


World Cities and the Organization of Global Space
Globalization

The process of globalization has been described as an intensification of connectedness and a reconstituting of the world as one place that has generated profound economic, social, and cultural change (Knox 1995).



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Globalization

The “Fast World”

“Global Metropolitanism”

The greatest change has occurred and continues to occur in what is called the “fast world,” that is, the 800 or so million people who live in the world’s core regions of North America, Western Europe and East Asia (Knox 1995).

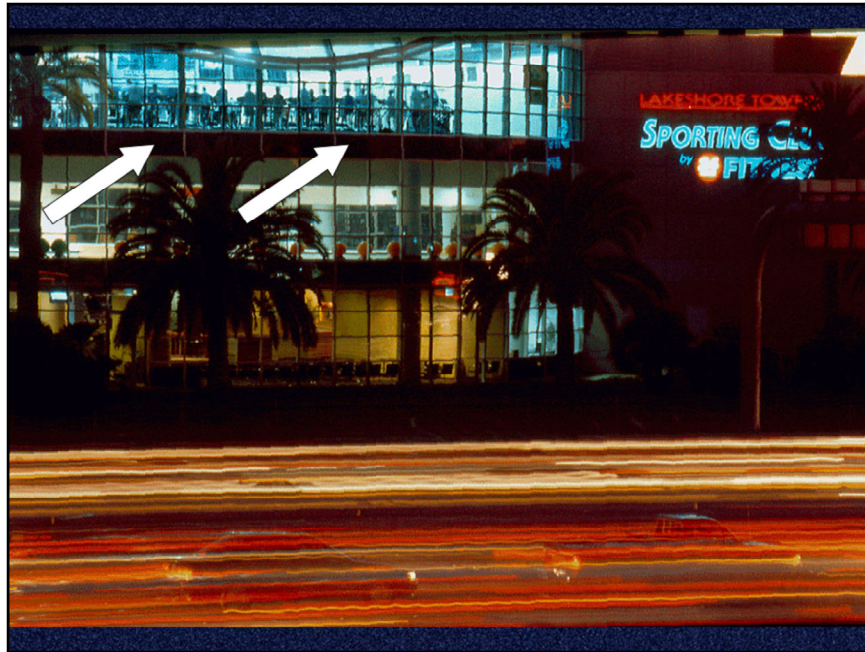
The term “global cities” refers to about two dozen urban areas found within this core that serve as “nodal points” that transact and mediate the multiplicity of linkages and interconnections that sustain the globalization process. This presentation today focuses upon these global cities in the fast world and upon a process called “global metropolitanism” that facilitates the construction of new identities and new forms of meaning, along with new economic, social, and cultural movements, institutions, and material forms.



This image illustrates the fast world by showing the lights of cars speeding along a freeway in a world city. Those lights represent the multitudinous and sinuous flows that stream at breakneck speeds through the nodal points formed by world cities – flows of information, technology, finance, innovation, and homogenization to name but a few.



But look closely and you'll see what appear to be phantoms of cars enveloped within the streaking lights. In a similar manner, the social, cultural, and philosophical underpinnings that provide people with meaning and identity are immersed like ghosts in the multifarious flows, shifting and transforming, some would even say mutating into new and untested forms.



Then notice the people up in the heights of the fitness center. Various authors (Tuan 1977, Weightman 1990) have stated that ascendancy has been perceived eternally as power and that structural height stands for both power and achievement.

Perhaps these denizens of world cities do in fact exist at the locus or even the pinnacle of the globalized world system, partakers and dispensers of what has been termed the authority, the sociability, and the innovation that “directs” world transformation. As they recreate, they are clearly tied into the global media system as witnessed . . .




. . . by the huge screen TV showing an up-to-the-minute news story that on this day was about meetings of the World Trade Organization.



Yet the very activity of these individuals belies a disquieting undercurrent of potential meaning – as they march furiously on those stepping machines they actually remain in one place [pause].

While the individuals may or may not be moving ahead “within” the globalization process, they are clearly moving onward with it, and one author (Sklair 1991) describes their niche as the. . .



“Transnational Producer-Service Class”

“Transnational Producer-Service Class”. . .

. . .which has been described as

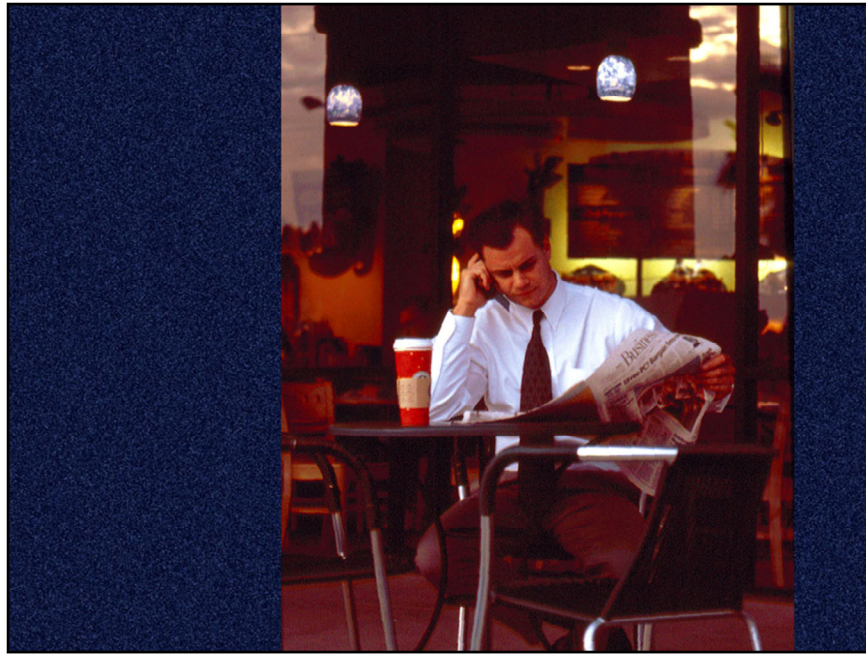
“[P]eople who make decisions and transact investments that are transnational in scope, who edit the news, design and market international products, and travel the world for business and pleasure. World cities not only represent their workplaces but [exist as the stage where they play out their] materialistic, cosmopolitan lifestyles, [and serve as the] crucibles of their narratives, myths, and transnational sensibilities” (Knox 1995, 243).

“Transnational Producer-Service Class”

Nexus Point

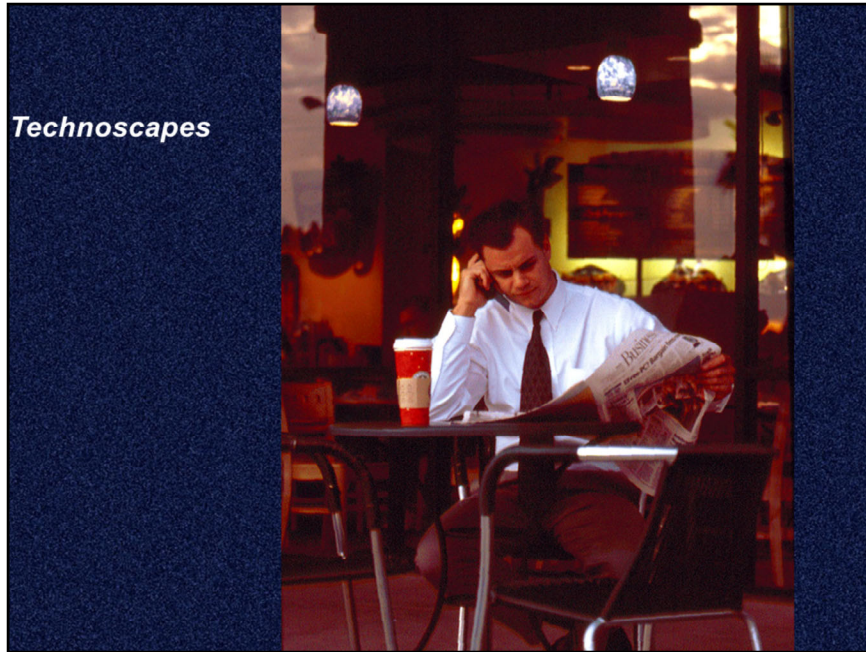
Reflect and Reproduce

These people form a nexus point of sociocultural flows that both “reflect” and “reproduce” global metropolitanism. The next slide shows a member of the transnational producer-service class.



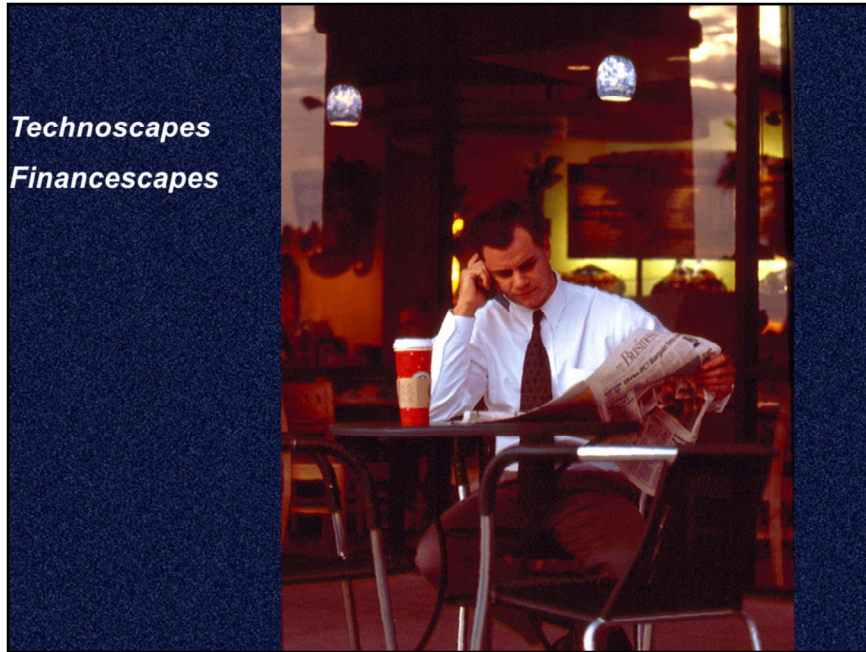
He is sitting at a Starbucks coffee house early on a weekday morning. He is already reading the morning stock report in the newspaper and communicating with business associates on the phone while, at the same time, fueling up with caffeine for his day of activity in the “fast world.” A set of categories has been developed to describe the manifestation of the sociocultural flows this class of people engage in and in which they are immersed (Knox 1995, Appadurai 1990). They include:

Technoscapes

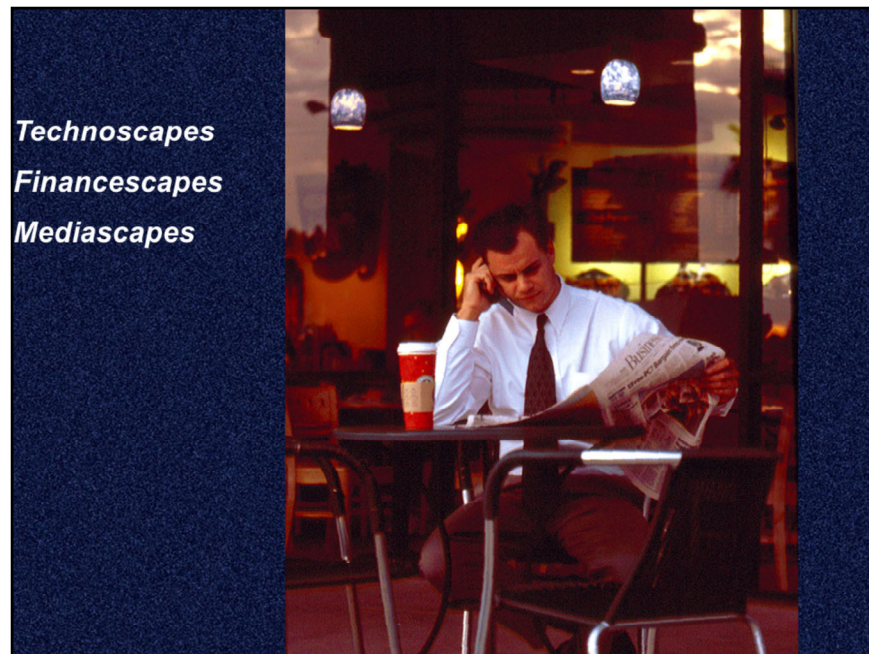


- Technoscapes – illustrated by the cell phone – which are produced by flows of technology, software, and machinery that are disseminated by transnational corporations, supranational organizations, and government agencies;

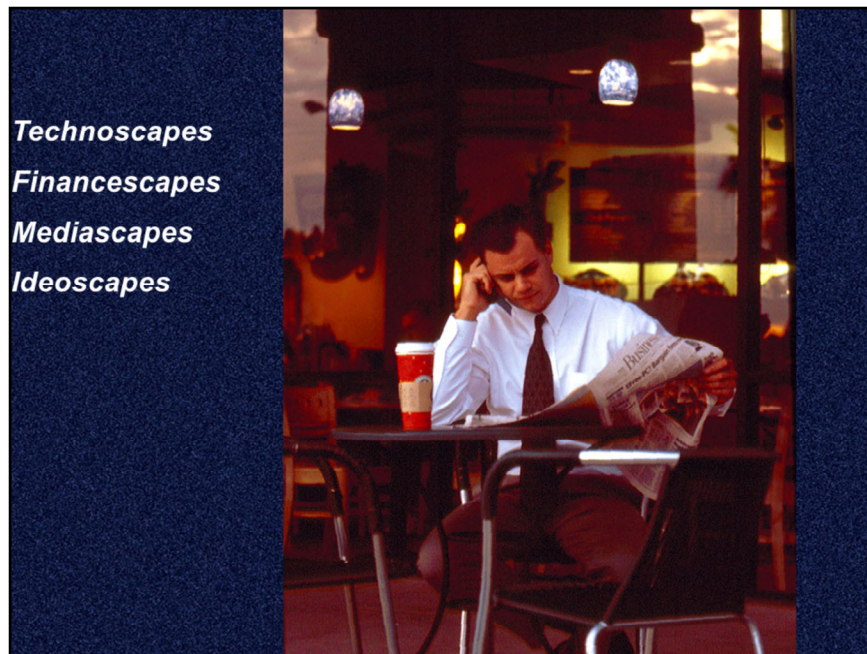
Technoscapes
Financescapes



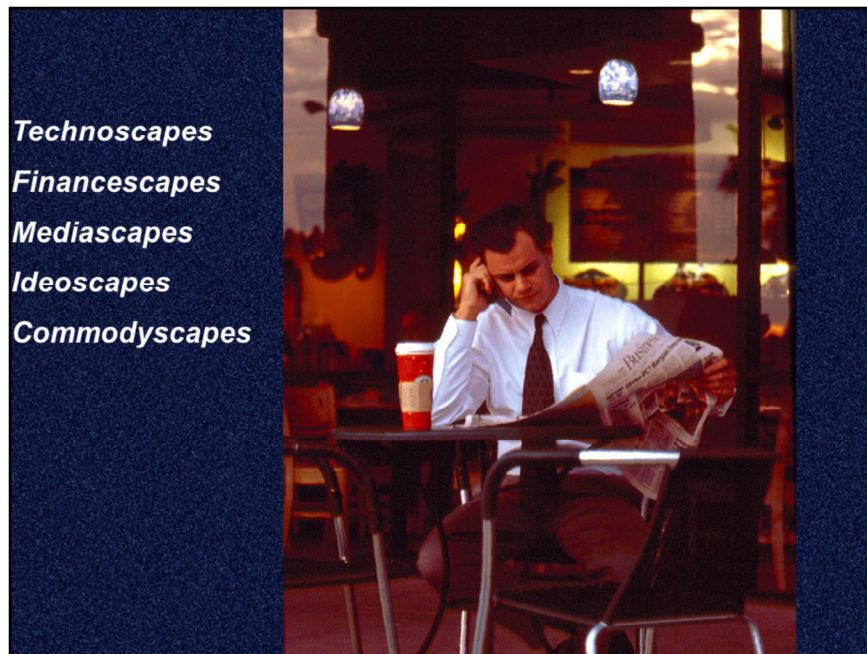
- Financescapes – shown by the newspaper business section and headline reporting the merger of computer firms – that are produced by rapid flows of capital and that generate a rapidly-changing geography of investment and “disinvestment;”



- Mediascapes – exhibited by the newspaper itself but including television, films, and the Internet – that are produced by rapidly disseminated images and information through which people have come to see their lives as prisms of those mass media portrayals;



- Ideoscapes that are produced by the dissemination of ideological constructs that seem to exude from the individual in this image: efficiency, capitalism, upward-mobility, individualism and a belief that globalization will not only continue to increase wealth but will spread that wealth around to rich and poor countries alike;



- Commodyscapes – or high-end consumer products such as clothes, interior design, food, personal objects, and so forth that are signifiers of good taste and distinction within the culture-ideology of consumption. They are illustrated in this image by the impeccable attire, the trendy Starbucks coffee, and the chic restaurant design.



As the transnational producer-service class, and their associated manifestations and geographies move onward, the “places” that people inhabit undergo modification as well.

Places are parts of the world which people have endowed with meaning through lived experiences and the building of memories, and they are created and continually “re-created” in an ongoing process. Uniqueness and delight can be produced by the differentiated “heterogeneity” of authentic places created by local people in an almost organic fashion.

However, the uniqueness and delight is inevitably “ruptured by the need to restructure both metropolitan form and metropolitan labor markets in response to the imperatives of global capital accumulation” (Knox 1995 246).



To illustrate, this image from 1979 was taken at the corner of Main Street and Pacific Coast Highway in Huntington Beach, California. The building in the center is Jack's Surfboard Shop, an icon in this town that is known as "Surf City," and the shop dates back to the 1950s. Such an icon not only establishes an "authentic" sense of place but also offers what are referred to as "landscape clues to the past" that provide what have been called "unmediated impressions of former times" (Lowenthal 1982, 89-90).

Moreover, the broader scene reveals what one author termed the delight of "intimate, undisciplined, differentiation of traditional cities" (Sorkin, Introduction). Notice the various storefronts along the street and the hand-painted sign on the building to the right of Jack's announcing "Funky Things." The very aura of the place invites one to explore the nooks and crannies of the stores on a search to discover the unique and intriguing, possibly hand-made items that may lie within.

But these unique places have little value in global metropolitanism, and they are demolished so that new structures can be erected on their sites.



This image shows the same corner of downtown Huntington Beach, 20 years later in 1999. Jack's Surfboards is still present, but the icon and memory clues to the past have been effaced.

In place of the uniqueness of hand-crafted items in the various storefronts we see mass produced consumer products lining the racks in front of a uniform mall of shops. Some would argue that the new landscape offers "fresh experiential opportunities" and is "more comfortable and convenient than [the] previous ones" (Weightman 1990, 80). Yet this landscape of transnational architectural styles is so generic and inauthentic. Is this place in Huntington Beach, Miami, or Jamaica? Is it even a place at all, or has it entered into the realm of what has been termed "placelessness" (Relph 1976).

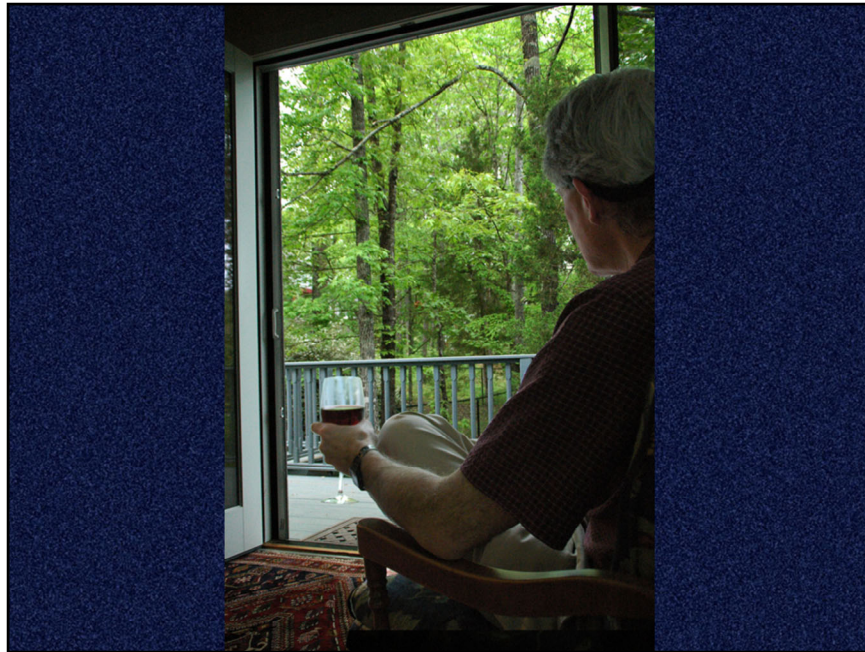
Even the building sign which reads Oceanview Promenade reveals ambiguity; those balconies certainly possess an ocean view but the word promenade implies the capacity to stroll leisurely at length while the limited size of the balconies on this edifice preclude such activity unless one would wish to promenade in little circles. Nonetheless, in spite of this limited range, an outdoor balcony does allow people a multi-sensory experience of the somewhat natural world instead of the steel and

glass encapsulation that was shown in the first slide where the people were furiously climbing mechanized stepping machines while breathing processed air and being mesmerized by the giant mass media screen that connects them incessantly to the fast world of global metropolitanism.

Which brings the presentation to a final topic, the human response to globalization.



This final topic considers the ways in which the human response to globalization is manifested in the geographies of global cities.



This slide shows a member of the transnational producer-service class, sitting at home and leisurely sipping a glass of imported wine while enjoying the forest view beyond the balcony.

Because people are so deeply embedded in global information flows, they feel the need to “revive small enclaves of familiarity, intimacy, security, intelligibility, [and] organic-sensory interaction in which to mirror” themselves (Knox 1995, 246). “The possibility of being exposed, through modern communication technology, to a near infinity of places, persons, things, [and] ideas, makes it all the more necessary to have a center in which to cultivate one’s self” (Knox 1995, 246).

The 800 million or so inhabitants of the fast world, all affluent compared to the 7.2 “Billion” people living in what can be called the “slow world,” seek and develop places that can be given both social meaning and spatial identity. One author states that “This impulse has been articulated through housing markets. . . and commodified through neo-traditional urban design and the merchandising of local histories” (Knox 1995, 246).

But as one sits in a home such as this, sipping wine, eating meals, playing with the

kids, or entertaining friends, a question slowly floats into thought: has there really been a change in the human condition?

Whether in the fast world or the slow, every person's life still contains times of pleasure and pain, laughter and weeping, dancing and mourning. The world is still filled with wisdom and folly, understanding and madness, power and oppression, feasting and hunger, riches and poverty, love and hate. Many authors have done an admirable job of elucidating the structures and processes that form the globalization that is occurring in contemporary times. However, they have perhaps overlooked key elements of philosophical, religious, and spiritual thought.

I end this presentation by leaving you with a few words written some 3,000 years ago by King Solomon who had studied the human condition in depth. His words seem as apropos today as when they were written.

*What has been will be again.
What has been done will be done again.
There is nothing new under the sun.*

Ecclesiastes 1:9

“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again. There is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9).



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