

From the Creative towards the Vital City: establishing 'ground' for urban life.

Stephen Read
Anthony Fuchs
Department of Urbanism
Faculty of Architecture
Delft University of Technology
Delft, The Netherlands

Abstract:

'Creativity' in cities and regions is associated with 'economies of agglomeration'. It is presumed that density and proximity is what matters in making places productive in economic and cultural terms. The paradigm is by no means watertight however: we see 'creative cities' that are not dense, clusters of creative firms who do not apparently talk to each other, and a lack of a dynamic dimension in the 'density and distance' basis of the model. We suggest an alternative posed in a relational way of thinking looking at issues of hierarchy and scale in relation to networks, showing how processes of the coherent construction of the city in different scales produce the key structures formative of central place and centrality.

We look at the way 'forms' emerge out of human techniques of doing and making and infrastructures and the way these infrastructures (we could start with tables (Arendt) and houses) create the spaces within which action becomes coherent and conceivable. They produce both the spaces of possibility of our actions and, crucially, the scales at which we act. It is at the interfaces of different 'fields' or 'regions' of places that the urban qualities we understand in situ as 'centrality' emerge.

We illustrate with examples taken from research on the historical development of Berlin.

Every sign *by itself* seems *dead*. *What* gives it life? – In use it is *alive*. Is life breathed into it there? – Or is the *use* its life?

Wittgenstein¹

Introduction

The study of the city must have as one of its aims, its elucidation as a locus of human activity and of a vivid 'urban life'. The *creative city* is one of the ways this innate vitality has been thought about – and one of the ways we have tried to think of strategies for facilitating 'creativity' or 'vitality' in urban places. The creative city is founded in an economic space and rationality that though highly nuanced in its present day form is not without its problems as a *system*. By system we mean a relational space which finds its rationale internally, in the system of relations itself. For Wittgenstein language is such a system of internal relations, and the "miracle of the existence of the world ... is not any proposition in language, [it] is the existence of language itself" (Wittgenstein). The problem of commensurability across the system of the city becomes a problem in that 'creativity' tends to be theorized *ad hoc* and differently at different scales – at the scale of the geographical region and at that of the place in the region for example. We are left imagining different 'substances' in 'flows' and 'places' at different scales, each with its own 'mode' of creating 'creativity'. We also tend to flatten the whole construction, dealing with it one scale at a time as if working from a single map, and we tend thereby to lose the way central places work *across* scales 'hinging' different scales together in place. We will show how attention to the scales of places in real cities suggests an alternative model of urban 'vitality', and the production of places in a recursive scaling. Also, and in particular, and for us as urban designers, it suggests a very concretely patterned and mappable view of the city as a dynamic form of human activity.

There is spatial order or *form* to the city. What that form is, depends on (and is in a sense produced by) the questions we ask of it and what it is we are looking for. There is a history in urban geography of considering urban spatial order to be economic and of considering the actions of people and other economically rational agents to be influenced by and determining of this form. Much has been achieved by this point of view but there are also certain problems of commensurability and systematicity that arise with considering space as somehow *intrinsically* economic (set up between the 'economic rationality' of subjects and objective effects of this rationality) which have never really been resolved and which leave us with a curious mix of conceptual schemes across scales – and a gap of commensurability between the local and the global. This has in particular left us unable to very successfully understand human action – in particular how action can take place in ordinary urban situations (in places) and coherently over distance.

These problems also make it difficult for us to understand how human action in the city can at the same time be free and a part of the form of the city. The

¹ Wittgenstein PI 432

unconvincing image of a curiously passive, economically rational subject constrained in his or her action by metric distances has provoked on the one hand a resistance to attempts to understand the city in terms which may be interpreted as spatially or technologically deterministic, and on the other a rather over-hyped view of the ways *new* technologies are themselves responsible for our ability to escape the tyranny of the local. In fact we believe we have always (or at least for a very long time) been non-local and will try to elaborate an order of the city which might be called 'communicative' in that it draws on ideas about communication and action. It might also be thought of as *materially* 'cognitive' in that it tries to elaborate a distributed Mind *in the world* in the senses that Levi-Strauss, Bateson or Dilthey might have meant this (see Armand). We will try to begin to elaborate the city (and places in general) as systematizable 'devices for action'.

We need to remember that in discussing systems we are talking about epistemology – about knowledge – and not 'truth'. The vital city we try to begin to propose is an integral relation of ideas but it also takes up the cybernetic method 'internally' in considering the structurality of differential relations between and across different ways of (scales of) living and being in cities.

Urban space and the problem with 'agglomeration'

The concept of 'agglomeration' is next to useless for us as urban designers because we know next to nothing about its form beyond the fact that it is centered somewhere and has boundaries at some rather vague line where agglomeration ends. The problem begins with the notion of space and various ways geographic territories or regions are conceived. On the one hand economists have concentrated on the way economic effects degraded with distance and turned space into a shorthand for the economies of distance (Fujita et al); on the other sociologists and geographers recognized that economic relations were 'embedded' (Granovetter) in other sorts of social relational networks, but privileged 'strong ties' (in a sense leaving much of the social-relational 'black-boxed' inside the concentrations or agglomerations produced in economies of distance) and turned networks into a shorthand for new-technology mediated, trust-based links that were essentially scale and distance independent.

The 'proximity' factor in economic accounts is often seen as something else than the action it supports: a matter of material (as opposed to relational) *density*. According to Rosenthal & Strange "the theory of agglomeration is almost entirely concerned with density" (Rosenthal & Strange). This view is nuanced to a density of '*cultural*' factors (as opposed to material or spatial ones), or to possibilities for face-to-face interaction in bounded places (when these relations have no clear methodological commensurability with the higher scaled 'forces' which constitute the global end of the global-local scale spectrum). We are left with a general problem of commensurability – local factors are of some other order than the global or regional spaces of flow. In general, the factor most often taken to drive high levels of activity and centrality *inside* the cities suspended in metropolitan or global networks is 'agglomeration' – a term rather diffuse in its spatial definition. Agglomeration

still often assumes in practice and in theory (and, more importantly perhaps, in our presuppositions about how cities are put together spatially) a concentration or density of people or buildings or transactions or whatever in a basically *bounded* local place, although there is plenty of lip-service paid to “networks all the way down” (Musterd & Salet 16). This gets highly elaborated and nuanced in more recent accounts which understand a complex clustering of both ‘strong’ and ‘weak ties’ (Storper; Storper & Manville; Sassen 2007).

What we end up dealing with for a large part in contemporary regional urbanism is a view that sees cities as relatively integral and bounded *nodes* (hubs) in *networks*, or discrete material *places* in extensive immaterial (relational) *spaces*. We also see a ‘flattening’ of the city as the *network* of elements that make up the regional city replace the *hierarchy* of center and periphery (Meijers 2007). The idea of the region as a network of complementary nodes or places has largely displaced the territory as an areal surface defined by its limits. But bounded places remain (as a residual, we propose, of theories on their way out) and, a little surprisingly to us, are still seen as being where the *life* in the city is, as opposed to the abstract and lifeless ‘non-place’ connectivity of the periphery. Relationality is indeed often understood as something rather new (and a consequence of new technologies), to do with the expansion of cities into a formless periphery, and is often associated with a lack of the *grounding* that traditionally comes to us from material places. Concrete (bounded) places are still often assumed to be needed to save us from a slippery and rootless ‘non-place’ existence in a flux of fast movement and easy communicability.

This view has come in for criticism from some who believe that the network view has not been understood in a radical or dynamic enough way. Doreen Massey has proposed that not just space but also place may be ‘global’, and speaks of a “global sense of place” in 1994. Later she speaks of place as an “event” (2006). Places, for her, are no longer to be theorized as internally concentrated bounded discreteness; rather, they are themselves to be conceptualized relationally. Places, in a move that reminds us of the process thinking of Leibnitz or Whitehead, need to become not so much discrete ‘things’ as “congealed moments ... brief deposits ... that conceal the reality of the motion from which their objecthood is a momentary respite” (Appadurai). David Harvey has long contended that ‘relative’ conceptions of space show how “activities and objects ... define spatial fields of influence” (1969, p. 208). There are therefore, according to him, no external viewpoints (or absolute spaces) from which to assess and measure distances absolutely; distance “can be measured only in terms of process and activity.” Harvey has proposed that distance must be assessed from *within* such processes. Forer has taken this idea on to propose that space becomes ‘plastic’; stretched and pulled by the way ‘distance’ and ‘speed’ vary over the geographical surface (Forer). But, as we see it, we need to go further even than this. As urban spaces emerge around distinct ‘spatial fields of influence’ they become distinct themselves, and multiple and may even become *disjunctive* in relation to one another (Thrift).² Contiguous places may reflect and be relational products of quite

² Thrift paints a picture of endless multiplication and dislocation – we will argue that not all spaces tend to a chaotic proliferation; some spaces organize

different 'distances', and may disengage from each other, creating a landscape "of nearness and rifts" (Serres & Latour). We may find that different and quite incommensurably 'distanced' or 'speeded' spaces begin to constitute different ways of moving and being in the city, and make the geographical surface quite impossible to resolve, however much it is stretched and pulled, into just two dimensions.

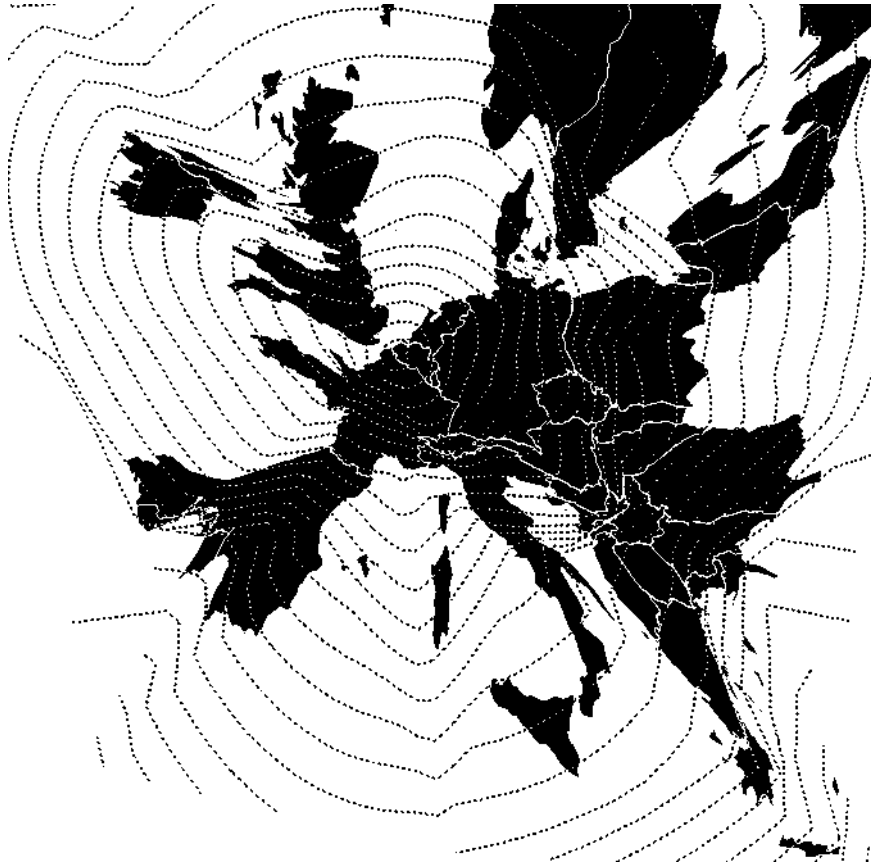


Figure 1: Forer map.

Harvey, like Appadurai, proposes that we should understand cities and other places as *becoming* out of 'relational' network fields rather than as simply *being* 'place-objects' or nodes which exist 'relative' to one another in networks (Harvey, 2007). The question however of how this constitution happens in, or is related to, concrete and physical urban situations and layouts is still very much an open one, and planners and designers of the physical city remain short of direct leads as to how real urban places may affect use and experience. Indeed, the kinds of process that matter here are presumed to have much more to do with rather abstract and generalized notions of modernity and globalization, consumption, with social and institutional organization, and the formation and maintenance of identities in relation to global spaces. A strong presupposition remains amongst urban geographers and planners that physical layout itself doesn't much matter at the lowest scales in any but aesthetic terms.

and stabilize and make the world coherent for us; indeed that we construct these spaces to open 'fields of influence' for ourselves and to make them coherent and available for our use.

The bottom line is that urban design thinking still finds it difficult to explain the way real *central places* become concretely constituted in relation to 'spaces of flows'. We also find it difficult to show just how spatial planners and designers can affect this process of constitution and make places which attract public space activity and finely articulated centrality at the scales of the street, center and neighborhood.

Setting central places in regions

Urban thinkers have for a long time noticed that cities were no longer confined by city limits (Mumford; Gottmann) and that their forms were changing. Many found potential social and political advantage along communitarian (and rather anti-urban) lines to this dispersal of the city (Mumford; Bookchin), others saw the city dispersing in direct response to, or as a reflection of the new frameworks of organization and ranges and opportunities for action offered by technologies of movement and communication (Gottmann). Some nuanced this view recognizing that centers were still a powerful prerequisite for (at least certain kinds of) action (Sassen 2001). The 'urban region' became the unit of analysis (McKenzie) as a new relational 'space' of the regional territory began to emerge. The understanding of and articulation of this space has certainly not been uniform, but it seems clear that with the regional perspective came an increasing awareness of and attention to dynamism and relationality that were not part of the classic spatial economic model. A regional thinking in 'spaces of flows' (with its attached and tightly implied regional scale) has become the norm in thinking about metropolitan regions today (Leitner et al).

This regional dynamism and space has come to be seen as 'adding value' and as producing 'synergy' in relational configurations of centers. Meijers (2005) looks (skeptically it must be said) at the proposal that "collections of distinct but proximally located cities relate to each other in a synergetic way, making the whole network of cities more than the sum of its parts." In the mean time European spatial planning has taken on this urban region idea and polycentricity as an explicit target for regional planning, and many planners and geographers today understand a synergetic 'complementarity' of roles and functions between 'hubs' in regions. We see especially this thinking extended to strategic ideas about planning and design; in the Netherlands and in other parts of the world, the scale of governance and planning at metropolitan and regional scales is high on the agenda as are the possibilities of strategizing whole urban regions as functional unities. And transportation interchanges attached to metropolitan scaled infrastructures being seen as interesting sites for projected centralities, variously called 'creative cities' (Scott), 'knowledge centers' (Carrillo), 'transit oriented developments' (Cervero) or 'mobility environments' (Bertolini & Dijst).

But we could also see in all this the relative loss of an interesting conceptualization and multiscale model of the city. In an urban theory divided between the space of the global and the agglomeration of the local and decreasingly attentive of the material networks of human action and inhabitation (especially at the everyday level), a more ecological and dynamic understanding of cities and the ways they work as human environments may

have been lost. We propose there is a more fundamental and 'background' meaning to the 'region' idea, to regional relationality, and 'complementarity' than the simple functional network interpretation many urban thinkers give it.

The roles of cities were understood by some early geographers (Reclus; Braudel), archeologists and paleo-urbanists (Childe) in terms of their origins in trade routes and the local roles they performed in increasing divisions of labor in response to more complex lives lived *across* scales (Childe; Jacobs). Jean Gottmann, who was well versed in Reclus' ideas, coined the word 'complementarity' in his regional geography of the emerging 'megalopolis' of the north-eastern seaboard of the United States. He clearly, in other writings, promotes the idea of the city as a "hinge" connecting different "orbits" (Gottmann & Harper 13/24). Centrality for him is not in the first instance a concentration or agglomeration at all; it is a *hinge-point*. We have the sense in his writings of discrete 'worlds' or 'spheres' or, as we will later articulate it, *forms of life*, that are hinged together in significant and particular central places. This logic articulates an economy but not in the sense of a distance dependent 'central place' economy; it is rather an ecology of action and activity working between and *hinging* different scales of being and doing things. The importance of primary cities in regions of cities as 'global gateways' to the secondary cities of the region is also emphasized by Childe (138) in his analysis of regions in Neolithic trade routes, so that we can see the modern idea of the 'gateway city' in regional geography as a move *backwards* to a conceptualization of the city and of centrality quite familiar, at least in certain circles, in the past.

The central place in this view becomes less a 'thing' (a concentration or agglomeration of dumb matter) and more a continual processing of the relations between different scales of doing things, and a continual becoming of a place in that continual process of work and situated organization of different skills and economic roles. This organization in a sense produces central places as sited repositories of skills and procedures and tacit and explicit knowledge – as well as the material *situations* and embedded habits and forms of life *from which* the scales of the urban region and higher are understood and processed and made available in the local. Activity incorporates all manner of movements and habits, evolved and regularized in practice, supported by infrastructures and technologies, 'naturalized' in use and "by definition invisible, part of the background for other kinds of work" (Star, p. 380).

Note that the 'non-local' local people process and respond to doesn't have to be strictly *true*, but their responses do have to be functional. We notice not so much an 'objective' impact of global 'forces' on local places (metaphysics?!) as more or less functional responses to events in the local in the light of locally constructed, adapted and maintained 'globalisms' or 'universalisms' (Robertson; Geertz). When we consider how much of that functional response and knowledge may be tacit, embedded in locally evolved and developed practices and unspoken orders of doing things, we can see that it is not surprising if a great deal of it becomes difficult to transfer. Recently, in some cases, we have seen an increasing regularization, technologizing and specialization (as well as privatization and securing) of some of the

possibilities and technical and organizational means for acting at a distance – and a dispersal of some ‘agents’ as they take their means for acting (their ‘central places’ we could say) with them. We will not consider these developments in this paper, nor the recent ‘rediscovery’ of urban centrality; rather what we want to do is try to begin to trace the role of the city as our most basic ‘technology’ (Weber) for acting at a distance and for creating and sustaining the ‘central places’ from which this action becomes possible.

The idea of ‘region’

We need to expand a little on the notion of ‘region’ here. The concept of ‘region’ forms a central part of Heidegger’s system. Starting with a space derived from Aristotle (that puts place first and derives space as the result of the trajectories made between places) he sees a relational ‘region’ of ‘places’ as a fundamental *background* to all we know and do. Further it is one that can be assembled and reassembled (in terms of the places out of which one constructs ‘region’) in ways that can be learned, relearned, adapted, and even understood in different ways in relation to different intentions without compromising its material ‘objectivity’.³ We could, and will here, regard it as one of the bases of knowing things; a condition of our intelligible and knowing ‘being in the world’. In a sense it is like language (Heidegger 1982), constituting the means by which we know the world and the way the world is revealed in everyday lives – through the sense we make of it in language. But as with language for Heidegger, the knowledge that attaches to regions is something revealed in our encounter with the world rather than being something apart from us which can be defined in any autonomous ‘objective’ sort of way. Just as the meanings of things are revealed *in* language (actually in *speaking*, or in *doing* language, according to Heidegger), so the meanings of places are revealed in regions (actually in moving or putting places together – or in ‘*doing*’ regions).

Regions *mediate* places in Heidegger – as language mediates things. The meanings of things become clear in language through the way they are articulated in relation to other things; the meanings of places become clear in the way they are articulated in relation to other places. And as is the case whenever the background role of medium is acknowledged we find that the whole subject-object dualism is revealed as problematic. This is too big an issue to discuss in detail here but is clearly central to the argument we are outlining.

³ It starts to reverse the assumptions we have about space being ‘objective’ and place ‘subjective’. It also reverses the presupposition we have that places are related to individual knowing while regions are more collective (Paasi). We will agree with Paasi that regions become ‘institutionalized’ and part of a collective consciousness, but that doesn’t make place any less institutionalized and part of a shared context. This shared context is an essential prerequisite for communication and this argument is developed further in a parallel paper provisionally titled “Formalizing scale with Heidegger”.

The meaning of place is conventional and shared with other minds – but it is also real in that its relations with other places are constructed over time in all sorts of ways including in the material environment itself (see Clark). In a world where we do not measure our place in the world as a set of coordinates on an absolute spatial datum but rather in relation to other places, the ‘region’ takes on a very special significance therefore as a perceptual device; an instrument or device of knowing. But it works as part of the background – as the contextual ‘circumstances’, ‘occasions’ or the ‘forms of life’ (Wittgenstein) within which places acquire meaning. We note that there is nothing ‘subjective’ about this: in treating the environment as medium (and essentially as *communication*) we enable an understanding of it that is simultaneously objective and ‘cognitive’.

The *construction of real scale*

An important component of this place-regional background is scale. The ‘pure’ concept of ‘region’ comes without the scale that attaches to the geographical idea of region. Instead ‘regions’ in this conceptual sense are simply spaces that relate things or places together – and they may in principle be defined at any scale we like and consist of things or places of whatever kind we like. But pretty soon we begin to see that in our encounter with the world (or in empirical research) that there is plenty of regularity in this multiplicity. We find in fact that rather than dealing with any ‘pure’ or abstract concept, we end up dealing with the way the concept becomes *materialized*, and embedded in real landscapes to define places and relate them to one another at very particular contingently defined scales. A street is a place and a city is a place, but no-one imagines that Rotterdam is of a similar order of place to the Kalverstraat. We discover that place-regions have histories and are not just ‘institutionalized’ (Paasi), but also *constructed* materially over time in the environment. We like pointing to the London Underground or Paris Metro to make it clear how literally we mean this and to point at exactly what sort of ‘construction’ we mean! So that while we could regard these scale regularities as normative or canonical in the sense that they appear to belong to a realm of *social* constructions (Manson), at the same time they are absolutely concrete and real. Manson has separate categories for ‘realist’ and ‘constructionist’ scales; our scales are at the same time both real *and* constructed.

The critical move is to deny the ‘metaphysical’ exclusion of us from the physical world which gave rise to psycho-physical dualism, and the assumption that mind and matter are different things. “This exclusion of us from the natural order of things gave rise to the epistemological dualism of knower and known, and it is this derivative dualism that has been taken to be the pressing problem within Western thought” (Costall). The city has been understood as self-evidently separate – of another order of things – from the occupier of that city, and the problem of cognition had to bridge a gap not just between knower and known but also between incommensurable substances of material and thought. The ‘wayfinding’ perspective is built on this opposition. We understand the city on the other hand to be a form which directly reflects on the one hand the way complex organization and ongoing work characterize a local environment dedicated to maintaining non-local

networks, and on the other our inhabitation of it and our need for intelligibility and coherence of the world we inhabit. This 'coherence' works as a 'background' to everyday action; as something we live in, defining itself what comes to presence in everyday life. It is a form of our knowing the city and on 'dwelling' integrally with it.

Conceptual and real become one in these scaled structures – they become 'concrete abstractions' – suggesting also that *places* are by definition at the same time both conceptual and real. Concepts become embedded in real landscapes by the ways these landscapes are constructed over time. This regularity can be seen most directly in the regular hierarchies we use to *address* places, where the scale of the house or street is not mixed up with that of the neighborhood nor that of the city.⁴ What is less clear perhaps (until we remember the London Underground and Paris Metro examples again) is just what is '*stabilizing*' these regularities; what is it that holds these scaled place-regions as coherent and distinct from each other? What prevents them slipping together into an unintelligible mess? What prevents them from flying apart in individual subjective constructions? What prevents us all from having incompatible incommunicable images of London or Paris or the places in them?

We negotiate different 'language-games' in our active lives according to Wittgenstein. The way we do this, and the skill with which we do it, defines the way we interact with different people, further different projects, find solutions to problems and find our ways past a myriad large and small obstacles in everyday, social and professional lives. Language-games are extraordinarily open, the base material of creativity, but language-games are not simply open (Phillips, 171), they are not simply imaginative activities, unconstrained and unstructured by 'hard reality'. They are contextualized by, and *given sense* by 'forms of life' which Derek Phillips interprets as bounding the open possibilities inherent in language-games. For Phillips forms of life are a "meta-language *in use*" that is "not only linguistic, for it includes a host of activities directed toward coping with the world around us. It consists of what we *do*, the ways we proceed, which allows us even to understand what it means to give an interpretation in the first place." (129) Wittgenstein is no simple conventionalist: he is not saying that anything goes. Rather he seems to believe that the creativity and choice which attaches to language-games is constrained by forms of life in a real world and constituting practical world-views which give sense and meaning to activities and things.

The city as an evolution of form and of 'forms of life'

⁴ It becomes clear fairly soon to the reflective reader that the nature of the order which connects the different components of the region is one projected by the observer (or perceiver). Aristotle calls this order 'similitude'. It is these kinds of little thinking exercises that turn us into philosophers because it is hard to escape the conclusion that the regularity in this multiplicity is one we have ourselves imposed and constructed even if only by the regularity of our habits over spans of time.

The regular *scales* of places (better, of place-regions) turn out to be quite as material as they are conceptual and exist in the physical form we will be describing – a form which also provides the ‘hinge-points’ or ‘transitions’ or ‘interfaces’ in which the ‘central places’ in our model are *materially constituted*. The working *across* scales of central places turns out to be fundamental. Whereas economic logics tend to see the causes of centrality effects in the same scale level as the effect itself (Leitner et al), we will be arguing that they come to be in the transitions (hinges) between scale levels. What ‘agglomeration’ fails to successfully articulate is the ‘internal’ structure of the nodes themselves – the “networks all the way down”. What they also fail to articulate is the way places materially *become* as a consequence of their relations with other places and the located practices in place designed to deal with those relations.

Berlin: a crossing on the Spree

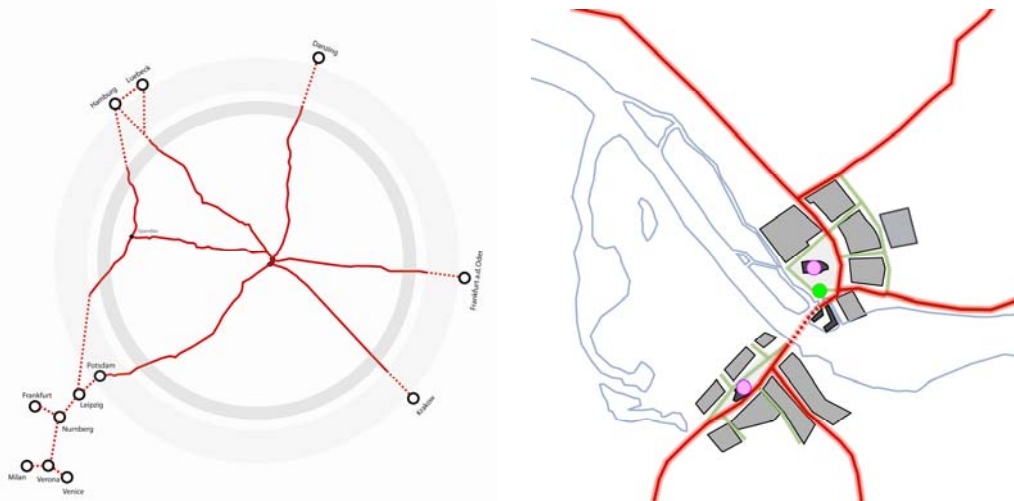


Figure 2: Berlin 1220: a. the city in a region of cities; b. the city as a ‘region’ of inner-city places.

The city of Berlin began as a small settlement on a crossing of the Spree. It formed at an important concentration point of North-South routes linking Italian cities like Venice and the Baltic Sea cities of Hamburg and Lübeck. Already, at its beginning Berlin formed an important reference – in a sense a command point – between these cities. But at the same time the settlement served as a crossroads at a different scale. There could have been another sign on the crossroads pointing to the inn, the church, the toll house, the market, and the town hall. At the important crossings of the little town we get in other words the crossing of two different ‘worlds’, one local and the other far from local. The place becomes at the same time a crossing in more than one region of places. One of those regions integrates cities, of which Berlin is one; the other integrates buildings and places in the little settlement itself. Already we see the essence of the spatial organizational argument we will make and state it here as a strong hypothesis: vivid and distinctive places are constructed in situations where local and non-local worlds share a place together. We note that two *scales* are being concretely constructed in the settlement with the roads connecting the trading centers across Europe on the one hand, and the streets connecting the buildings in the settlement on the

other. We see in the plan how the spatial layout of the little city becomes a hinge through which local and non-local movements are articulated and hinged together *in place*.

The spatial organization here begins to challenge the simple 'agglomeration' perspective (that the center is a node or simple concentration, rather than itself being networks of local and non-local lives and movements articulated together in place). We can see that the bounding of these lives is multiple (dual in this case) and articulated around a scale 'transition' that is not so much boundary as an interface between two 'regional' spaces which overlap and define the city in two different ways simultaneously. The city is a 'hub' in a 'region' of other cities; while it is at the same time a 'region' of inner-city places that we could see as *servicing* the relations that integrate the larger 'region'. The inn, the market, the toll-house, the smith, the cobbler, will be located on or near main-streets or crossings – on or near in other words the real place which centers both worlds simultaneously.

The growth of Berlin

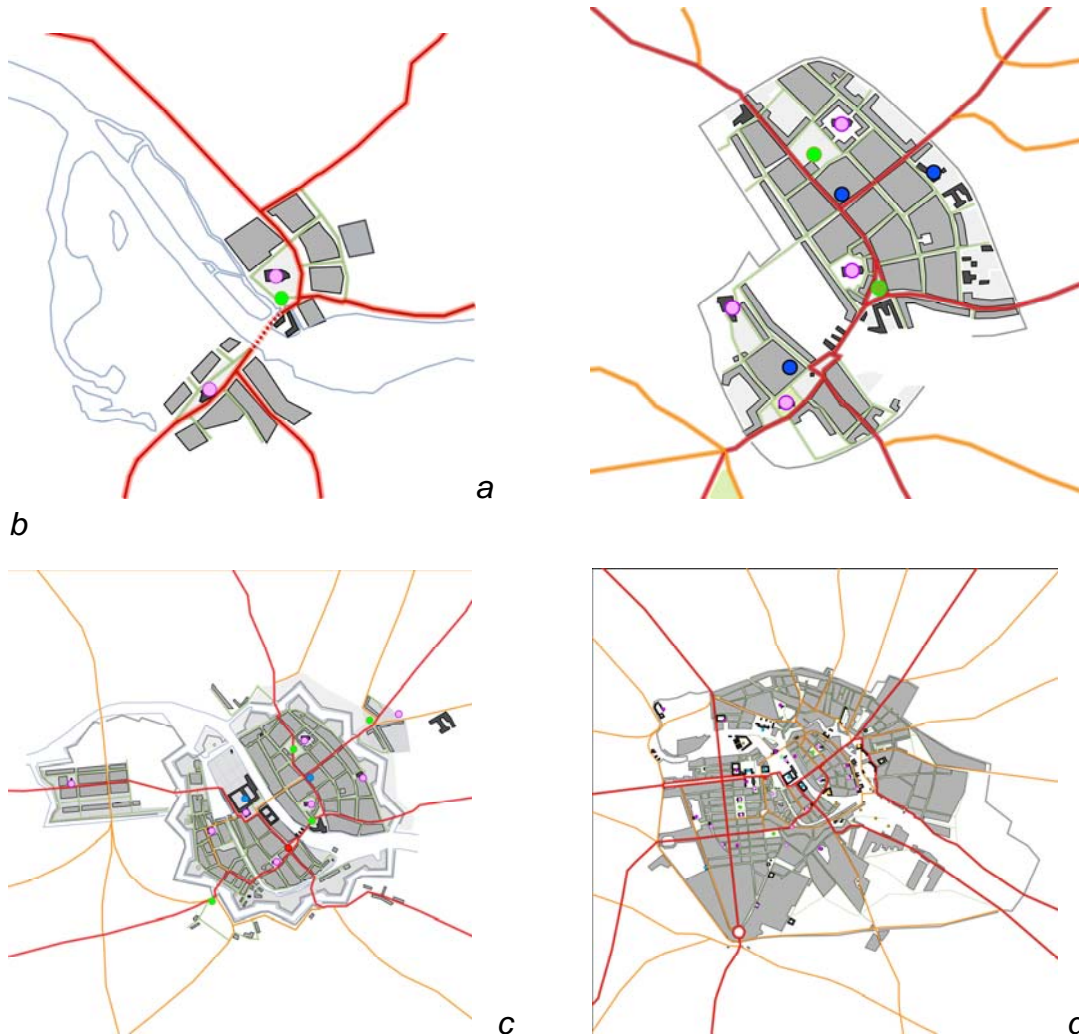




Figure 3: Berlin a: 1220; b: 1415; c: 1685; d: 1778, e: Zoom in on a neighborhood centered on intermediate-scaled web.

The process of the growth of the city complicates the issue somewhat in that the 'local' (the 'region' representing the places 'inside' the city) begins to spread and becomes too extensive to be seen any more as a simple interface in one place between local and non-local movements and lives. What we see happening in historically evolved European centers, apparently without any overt planning, is the growth of an intermediate scaled movement web along with the spread of the built fabric as a whole. It was the empirical 'discovery' of this web in urban morphological studies and of the apparent importance of this web in structuring the fabric into urban places and centers commensurate with an urban life, which brought us to a different view of the center as a layering of different regions by scale (now local, sub-continental, and an intermediate 'urban' scale) (Read 2009a, 2009b). This intermediate scaled web makes up the main routes for getting around the whole central fabric and at the same time centers the fabric and its neighborhoods on itself. It sets up another hinging form, as 'main streets' or 'high streets' spread through the center and center neighborhoods on themselves.

In the case of Berlin (but not in all cases) we see this intermediate scaled grid spreading out beyond the center itself and connecting a region larger than the city itself. Many cities spread then along these movement routes and their further growth is structured to some extent by these routes.

But here again then (Figure 3e) we see a real place articulating two differently scaled 'regional' spaces – the high street is at the same time part of the web for moving around the center as a whole and the center or high street of the neighborhood. A simple and generic (for European cities at least) form is set up which centers neighborhoods on high streets, distinguishes high streets from backstreets and articulates the part and the whole (neighborhood and city) of the center. Notice that it does this without establishing boundaries between the parts; it *centers* parts in different places, in the process defining the places in an overlap of a neighborhood 'region' with a city 'region' (of neighborhoods) – this part requires concentration! We have just demonstrated here not just the structure of historic European urban fabric, but also a proposal for the structure of centrality in urban fabrics and the structure of urban place – three urban 'problems' solved!

Contemporary central places as 'transitions' between 'regions'

We see sets of nested regions, set up as relational structures without overt boundaries, each lower-scaled region co-centered with a region of a higher scale and each apparently doing 'work' in processing the non-local relations of the scales above. The nested structure we are talking about is quite apparent in many contemporary mappings of urban fabric. We have picked out a map of traffic noise in Berlin as an example.



Figure 4: Berlin noise.

But then we see apparently from this mapping a new structure emerging in the noisiest parts of the fabric. The growth of many European cities since the middle of the last century has ceased to be along the intermediate scaled grid we have just highlighted and starts instead to integrate a region of places at a much higher scale. Towns and villages in the region of Berlin become integrated into a new structure and new dominant region (of the metropolitan region) and a new infrastructure is built to facilitate movement between these places. We see the 'explosion' of the city into the periphery and the region which is connected to this emergence of a new dominant region and a new infrastructure.

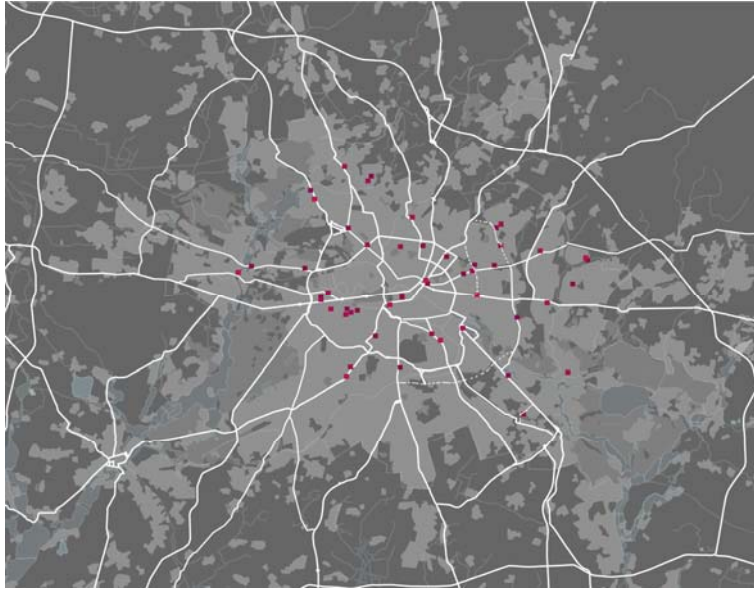


Figure 5: Berlin metropolitan region with the emergence of 'new centralities' in metropolitan regional space.

We find new central places emerging in the metropolitan region at points on the new regional infrastructure. They still seek out overlaps with other 'regional' spaces. These regions (places and the infrastructures that connect them) are still being built into the fabric as 'material canons' which scale the places which constitute them. We are left with a fabric of movements, with infrastructures connecting systems of places that 'lamine' along scale lines. And it all happens according to a logic of sense and making sense which is so close to us it is almost invisible. It forms in effect the *ground* of urban existence, *affording* particular *forms* of knowing and living in place which have each a strong and specific scale.

Situation, affordance, background, action

Movement infrastructure is not just a technology of mobility and access but is also a technology of *information* and background to our practical *knowledge* of the world. Seeing the problem like this takes us to the crux of the debate about our world as human; as construction and representation – suggesting that the world is concrete and real (Hacking), a condition of us knowing anything at all, but also a product of our own ordering and technics. We encounter a history, built into our world, which is already a background formalization of knowing and of use. James Gibson's special contribution was to recognize that the perceiving organism and the environment are already related through the co-evolution and co-adaptation of each to the other, and that the environment therefore *offers* conditions commensurate with the organism's needs. As a result, perception for the organism is the pickup of information on the go that supports the organism's perception and action. Gibson called this action-supportive information 'affordance' (Gibson). It is the affordance the environment offers that is the proper object of perception, and this affordance may be directly perceived without intervening mental representation. "An affordance is neither an objective property nor a subjective property; or it is both if you like. An affordance cuts across the

dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the observer.” (129 Gibson). Gibson regarded not objects, not relations, but *affordances* as being ontologically primitive (Sanders): what really matters in the organism-environment relation are the affordances themselves and how they are arrayed in the environment.

Both Gibson and Heidegger specify the environment therefore as being *for* the perceiver in a relation of being available and affording or *vorhanden* (to-hand). For Heidegger: “Self and world belong together in the single entity, *Dasein* [being-there]. Self and world are not two entities, like subject and object ... but self and world are the basic determination of *Dasein* itself in the unity of the structure of being in the world.” (p. 297) The relation *itself*, rather than material or mind, or object or subject, is the irreducible object we deal with when we talk about ‘environment’. But in the process we move the locus of determination from the psychology or neurology of the perceiver back into the environment where the affordances for knowing and action are arrayed.

How we manage to act non-locally remains the big question, but one it may be possible to answer case by case in the way people construct environments in frames of present and visible order. The medium itself becomes the path by which the message is revealed and one that can be used strategically to give shape to individual and collective lives. People may construct ‘pockets of local order’ in which activities and projects may be carried out, solidarities maintained or cultures nurtured, in particular conditions of visibility and presence to themselves and others. We are left with ‘economies of presence’ and everyday visibility – of the presence of things and people to us that Hannah Arendt problematized as ‘appearance’. And it is organized as we have seen in Berlin around the ‘regions’ of places and the transitions between differently scaled ‘regions’.

Action, in economies of presence, brings together movement-intent and places with all their extra-local ‘regional’ relational structures and meanings attached, not to mention the activities which mark places as already connected in particular ways. There is an integration of person-in-movement and environment-structured-for-perception at a level which is not captured by logics of static elements and their alignments and their local and in-one-time effects on the moving subject. This is much more than a question of wayfinding, it is a question of being in a very integral way not just in place but in that place’s extra-local ‘region’ as well – whether one is already familiar with that region or is exploring and using its structure to find out more about it. The possibility of error and the possibility of getting lost should not be ignored or forgotten! We act in a non-local as it is afforded in place – in other words we act in a situation as it appears in the ‘self-world’ couple in action. Gibsonian affordance is thereby extended into the extra-local – the means being the Heideggerian notions of the place-region and ‘intentionality’.

The environment as technique

The form we outline is one embedded both in perception (in the way regions orient us to particular places) and in the environment itself (in the way the

places of our perception become fixes or landmarks around and between which we build things like movement and communications infrastructures). We seem to be dealing with a background-foreground problem, with action made coherent and not just possible but *conceivable* against a background 'prescriptive' logic spatialized between places arrayed as a region, while it is at the same time free to 'negotiate' (Murdoch) between these points of reference and construct particular actions and lives in relation to them. These systems – like language itself – become the conditions for life (at least as we know it).

It seems clear that we cannot separate the logic of place, and of finding our place in the world, from that place in the world – in other words, that the intelligent knowing and the intentional agency that we exert in the world exists in some real sense also in that world, both in the way we situate our actions and act from somewhere, and in the way the 'products' of those actions accumulate in place over time. We are confronted with the inseparability of action and context (we might say agency and structure) and the necessary relation between material situatedness and the conditions of action. We find also that this 'material culture' we develop in this dynamic needs history (or else some very careful design that short-cuts the time dimension to give us the spatial 'structure' of historic places without history). We are talking about a formalization in technics – in infrastructure and in historically evolving technique for ordering the world, but also for securing it and making it conform to and mirror structures of power and in standards derived from a technological view of the world. Herein lies the danger: the formalization threatens to become a 'framing' (*Gestell*) of movement in terms ever more controlling of lives and opportunities. Further research needs to be directed to the possibility of layered centers that open opportunity for freedom and diversity rather than closing it.

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