrated national markets (viz, the unification of Germany and Italy during the late 19th century) and dependent territories. The classical case of an agrarian 'subsidiary country' was Ireland, whose budding industries, as Marx noted, were destroyed in an early example of the process of capitalist underdevelopment. Other similar subsidiary regions or 'internal colonies' included Flanders, the US South, the Italian Mezzogiorno, many parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, some eastern and

southern sections of Germany (Bavaria, Silesia, Pomerania–Mecklenburg), the agrarian west and center of France, and southern Spain. What was occurring throughout the 19th century was a regionalization and expansion in scale of the town–countryside relationship and the 'primitive accumulation' which marked the origins of capitalism.

Regionalism developed primarily out of an attempt to preserve distinct regional cultures and to resist the particular spatial division of labor being imposed through market integration. For the most part, this involved subsidiary agrarian regions, but relatively industrialized locales, such as Catalonia, also responded. Anarchist thought found fertile ground in many of these regional peripheries, with its antistate and decentralist principles, but there also developed powerful new regional hegemonic blocks (to borrow from Gramsci) which welcomed, orchestrated, and gained from regional underdevelopment.

In the age of imperialism and the rise of corporate monopolies and oligopolies, the primary source of superprofits shifted, very much as part of a scale-expanding spatial fix when superprofits from regional underdevelopment within industrialized countries became insufficient, and prolonged economic crisis ensued. The *international* juxtaposition of development in the imperialist states and underdevelopment in colonial and semicolonial countries spurred recovery from the late 19th century depression and rapid economic growth in the first two decades of the 20th century. Capitalism did not suddenly internationalize. Mercantile capital had been operating to extract superprofits throughout the world for centuries through commodity trade. Imperialism, however, internationalized another circuit of capital (money, finance, investments), which efficiently organized exploitation and geographical transfers of value in a more formally established and actively developed global periphery.

Regional underdevelopment in the core countries did not disappear, nor did the pressure of antagonistic regionalisms. There was some significant regional restructuring, however, shaped largely by the geographically uneven impact of internationalization and the accelerated concentration and centralization of capital (for example, the rash of vertical and horizontal mergers) associated with it. Regions containing the main imperialist capitals and the centers of monopoly control (for example, major corporate headquarters) tended to grow much more rapidly than those which formerly were at similar levels of industrial development. The major scale for spatial restructuring in the core countries, however, was not so much the regional division of labor (where the hierarchical structure of levels of development probably did not change very much, even if the gaps between levels may have been reduced). It was concentrated at the urban scale[3].

The older agrarian peripheries were either partially urbanized or left relatively alone, but their key past role of supplying cheap labor, food, raw materials, and consumer markets for industrial goods became increasingly transposed into the 'external' colonies. Where these functions did remain important—for example, in Ireland and the Mezzogiorno—peasant rebellions and aggressive regional movements did arise. But the political and economic 'action' was sandwiched around them, in the major urban areas and in the international arena of interimperialist rivalry.

[3] Greater corporate centralization, increasing segmentation of the labor force into monopoly and competitive sectors, the increasing separation of management and production functions, and the desire to escape working-class militancy contributed to the reorganization of *urban* geographical divisions of labor. The central core became increasingly tertiarized as industrial production moved out into the formerly residential rings and satellite cities, especially in the United States of America. Combined with a surge in residential suburbanization beginning before the turn of the century, this selective decentralization helped to fragment the working class and improve social control over the expanded urban labor force, at least temporarily and not without significant struggle (see Soja et al, 1983).

This distinctive regime of accumulation, based on the consolidation of an international division of labor partitioned into a dominant-industrialized-imperialist core and a dependent-agrarian-underdeveloped periphery, as well as on the more centralized corporate structure of monopoly and finance capital, traced a similar path of historical development to that of the competitive-entrepreneurial industrial capitalism that preceded it. Emerging clearly during the period of crisis and restructuring of the late 19th century, it became the foundation for an expansive boom in the early 20th century, only itself to plunge into crisis and significant restructuring during the Great Depression. Imperialism and monopoly capitalism did not disappear, however, just as its assertion as a predominant regime of accumulation did not erase its predecessor. What developed was another 'layer', a reorganized regime of accumulation articulated with its residual antecedents and able to coordinate recovery from the deepest depression in capitalist history.

Mandel describes this new regime of accumulation as "Late Capitalism" and argues that it marks a shift in the primary source of superprofits from GUD to "the overall juxtaposition of development in growth sectors and underdevelopment in others, primarily in the imperialist countries but also in the semi-colonies in a secondary way" (Mandel, 1975, page 103). As he is careful to note, these *technological rents*—surplus profits originating from advances in productivity based largely on technological developments—existed in earlier periods and were essential to the very origins of capitalism. In the absence of high levels of centralization of capital, however, their past importance tended to be sporadic and of short duration. Only within Late Capitalism, he argues, do they become predominant and systemic. They also become more central to an understanding of the changing regional divisions of labor and the changing nature of the regional problem over the past forty years.

Muted during the Great Depression and in the immediate postwar period, the regional question took on a new importance in the 1950s. From the reorientation of the British new town programs toward more regional versus exclusively urban problems, to the beginnings of planning for the development of the Italian Mezzogiorno and other 'backward' regions in core countries, regional welfare planning was put on the public agenda, often but not always in response to regional unrest and political pressures. As was true for other forms of planning and the role of the state in general, there were two often contradictory sides to these promises of improved regional welfare. State-managed capitalism required a sustained social legitimization, especially from those most likely to create political and economic disorder. Promising more balanced regional development accorded well with this objective. At the same time, the state—in no small part because it depended upon tax revenues—had also to facilitate the capitalist accumulation process, which did not always coincide with regional welfare improvements. After all, uneven regional development has always been an important foundation for the generation and extraction of superprofits.

This contradictory role of the state and of regional planning remained relatively invisible well into the 1960s, although virtually every major regional development program met with powerful resistance from some segments of private capital. Even when their initiation could not be blocked, program activities were at least partially co-opted to benefit highly centralized and concentrated capital interests, often draining resources (and available technological rents) from the 'backward' region into the most developed areas of the space economy. Awareness of the countervailing spatial strategies of capital (and of the state) was minimal on the part both of the 'targeted' regional poor and of the experts (theoreticians and practitioners) who were shaping regional policy. For the most part, the first group were soothed by the

promises proffered while the second group were convinced that their idealistic objectives could be obtained through good intentions, well-formulated policies, and innovative planning ideas.

Regional planning never received especially large portions of public expenditures, but the period from 1950–1970 was a 'golden age' of sorts in the history of regional development theory and practice. Growth poles and growth centers, regional science and spatial systems analysis, urban systems modelling and various schemes for 'concentrated deconcentration' entered public policy in most of the industrial core countries and were assiduously exported, perhaps even more influentially, throughout the decolonizing periphery and the slowly and selectively industrializing semiperiphery. By 1970, virtually every country in the world had adopted some form of spatial planning program, in some instances placing it as the centerpiece of the national economic development plan. This worldwide expansion of regional planning signalled an explicit (if often only documentary) commitment by the state to redress regional inequalities, in effect to change the inherited regional division of labor. As long as the promises appeared potentially achievable, antagonistic regionalisms remained relatively quiescent, even when the intended changes showed no sign of coming about.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the postwar boom peaked and major recessionary tendencies initiated a series of crises which continue today. Under these less optimistic conditions, there has been a serious critical rethinking of regional and spatial theory, provoked discomfortingly by an increasingly compelling radical critique of the welfare state and the *système étatique*, of the centralized top-down planning process, and, more generally, of contemporary capitalisms and socialisms. Even more influential has been an explosion of regionalism and the increased politicization of regional problems in Europe, North America, and many other parts of the world. Looking back at the historical geography of capitalism, we appear to have entered again into a prolonged period of restructuring and another round of attempted intensification and extensification, 'deepening' and 'widening', another search for both a spatial and a sectoral fix, another complex interplay between 'inherited' and 'projected' spatialities. A contemporary interpretation of the regional question must thus be situated directly in this context of restructuring.

Situating the regional question 4: the contemporary restructuring process

Not all regional political economists adopt the specifically Mandelian conceptualization of long waves, Late Capitalism, and technological rents. Nevertheless, underlying such alternative interpretations of the contemporary restructuring process as the articulation of 'submodes' of production and the rise of 'global capitalism' (Forbes and Thrift, 1984; Gibson and Horvath, 1983; Gibson et al, 1984), the French modes of regulation/regimes of accumulation approach and its related arguments about the 'globalization of the crisis of Fordism' (Aglietta, 1979; Lipietz, 1984a; 1984b), and especially the new industrial geography of territorial labor markets, sectoral profit cycles, and changing spatial divisions of labor (Massey, 1984; Scott and Storper, forthcoming; Walker and Storper, 1984) is a set of similar assumptions about the historical geography of capitalist development and hence about regional restructuring. There are differences in periodization, labelling, and particular explanatory emphases, but there are many important commonalities.

All share a similar crisis model of historical and geographical change; an emphasis on class analysis and the labor process; an appreciation for the relevance of technology and corporate structure to the differentiation of productivity and profits; explicit attention to the interplay between spatiality, politics, and the role of the state; a concern for analyzing the internationalization of capital and the associated acceleration of capital mobility and labor migration. Interpretations typically hinge around a

critical turning point in the late 1960s to early 1970s and its echoing of Great Depressions of the past; and there is an open acceptance of the general restructuring hypothesis: that we are currently in the midst of a period in which capital and labor are being significantly restructured in an attempt (not yet completely successful) to restore rising profits and reinforce labor discipline, in part through a direct attack on working-class organization, wages, and standards of living.

These shared emphases engender a particular perspective on regional restructuring and changing patterns of uneven regional development. To begin with, they suggest that the 'new' regional and international divisions of labor taking shape in the past twenty years are not all that much different from the 'old' divisions, which remain not only alive but kicking as well. The historical geography of capitalism has not been marked by grand turnabouts and complete systems replacements, but rather by an evolving sequence of partial and selective restructurings which do not erase the past or destroy the fundamental and definitive structural conditions of capitalist social and spatial relations. There thus seems no justification for a 'rush to the post'—to postindustrialism, post-Marxism, post-Keynesianism, postimperialism, postcapitalism—or other proclamations of the 'end' of an era, as if the past can be peeled away and discarded.

Nevertheless, there have been significant changes and they cannot be ignored. Paradoxical as it may initially appear, part of the change has involved an intensification of preexisting patterns of uneven regional development and a reinforcement of old core and periphery relations. Many well-established core regions have experienced sustained and even expanded relative economic and political power, while many backward peripheries have plunged deeper into relative impoverishment, in some cases into pandemic famine. These 'intensified continuities', however, are not simply more of the same, for they have been occurring under a new set of sectoral, social, political, and technological conditions which have significantly modified how GUD is produced and reproduced. Understanding these changing conditions has become the critical focus for contemporary interpretations of regional restructuring.

It is useful to return to Mandel's insightful argument about technological rents as the primary source of superprofits since World War 2. Technological rents have always been important, but over the past forty years their pivotal significance has made regional change much more than ever before a product of *sectoral* change within the capitalist world economy, as particular industries and specific branches and firms within industrial sectors are increasingly differentiated in terms of productivity, profitability, and control over the labor force, especially in response to deepening crisis. Underlying this juxtaposition of rapid growth cycles in some sectors and decline and devalorization in others has been a far-reaching technological 'fix' stimulated and sustained by state policies (including defense and military expenditures) and the activities of financial and banking capital (often overlapping with the state) as well as through the normal channels of capitalist competition. Rapidly changing sectoral patterns of development and underdevelopment, accelerated product and profit cycles, and accommodative new technologies have been accompanied by increased *capital mobility* to facilitate the efficient search for sectoral superprofits anywhere in the world. Locational decisionmaking is not always successful, but the aggregate effect has been to derigidify long-established spatial divisions of labor at virtually all geographic scales.

Variants of this interpretive scenario differ in their specific emphasis and terminology, and debates and controversy continue over its theoretical and political meaning, but there is sufficient common ground to at least outline some projected repercussions on the contemporary restructuring of regions. One of the more obvious effects of the derigidification of regional structures has been what Mandel

called the "role reversal of regions". Over the past fifty years and most visibly over the past twenty, many once highly industrialized and prosperous core regions—such as segments of the American manufacturing belt, northeast England and Wales, northern France, Wallonia, the Ruhr—have experienced accelerated economic decline and deindustrialization, while many poor peripheral regions (including some of the classical examples of regional underdevelopment) have become new centers of industrial growth and economic expansion. These still somewhat tentative role reversals reflect the most extensive decentralization and international spread of industrial production since the early development of industrial capitalism, and have created a category of NIRs (newly industrialized regions) to match the so-called NICs (newly industrialized countries) which figure so prominently in arguments about the restructured international division of labor.

Within most countries, however, the role reversal of regions is actually an oversimplification of a much more complex restructuring process that might better be described as an accelerated regional *recycling*, as regions move through several phases of development and decline following sectoral shifts, rounds of intensive labor disciplining, and heightened capital mobility. The sequence of changes experienced in New England offers one well-analyzed example (see Harrison, 1981) and a similar recycling first into then out of decline may be occurring in the Scottish Lowlands and in many other older industrial regions. There is also some evidence to suggest that the industrial 'miracles' of the NIRs and NICs may be equally unstable and short-lived, making such grand descriptive metaphors as the frostbelt-sunbelt shift and the new international division of labor appear increasingly exaggerated and misleading.

What has been occurring can be more cautiously described as a significant but not transformative shake-up in long-established regional divisions of labor and the formation of new and still highly unstable *regionalizations* of national economies generated in large part through a more intensified crisis-spurred search for sectoral superprofits. Many influences impinge upon this process, and its interpretation remains controversial and incomplete, defying easy generalization and glib conclusions. Nevertheless, it can be added that this regionalization has become associated with a new *regionalism*, as various social movements and regional political coalitions respond to regional restructuring—to resist, to encourage, to reorganize, or to demand more, for there is no singular regionalist response. These multiple forms of regionalism, however, have repoliticized the regional question as a more general spatial question. No longer is regionalism rooted only in resistance to the homogenization of cultural traditions, as it was primarily in the 19th century, but is spurred more directly by what Goodman (1979) aptly called "regional wars for jobs and dollars", now expanded to a global scale and encompassing the whole hierarchy of spatial locales, all spatial divisions of labor.

The central importance of technological and sectoral restructuring has not eliminated the exploitation of GUD as a source of sustaining superprofits. Nor has it reduced the political and economic relevance of the spatiality of social life. Indeed, the current crisis is *accentuating spatiality* and revealing more clearly than ever before, the spatial and locational strategies of capitalist accumulation and the necessity for labor and all segments of society 'peripheralized' by capitalist development and restructuring to create spatially conscious counterstrategies at all geographical scales, in all territorial locales. Progressive social movements must thus become consciously spatial movements as well. Each of the four interpretive contexts used here to situate the regional question are means toward that end.

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