

Territorial, Scalar, Networked, Connected: In What Sense a 'Regional World'?

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**TERRITORIAL, SCALAR, NETWORKED, CONNECTED:
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Abstract

Whilst undoubtedly central to academic and policy-relevant spatial analysis for over a hundred years now, ‘the region’ has continued to be an elusive category: its various meanings and the implications therein frequently being challenged and modified through paradigmatic shifts in such spatial analysis. Today, amid what is undoubtedly a period of dramatic economic transformation, political restructuring and sociocultural change, a range of often multi-disciplinary approaches to the regional concept exist, informing us, variously, how regions can become competitive economic zones within a global economy, strategic political territories in a complex system of multi-level governance, cultural spaces forged through a politics of identity, or – in an approach that departs quite radically from conventional territorially based readings – spaces constituted out of the spatiality of flow and relational networks of connectivity. Drawing on the experience of a post-devolution United Kingdom, this paper critically assesses the respective merits of these various conceptualizations of the region, and offers some remarks about the challenges confronting contemporary regional studies.

TERRITORIAL, SCALAR, NETWORKED, CONNECTED: IN WHAT SENSE A 'REGIONAL WORLD'?

Regions are not simply the unintended outcomes of economic, social and political processes but are often the deliberate product of actions by those with power in society, who use space and create places in the pursuit of their goals (Ron Johnston 1991: 68).

In this world so often described as a space of flows, so much of our formal democratic politics is organized territorially (Doreen Massey 2004: 9).

1 Regional Worlds Apart?

Since the mid-1990s, and stimulated at least in part by a succession of landmark scholarly publications (e.g. Harvie 1994; Amin and Thrift 1995; Storper 1997; Cooke and Morgan 1998; Keating 1998; Scott 1998), the foundational concept of this journal has been the subject of quite intense debate across a number of academic disciplines and sub-disciplines. The economic geographer, Michael Storper, captures much of this intensity in his forthright assertion that, whereas for much of the mid- to late twentieth century, the region was largely a residual category – merely an “outcome of deeper political-economic processes” (Storper 1997: 3) – the current epoch sees it as representing a fundamental basis of economic and social life. A similar view is expressed by the political geographer, John Agnew, who contends that, far from disappearing amid the full force of globalization, “regional economic and political differences seem, if anything, to be strengthening”, implying that regions must be viewed as “central rather than merely derivative of nonspatial processes” (Agnew 2000: 101).

Not that the debate has been limited to professional geographers. For the claims being made in the paragraph above are supported by an ever expanding portfolio of research and writing, much of which transcends disciplinary boundaries (Pike et al 2007). Its volume and impact, both in terms of academic debate and policy-related discourse, has led it to be labelled the ‘new regionalism’ (cf. Keating 1998; Lovering 1999; MacLeod 2001a; Ward and Jonas 2004; Hadjimichalis 2006a; Harrison 2006; Lagendijk 2006). Some notable expressions of this include:

- 1) A profusion of studies highlighting the remarkable rise to prosperity of certain economic territories, exemplars being California’s Silicon Valley and Route 128 in Massachusetts and the so-called Third Italy (e.g. Scott 1998; Saxenian 1994; Cooke and Morgan 1998);
- 2) A deep reservoir of research documenting how sub-national regions are mobilized as political territories in a complex system of multi-level or multi-scalar governance, particularly in Europe (Bulmer et al 2002; Hooghe and Marks 2003; Brenner 2004; Pike and Tomaney 2004; Goodwin et al 2005); and
- 3) Studies revealing how certain regions are being (re-) constituted as cultural spaces of belonging and democracy, often forged through an insurgent

politics of identity (Paasi 2001; Batt and Wolczuk 2002; Bialasiewicz 2002; Jones 2004; Jones and MacLeod 2004).

Nonetheless, the very *spatial grammar* which underpins this new regionalism, or more accurately, new regionalisms (Painter 2007a), has been challenged of late by an assemblage of geographers, mainly based in the United Kingdom, who advocate a radically 'relational' approach to the study of cities and regions (cf. Allen, Massey and Cochrane 1998; Allen 2004; Allen and Cochrane, 2007; Amin, Massey and Thrift 2003; 2004; Amin 2004; Massey 2007). At its heart is a disavowal of a territorial or scalar logic, and, in its place, the proposition that:

an adequate understanding of the region [...] can *only* come through a conception of places as open, discontinuous, relational and internally diverse (Allen et al 1998: 143; our emphasis).

In accordance with this alternative spatial imaginary, to *think* of a region as a network of stretched out social relations "reveals not an 'area' [*per se*], but a complex and unbounded lattice of articulations" (ibid: 65). Cities and regions are thereby interpreted as "sites within networks of varying geographical composition [...and as...] spaces of movement and circulation (of goods, technologies, knowledge, people, finance, information)" (Amin et al 2003: 25).

Viewed through this alternative lens, emerging spatial configurations are no longer interpreted as territorial and bounded. Rather they are constituted through a kaleidoscopic web of networks and relational 'connections', which are "not fixed or located in place but are constituted through various '*circulating* entities' (Latour 1999) ... [which in turn] ... bring about relationality both within and between societies at multiple and varied *distances* (Urry 2003: 28). Relatedly, it is reasoned that political engagement is increasingly transcending traditional territorial sites like city hall and parliamentary government and, instead, being choreographed through trans-territorial topological connections, virtual public spheres, and rhizomatic traces of association (Amin 2004; Barry 2001; Latour 2005). The upshot of this is that:

...no institutional coherence or consensus should be assumed from the variety of public, private and intermediate organizations that collect in a heterarchically constituted region (Amin et al 2003: 25).

With so much intellectual and political energy currently being invested in the conviction that such institutional coherence *is* actually possible – whether through the form of regional development strategies, local strategic partnerships or joined-up government and the like (cf. Dreier et al 2001; Gleeson 2003; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger 2006; Morgan 2007) – this *relational networks of connectivity* or *network-topological* approach is sure to disturb the ontological surety of many of us who write about and work on behalf of particular regions. And it undoubtedly prompts fundamental questions about how we approach the analysis of places, methodologies for undertaking such analysis, and also how, as 'regional' researchers, we interpret spatial politics and the promotion of progressive and effective spatial policies (see *inter alia* Markusen 1999; Lagendijk 2003; Peck 2003; Hudson 2003).

Following a brief introduction to the origins of what has retrospectively become known as ‘traditional regional geography’ and the subsequent rise during the Twentieth Century of a definitive regional studies, this paper aims to assess the respective merits of the currently prevailing approaches discussed above. It does so by drawing, albeit selectively, on the experience of the United Kingdom, where between 1997 and 1999, a significant programme of devolution saw the introduction of an elected Parliament for Scotland, National Assemblies for Wales and Northern Ireland, an elected London Mayor and a Greater London Assembly, alongside Regional Development Agencies for the eight English regions. In effect, these transformations represent a new map of political power and responsibility in the UK. And throughout the discussion in Sections 3 and 4, we aim to demonstrate how the various expressions of this evolving map can be examined through the territorially-oriented ‘new regional’ perspectives and the ‘relational-topological’ or non-territorial approaches. In Section 5, we discuss three key themes that emerge out of the discussion and which we consider to be pivotal to future debates in regional studies.

2 Regional Geography and ‘Old’ Regionalisms

2.1 Regional Geography and the ‘Regional Tradition’

Whilst undoubtedly central to academic and policy-relevant spatial analysis for over a hundred years now, ‘the region’ has continued to be an enigmatic concept: its various interpretations and the implications therein periodically being challenged and modified through paradigmatic shifts in such spatial analysis (cf. Agnew et al 1996; Paasi 1986; MacLeod and Jones 2001). In the modern world, the early examination of regions as areas possessing some sort of unity distinguishing them from other areas, was intertwined with the expansion of Europe and a Eurocentric geographical imagination that set it apart from other areas like ‘the tropics’ and ‘the Orient’. This cartographic process of ‘othering’ provided much of the economic and political impetus for horizontal space to be divided into manageable portions: a geopolitical territorialisation that helped to foster the construction of nation states, and which, in turn, provided each state with a map-able domestic administrative geography (Mann 2003).

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this state-centred ontology was superseded by an emerging ‘regional geography’ which focused more resolutely on the nature of distinguishable regions internal to nation-states (Claval 1998). Indeed the region was subsequently to become the foundational object and ‘building block’ of geographical inquiry¹ (Thrift 1994; Gregory 2000). Some pioneering studies included: Herbertson’s (1905) investigation of regions as products of their natural environment giving rise to associated ‘ethnic’ modes of life; Fleure’s (1919) anthropological search to locate ‘human regions’; Fawcett’s (1919) account of England’s regional ‘provinces’ as a basis for governmental administration; and Vidal de la Blache’s (1926) characterization of a region’s essential unity “where many dissimilar beings, artificially brought together, have subsequently adapted themselves to a common existence” (in Cloke et al 1991: 7).

In turn, however, this idiographic approach was denounced for lacking a systematic method with which to aggregate the disparate data-sets on *particular* regional territories and channel them into a *general* society-wide stock of knowledge. And in a backlash against both environmental determinism and anthropological approaches

to regional analysis, inter-war Britain saw regions assuming a role as ‘pigeon holes’ for the multiple layers of a systematically accumulated geographic database (Hartshorne 1939).

In effect, another paradigmatic shift was in prospect, as these developments precipitated a decline in the idiographic tradition, and, in turn, summoned the ascendancy of what became termed *regional science*: a hybrid sub-discipline which deployed formal neo-classical economic theory with rigorous statistical techniques to develop a quantitative modelling approach to locational analysis and an unshakable quest to identify *general* laws to *explain* spatial behaviour: i.e., not merely to identify region-specific, descriptive features (Isard 1960; Barnes 1996)². During the late 1950s and 1960s, regional science also helped to fashion a profound reconstruction of human geography, part and parcel of what became known as the quantitative revolution (Chorley and Haggett 1967). In concrete policy terms, the laws of regional science were ordinarily expressed as the friction of distance on everyday economic and social practices, and the widely held belief that human behaviour could be predicted and planned accordingly (DEA 1965). Whilst all this undoubtedly heralded a relative decline in deeply immersed anthropological studies on particular places, the concept of the region itself survived and was recognized to be “one of the most logical and satisfactory ways of organizing geographical information” (Haggett et al 1977; in Gregory 2000: 687).

Although undeniably different in their approach, then, regional geography and regional science were each to play a determinate role in cementing the idea of ‘the region’ as both a sub-state territory and a meso-level for academic analysis. It was consequently to become a crucial *functional* unit in the national state projects which proliferated throughout the ‘global north’ in the mid-Twentieth Century, each with their accumulation strategies and modernizing impulse to widen and deepen the governmentality of economic and social affairs (Peck and Tickell 1994; Rose 1999). One key dimension of this saw the rolling out of explicitly ‘urban’ and ‘regional’ policies designed to ameliorate uneven development by enabling, at least in principle, a strategic mobility of capital and people: in effect a form of *spatial Keynesianism* (Townroe and Martin 1992; Brenner 2004). Such spatial policies were deemed to weave localities more tightly into the fabric of a *national* society and thereby to maintain a ‘balanced’ Fordist economy. It was also this political milieu – one brimming with the optimism of a progressive modernity (Lipietz 2003) – which helped spawn a professional technocracy of urban and regional planners, and, indeed, the formation of *Regional Studies* in 1967 (Pike et al 2007)

2.2 A ‘Residualization’ of the Regional?

Taking all this regional endeavour into consideration, then, what is it that leads Storper (1997) to surmise that during the middle decades of the twentieth century the region came to represent a ‘residual category’? Well, aside from functioning to integrate the socio-economy – and, in the process, hopefully reduce regional inequalities – another notable consequence of the Fordist-Keynesian mode of regulation and its centrally orchestrated *regionalization* of national society was that it helped defuse any flickering sparks of *regionalism*³ vis-à-vis insurgent territorially motivated movements for regional decentralization or political representation. Indeed certain countries actively suppressed regionalist political ideologies, which sometimes became associated with the more esoteric and violent fringes of the political arena (Painter 2007a). Moreover, regional loyalties and affective

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attachments to place often came to be viewed as backward, anti-modern and provincial⁴, as potential threats to economic modernization and the territorial integrity of nation-states. Regions were effectively consigned to a role as auxiliary instruments for *national* political administration (Parsons 1988): incidental to the stuff of high politics.

Nonetheless, the institutional fabric of this ostensibly stable political economic settlement was to unravel quite dramatically during the 1970s and 1980s. For a start, the period of sustained economic growth enjoyed by the industrialized countries of the global north was interrupted by the onset of a severe economic crisis and an associated deindustrialization of many core and subsidiary industrial regions (Bluestone and Harrison 1982; Martin and Rowthorn 1986). With large vertically-integrated companies either closing their operations or seeking alternative locations, this industrial decline assumed a political significance as resistance was waged – often it must be said *in the name of* ‘the region’ – against plant closure and the changing geography of investment (Massey 1979; 1984; Hudson 1989).

Nervous of financing potentially ‘lame duck’ sectors, fiscally challenged national governments were forced to redraw the map and reduce the scale of regional policy (Morgan 1985). In some countries, these conditions helped to foster a territorially articulated politics at those regional levels, sometimes directed against a putatively encroaching if increasingly enfeebled central state apparatus (O’Connor 1973). During such moments of state crisis and vulnerability, the universe of political discourse becomes especially permeable to insurgent groups and actors. And it was this vulnerability which helped to foster a range of regionally articulated movements and, crucially, enabled certain regionalist and nationalist parties to assume prominence and become enrolled into the electoral mainstream, notable examples being the *Parti Québécois* in Canada and the *Scottish National Party* (Rokkan and Urwin 1983; Jenson 1990; Painter 2007a; MacLeod 1998).

3 Globalization and New Regionalisms in a Multi-Level World

3.1 Globalization and the Re-Emergence of the Region

This is the tumultuous political economic environment within which the political scientist, Michael Keating (1998), locates his pioneering analysis of the new regionalism in Western Europe. Keen to underline that it symbolizes no return to the old provincialism of earlier periods, he traces the ‘rise of the region’ to three interdependent political economic tensions. The first concerns a *functional restructuring*, where, under conditions of intensified economic globalization and with nation states less capable of managing their economies through redistributive policies and the strategic placement of public investments, the region is considered to represent the most appropriate political level. The second is *institutional restructuring*, where a decentralization of government may be conducted either: i) in the name of modernization; ii) as a response to pressure from regional movements; or iii) as a means to enhance national political power by devolving the responsibility to regional stakeholders (Peck 2001; Hudson 2005). Finally, he identifies *political mobilizations* which might be enacted in the name of nationalism or regionalism.

Keating effectively encapsulates the transformative moment of the late Twentieth Century in his assessment that:

The political, economic, cultural and social meaning of space is changing in contemporary Europe... new types of regionalism and of region are the product of a decomposition and recomposition of the territorial framework of public life, consequent on changes in the state, the market, and the international context (Keating 1997: 383).

This version of the new regionalism focuses primarily on the intensifying expression of sub-national spaces as products of *politico-administrative* action: what Neil Brenner (2004), in another pioneering and authoritative treatise, defines as a rescaling of statehood and an associated materialization of cities and regions as 'new state spaces'. This focus on political agency also characterizes another self-styled 'new regionalism', which might be less familiar to readers of *Regional Studies*. It concerns endeavours in certain US cities to transform the diverse fragments of urban, suburban and neighbourhood government which have unfolded across the American landscape throughout the Twentieth Century – and which are perceived to promote wasteful duplication, inter-locality competition, uneven public service provision, and environmental degradation – into a consolidated metropolitan-wide level: a new regional 'metropolitics' for the sprawling metropolis of the Twenty-First Century (Dreier et al 2001; Orfield 2001; Swanstrom 2001).

These politically inflected new regionalisms are distinguishable from two other notable and perhaps more widely recognized bodies of work which address the sub-national level but which are concerned with economic development (Painter 2007a). The first relates to the work of the Californian economic geographers, Allen Scott and Michael Storper (Scott 1988; 1998; Storper 1995; 1997; Scott and Storper 2003). Scott and Storper focus on the locational patterns of post-Fordist high technology sectors and reveal how a mixture of traded transaction costs and 'untraded inter-dependencies' can encourage a process of locational convergence among firms, and, in turn, constitute a clustering of networks of firms and suppliers, giving rise to entirely new industrial spaces or territorial production complexes like Rhone-Alpes in France and Silicon Valley in the United States (Scott 1988; Storper 1993). In their subsequent respective writings – Scott (1998) through his notion of the 'regional directorate' and Storper (1997) through his deployment of the economic theory of 'conventions' and reflections on the 'institutions of the learning economy' – they each offer indicative remarks about the crucial role played by supportive institutional infrastructures and public-private organizational ensembles in enabling the process of economic innovation.

The second body of work is more directly concerned with these extra-economic infrastructures. Notable contributions include: Richard Florida's (1995) (pre-'creative city') analysis of how the relationship between innovation-mediated foreign direct investment and a range of supportive infrastructures can help to transform deindustrialized rustbelts like the US Great Lakes into 'learning regions'; Cooke and Morgan's (1998) examination of the 'associational economy' in Emilia-Romagna in Italy and Baden-Württemberg in Germany, and in particular the crucial played by public and private organizations in facilitating an informational infrastructure in things like training and technology transfer; and Amin and Thrift's (1994) analysis of 'institutional thickness' in instituting a stock of codified and tacit knowledge and a common regional agenda. In these two accounts the prototype regions are drawn from central and western Europe stretching from Catalonia through to Emilia-

Romagna, Rhone-Alps, Munich up to Jutland in Denmark and across to England's M4 corridor, forming a so-called 'hot' or 'blue banana'⁵.

In the next section, we examine the way in which these various new regional approaches might shed some light on the post-1997 map of devolution in the UK.

3.2 The Territorial Shape of UK Devolution: In What Sense a 'New Regionalism'?

There are undoubtedly compelling grounds for interpreting Scotland and Wales as examples of Keating's brand of 'new regionalism', especially if we consider the crucial role played by the Scottish Constitutional Convention and the Campaign for a Welsh Assembly in mobilizing for some degree of *political* devolution (MacLeod 1998; Morgan 2006). While the political lobbying for England's Regional Development Agencies (RDAs)⁶ may have been relatively under-stated, given that they were explicitly launched in 1999 as part of a 'modernization' of outdated government (Goodwin et al 2005), it might also be meaningful to view the RDAs as an example of Keating's new regionalism vis-à-vis his musings on *institutional restructuring*.

Yet in substantive terms, RDAs have been heralded as strategic drivers of economic development, designed to improve the relative competitiveness of their respective regions whilst also coordinating local regeneration (DCLG 2006). Thus, economic concerns have been to the fore from the start. Indeed, as Joe Painter (2002) contends, it would seem that the RDA project has at least in part been inspired by Europe's 'blue banana' of regional economic hotspots: the aim being, quite literally, to *constitute* such regional economies across the industrial and post-industrial landscapes of England (Jones and MacLeod 1999; Jones 2001; Webb and Collis 2000). Nonetheless, the extent to which the RDA regions have conjured discernible territories of concentrated economic growth – at least as characterized in the analyses of the California School and the 'associational economy' or 'institutional thickness' perspectives – remains a moot point. For a start, their boundaries do not conveniently map onto the much more messy economic geography of investment punctuating those landscapes (Henry and Pinch 2001; Amin et al 2003). And it seems doubtful that the administrative levers available to RDA strategists are in themselves sufficient to magic a Silicon Valley of high tech clusters in Northern England (see Jayne 2005).

Indeed, the case of England's RDAs forces us to confront at a more general level three key issues with regard to contemporary analysis of regional development. Firstly, it is vital to acknowledge how the literature on industrial districts and new industrial spaces more often than not refers to economically integrated areas like Silicon Valley which do not readily correspond to regional political boundaries or regional cultures. In a crucial sense, then, as Joe Painter (2007a) contends, the boundaries characterizing the various new regionalisms are often 'incongruous'. And secondly, claims made by advocates about the extent to which a regional level of governance can be the catalyst for an 'economic dividend' or a sustainable economic renaissance in underperforming regions need to come with a health warning. In a recent review of the topic, Hudson concludes that:

[T]ypically such evidence as there is of the link between devolved regional government and regional economic success is evidence of association rather than causation (Hudson 2005: 621; also Rodríguez-Pose and Gill 2004; 2005).

The third point is that, the emphasis on building regional level institutions and governance can sometimes detract from the fact that many of the process shaping regional economies and regional polities are effectively ‘located’ beyond the regions themselves, representing agencies and partnerships orchestrated through the strategies of nation-states, supra-national institutions like the European Union, or trans-territorial actors like multinational corporations (MacLeod 2001a; Allen and Cochrane 2007).

3.3 Territorial Restructuring, the Multi-Level Political World, and a ‘New Grammar of Space’?

All of which touches on yet another variant of the ‘new regionalism’ literature; that which is associated with International Political Economy (IPE) and which examines the regional – in this case *supranational* – impact of domestic (or ‘home’ country) economic decisions often focusing on the developing countries of the ‘global south’ (Hettne and Soderbaum 2000; Thompson 2000). This IPE perspective offers a cautionary reminder to scholars of *sub-national* regional studies that the contemporary restructuring of territorial spheres – what Brenner (2004) labels a twin process of de-territorialization and re-territorialization – is not strictly limited to those relationships between the central state and sub-national levels.

Indeed in a useful analysis of this jockeying for political economic territoriality, Allen Scott (2001: 814) distinguishes what he terms a *new grammar of space* featuring “the apparent though still quite inchoate formation of a multilevel hierarchy of economic and political relationships ranging from the global to the local”. In Scott’s view, four key aspects of this unfolding world system call for immediate attention:

1. The extent to which ever-increasing amounts of economic activity stretch long-distance and operate cross-border, creating numerous conflicts and efforts at resolution that in turn serve to institutionalize a range of politically constructed international forums such as the World Bank, the OECD and the World Trade Organization.
2. One corollary of this international negotiation has seen the establishment of pluri- and multinational ‘macro-regional’ trading blocs such as NAFTA, ASEAN, APEC, and CARICOM, and in the case of the European Union an enlarging supra-national economic *and* political alliance.
3. Contra the arguments of the more belligerent globalist accounts and the fantasies of certain business gurus (Ohmae 1995), sovereign nation-states and national economies remain important and, in some respects, dominant forces in shaping the contemporary political economic landscape (MacLeod 2001a; Jessop 2002).
4. Finally, as revealed in the preceding pages and most significantly from our perspective, contemporary societies are characterized by a notable intensification of active institution building at urban and regional levels.

On face value, Scott's synthetic schema appears to offer a prescient account of the emerging multi-level globalizing political economy. It is, nonetheless, exactly the kind of reasoning that those advocating a 'relational' approach to space deem to be restricting our comprehension of today's political economic landscape.

4 Challenging a Territorial Spatial Grammar

4.1 Relational Regions and Networked Topologies of Connectivity

Although not targeting his comments explicitly at Scott, it is the continued predominance of a multilevel territorial approach which has provoked Nigel Thrift to contend that space and spatiality should "no longer [be] seen as a nested hierarchy moving from 'global' to 'local'. [...and, furthermore] This absurd scale-dependent notion is replaced by the notion that what counts is connectivity" (Thrift 2004: 59). Similarly, in an insightful and provocative article entitled "Regions Unbound", Ash Amin professes bewilderment about how a territorial imaginary can continue to hold sway in contemporary discourses about cities and regions (cf. Amin 2002; Amin and Thrift 2002). Building on the pioneering work of colleagues at the *Open University* (John Allen, Allan Cochrane and Doreen Massey), Amin contends that the major 'compositional forces' associated with globalization, which have been transforming the material and experiential character of cities and regions in recent decades – not least the routine trafficking of objects and people and the instantaneous circulation of information – are surely disturbing any semblance of a world order made up of nested territorial formations. Amin's characteristically eloquent reasoning on this is worth quoting at length:

In this emerging new order, spatial configurations and spatial boundaries are no longer necessarily or purposively territorial or scalar, since the social, economic, political and cultural inside and outside are constituted through the topologies of actor networks which are becoming increasingly dynamic and varied in spatial constitution. [...] The resulting excess of spatial composition is truly staggering. It includes radiations of telecommunications and transport networks around (and also under and above) the world, which in some places fail to even link up proximate neighbours. [...] It includes well-trodden but not always visible tracks of transnational escape, migration, tourism, business travel, asylum and organized terror which dissect through, and lock, established communities into new circuits of belonging and attachment, resentment and fear. [...] It includes political registers that now far exceed the traditional sites of community, town hall, parliament, state and nation, spilling over into the machinery of virtual public spheres, international organizations, global social movements, diaspora politics, and planetary or cosmopolitan projects (Amin 2004: 33-34).

Viewed through this ontology of relational space, cities and regions come with no automatic promise of territorial integrity "since they are made through the spatiality of flow, juxtaposition, porosity, and relational connectivity" (Amin 2004: 34). This topological mode of analysis undoubtedly offers a fundamental challenge to the territorially oriented perspectives outlined above, and also to the more specific approach that envisages the contemporary political arena to be forged in and through a 'politics of scale' (Smith 1992; Brenner 2001; and see below). Indeed, Amin is unequivocal in his assessment that the vernacular of 'nested scales and territorial boundaries' is deemed to omit "much of the topology of economic

circulation and network folding” characteristic of contemporary capitalism (Amin 2002: 395).

Yet the challenge is not strictly limited to ontology and method. For it also forces a re-imagining of the very practice and performance of spatial politics (Thrift 2004), not least in that:

In a relationally constituted modern world in which it has become normal to conduct business – economic, cultural, political – through everyday trans-territorial organization and flow, local advocacy ... must be increasingly about exercising nodal power and aligning networks at large in one’s own interest, rather than about exercising territorial power ... There is no definable regional territory to rule over (Amin 2004: 36).

Following this premise, Amin cautions against any endeavours to fetishize places as ‘communities’ that effortlessly “lend themselves to territorially defined or spatially constrained political arrangements and choices” (*ibid*: 42; Massey 2004). This is a profoundly significant point, especially when we consider the extent to which political organizations and governments across the world are routinely summoning the formation of ‘communities’ in all walks of life, from the governance of sociable neighbourhoods to the ‘responsibilization’ of active citizenship (cf. Rose 1999; ODPM 2003a; DCLG 2006; Herbert 2005; Amin 2005; Raco 2007).

The warning shots against predetermining spatial policy to be *de facto* territorial are fired most pointedly in a pamphlet by Amin, Massey and Thrift entitled *Decentering the Nation: A Radical Approach to Regional Inequality*. In this, they disavow the ‘spatial grammar of British politics’ that has punctuated the procedure and practice of the New Labour government’s devolution project. They proclaim that by following the well-trodden path of a territorially rooted political discourse and strategy, New Labour’s devolution project – particularly with regard to England – has done little to disturb the London-centrism that has characterized the business of politics and economics for over the last one hundred years, and whose spatial grammar has “become so ingrained in the British psyche that it never occurs to anyone to think that there is a political battle to be had” (Amin et al 2003: 7). Indeed, the global financial muscle wielded by ‘The City’, alongside the extraordinary concentration of power within Westminster’s political village and its incessant dramatization through the media renders London to be a ‘classic centre of control’.

In order to confront this entrenched hegemony of London, Amin et al advocate replacing the territorial politics of devolution with a ‘politics of dispersal’ and ‘circulation’ (Amin et al 2003). This envisages different parts of England playing equal roles in conducting a more mobile politics, perhaps involving national institutions like Parliament travelling from London to the various provinces, although presumably this process itself would render such a term redundant. They reason that such acts of dispersal would instil new spatial imaginaries of the nation – multi-nodal as opposed to deeply centralized – enabling regions to become effective national players whilst also stretching the cognitive maps of regional actants to embrace external connectivity in fostering economic prosperity and social and cultural capital. However, the decision to construct a dazzling national sports stadium on the original Wembley site in North London and the plans to stage the 2012 Olympic Games in the capital only serve to underline the unrelenting economic

and cultural hegemony of a London-centred super-region (Morgan 2006; Allen and Cochrane 2007)⁷.

Finally, Amin also appears to offer a further acerbic critique of the actually existing politics of devolution which he views to be territorially “grounded in an imaginary of the region as a space of intimacy, shared history or shared identity, and community of interest or fate. [Further ...] these have become the motivating cultural reasons for a politics of local regard and local defence to be delivered through devolution” (Amin, 2004:37). This is contrasted with a *relational politics of place* “and a spatial ontology of cities and regions seen as sites of heterogeneity juxtaposed within close spatial proximity, and as sites of multiple geographies of affiliation, linkage and flow” (ibid: 38). There is a sense of a relational politics of place being inherently progressive, cosmopolitan, and perhaps ‘urban’, whilst simultaneously leaving the impression that territorial political affinities are ‘regional’ and “antediluvian, parochial or even reactionary” (Morgan 2007: 33). We return to this point in Section 5.

4.2 Relational, Networked, Connected: England’s Northern Way of City-Regions

As we have just seen, Amin et al proffer their non-territorial reading as a critique of prevailing theories and the current praxis of spatial politics in the UK. However, there may actually be some signs that a relational ontology has begun to punctuate the practice of actually existing devolution. For sure, the government has implored each RDA to develop effective regional and sub-regional partnerships and to foster a robust Regional Spatial Strategy (Tewdwr-Jones 2006). However, throughout the mid-2000s it has also been encouraging the creation of alternative regions in England, including the M11 corridor, Thames Gateway, Milton Keynes-South Midlands (ODPM 2003b; Allen and Cochrane 2007), and *The Northern Way*⁸.

The latter was launched in September 2004 and sees the three northern RDAs “unit[ing] in a common purpose” (John Prescott, Foreword in NWSG 2005b: 3). The geographical shape of *The Northern Way* is particularly interesting. For a start, the RDA boundaries magically disappear. Those lines which feature most prominently are rail and automobile routes and tributaries, all emphasizing mobility, linkage, networks, connectivity. Drawing on the conceptual framework of Amin and colleagues, the Northern Way looks like a relationally networked region in the making. This is given further inflection by the prominence given to eight *City-Regions*: Liverpool/Merseyside, Central Lancashire, Manchester, Sheffield, Leeds, Hull and Humber Ports, Tees Valley, and Tyne and Wear. The city-regions too have a *fuzzy geography*, each node acknowledged to “cover areas extending well beyond the city centres at their core [and...]. They contain a spectrum of towns, villages and urban fringe areas, and they have mutually inter-dependent relationships with the countryside around them” (NWSG 2005a). During 2004 and 2005, stakeholders in each city-region prepared City Region Development Programmes, which provided:

...for the first time an overview of the economic development potential and requirements of the North’s major urban economies. They look at the flow of markets across administrative boundaries and draw out the consequences for the development of policy and investment in a coherent way within *these new geographies* (NWSG 2005b: 9; our emphasis).

It is interesting to note here how the evolving process of devolution appears to be opening the institutional space for new geographies such as *The Northern Way* and City-Regions to surface. Indeed all this may actually be indicative of how the UK state is seeking to deal with the ever more complex diversity of policy demands: neighbourhood, local, sub-regional, regional, trans-regional, and trans-national. In doing so, it is creating fresh relationally networked spaces, some of which are cutting across the territorial map that prevailed throughout much of the Twentieth Century (Allen and Cochrane, 2007). And in conceptual terms, by deploying a relational spatial grammar, it might well be that researchers and policy-makers can more accurately interpret the tangled hierarchies and emerging trans-regional networked forms of governance that are proliferating in a devolved United Kingdom.

5 Territorial, Scalar, Networked, Connected: Locating the ‘Whereabouts’ of Regions, Politics and Power

... [regional] studies are always done for a purpose, with a specific aim in view. Whether theoretical, political, cultural or whatever, there is always a specific focus. One cannot study everything, and there are always multiple ways of seeing a place: there is no complete ‘portrait of a region’. Moreover, ... ‘regions’ only exist in relation to particular criteria. They are not ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered; they are our (and others’) constructions (Allen, Massey and Cochrane 1998: 2).

In this final section of the paper we discuss three themes which have emerged out of the foregoing discussion and which we consider to have some significance for current debates in regional studies. The first relates to the respective merits of the territorial and topological perspectives as discussed, respectively, in Sections 3 and 4 above, and which have been deployed to analyze, albeit briefly, various expressions of the UK’s devolution project. Stated baldly, how appropriate is it to view devolution as a form of territorial restructuring? Alternatively, in the age of globalization might it be more meaningful to interpret devolution as a configuration of new and existing trans-territorial networks of connectivity? Or might it actually be unhelpful to be posing the question in such binary terms?

Our conclusion is to opt for the latter proposition (cf. Agnew 2002; Bulkeley 2005). For on one level, of course, all contemporary expressions of territory – regional, urban, national – are, to varying degrees, punctuated by and orchestrated through a myriad of trans-territorial networks and relational webs of connectivity. Alongside the obvious conceptual implications, this has some non-trivial repercussions for policy. Indeed Amin et al (2003: 24) caution the UK policy community about the need to balance a prevailing obsession to foster localized clusters of firms with an acute sense of “another [...] geography of economic organization [one...] of stretched corporate networks and flows of varying spatial reach and intensity”. Similarly, Allen and Cochrane (this issue) highlight how the governance of a rapidly growing urban-region like Milton Keynes in southern England is increasingly orchestrated through an assemblage of affiliations and networks that stretch across and beyond any given city or regional boundaries. And as we saw earlier, the *Northern Way* represents a pan-regional economic strategy for the north of England forged through a multi-nodal inter-urban network.

Nonetheless, and while the RDA boundaries may have magically disappeared from the *Northern Way* map, there is little opportunity of its undulating networks being entirely released from the territorial grids of regional and other politico-administrative boundaries. In their analysis of recent experience in California, Jonas and Pincetl draw a similar conclusion, indicating that:

... however much the New Regionalism has sought to remake state geography in California in the virtual world of cooperation and collaboration, in the end it has had to confront the hard reality of fiscal relations and flows between State and local government, jurisdictional boundaries, and distributional issues of each place in the State (Jonas and Pincetl 2006: 498)

To be sure, globalization and state restructuring have each rendered all cities and regions more open and permeable to 'external' influences. However, we wish to balance this with an acknowledgement of how many prosaic moments of *realpolitik* – as in a central government classifying a region as a 'problem' or local activists campaigning for devolved government and cultural rights – often distinguish a territorially articulated space of dependence through which to conduct their politics of engagement (Cox 1998). For example, and leaving aside for a moment the Celtic nations, since the introduction of devolution, the South West of England has witnessed a situation where the official government organizations (Government Office, RDA, Regional Chamber) and oppositional political actors (Mebyon Kernow and Senedh Kernow) have been (re)presenting contrasting territorial spheres – respectively, the South West regional boundary and Cornwall – around and through which to wage their quite explicitly territorial political projects (Jones and MacLeod 2004). And yet, in turn, a network-topological perspective sensitizes us to the ways in which these political struggles are conducted through a myriad of actor networks of people, objects, information, ideas and technologies of varying spatial reach (Mol and Law 1994). To this extent, then:

...the spaces we call territories are necessarily porous, incomplete and unstable. They are constantly produced and accomplished by countless human and non-human actors. [Thus...] territory is not a kind of independent variable in social and political life. Rather, it is itself dependent on the rhizomatic connections that constitute all putatively territorial organizations, institutions and actors (Painter 2007b: 28)⁹.

The upshot of all this – and it dovetails very much with the key message of the quote from Allen et al above – is that the degree to which we interpret cities or regions as territorial and scalar or topological and networked really ought to remain an open question: a matter to be resolved *ex post* and empirically rather than *a priori* and theoretically. In an insightful paper on the UK's emerging 'polycentric state', Kevin Morgan has made a related claim that in order:

To overcome the debilitating binary division between territorial and relational geography we need to recognise that political space is bounded *and* porous: *bounded* because politicians are held to account through the territorially-defined ballot box, a prosaic but important reason why we should not be so dismissive of territorial politics; *porous* because people have multiple identities and they are becoming ever more mobile, spawning communities of relational connectivity that transcend territorial boundaries (Morgan 2007: 33; original emphases).

We also share Morgan's bemusement about the way in which those who proffer a relational-topological are sometimes inclined to present a caricatured reading of territorial and scalar approaches, whereby cities and regions are somehow thought to be closed and static. This is all the more frustrating given the extent to which many of us who are sympathetic to a territorial perspective have been at pains to emphasize how, far from being pre-ordained and static, regions and territories are forged out of active political struggle and discursive imaginings; in short, they are institutionalized (Paasi 1986; 2001; Pudup 1988; MacLeod and Jones 2001).

This emphasis on the 'becoming' and institutionalization of territory represents our second theme and is pivotal to the *politics of scalar structuration* perspective which has become influential in debates on the relationship between state restructuring and urban and regional governance (Smith 1992; 2003; MacLeod and Goodwin 1999; Brenner 2001; Bulkeley 2005). A fundamental premise of this approach is that geographical scales such as those of a nation-state or a region are considered to be socially produced rather than ontologically pre-given, and that, in turn, they "are themselves implicated in the constitution of social, economic and political processes" (Delaney and Leitner 1997: 93). This perspective, then, is itself quite explicitly a *relational* approach to the understanding of territory, and one which:

... does not in itself assign greater validity to a global or local perspective, but alerts us to a series of sociospatial processes that changes the importance and role of certain geographical scales, re-asserts the importance of others, and sometimes creates entirely new significant scales. Most importantly, however, these scale redefinitions alter and express changes in the geometry of social power by strengthening the power and the control of some while disempowering others (Swyngedouw 1997: 141-2)

Katherine Jones (1998: 26) informs us how this relational process of scalar structuration is actively performed through a *politics of representation*, whereby political agents discursively (re-)present their struggles and strategies often across and beyond territorial scales: action that, in turn, implicates spatial imaginaries like regions and nation-states to be continuously implicated as 'active progenitors', offering an already partitioned geographical 'scaffolding' in and through which such practices and struggles take place (Smith 2003; Brenner 2001). In our view, this scalar structuration framework opens avenues for analyzing the geohistory of UK devolution (MacLeod and Jones 2006). In the case of England, it could enable us to appreciate how the contemporary map of the RDAs can be traced back to the formation of the regional planning boundaries established during wartime in the 1940s, and, in turn, to comprehend how, once institutionalized, these boundaries came to represent 'active progenitors' in shaping the map of England's RDAs.

It is in this sense that – for all its ability to shed light on the geography of mobility and trans-territorial connectivity in political economic life – we contend that a network-topological perspective is less adept at locating the asymmetrical geometries of power. Quite simply, the world is neither as multi-nodal nor as flat as some of our colleagues would have us believe (see Smith 2005). And our contention here is that a scalar structuration approach offers more prescient insights about both the exercise and the transfer of power within the sphere of spatial politics and between scales or territories. So, for example, we can consider how the relative

power exercised by political campaigners in mobilizing civil society and assembling through the territorially articulated Scottish Constitutional Convention and the Campaign for a Welsh Assembly enabled them to present their political struggles through a scalar narrative, but crucially across scales, stretching to London and beyond (see Agnew 1997). Further, Morgan advises us about how a more discriminatory view of such territorially-based politics would insist it to be a wholly contingent question as to whether such a regionalist politics assumes a progressive or a reactionary form. Thus:

The devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and London may be spatially bound institutions, but they also constitute new spaces of deliberative democracy that have rendered public debate more open, more diverse and more cosmopolitan. They have helped to foster multiple rather than singular identities within their respective territories and, beyond their territories, they have engaged like never before with global networks of development, especially in Africa [...]. What this suggests, in short, is that the caricatured regional imaginary conjured up in the relational critique of territorially-based politics is not merely theoretically questionable, but politically emasculating (Morgan 2007).

Our third and final theme concerns a requirement to acknowledge the always *provisional* nature of political power and, by implication, government itself. We have only just discussed how, as part of the process of devolution, there have been some notable transfers of political power and responsibility from certain territorial spheres to others. However, John Allen (2003; 2004) makes the crucial point that while much recent work on territorial restructuring and a re-territorialization of the state (e.g. Brenner 2004) has identified important redistributions of political and institutional power, the picture presented is often one of power more or less exchanged intact between scales such as national, supra-national, urban and regional. From this perspective, Allen contends that power has a 'dispositional quality': the implication being that power takes the form of a capability thereby permitting those who 'hold' power to effectively realise their aims.

For Allen, however, and not least given the ways in which authority may have been fragmented by both the relatively independent use made of newly devolved powers and also the continued flourishing of semi-privatized forms of governance, it remains an open question as to precisely what kind of reconfiguration of power has actually taken place. While this is far from being a form of 'placeless power', it is certainly a spatially diffuse and fragmented array of decision-making practices; in effect "the unmarked territory of a centralized yet dispersed government" (Allen 2004: 27). Crucially for Allen there is no 'spatial fix' to any of this, no spatial template which suggests that the authority of the centre will always be undermined, displaced or indeed guaranteed or strengthened. Thus:

In seeking to grasp the whereabouts of government, it is not the simple language of centres, hierarchies and dispersions which reveals its presence, but rather the diverse, cross-cutting arrangements through which power is exercised (not possessed). With government initiatives in the UK such as the PFI [Private Finance Initiative], for example, where the boundary between state and market has been deliberately blurred, the whereabouts of power arise from a combination of far-reaching financial constraints, remote authority arrangements, complexly mediated incentives, distant shareholder interests, and more

proximate relations of managerial influence and expertise. It is this criss-crossing mix of distanciated and proximate actions, where the effects of such mediated relationships are experienced in a variety of institutional settings, which gives rise to the provisional, yet connected, nature of government at a distance (Allen 2004: 29).

A deeper engagement with this approach and an associated identification of the nature of such ‘criss-crossing’ mix of distanciated assemblages in regional studies might thereby reveal some insights about why – in spite of the devolution and ‘transfer’ of powers and responsibilities from Westminster and Whitehall – this has not, in the words of Amin et al (2003), seriously affected the sovereignty of Westminster (see Allen and Cochrane, this issue). And ongoing developments by the Labour government to enact a network of city-regions and new regional spaces like the M11 and the Northern Way will offer a hugely fertile terrain upon which scholars of regional studies can further examine these exciting developments.

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¹ It is, however, worth pointing out that 'region' has never been the sole prerogative of regional geographers. For historians, historical sociologists and international political scientists have long used it to refer to a variety of 'global' geographical divisions such as East and West, colonial and coloniser, the three worlds of development, and North and South (Agnew et al. 1996, pages 366-377).

² The Regional Science Association was established in 1954, and in 1958, the house Journal of Regional Science was in press (Barnes 1996).

³ Here we wish to acknowledge this very distinction that Loughlin (2000) and Painter (2002) both draw between 'regionalization' and 'regionalism'.

⁴ Further, in examining certain connotations of the word 'region' Raymond Williams notes that "regional as a cultural term ... can ... be used to indicate a 'subordinate' or 'inferior' form, as in *regional accent*, which implies that there is somewhere ... a national accent" (Williams 1976: 265; cited in Painter 2007).

⁵ While a full assessment of these perspectives is beyond the scope of this paper (MacLeod 2001b; Rossi 2004; Harrison 2006; Lagendijk 2006;), one key point to note concerns the way in which the analytical gaze on non-economic factors can give the impression that successful regions are somehow devoid of labour process exploitation and patriarchal familial relations (see Hadjimichalis 2006a).

⁶ In terms of Ministerial responsibility, the Department of Trade and Industry has responsibility for sponsorship of the RDAs but the Communities and Local Government (formerly Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) retains policy responsibility for the regeneration initiatives delivered by the RDAs.

⁷ No one would wish to deny that the site of the Olympics in the Thames Gateway east of London is an area in need of investment, but it's the sheer scale of investment which continues to be channelled into the London city-region that is awe-inspiring.

⁸ A full discussion of the Northern Way is beyond the scope of this paper; for detailed commentary see Goodchild and Hickman (2006).

⁹ Painter's observations force the issue on another significant point: while much of the analysis of networks and network perspectives has been conducted on economic factors (Dicken et al 2001; Yeung 2005; Smith 2004), and, conversely, analyses of territory have often been on political institutions (Elden 2005), it is important to eschew any conceptual slippage where the binary of network-territory is simply mapped onto that of an economics-politics binary. For it is not only the economy that is comprised of topological flows and rhizomes; the state is also rhizomatic (Painter 2007b).