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# Theorizing Impending Peripheries: Postindustrial Landscapes at the Edge of Hyper-modernity's Collapse

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## **Abstract**

This article discusses the ways in which the predominant economic mechanisms of capitalism, characterized by a hyper-mobility of flows, affect actual places and people. The rationality informing these mechanisms is the quest for a reduction of costs and the increase of potential benefit, and this can only be achieved by jumping from locale to locale searching for a cheaper labor force, new pools of resources, or an absence of environmental regulations. Mobility becomes the fundamental framework through which to understand modernity and its new economic articulations and their associated sovereignties. Anthropology has often discussed and theorized the impact of market integration on local communities across the world. This paper, in contrast, analyzes the extraction, or the disconnection, of a community away from the market.

### **Ephemeral Industrializations**

Whether we are talking about collapsing mining complexes (Ferguson, 1999; Vaccaro, 2006), plantation economies suffering the vagaries of the market (Mandle, 1974; Wiley, 2008), decapitalized industrial farming economies (Dudley, 2000; Tauxe, 1993), depleted fishing stocks resulting in abandoned canneries and quiet fishing ports (Shrank, 2005; St. Martin, 2005), deforested and impoverished timber country (Clark, 2001; Matthey, 1990; Power, 2006; Raffles, 1999), or crumbling factories because industrial activities are displaced to unregulated labor reservoirs (Bluestone & Harrison, 1984; Cowie & Heathcott, 2003; Dudley, 1994), the hyper-mobile fluxes of capital, people, information, commodities, ideas, and energy that characterize the current globalized economy have had an important transformative effect on social and ecological rural landscapes all over the world (Bell, 1973; Castells, 1996; Pred & Watts, 1992; Hannerz, 1996; Inglehart, 1997; Sivaramakrishnan & Vaccaro, 2006).

This article discusses the ways in which the predominant economic mechanisms of capitalism, characterized by a hyper-mobility of flows, affect actual places and people. The rationality informing these mechanisms is the quest for a reduction of costs and the increase of potential benefit, and this can only be achieved by jumping from locale to locale searching for a cheaper labor force, new pools of resources, or an absence of environmental regulations. Mobility becomes the fundamental framework through which to understand modernity and its new economic articulations and their associated sovereignties (Steinberg, 2009). The goal of these pages is to create a framework through which to understand the localities affected by this hyper-mobility and the aftermath of their radical transformations resulting from quick industrialization and ever quicker abandonment. Peripheral locales are radically transformed when they are suddenly integrated into an economic framework characterized by mass extraction or transformation of natural resources (Godoy, 2001; Netting, 1993). The social and ecological transformations resulting from the industrialization of rural areas often shift their fabric in ways that do not allow for a comeback to a preindustrial situation once the industrial activity stops. Such transformations affect the resilience of the affected regions, forcing a regime shift (Peterson, 2000). This postindustrial modernity, this liquid modernity, is characterized by high levels of uncertainty, risk, and, therefore, vulnerability (Bauman, 2007; Beck, 1992). This paper, by identifying the commonalities and differences that characterize different localities experiencing a transition from a position of centrality in the global mercantile networks to a renewed peripheral situation, connects the struggles of a series of places to a socio-economic global phenomenon: market integration, hyper-mobility, expansion, abandonment and reinvention. The goal is to integrate into a single analytical domain and understand a diverse array of localities across the world that are experiencing the traumatic severing of ties with the consumptive centers of the world by recognizing the logic of the transformative process that affects them. This is not to say, of course, that context and specificity do not matter, but rather that the presence or absence of market integration and mercantile networks is a key social indicator (Ensminger, 1992; Peters, 1994). Anthropology has often discussed and theorized the impact of market integration on local communities across the world. This paper, in contrast, analyzes the extraction, or the disconnection, of a community away from the market.

Hyper-mobility is a fundamental feature of the current form of modernity, and this article uses the concept hypermodernity to characterize the current social model dominating the global ecumene (Charles & Lipovsky 2005; Pred & Watts 1992). I purposely avoid the word

“postmodernity,” as it reflects intellectual changes that may have occurred in fields like cultural studies, philosophy, or art but it also implies an ontological change of the socioeconomic model of modernity that does not reflect the acceleration of the contemporary process of globalization. Postmodernity, a terribly polysemous word, as defined by Harvey (1989), Jameson (1992), or Lyotard (1984), discusses the emergence of relativity, flexibility, and the power of discursivity, not the densification and acceleration of the traditional infrastructures and logics of modernity (Castells, 1996).

The collapse of mass production manifests itself in different ways. This article examines a handful of examples of emergent models of postindustrial society and identifies possible common trends in its different manifestations. The postindustrial crisis seems to lead down three different possible paths: (1) collapse and social extinction (ghost towns), (2) subsidized livelihoods resulting in societies maintained by public agency as an act of state-making (welfare communities), and (3) successful reconnection to the global network via the identification and exploitation of a new, substitute valued commodity (reinvented communities).

The goal of this article is not to reproduce a binary center-periphery model but, instead, to follow the uneven development approach with a transnational network perspective of contemporary economic activities (Harvey 2001; Smith 2008). As commodity chain analysis literature emphasizes, the central nodes of the network tend to be cities since the network flows are dominated by the gravitational pull of the larger markets (Appadurai 1988; Bestor 2001; Freidberg 2001; Grossman 1993). These pages describe a flexible, ephemeral network in a perpetual state of change and in which peripheries and centers are continuously made and unmade.

At some point in modern history, specific productive advantages attracted industrial, mass-oriented production to rural areas around the world. When the strategic advantage of one such rural area disappeared, the productive activity vanished with it, leaving abandoned landscapes and communities behind. For instance, the Spanish mountains of the early twentieth century offered cheap coal, yet most Spanish mines closed as soon as cheaper South African coal started to fuel the Spanish power plants (Vaccaro, 2006). Textile factories across Western Europe closed their doors after low cost South Asian and Moroccan products started to flood European markets. The Midwest's car belt became the rust belt as soon as American car companies started to outsource to the Far East at the same time that Asian companies started to distribute equivalent and cheaper products in America (Dudley, 1994; High, 2003; High & Lewis, 2007). Timber mills all over North America were outcompeted and abandoned due to the massive flows of transoceanic processed wood. Fish processing towns became ghost towns when processing ships took over and delocalized the fishing industry (Marchak et al., 1987; Sepez et al., 2007). These phenomena are not exclusive to the Western internal peripheries. This process affected the Zambian copper belt when extraction costs raised and global prices dropped (Ferguson, 1999). The Amazonian rubber tapper industry evaporated once someone learned to cultivate the rubber tree and opened plantations in Asia (Dove, 2002). The economies of entire Third World countries collapsed when their main export markets failed because of significant shifts in global supply (Frynas et al., 2003).

The phenomenon of industrial abandonment is not new and did not appear as an exclusive consequence of hypermodernity. The process of British industrialization created similar boom and bust cycles all over the English countryside (Thompson, 1968). The events

studied here are not ontologically new; the novelty lies in their frequency and range. What we discuss here is precisely the expansion of this model to the global level.

In industrialized rural locales, entire generations were raised—socialized—to fit a modern and developed way of life: a way of life intensively connected to urbanization patterns, wage economies, and market-regulated distribution of resources. Residents of these locales became miners, fishermen, loggers, factory workers, plantation laborers, or monoculture farmers. The flight of the dominant productive activities, or the collapse of specific markets, resulted in the dismantling of these emergent ways of life, or rather, the dismantling of the industrial complexes and infrastructures that sustained these emergent ways of life. This disintegration resulted in cultural and economic dislocations as the expectations of modernity created by the economic boom failed with the bust (Ferguson, 1999). This seems to suggest that the reconfiguration of economic structures seems to occur at a faster pace than the equivalent redefinition of local collective and individual identities. These undigested transformations result in ‘cultural disenchantments’ associated to failed expectations (Holmes, 1989). Holmes and Ferguson talk about failed expectations and explain that every massive economic transformation comes with an attached new framework of individual and collective positionalities that articulate identity and rights. Furthermore, by replacing the previous socioeconomic model, this new framework leaves a generation of already socialized individuals “offside”—expected to play by rules that are no longer valid. The local moral economy is challenged by these massive and successive alterations (Polanyi, 1944; Thompson, 1968; Scott, 1976).

This industrial model, centered on specialized mass production of a single commodity, diverges from the preindustrial era, in which small scale communities were characterized by an economic model based on productive diversification. Rural households invested in the production of several items required for subsistence in modest quantities (as opposed to emphasizing monocropping) in order to reduce vulnerability to agricultural pests or adverse weather conditions. If one of the crops failed, the remaining crops would allow the family to survive (Altieri & Hecht, 1990; Toledo et al., 2003). In the absence of a large consumptive market, there are no incentives for producing more than what is needed for survival. The connection to large and dynamic regional markets, however, completely changes this economic behavior (Ensminger, 1992; Peters, 1994). Such a connection provides incentives for massive production of a single commodity. It “...stresses the contextualized struggles of local producers increasingly articulating with larger markets, systems, institutions and cultural forces” (Robbins, 2002, 1510). The possibility of implementing mass production completely changes the behavioral framework of these peripheral communities.

In these peripheral locales, modernity manifests as a sudden occurrence connected to mass production and often to industrialization, a socioeconomic bubble of uncertain durability, with dramatic cultural and political impacts. Modernity, as a historical regime, results from the implementation of a new type of governmentality associated to the simultaneous consolidation of nation-state and capitalism, with individualism as a generic behavioral framework (Sparke, 2005). The environment and population of the rural area become a set of national resources ultimately managed (if not belonging) to the state (Burchell et al., 1991; Foucault 2008). The state proceeds to measure, count, localize, and manage its resources (Braun, 2000; Hannah, 2000; Scott, 1998). It also proceeds to homogenize its subjects with standardized national education and legal systems in order to create a nation of equally interchangeable individuals, the citizenry as an imagined community (Anderson, 1995; Gellner, 1983; Dean, 1999). In other

words, the state proceeds to territorialize its inlands.

The simultaneous implementation of mass-production economic structures also has an impact on how resources and people are assessed and managed. The production of subjects under industrial conditions of production has governmental consequences. Factories and mines in rural areas often create their own settlements, in which workers and their families are concentrated (Terradas, 1979; Campbell, 2004). The mining complex in West Virginia is a perfect example of this trend. "Before World War I, nearly 80 percent of mine workers of West Virginia lived in company owned towns" (High & Lewis, 2007, 146). In this and other locations like it, skills, time and calendar are redefined to adapt to the managerial and productive needs and constraints of the factories, which are extremely different from the ones formerly presented by farm life (Attali, 1985; Addas, 1989).

Every single one of the above mentioned processes, in their emergence and their collapse, is an example of radical (and ephemeral) market integration of a peripheral area. This is about mass production. This is, therefore, about the ability to quickly move the produced commodities to suitable markets. Peripheral areas, scarcely populated or with low acquisition potential, cannot take consumptive care of these new flows of commodities. Rural areas become targets of industrialization when they have an abundance of raw and rare materials or cheap labor. Suitable markets are typically cities: densely populated areas with relatively high consumptive power. Consequently, productive areas do not necessarily overlap with markets. As a result, transportation infrastructures and worker resettlement are key ingredients of successful industrial societies. People and commodities have to be able to quickly go back and forth between the sites of production and those of consumption. The capacity to mass-produce something and the capacity to swiftly and cheaply move it to its place of consumption are the secrets to the success (and ultimate doom) of each one of the above mentioned places.

Once a commodity becomes valuable because it has a sizable market and an acceptable profit margin, an economic opportunity emerges. Producers will have incentives to produce as much of that commodity as possible because of the absorption capabilities of the current global market, and although the international market is regulated and limited by tax barriers, it often behaves as an open access resource pool in which players are pushed or encouraged to maximize production. In any case, the relation between supply and demand does not remain stable for too long, nor does the value of the any particular commodity. It is this capriciousness that marks the fate of industrialization focused on single products across the globe. Market integration often pushes peripheral rural areas into unilateral productive approaches. Transportation is costly, and only specific, high value products justify the investment. When the commodity ceases to carry high profitability levels due to increasing extraction or labor costs, rising low-cost competition, or withered raw materials—the whole enterprise is terminated or moved to a place with lower productive costs.

This article scrutinizes the framework of this transformative process, analyzes the new social formations that are emerging in the voids left behind by the flying industries, and introduces a discussion on the potential impacts of the current second oil crises on the hyper-mobile economic model that has characterized the last phase of global capitalism.

The soaring oil prices that dominated the energy markets of three quarters of 2008 changed one of the key variables of the hyper-modernity's equation: cheap mobility (Roberts, 2008). As a result of those months of unaffordable gas and the global financial crises that ensued,

the collective imagination started to understand some of the limitations of the oil age. This trend may yet alter the global economic market and provide incentives for the relocation, once again, of the productive poles near their markets. Serious consideration of this relocation of productive centers has coincided with the consolidation, in the West, of a pool of consumers interested in high quality food, organic agriculture, and ranching. Interestingly enough, the organic movement is specifically not interested in high transportation costs and is remarketing itself as producing “anti-economic crises commodities,” products which are not tainted by the accusation of contributing to the global climatic and ecological crises.

### **Postindustrial Landscapes: Failed Modernities, (Re-) Emerging Peripheries**

These sudden cycles of industrial transformation (boom) and de-industrialization (bust) are intimately connected to an economic system in which mobility and interconnectedness of commodities, people, capital, and information through networks are fundamental for the functioning of the system itself (Appadurai, 1996; Castells, 1996; Sassen, 2006). This economic system is a globally integrated market in which costs are not an obstacle to a commodity’s mobility. This system results on ephemeral productive territoriality in the spaces chosen for production: the territory and its communities are administratively and economically reorganized to serve the purpose of mass production. Deindustrialization forces the reconceptualization of this model.

Hyper-mobility is not facilitated by the theoretical lack of rules of the global free market. This global and highly variable economic structure is not normatively homogenous. Against early assessments of the late twentieth century capitalism (Harvey, 1989), this is not a friction-free system (Tsing, 2005). It is crossed and fractured by an infinite number of intangible boundaries: national borders and their export prohibitions and tax barriers, differentials on environmental and labor regulations, multilateral organizations impositions, and so on. The global institutional network, dominated by the regulations of the most powerful nations (G8), the Breton Woods institutions (World Bank, World Trade Organization or the International Monetary Fund), United Nations, or the proliferation of free trade treaties often sets up an asymmetrical global economical playground that unevenly affects the flows of raw material, commodities, and people (Goldman, 2006; Perkins, 2005; Woods, 2007). This institutional network, serving the interests of markets dominated by first world corporations, has promoted and provided incentives for monoculture export approaches that make places vulnerable to outsourcing, market shifts, or extractive collapse.

This new form of modernity, hyper-modernity, has coevolved with an increasingly complex urbanization of the world. The populations concentrated in cities are, in both absolute and relative terms, higher than ever. Their consumption patterns and their social and ecological footprints affect larger and larger areas, if not the whole globe (Cronon, 1991; Davis, 1999; Gandy, 2002). Their inexhaustible urban needs drive the directionality of the hyper-mobility of capital and commodities and also facilitate environmental and social devastation. As peasant studies established long ago (Potter et al., 1967; Redfield, 2000; Bebbington, 2000), the idea of isolated peasant communities is a fallacy. The urban-rural divide is also a myth (Williams, 1973). Everywhere, at the theoretical peripheries of the world, at the hinterlands of states and cities, rural communities are modernized and restructured to produce what urban markets need. That is, they are integrated into regional, national, or international markets; their locally made

products are targeted for exportation, and the productive system is altered to cover these changes. These activities drive the monetization of the local economy through wages, taxes, and revenues (Sepez et al., 2007; Sivaramakrishnan & Vaccaro, 2006).

The process of market integration connects these rural, peripheral areas to large networks of production and consumption (Chaffin, 2004; Freidberg, 2001; Grossman, 1993). Mass extraction is traditionally connected to industrialization. When the industrial activities disappear, a productive void occurs, and social and demographic collapse follows. In this void that characterizes postindustrial landscapes, some new opportunities may emerge (Vaccaro et al., 2009). In the global urban society and its Western consumptive postindustrial demographic centers, leisure (i.e. ecotourism) and high quality products (i.e. organic coffee, Brazil nut conditioner) become new possible productive anchors, re-connecting the rural areas to the different regional and international economic networks. Consumptive patterns, driven by urban desire, have a fundamental impact on the directionality of the flows of commodities and, consequently on the locale of the next productive effort (Stearns, 2001).

So, what happens with localities that, after a period of centrality, are abandoned by modernity and suddenly dropped back into the periphery? Industrialization tends to generate several levels of social hyper-trophy: it requires higher densities of labor for the factories, which in turn increases the level of consumption in absolute terms due to the sheer number of people required and in relative terms due to the development of new needs associated with modern life. These needs are covered by a continual flow of cheap commodities produced elsewhere in other peripheral nodes of the networks controlled from the urban centers. When a mass-oriented way of production moves away from a given location, local communities tend to have reached dimensions beyond the carrying capacity of their local environments and are no longer self-sufficient productive regimes. At that point, however, nobody is interested in providing these community members with the products they have grown to desire because the community members no longer have wages to pay for the products. In addition, the expectations, the perceived quintessential needs, of these postindustrial populations cannot be covered by the preindustrial local mode of production, which is neither developed nor diverse enough to do so. Emerging postindustrial modernities, thus, are characterized by restructuring and, more often than not, different levels of scarcity and crises.

As the stock-market crash of September 2008 and the subsequent governmental plan to salvage the market has proven to the last believers of the free market, state and big corporations work and exist in close articulation. Public national interest, as defined by the national centers of power, directs governmental agency. The achievement of the highest possible margin of economic benefit in the shortest possible time directs capital investments (capitalist agency). Only by understanding the interaction of the agency of state and major economic actors will we comprehend the paths taken by postindustrial locales. Postindustrial locales face a restructuring amidst what is perceived as a recession characterized by scarcity and collapse, or in other words, inadequacy. The future requires a will to improve, a conscientious effort to (re)achieve modernity (Murray Li, 2007).

Ferguson in 1999 discussed the idea of an *Ethnography of Decline* to analyze the changes that were transforming a Zambian society that was experiencing an accelerated rate of de-industrialization. The Zambian economy, an exemplary model of national modernization via export of a single commodity (copper), collapsed during the 1980s due to the decline of copper



price and exported quantities. The emergent copperbelt urban society collapsed, too. The cosmopolitan networks connecting Zambian workers to the global economy were gradually severed. Individuals redirected their efforts to reconnect with the rural areas from which they had originally come in order to secure access to new sources of food. The country shifted from the list of emerging modern nations into the aid-dependent postcolonial nations. Lacking alternative commodities attractive to the global market, Zambia fell out of the global gravity fields. It entered, in Ferguson (1999) words, into an era of *global disconnect*.

This type of global disconnect parallels the national disconnect of the Appalachian steel and coal country (Whitson et al., 2006). The Zambian and Appalachian cases exemplify the impacts of massive natural resource extraction in the framework of a hyper-mobile economic system. The 'mining problem' produces classic cases of social foreclosing associated to industrial flight. The mining communities, left to their own devices, without the main productive activity that was articulating the social and economic life, fall into depopulation and social stagnation. This situation in Zambia resulted in a reconnection with the rural areas and a recovery of the old productive practices. West Virginia has lost over one million people since 1945 (High & Lewis, 2007, 147).

In the Spanish Pyrenees, the closure of mines and factories, combined with the near-disappearance of traditional mountainous agroranching, resulted in a process of accelerated depopulation (Ayuda, 2002; Molina, 2002) and the subsequent reduction of the human pressure on the environment (Molina, 2000; Roura et al., 2005; Vaccaro, 2006). This reduction of pressure, in this case, translated to a process of environmental recovery (Poyatos et al., 2003). Ironically, depopulation and environmental recovery set the stage for social and economic revival. The landscape, with its natural values and beauty, became the next commodity that these areas could offer to the urban customers (Vaccaro & Beltran, 2007b). Protected areas, ski resorts, and second residences became powerful economic drivers of mountain economies.

Nature, as a hot commodity, has paid off in numerous locales across the globe that are transitioning away from an industrial, mass-oriented, productive system. Old Afrikaans farms around Kruger National Park are being reconverted into thriving safari enclosures in which the veld—the bush—is recreated, and wild animals are unleashed for the pleasure of European and American tourists or hunters. The social impacts of such shifts are numerous. Game farms require a smaller labor force from neighboring communities than do industrialized farms. These new, smaller productive units produce money (remunerated services) instead of large amounts of food that could reduce basic product costs in the area.

During the nineteenth century, industrial elites reinvented the concept of leisure (Plumb 1973; Veblen 1998), turning non-productive activities into an identity marker, a distinction that is part of a *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1984). The generalization of mass production and consumption that accompanies the expansion of *Fordism* translated to a multiplication of the social strata (Gramsci, 2000; Koch, 2006). The social structure began to mirror the complexity of the productive system. The generalization of mass production and the multiplication of supply generated the need to create new markets and divergent consumption patterns. In a multilayered mid-twentieth century industrial society, *habitus* and taste experienced capitalistic fragmentation. That is, each social group adopted mass consumption patterns according to their different monetary possibilities and diverse cultural and aesthetic expectations (Cross, 1993; Baudrillard, 1998). The enormous creation of wealth associated with the consolidation of post-World War II capitalism resulted in the spreading out of postmaterialistic values from the elite to

the rest of the social structure (Galbraith, 1998; Inglehart, 1997). In this way, leisure then became a quintessential postmaterialistic economic sector that was expanded as a social and cultural right across Western societies (Galbraith, 1993). The consumptive domains were expanded because of new leisure preferences. In the postscarcity society that consolidated during late industrial capitalism, leisure became a central social domain (Giddens, 1995; Lazareth, 2007; MacCannell, 1999). The consolidation of postmaterialistic values and leisure as an economic sector have had a fundamental influence on the paths taken by many rural areas experiencing the decay that follows industrial abandonment.

The economic and cultural shifts that accompanied the unfolding of modernity came associated with important new legislative developments. The construction of the idea of national interest, the public good that characterizes the emergence of the modern states and their consecution of the governmental and coercive monopoly (Dean, 1999; Foucault, 2007), evolved to include environmental protection (Gottlieb, 1993; Guha, 2000). This new type of governmentality, environmentalism (Agrawal, 2005), which hesitantly started to be implemented at the end of the nineteenth century with the first territorially based protected areas (USA 1872, Canada 1885, South Africa 1902/1926), has become a massive worldwide phenomenon. The increased value attributed to nature as space of contemplation and leisure has gone, thus, hand in hand with increased penetration of public agency on environmental protection. In 2005, 6.1 percent of the world, 1,506,436 hectares, was under some level of IUCN protection. This process has resulted in the conversion of the environment into public patrimony (Cooper, 2000).

The intellectual introduction of the environment into the realm of the public dominion prepares the redefinition, via conservation, of landscape and territory from private (individual or communal) to public, thereby making it susceptible to being expropriated by governmental agency (Haenn, 2005; Hayden, 2003). Postindustrial landscapes are often characterized by depopulation and economic recession, and, consequently, important ecological transformations are associated with these changes based on the variations of the level of human pressure. Idealized versions of culture and nature emerge in this situation. The state expands the idea of national patrimony to the realms of nature and culture, allowing for public agency intervention. Nature is culturalized through conservation as it becomes a symbol and a commodity. Culture is naturalized through its preservation and consumption as an ideal form in museums and other cultural heritage sites (Vaccaro & Beltran, 2007a).

Restoration ecology, as a field, exemplifies this dominion over nature in which some specialists re-engineer nature to re-shape it to an ideal form deemed, accurately or not, ecologically adequate (Guha, 1997; Vaccaro & Beltran, 2009). Barret and White define the mandate of restoration ecology as one of creation of postmodern ecologies (2001). This natural recreation does not often include rural perspectives on nature as working place, but it does consider nature a site of leisure (Knight, 2006; Mech, 1991; Neumann, 1998; Phillips, 2005).

This patrimonialization happened in parallel to a commoditization of the environment. The enjoyment of the environment has become a multimillion business, sustained on the consolidation at all strata of Western society of postmaterialistic values (Inglehart, 1997). Even the environmental discourse has become a commodity in itself, just another link in the mass consumptive behavior of enlightened contemporary households (Guha, 2000; Santamarina, 2006). In many rural peripheries affected by depopulation and economic crises, the revalorization associated with patrimonialization and commoditization has opened new venues to

market integration to reconnect with different regional, national, or international networks (Escobar, 2008; Zanotti, 2009; Zimmerer, 2006). The consumptive preferences, the cash availability, and the easy mobility enjoyed by the urban masses at the turn of the twentieth century made this connection possible.

Numerous farms from Dakota and other areas of the Midwest, subject to the vagaries of international markets of crop prices, did not have such an alternative, and abandonment or land consolidation ensued (Dudley, 2000). The sudden dominant appearance of biofuels into the agricultural market is inserting a new variable into the cultivation strategies all over the world. Although this phenomenon has increased the margins of benefit associated to corn and soy, its performance will ultimately be also affected by supply and demand, and at some point economic dependence on such a commodity will generate a high degree of vulnerability.

Important areas of the Midwest, after the factory closures of the 1980s associated with the outsourcing phenomenon, had to reinvent themselves as part of a postindustrial locale in permanent reshaping in an attempt to provide attractive residential lifestyles to old and new residents (Cowie, 2001; Dudley, 1994; High, 2003). After a crisis that menaced with severing rust belt communities from the important regional economic networks to which they had been connected for several decades, the towns redirected their energies to a new set of economic networks linked to second residences or tourism (Cowie & Heathcott, 2003).

Ghost towns, abandoned or semi-abandoned communities, are an embodiment of the asymmetrical relationships that characterize the hyper-mobile economic global order. Such towns are localities that had no alternatives to deindustrialization, that were unable to return to a preindustrial economic model, or that did not have enough political weight or strategic importance to attract governmental support to stay functional. They are a tangible reminder of the effects of global socio-spatial hierarchies on vulnerable places (Appadurai, 1988).

In other peripheral locales, the disintegration of an industry has been followed by compensation through massive public subsidy campaigns. In some cases, the state considers keeping an area populated, despite an economic collapse, to be in the best public interest. The case of North Atlantic fisheries is a paradigmatic example (Hamilton et al., 2004). One-product export dependence has resulted, once the fish stocks started to collapse, in population loss and increased vulnerability of the communities (Hamilton & Otterstad, 1998; Silk, 2006; St Martin, 2006). The economy of entire regions needed to be reinvented once the main product became scarce. In Canada, a new model based on heavy subsidies and transition to different although less abundant species was built (House, 1999; Shrank, 2005). In this situation, the maintenance of a viable society in a rural peripheral locale becomes a state-making strategy that keeps the state's solid hold to a geographical area via demographic occupation, or, in legitimacy terms, by taking care of the social responsibilities acquired as a welfare state.

The subsidies, in some cases, attempt to keep economic arrangements with systematic deficits afloat because they are perceived as strategic to the nation. For several decades, several Western European states subsidized the coal extraction in their countries because although foreign coal was cheaper and of better quality, it was generally assumed that the nation needed to have a potential energy source ready and available in case of international shortages: the national interest, in terms of energetic security and employment in deprived areas, justified this public distortion of the free market (Kolstad, 2004; Radetzki, 1995).

The Northwest of the United States and the Canadian West coast, natural resources rich areas, offer yet another stereotypical example of the volatile relationships that geographically

remote and raw material rich areas develop with urban dominated markets through ephemeral productive ventures. These areas have been characterized since their European conquest and subsequent integration into the American markets by the production of wealth via massive timber and fish extraction. However, they lost innumerable jobs and settlements when the economic system was reorganized to overemphasize hyper-mobility by concentrating processing facilities in cities or in big boats capable of fishing and processing at the same time (Newell, 1989; Campbell, 2004; Sepez et al., 2007).

As pointed out in the introduction, these transformative processes of social decomposition (when adaptation fails) or restructuration (when it manages to rebuild its economic viability around alternative productive possibilities) have important cultural and ecological consequences. Each mode of production brings a specific moral economy, a code of values that states what is right or wrong economic behavior (Polanyi, 1944; Thompson, 1968). These processes of economic and political transition have important consequences to the collective and individual processes of identity formation (Godelier, 1986). The market integration that arrived with the industrialization of the mentioned locales brought about a fracture with previous premodern solidarities (Edelman, 2005; Sivaramakrishnan, 2005). The conflicts emerging from the collapse of the industrial model can be expressed, also, in terms of identity struggles. Individuals are socialized amidst a particular set of social conditions, and when these conditions change, personal identities built upon previous socioecological systems are not as mutable as markets. Sometimes resistance ensues, as the individuals perceive the unfulfillment of traditional solidarities or the crumbling of hard fought expectation as unacceptable (Scott, 1976; Ferguson, 1999).

Individual cognitive dissonances emerge as individuals that perceive themselves as miners or ranchers actually live and work in communities that have become tourist centers or marginal agricultural havens. It is not the same to be a commercial fisherman as it is to be a guide for rich sport fishermen, nor is it the same to be a fisherman or a miner as it is to be someone that sits at home or at a bar waiting for the state subsidy check. Personal pride and dignity are also part of the identity equation. Knowledge and behavior are interdependent with identity, and confused identities result in unrealistic expectations. This is not to deny the flexibility and adaptation capability of humans wherever they are. However, small peripheral communities and their inhabitants, dependent on a small and localized scale of social recognition, do not fair necessarily well on the deterritorialized and disembodied hyper-mobile contemporary global society.

### **The Collapse of Hyper-modernity's Way of Life**

This final section reflects on the contemporary situation of industrialism. After all, the process that this paper has described has been around for quite a while. My grandfather started his productive life as a blue-collar worker of a Siemens factory in the periphery of Barcelona, Spain, back in the late 1920s. This German company was already taking advantage, in a modern sense, of the salary differentials and the growing European interconnectivity. Since then, as it has been discussed, things have not stopped accelerating. The economic system, above anything else, has emphasized a high degree of hyper-mobility in all social instances. Time and space have not ceased to contract (Hannerz, 1996; Virilio, 2000).

So, what could be the purpose of a critical update? Is there anything radically new changing in the way things are being carried out in the world? Well, in the year 2008, a worldwide oil crisis and a deep economic recession, which affected cash availability and levels of consumption, started to severely impact the Western world. Thus, a key variable of hyper-modernity's equation, transportation costs, is changing. The price of oil is growing, or at least becoming so unpredictable that it is quickly diminishing the potential mobility of industries and commodities. Many industries are trying the same solution they used during the first oil crisis at the beginning of the 1970s: moving to unregulated labor reservoirs in the Third World. However, important sectors of Western countries' secondary sector disappeared with that move and could likely do so again. When labor costs rise, industries try to keep moving deeper into more remote labor pools, but an unquestionable fact remains: transportation overhead costs are now rising fast enough to make those moves increasingly irrelevant. For instance, the costs of the main transoceanic routes used by Chinese industries have tripled, making outsourcing a less appealing strategy (purchasing.com, 2008). Chinese industry, the main supplier of the world's cheap manufacturing market, is redirecting its production to the national market, diminishing its transportation costs (China Daily, 2010). Some areas of China have even experienced industrial flight, becoming yet another example of a sudden disconnection from the global economic networks (Bangkok Post, 2010).

A critical update on today's industrial trends has to reflect on the consequences of a global expansion of time and space due to an abrupt deceleration of the, until now, reigning hyper-mobility. In addition, this increase in the uncertainty of the cost of transportation occurs at the same time that the most economically dynamic countries in the world are, starting in 2008, in the middle of a recession. This process results in a slowing down of the average consumption expenditures and the concurrent increase of uncertainty associated with market volatility and currency reliability. International trade and consumption, and therefore the incentives to produce in remote locales, have contracted during 2008 and 2009 (Walt Street Journal, 2009). The contraction of trade has resulted in reduced demand on the transport infrastructures, and, as a response, oil prices dropped during early 2009, only to go up again in 2010 (Globe & Mail, 2010). The cost reduction, although significant, does not supersede its volatility and is not reactivating trade as expected.

This framework, perhaps, is reopening the door for the emergence of industries located nearby their potential markets. Some products (the production of which, for decades, had been abandoned in places that were being flooded by cheap competitors from the other side of the world) may again become profitable or competitive with the addition of the new transportation costs on the overseas product. New potential landscapes and societies may emerge from this combination of events.

This process is even more interesting if we take into account that this transportation crisis is happening at the same time that a conscience of a global ecological crisis is becoming part of many countries' mainstream collective imagination. This conscience has resulted, on the one hand, in social pressure to diminish oil consumption and, on the other hand, in the development of a powerful demand for organic, ecologically sound, and high quality products. Both elements provide further incentives for the relocation of productive activities nearby their markets. If we talk agriculture, for instance, organic products are remarketing themselves as anti-crisis commodities. They claim to offer high quality, environmentally sound produce, and to generate a fairer society by directly connecting producer and consumer, revitalizing the rural areas and

improving the health of the urban inhabitants. This emphasis on locally grown or produced food and other commodities is not new. What is new is the simultaneous occurrence of a severe global oil crisis with direct impact on transportation costs.

It is still too early to examine whether the contraction of the consumptive demand associated with the current worldwide recession (not to mention the crash of the endowments that were sustaining most environmental NGOs) will have an impact on global tourism and environmental conservation related development. By affecting the development of leisure in general and tourism in particular, the recession has the potential to slash out some of the possibilities that were allowing postindustrial locales to reconnect to urban markets. It remains to be seen, however, if a general decline of the resources available to the average Western household will shrink the emergent postmaterialist values and associated consumption patterns, bringing back to the fore the pre-second World War exclusive emphasis on pre-leisure material needs.

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