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THE RESTRUCTURING OF GEOGRAPHICAL SCALE: COALESCENCE AND FRAGMENTATION OF THE NORTHERN CORE REGION*

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In order to understand the dimensions and significance of contemporary regional restructuring and in order to provide a coherent basis for a "new regional geography," it is vital to tackle the question of scale. We hypothesize in this paper that the scale at which economic regions are constituted is periodically transformed, and we attempt to demonstrate this with respect to the coalescence in the postwar period of a single region comprising the Northern Core. A coalescence index is devised to measure levels of coalescence in experiences of manufacturing employment, service employment, value added, number of manufacturing establishments, and unemployment rates. The pattern which emerges might be interpreted in several ways, but it seems that the coalescence of a relatively homogeneous Northern Core by the mid-1970s has been superseded by a more fragmented pattern in the 1980s. While suggestive of complex changes in the regional scale, this inquiry also points toward further empirical research.

With the emergence of industrial capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the social, political, and economic world was dramatically reconstructed as a jigsaw puzzle of national pieces. Previous territorial divisions of the world had been quite different; there were city states and regional states, fiefdoms, provinces, duchies, and kingdoms, sometimes incorporating distinct national groups or engendering far reaching empires, but never had the world been so discretely divided as it would be on the basis of separate nation states. Often of course there was a problem of fit, and war was the commonest means by which lasting national boundaries were eventually established. But if the origins of national boundaries derived largely from political struggles [4], the larger function of the national scale of organization was also

economic. As Nigel Harris puts it, the emerging capitalist class "divided up the territory in patches" [24, p. 17] as a geographical solution to their contradictory obligations to mutual cooperation and competition. Nation states emerged as the basic building blocks of the advanced capitalist world system; they emerged not as internally homogeneous pieces but rather as national units geographically divided into economic regions.

There was a diverse rationality to the patterns of regional differentiation; natural differentiation in resource availability, cultural differentiation in work practices, accessibility to large markets and transport routes, and wide differences in worker/employer relations were all important. Regions were indeed "class practices" [15] in the broadest sense; each national piece in the world jigsaw was itself internally divided into coherent sub-national "production platforms," some

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Editor's Note: This paper appeared in Volume 63, Number 2 of *Economic Geography* (April, 1987). Unfortunately, there were several transpositions of text on the first few pages of the article as printed and distributed in that issue. The errors were substantive enough to require the reprinting of the article and its distribution to the subscribers to Volume 63 of *Economic Geography*.

The attached reprint should be considered as a complete replacement for the article as it originally appeared. Libraries may wish to remove the original version and substitute this new one when they have their *Economic Geography* volume bound. Please excuse any inconvenience which may have been caused by the errors in the original version.

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With the emergence of industrial capitalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the social, political, and economic world was dramatically reconstructed as a jigsaw puzzle of national pieces. Previous territorial divisions of the world had been quite different; there were city states and regional states, fiefdoms, provinces, duchies, and kingdoms, sometimes incorporating distinct national groups or engendering far reaching empires, but never had the world been so discretely divided as it would be on the basis of separate nation states. Often of course there was a problem of fit, and war was the commonest means by which lasting national boundaries were eventually established. But if the origins of national boundaries derived largely from political struggles [4], the larger function of the national scale of organization was also

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more developed than others, some producing for export while others produced for local or national consumption, and some producing relatively little while others acted as the virtual foundry for entire national economies. The regionalization of the national economies of Western Europe and North America was, therefore, an integral part of the emergence of distinct national patches in the world system. The economic prowess of the core industrial regions provided the bulk of profits which empowered the national economy in international competition and funded the military defense of national boundaries and trade interests abroad. If from a different general perspective, Paterson notes precisely this symbiosis in remarking that “the position of an individual region relative to the national unit” is an important source of regional definition itself “once society has organized itself, and in particular, once the nation-state has become the basis of that organization” [43, p. 178].

This division of nation states into specialized industrial and agricultural regions was the staple of traditional commercial geography and, later, American regional geography, but it was a disappearing reality by the second half of the twentieth century. The international economic recovery following World War II brought both an internationalization of markets for many products and eventually the globalization of an expanding range of production processes, rendering the inherited national scale of production and economic organization increasingly obsolete. The political (as opposed to economic) coherence of national states has of course prevented the dissolution of nation states and the national scale of organization; indeed, it could be argued that in geopolitical response to economic crisis and insecurity [29] there has been a Ramboesque reaffirmation of national boundaries in the form of militaristic saber rattling, trade and immigration restrictions, and tightening currency controls.

But if, in response to crisis, econom-

ically obsolete national boundaries are hardening politically in the global landscape, the opposite is happening to regional boundaries. Without the protection of conjoint political organization (except in those very rare cases where regions are geographically synonymous with specific countries or states, counties, or provinces), regional boundaries are increasingly porous in economic and social terms, and the familiar mosaic of small, often city-centered regions distinguished from each other by their different industrial specializations is well gone. As Massey [35, p. 196] argues in the British context, industrial reorganization and spatial reorganization take place together, and in the old manufacturing regions “industrial change has broken down a pre-existing coherence and homogeneity” such that these regions are no longer as self contained and “do not have the same validity or boundaries” as they once had. But it is not just a matter of old regions being diffused and broken down; new regions and a new regional system are emerging simultaneously, but these new regions are quite different in geographical scale, constitution, and *raison d'être* from those of the old regional system being replaced.

The reality of this regional restructuring is profoundly evident to some popular observers in the United States. Here, for example, is Joel Garreau [19, p. 1] who wants to replace the traditional regional geography of North America with a division into “nine nations”:

Forget the pious wisdom you've been handed about North America. Forget about the borders dividing the United States, Canada, and Mexico, those pale barriers so thoroughly porous to money, immigrants, and ideas. Forget the bilge . . . about East and West, North and South. Forget the maze of state and provincial boundaries, those historical accidents and surveyors' mistakes. . . . Consider, instead, the way North America really works.

Garreau proceeds to identify nine alternative regions, or nations as he calls them, on largely impressionistic grounds. Many

of his new regions are as dubious as the old ones he wants to discard—for instance his “breadbasket” is a central catchall region—but his critique remains insightful, and some of his regions such as the “foundry” make eminent sense. His major insight is in perceiving the expanded scale at which some of the new regional divisions are being forged. Despite other problems with the concepts, the same insight concerning geographical scale is reflected in the popular perception that a “sunbelt” has emerged in contrast to the older “snowbelt,” “frostbelt” or “rustbelt” [48].

Yet, the profundity of this change in the geographical scale of regionalization is rarely comprehended. In the first place, the new regional configuration is trivialized and obscured insofar as it is labeled in terms of *climatic* differences: “The change in employment location during the 1970s and early 1980s can . . . be explained as a move from ‘frostbelt’ to ‘sunbelt’ only as long as ‘frost’ and ‘sun’ refer to the social conditions for profit making” [46, p. 45]. Secondly, the tendency for researchers to attempt to identify parallel sunbelts in other national territories—a “British Sunbelt,” for example, running from Bristol to London and Cambridge—completely misses the point that the new scale and patterns of regionalization result from transformations in the international economy rather than in separate national economic “patches.” Third, and perhaps most importantly, the novelty of contemporary regional change is disguised by the sloppiness of our language in denoting regions. The concept of a “region” is too commonly employed merely as an empirical generalization synonymous with “area.” Thus, in her otherwise insightful exploration of regional restructuring, Massey defines a region as “any sub-national area of any size” [35, p. 11]. “Region,” in fact, is widely and indiscriminately used to cover geographical spaces as small as a neighborhood or as large as several continents. Such disregard either for scale or for the actual social processes responsible

for the determination of geographical scale makes “the region” a classic example of a “chaotic conception” [51] which may reach its most chaotic in Giddens’ wayward attempt at a typology of space and spaces [21].

In a comment on the material basis of changing societal conceptions of space, Robert Sack observes astutely of pre-capitalist social formations that the “coordination of economic functions was achieved by shifting the basic fusion of society and place to the larger geographic scale of the absolute state and then to the modern nation state” [49, p. 184]. With the advent of capitalism, the expansion of the geographical scale of economic organization is accelerated, not only at the national but at the regional scale. This paper is a study in the expanding scale of regional constitution. Specifically, we want to demonstrate the transformation from the regional mosaic of the manufacturing belt of the United States at the end of the nineteenth century to the development of an increasingly unified Northern Core Region, which emerged by the early 1970s but appears to have begun to fragment in the early 1980s. We argue that the coalescence and fragmentation of the Northern Core and the implied change of scale at which this region was defined, constituted, and differentiated is explicable as one very specific aspect of contemporary processes of uneven development, and that the immediate impulse behind this regional restructuring came most directly from the gamut of processes associated with expansion, crisis, disinvestment, and deindustrialization. To the extent that this analysis might help in developing a more rigorous language for discussing regional change and the social production of spatial scale, we offer this essay as a contribution to emerging discussions of a new regional geography.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE AMERICAN MANUFACTURING BELT

In a recent and stimulating reinterpretation of history, David Meyer argues that

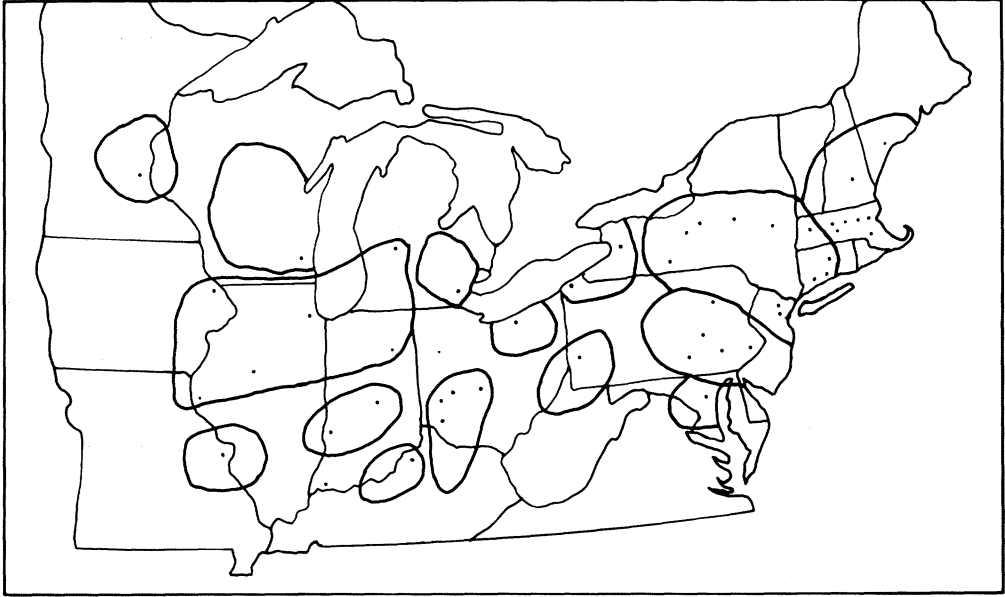


Fig. 1. The American Manufacturing Belt Mosaic, 1880 (after Meyer [37]).

there are three successive phases in the emergence of the manufacturing belt [37]. Antebellum manufacturing growth expands and develops the inherited city-centered hinterland regions of the earlier mercantile period, followed by the emergence of a more replete system of industrial regions. The latter, in turn, expand into regions premised on manufacturing for multiregional and national rather than purely regional markets.

From a small absolute base, the most rapid expansion of nineteenth century manufacturing employment and output actually occurred prior to 1850. Regional producers made durables as well as urban infrastructural commodities (bricks, lumber, glass, hardware, etc.) which were largely consumed in existing local hinterlands. The expansion of manufacturing and of regional boundaries beyond the limits of the hinterland was obviously an uneven process, beginning first in the cities to the east of the Appalachians but spreading quickly to the contemporary frontier cities of the Midwest. By the 1840s new and expanded industries began to develop significant extraregional markets, thereby increasing interregional

competition; single regions increasingly incorporated not just individual cities and their hinterlands but developed into regional systems of cities. The industrialization of the older eastern cities (Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, Boston) and, in a subsequent phase, of the newer Midwestern centers such as Chicago, Detroit, and Milwaukee "became inseparable from the growth of both intraregional and interregional markets." Interregional competition, in turn, led to significant territorial closure in the economic sphere as a "system of regional industrial systems evolved and new ones ceased emerging" [37, pp. 149, 159]. By the 1870s this system of regional industrial systems had filled out, and the outline of the American manufacturing belt was set. Few geoeconomic interstices were left, making it increasingly difficult now to break in afresh. Internally, the manufacturing belt comprised a mosaic of distinct regional systems, the backbone of which were systems of urban production centers (Figure 1).

Geographical closure, of course, did not mean economic stagnation. Continued industrial growth and develop-

ment combined with heightened competition and the continued development of the means of transportation led to an intense specialization among individual producers and between regional systems, leading eventually to the emergence of multiregional and national production units concentrated in specific regions according to product type and specialty [37].

The geographical limits of the manufacturing belt may have been set by the 1870s, but there continued a process of internal differentiation and structural change. As most industries became increasingly dependent on inter-industry linkages for raw materials and intermediate inputs, there also developed a stronger interdependency between the individual geographical pieces of the mosaic in the manufacturing belt, while at the same time the exclusionary advantage of established centers was increased.

In its ascendancy the regional system of the manufacturing belt was perpetually fluid, changing, developing, growing all the time, amoebae like. This fluidity did not cease as the regional production systems achieved some hypostatized equilibrium state but rather continued as ascent gave way to descent. Just as the industries of New England had been the first to emerge in the early nineteenth century, they were the first to experience decline in the twentieth. Even before the turn of the century, the New England textile manufacturers faced stiffening competition from the South. Mechanical automation of production, standardization of products and of production machinery employed in textiles, along with the relative diminution of skill levels in established manufacturing processes all contributed to the loosening of earlier more rigid regional boundaries while lower wages in the South provided a positive incentive for a geographical re-emphasis (if not always a relocation) by the textile industry. By the 1920s the decline of textiles was devastating whole communities in New England [25, pp. 52-53] and was spreading to other centers in the North-

east such as Philadelphia [54]. But, as ever, the decline was highly uneven; the Great Depression of the 1930s, which marked only a temporary decline in some industries and territories, especially in the comparatively newer Midwestern pieces of the regional mosaic, brought continuing secular decline for the older, mill-based industries of New England and much of the Northeast.

The causes of decline spring from the very sources of earlier industrial success. The development of multi-regional and national markets rather than purely local regional ones meant that in terms of distribution costs to the market, at least, many industries were progressively freed from their initial location. The increased complexity of production and the increase in intermediary processes between extraction and final commodity preparation, combined with the general development of the means of transportation, led to a further loosening of spatial bonds. The increasing standardization of products led to a relative deskilling in the labor process, thereby freeing the employers somewhat from locally monopolizable work skills. In addition, the last years of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth had seen a rising level of working class militance and union organization in the established industrial centers, providing a potent political and economic motive for the de-emphasis of the manufacturing belt in future rounds of investment.

The territorial mosaic that emerged with this economic evolution was quite faithfully reproduced in traditional regional texts in the first decades of the century. To be sure, regional geographers were extremely imaginative about classification criteria for regional differences, but the economic regionalization of the landscape was a central concern. C. R. Dryer went so far as to argue that "the final cause of a region . . . is economic. If the industries and occupations by which men get or can get a living in a given region are not distinctive and different from those of a surrounding territory, that

region, as delimited, lacks essential unity and utility" [17, p. 121]. In practice, the focus on economic regions was softened as writers attempted to convey not simply a geographical survey of economic products and trade relations, but also something of the personality of different regions. Its economic profile may lie at the core of a region's definition, but the region was more than this; if the extent of a region—its boundaries—were often determined by a single criterion, economic or otherwise, most geographers treated the substance of the region as a "complex whole," a synthesis of physical, economic, social, and cultural components. Here, for example, is J. Russell Smith attempting to present some of the regional flavor along with the economic reality of the New England mill towns:

Early in the morning the mill whistle in hundreds of towns and small cities blows a long, loud blast that can be heard for miles. This is a call to the workers to get up. A little later the whistle blows again, and thousands of workers start for the factory. At another toot from the whistle all start to work at their machines [55, p. 130].

Smith continues with a discussion of the major products of the area, locating hardware production around New Britain, brass in the Naugatuck Valley, textiles in the Merrimac Valley around Lawrence, Lowell, and Nashua, cotton specifically in Fall River and Pawtucket, machinery manufacturing in Worcester, Boston, and Springfield, shoes and boots in Brockton and Lynn, jewelry in Providence, and hats in Danbury.

Today, we could repeat this exercise and present a survey of production and production centers, and although we may well have more accurate statistical information than was available to Smith, our description would be far less accurate. To repeat the exercise would be to assume that the essential regional structure and boundaries remained unchanged; only the content of given regions had changed as they evolved from producers of one set of products to producers of another. But Smith's regional description of New Eng-

land is nostalgic not simply because it reminds us personally of school geography nor even because the products he cites are from an earlier time; where is the high technology concentration of Route 128, the office industry of Stamford, or the nuclear engineering and military contractors of Southern Connecticut? Rather, Smith's schema refers to a regionalization which in scale and function as well as substance no longer exists. Not only are the towns of New England making very different goods (or not "making" much at all), but they are now part of a regional division of economic space that is wholly different from that of six decades ago.

A NEW REGIONAL GEOGRAPHY?

The decline of regional geography following World War II is generally explained in terms of internal dissatisfaction among geographers themselves. The most widely voiced criticism was that regional geography concentrated on simple description rather than explanation of landscapes, relationships, and events. The definition of the criteria and boundaries that distinguished specific regions was often arbitrary, and the procedure for "doing" a regional geography quickly became formulaic. Summing up his disappointment, one participant remarked simply that much regional geography was "naive" [18, p. 142]. Neither the thrill of colorful regional interpretation nor the information value of duller regional recitation compared with the promised fruits of the bright new scientific method.

But it was not simply internal discontent that condemned regional geography to its old fogey status. The world that regional geography would describe and interpret was now changing so rapidly that the validity of descriptions became increasingly momentary. Thus, G. G. Chisholm is said to have regarded his *Handbook of Commercial Geography*, published in numerous editions between 1889 and 1928, as "a millstone round his neck" [18, p. 90] because it remained valuable

only insofar as it was continually revised with updated statistics. In addition, there may quite simply have been fewer and fewer coherent "regions" that would stay still long enough to be described and interpreted. The core objective of sculpting a regional synthesis from contributing geographical ingredients may have been fundamentally misconceived by the early decades of the twentieth century, not just because of the philosophical claims implied [23] but because the regional harmony suggested by this vision may no longer have been evident in regions stretched and fragmented almost beyond recognition by economic expansion and contraction.

There was nothing inevitable about it, but a traditional regional geography that was from the start narrowly conceived in philosophical terms failed to develop the means to deal with the changes taking place in the world it sought to interpret. Specifically, there was little if any systematic social theory in the enterprise, making it difficult to account for historical change or economic development. Regions tended to be treated as the individual spatial results of these processes, and there was little investigation of the larger social processes themselves nor any serious attempt to understand the contribution of regionalization to societal change.

For nearly three decades now geographical investigation has been dominated by the search for theory, first broadly positivist then equally broadly critical with Marxism as the core inspiration. Combined with the contemporary restructuring of regional systems, the results of this search have provided "a basis for a new regional geography" [35, p. 120]. The radical critique of the 1970s eschewed the universalist claims of positivism and sought instead an historically specific theory of social change and social structure and a comprehension of the mutual entwinement of society and space. Efforts at a new regional geography represent a continuation and significant refinement of these efforts; it is distinguished from its more traditional counterpart by

dependence on a broad theoretical foundation which provides an economic, political, and historical framework of explanation for contemporary restructuring. The ambition of the new regional geography is to combine detailed regional description with theoretical explanation, allowing us to conceive regions as individual contributors yet at the same time as products of more general processes which are responsible for restructuring the system of regions *per se*.

In order to achieve this blend of theory and detail and to fashion a body of knowledge sufficiently supple to deal with present regional shifts, much research has focused away from the aggregate patterns of change toward an emphasis on the rich variety of individual and institutional behavior. In particular "it was necessary to focus on the *social* organisation of production" [35, p. 4]—changes in the division of labor [53], the changing labor process in specific industries or industry groups [59], changing organizational strategies of individual firms (both in contemporary [39] and historical [54] contexts), the technics of regional adjustment [13], new patterns related to high technology [12; 22; 50], and the imbrication of production and reproduction relations [35].

In the immediate future, progress will be defined less by new and ambitious theoretical strokes and more by the careful amassing of more detailed case studies with only limited attempts to generalize the results. Yet, if "the unique is back on the agenda" [36, p. 19], this should not imply a focus on unique regional details either as illustrations of larger unexamined ideas or for their own sake. Such a return to an ideographic methodology would seem to be a serious possibility given the current aversion to theory in general, the "retreat from Marxist theory" in particular [41, p. 7], and the apparent legitimation of a sharp dichotomy between theoretical and empirical research in presently popular realist epistemology [52]. But there are clear dangers should such a narrow empirical turn eventuate [58]. For it was not the focus on aggregate

patterns *per se* that was the problem with earlier regional economic geographies. Rather, the primary flaw lay in the empiricism that guided both the choice of patterns to be examined and the interpretation of aggregate results; there was little sense either of the larger social flux within which geographical change occurred or of the more detailed events “underneath” the aggregate patterns. Equally then, we should not let the rediscovery of the individual and often fascinating details of places blind us to the goal of explaining regional change at the aggregate as well as individual scale. Regions are by definition aggregates of human and natural activity, and the very discussion of regions, whether unique or otherwise, already implies a conceptual aggregation. It is important to make this aggregation explicit.

Achieving rather than simply asserting this mix of empirical and theoretical insights has not proven easy, however. It is our contention here that one of the major obstacles to achieving this goal is the lack of any theory of geographical scale. The division between urban, regional, national, and international scales is generally taken for granted, yet one of the most significant features of contemporary restructuring is precisely the change of scale at which geographical units are constituted; there is nothing preordained about the scale of regional constitution, the scale at which regional aggregates achieve coherence, but rather it results from specific societal processes. This was not comprehended in traditional regional geography, which harbored a pragmatic rather than rigorous and theoretically informed definition of the regional scale. Freeman [18, pp. 84-85] suggests that in practice regional geography was prosecuted at two different scales of analysis: “one based on small local areas and another based on areas covering hundreds or even thousands of square miles.” In fact, the question of scale made little sense in traditional regional geography insofar as an agnosticism about regional definition was maintained, whereby

regions were treated as conceptual conveniences rather than real geographical entities; anything and everything might legitimately be seen to comprise a region depending on the imagination and artifice of the geographer. The question of scale was rendered irrelevant.

Nor is the historical production and coherence of geographical scale as well understood as we might expect in fledgling efforts at a new regional geography. Thus, Massey emphasizes correctly that “‘regions’ and coherent local areas are not pre-given to analysis, nor are they unchanging,” yet in practice her initial definition of the regional scale as “any sub-national area of any size” is so vague that the changing scale of regional constitution becomes invisible to the analysis, and regional restructuring is essentially treated as occurring within pre-given regions [35, pp. 195, 11]. In addition to the vagueness about scale here, there is also the increasingly problematic assumption that regions are inherently “sub-national.” Garreau’s admonition that we recognize the thorough porosity of national boundaries can hardly be overstressed in this context, not so much because national boundaries have no redeeming importance—clearly they do—but because our conceptual inertia treating regions as sub-national is so strong. At the opposite end of the regional scale, to cite just one further example, Harvey [30, p. 127] adopts uncritically from Jane Jacobs [31] the compromise notion of “urban regions,” which surely begs the whole question of the definition and differentiation of scale.

It may not be too much of an exaggeration to claim that the question of scale comprises the ground on which a new regional geography will either flourish or fail. For only by a coherent theory of the production of geographical scale will we be able to achieve some consensus on the definition of actual regions, or at least the criteria for definition, and thereby avoid the relativistic morass that crippled and trivialized traditional regional geography.

WHAT ARE REGIONS?

By far, a better way of putting this question is to seek the rationale for the constitution of regions out of everyday, societal activity. It is important to stress that our conception of regions should be theoretically rooted, and so we shall follow an earlier effort at deriving the coherence of the regional scale out of a theory of uneven development [57, pp. 142-7].

In the most abstract terms, we can conceive of regions as absolute economic spaces stabilized (however temporarily) in a wider sea of continually transforming relative space. They are geographical platforms of production, i.e., territorially discrete production systems; far from being static they are continually replacing and adding new planks as old ones become obsolete. Regional definition results from the continual resolution of opposing tendencies toward geographical as well as economic equalization and differentiation. Specifically, it is the broad conditions of production—the constellation of relations of production and forces of production—that comprise the central dimensions of equalization and differentiation. The regional production platform represents the accomplished, if only ever temporary, resolution of these opposing forces; just as the economy itself undergoes periodic crisis and restructuring, so too does the economic and geographical unevenness resulting from this resolution of opposing tendencies.

At another level, we can relate the fluidity and fixity of regional structure back to the relationship between fixed and circulating capital. Relatively stable regional production platforms result from the investment of fixed capital in the landscape for an extended period; without this stability capital accumulation would prove very difficult. Yet the fluidity of regional structure is equally a necessity, as produced surplus value is circulated for reinvestment in new and different constellations of fixed capital with different geographical characteristics and requirements. Given the endemic character of

economic crises and the recurrent periodicity of phases of valorization and devalorization, we can observe a difference between two contrasting experiences of regional investment (as distinct from disinvestment). There are distinct periods in which the outlines of new regional patterns of accumulation are laid down as part of a restructuring crisis, and there are other periods in which an essentially established regional “regimen” of accumulation is filled out. Webber [62, p. 200] makes the same point when he invokes the distinction between “establishing a logic for development” and “generalizing this logic.”

At yet another level, we can conceive of regional differentiation as an inherent geographical compromise between opposing forces of competition and cooperation. Regional difference reduces internal competition among producers in favor of cooperation, while it increases external competition at the expense of cooperation. This is obviously not to deny the existence of competition within regions, only to suggest that certain kinds of competition are blunted internally: employers in a region collaborate at varying levels in the use of physical infrastructure, manipulation of the state, determination of work conditions and relations with employees, etc., while competing with other firms in other regions over precisely the same issues. Thus, northern, unionized automobile plants compete with southern plants in right-to-work states even though they are owned by the same company; and yet the company—let us say GM—cooperates with the other auto companies in a bargaining strategy against the UAW. What provokes and is provoked by these internal economic contradictions is the geographical pattern of regional differentiation. The setting of geographical regions becomes a means (however volatile) of resolving the inherent anarchy of capital. The important question here relates to the specific conditions over which there is regional cooperation and the historical change in these criteria.

In this sense, we want to argue that

regions are real enough. They are as real as the economic and social relations that comprise them and that they comprise. But equally, they are as mutable and as malleable as these relations too.

DEINDUSTRIALIZATION AND REGIONAL PRODUCTION, 1947-1986

If a tight regional mosaic represented the regional structure of a young industrial economy in its ascendancy, the coalescence of the Northern Core signifies the transition to a geography of industrial contraction and decline. Its foundation was laid by post-Second World War expansion, political organization, and struggle, but this region comes to fruition as the offspring of disinvestment, deindustrialization, and decline. It is the geographical apotheosis of the "American Century" in which sustained and expanding valorization of capital in future industrial capacity is dissolved by widespread and long-term devaluation of existing capacity. These are not merely opposite processes with the geography of decline emerging as a reverse mirror image of the geography of expansion; rather, from expansion to decline, there has also been an historical progression and transformation in economic, political, and social conditions and thus a major disjuncture and asymmetry between the geographies of expansion and decline.

Although recent influential treatments of economic decline and deindustrialization have tended to view it as an essentially national process [1; 7; 8], it is necessary to emphasize from the start its international origins and dimensions [45; 56]. The Second World War was not in itself the solution to the crisis of the 1930s Depression, but it did provide basic opportunities for the eventual strategy of American expansion. The recession that followed the end of war was offset by major state-capital investments in Europe (the Marshall Plan was designed to reconstruct the European economies, stimulate an external market for U.S. goods, and provide a geopolitical beachhead against

the Soviet Union), reconstruction of Japan, and Third World industrialization through Truman's Point IV program. So successful was this effort in stimulating private foreign investment that by the early 1960s the reconstructed European economies were beginning to export capital back into the U.S. economy. An Atlantic economy [61], more integrated than at any previous period, was in the making, but more importantly, this economy expanded in the late 1960s to include Japan and the Middle East and in the 1970s Latin America and South and East Asia. "At home," the Korean War provided fortuitous economic stimuli, while the dramatic expansion of production was sustained by all the trappings of Fordism [2], from labor accords to mass consumption and suburbanization. The recession of 1965 should perhaps have been seen as a harbinger of emerging crisis, but continued and growing expenditure on the Vietnam War stretched economic growth into the 1970s at the expense of high inflation.

What was accomplished during the short period of American economic hegemony was quite remarkable. In effect, the world economy was transformed from a jigsaw of national parts, only really stabilized with the Versailles and related treaties after the First World War, into a global system whose individual parts were too interrelated to retain individual economic coherence. This became manifest after the crisis of 1973-1975 when the prospect of a continued major slump in the international economy was only forestalled by the unprecedented leadership role (in terms of economic expansion) assumed by the more advanced Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs) [24, p. 81]. The U.S.-led recession of the early 1980s abruptly grounded the NIC economies, resulting in declining exports and rising debts. The five-year recovery, beginning in 1983 and sustained in large part by debt-led U.S. military spending, increased the degree of integration in the world economy by temporarily reviving threatened and debt-encumbered NIC

economies, diversifying (sectorally and geographically) the world position of U.S. basic producers, and opening up (despite restrictive anti-Japanese trade agreements) further markets for Japanese products (producer durables as well as consumer durables) as well as Japanese finance capital.

All of this was profoundly real for the old regions of the U.S. manufacturing belt. The textile industry of New England claims the dubious distinction of being the first major industrial sector to experience deindustrialization, but since there was a simultaneous expansion of textiles in the American South, it was possible at the time to treat this as both geographically and sectorally specific rather than to view it as the leading edge of a much larger process. Nonetheless, the secular decline which began in the New England textile industry by the 1920s underwent an erratic sectoral and geographical generalization. The veins of decline threaded through the northern textile industry and New England as a whole in the 1930s, and, after a highly uneven recovery in these regions and sectors in the 1950s, began in the 1960s to penetrate a broader spectrum of industrial sectors throughout the Northeast.

Some of the specific processes involved in these emerging patterns of regionalization are widely known [9]. First, transportation costs have declined continuously in the twentieth century, thereby expanding the geographical field of trade within given cost conditions. Second, the standardization of production broke down existing geographical and market boundaries both for the sale of the finished product and for the acquisition of raw material and fixed capital inputs. Third, the minimum scale of efficient production for individual plants increased in most sectors of the industrial economy. For example, it has been estimated that the minimum efficient scale for a new raw steel plant in the late 1960s was 9 million tons per annum, and in the British context this represented a third of the entire national market. For an inte-

grated steel complex with a strip mill, minimum efficient scale criteria dictated a mill producing 80% of the British capacity. For multi-model auto plants the comparable figure was 50% of the market, 25% of the market for single-model plants and for various types of chemical plant. Even breweries, in 1970, would have to expect to supply 3% of the entire national market in order to produce efficiently in a new plant [47]. The new economies of scale resulting from production of the "world car" are likely to restrict profitable production to those companies that produce over 2 million cars per year for the world market [14, pp. 29-30]. This increase in the scale of production is by no means unilinear; a significant geographical fragmentation of the production process also takes place in connection with the continued division of labor and the emergence of smaller plants in new industries. Nonetheless, the point is that in many sectors, successful expansion can no longer take place within the confines of regional or national markets [42], even the mammoth U.S. market. The expansion of the scale of production has outstripped the expansion of national markets, and this has been a major impetus behind the expansion of the scale of economic organization—the geographical expansion of the regional scale from a unit of national space to a subdivision of international space.

Beyond these developments in the more technical organization of production there was also a profound generalization in the relations of production after the war. In the U.S., the 1930s saw the sharpest surge in the unionization of manufacturing workers and of labor militancy, and, following the war, organized labor was in a sufficiently strong position to force a compromised set of "labor-capital accords" with the employers. The late forties saw the rapid diffusion of national rather than local contracts, concerning issues such as basic wage rates, vacations, and arbitration procedures, if not local work conditions. Master agreements emerged in some industries (e.g.,

trucking), while in others agreements with target companies set the standard for nationwide and industrywide contracts (e.g., auto). Agreements in a few key industries provided a datum for others. In these accords, there was tacit agreement that in exchange for increased productivity and the acceptance of new technology, even when this meant layoffs, union members would receive annual wage increases and substantial health and benefit coverage. At a clear price, labor quiescence and generally low levels of militancy were secured. The state participated in establishing a national datum for production relations, especially through the Wagner (1936) and Taft-Hartley (1947) acts. Although it was a national process, the costs of the labor accords were sharply uneven between regions, with workers in the earlier and more fully unionized regions of the manufacturing belt extracting a disproportionate share of the benefits. Peet has mapped the “geography of class struggle” which emerged in this period. Combining measures of work stoppages, union membership, business climate, and wage rates, he shows the coherence of the Northern Core as a distinctively high-class-struggle region. Peet presents a strong case, in fact, that “the process of struggle is the primary cause” of the “movement of industrial activity from the Manufacturing Belt to the new industrial regions” [45, p. 129].

By the mid 1960s the larger economic and geographical scale of northern decline was increasingly clear; the Sunbelt as a whole now experienced more rapid growth in manufacturing output and productivity than the so-called Snowbelt [11]. But the international dimensions of regional restructuring were still barely apparent. While sustained disinvestment had begun in a number of industries, most notably primary metals led by steel, the results were rarely visible until the sequence of short but sharp recessions between 1969 and 1975. The remainder of the decade witnessed considerable decline in a range of industrial sectors in the

U.S. economy as a whole, although again this was an uneven experience with a short recovery peaking in 1978 (albeit with much higher rates of unemployment than in earlier growth periods). At the national scale, those industries that deindustrialized in the 1970s (identified by three-digit SIC groups) include: tires and inner tubes, household appliances, motor vehicles and parts, textile mill products, apparel, footwear, electrical distribution equipment, radio and television receivers, and chemicals [6].

The internationalization of capital has, of course, been a gradual process over decades and indeed centuries. What characterizes the post-war period is a far more specific internationalization of *production* capital, not simply finance and commodity capital. This globalization of production [20; 60] and the emergence of an increasingly integrated, productive, international economy has thrown the previously subnational structure of mosaic regions back into the crucible, as it were, where a new (and this time international) configuration of regions is being forged. The regional structure that is solidifying in the landscape as part of the contemporary restructuring crisis does not simply represent a “regional shift” of activities, the expansion of so-called service activities, or the complex reformulation of production and reproduction relations *in situ*. Rather, it represents a complete restructuring of the scale at which regions are constituted as coherent and integrated economic units.

This is most apparent in the old Northern Core, which by the 1970s had eschewed its inherited mosaic structure of specialized, product-defined regions only to be “equalized downward” [57, p. 129] into an increasingly coherent, single, declining region of global capitalism. In the following section we present some historical data on economic and occupational change which demonstrate this notion of a coalesced Northern Core by the 1970s. They also show a richer geographical and historical unevenness in the restructuring of the scale of regional differentiation.

THE NORTHERN CORE

Figures 2 to 11 show the percentage changes in manufacturing employment in five year intervals from 1939 to 1986. For each period, the data¹ were divided into quartiles, four groups of twelve states each covering the contiguous United States. They reveal the familiar pattern of manufacturing job growth in the South and West, especially after 1949, and relative job loss in the Northern Core which combines New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the East North Central states.² During the war economy of 1939 to 1944, seven of the eighteen Northern Core states were classified in the quartiles of higher growth, and in the period from 1944 to 1949 manufacturing job loss was greater in California, Florida, and Texas than in the Northern Core as a whole. This was the last period in which these Sunbelt anchor states registered a worse growth profile than the Northern Core (Figure 3). What is significant for our purposes here, however, is not so much the familiar fact of the aggregate regional switch from north to south but the pattern

of historical coalescence in the Northern Core.

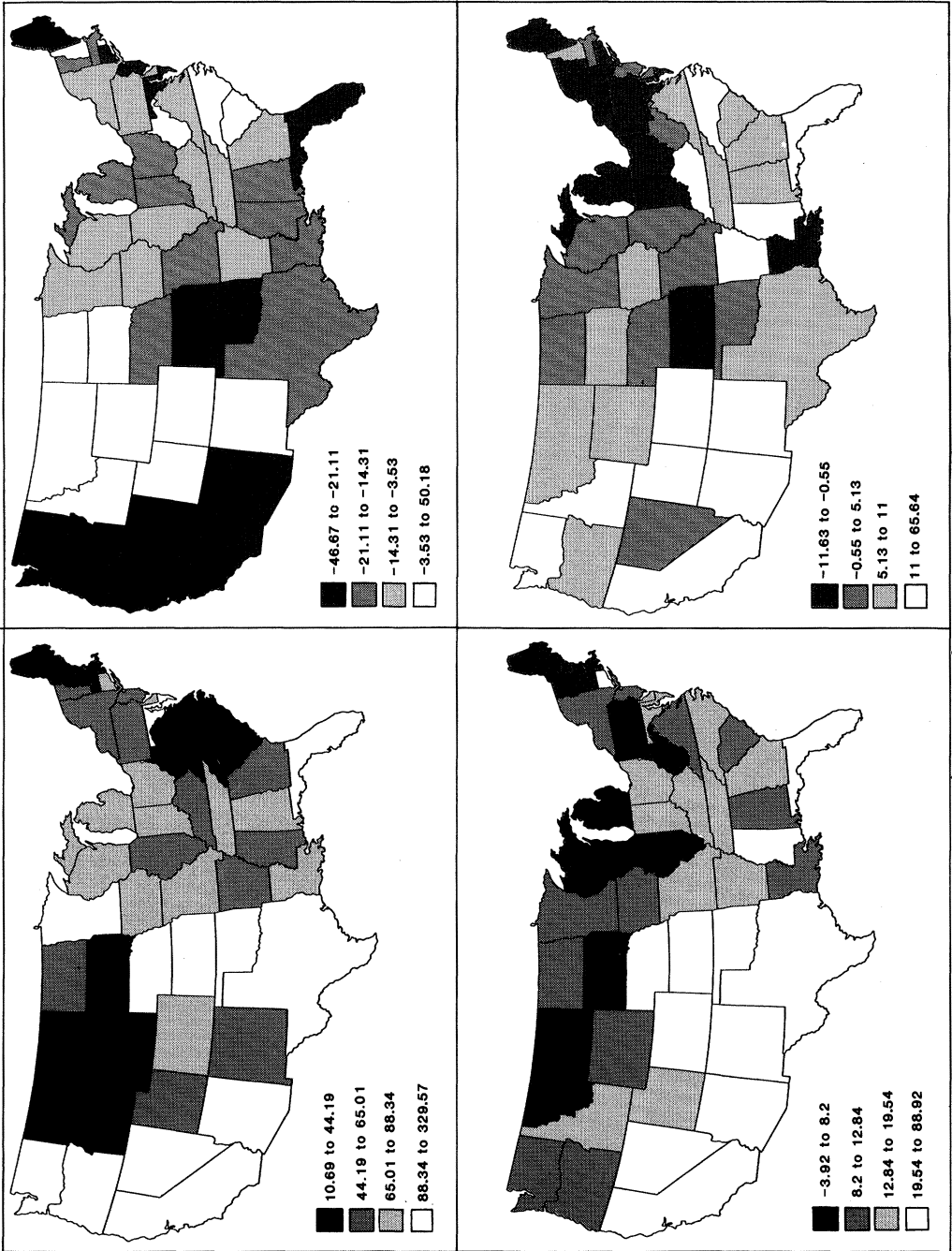
In the first period of postwar growth, the region showed a highly diverse distribution of growth rates, with states spanning all four of the growth quartiles (Figure 4). Thereafter, however, through the late 1950s and 1960s, none of the Northern Core states were in the highest growth quartile (Figures 3 to 7), and by the early 1970s, for the first time all of the Northern Core states were in the quartiles of lower growth (Figure 8). Further, eleven of the twelve states in the quartile of lowest growth between 1969 and 1974 were in the Northern Core, and these included the powerhouse states of Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. In the late 1970s, the pattern further solidifies with all of the states in the lowest quartile forming a single contiguous region in the Northern Core (with the addition of Kentucky on the southern border of the region). But at the same time, the three most northern New England states begin to experience a relative resurgence in growth rates (Figure 9) which, while absolute growth is negative, spreads to all of New England by the early 1980s (Figure 10). While the eastern states of New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware seem to experience a relative easing of manufacturing employment decline in this period, absolute decline remains substantial and these states remain in the lowest quartile into the mid-1980s (Figure 11) despite rapid economic growth in general, led particularly by services.

Using simple statistical measures of autocorrelation, it is possible to devise a "coalescence index" which measures the changing ratio of observed to expected levels of spatial association in employment decline.³ Based on a binary classifi-

¹United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Handbook of Labor Statistics*, Washington, D.C., 1978, 1980, 1985; Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment and Earnings*, Quarterly Reports, Washington, D.C., 1983-June, 1986.

²For purposes of the statistical analysis only, we define the Northern Core as comprising the following states: Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Missouri, Wisconsin, and Illinois. This definition was selected simply to allow us to make statistical comparisons; it should not be taken as a definitive or general definition, since one of the fundamental points of our argument here is that in its very formation the Northern Core is continually transforming. Further, parts of some border states, such as West Virginia, Missouri, and Wisconsin would seem to belong in the region because of distinct geographical concentrations of industrial activity (the northern valleys of West Virginia, St. Louis, Milwaukee), rather than the state as a whole. Because this paper is *not* about the drawing of definitive regional boundaries, we shall not explore this question any further, although a more refined picture would be achieved if data were analyzed at the scale of Economic Areas.

³The coalescence index is a ratio of observed versus expected levels in spatial association. For each indicator, levels of change were mapped and each state was classified as above or below the median level of change. Assuming a random allocation of change levels to the states of the Northern Core (as



Manufacturing Employment, Percentage Change:

Fig. 2. Top Left, 1939-1944

Fig. 3. Top Right, 1944-1949

Fig. 5. Bottom Right, 1954-1959

Fig. 4. Bottom Left, 1949-1954

cation of states (above and below the median), the coalescence indices for the five-year periods from 1939 are shown in Figure 12. The minimum value of the index is 0, the maximum 8, and the higher the coalescence index the greater is the internal homogeneity of the region, i.e., the greater is the commonality of experience within the region. The lowest level of coalescence in the Northern Core comes in the immediate post-war period when, in fact, the coalescence index of 2.1 is not statistically significant at the 99% level, making it difficult to claim that the Northern Core was a single coherent region in this period. For all other periods the index is statistically significant, but the most important trend in the data is that from the late 1940s there is an almost steady rise in the level of coalescence, reaching the maximum possible value of 8.0 by the mid-1970s. Thereafter, however, the index declines, although it remains significant.

This analysis was repeated for four other indicators of change—value added in manufacturing, the number of manufacturing establishments, unemployment rates, and changes in service employ-

defined above), the average expected number of links between contiguous states with below average levels of change is:

$$U_{\text{exp}} = Jp^2$$

where $J = 1/2 \sum L_i$, and L_i is the number of links of state i to contiguous states.

For the Northern Core,

$$U_{\text{exp}} = 7$$

The coalescence index

$$(C.I.) = U_{\text{obs}} / U_{\text{exp}}$$

where U_{obs} is the total number of contiguous links between states with rates of change below the median.

Since there are 56 total links in the Northern Core, the maximum value of

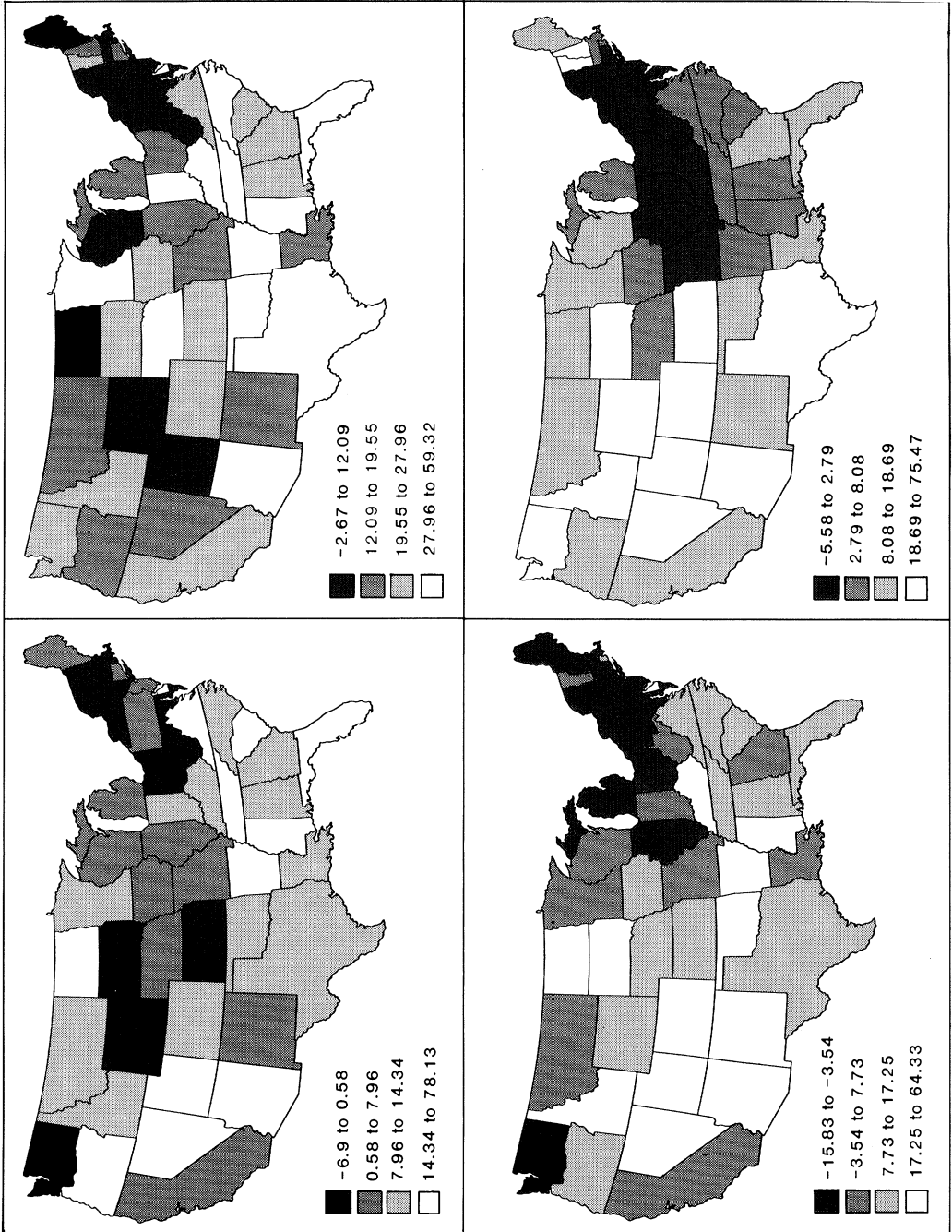
$$C.I. = 56/7 = 8.$$

ment.⁴ For sake of space constraints, the maps are not reproduced here, but we do reproduce the appropriate coalescence indices (Figures 13 to 16). Evolution of the two manufacturing indices and the unemployment rate substantiate the pattern of increased coalescence, peaking in the mid-1970s (Figures 13 to 14). Changes in service employment appear much less systematic at the regional scale (Figure 16).

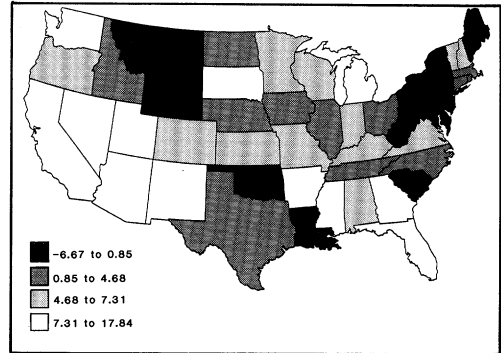
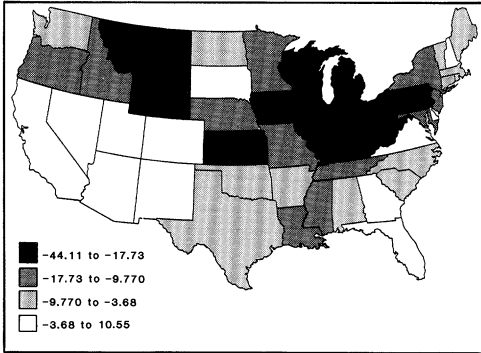
INTERPRETATION

The downward equalization of the Northern Core began in New England, spread to the east coast states by the mid-1960s, and incorporated the midwestern states in the 1970s. By the late-1970s, it even incorporated Kentucky, Iowa, and Minnesota (Figure 10) which did not have any consistent commonality with the Northern Core in earlier periods. As measured by the manufacturing indicators and the unemployment rate, this coalescence of the Northern Core was real but fleeting; no sooner did the Northern Core coalesce than it fragmented. For, behind the geographical unity of this region in the 1970s lay an important dimension of historical differentiation. That is, if the Northern Core coalesced in decline, it was for New England the end of several decades of relative and at times absolute decline, while for the midwestern states of the Northern Core it was only the beginning of decline. By the late-1970s, New England seems to have been experiencing significant *restructuring*, meaning investment in alternative and growing “industries,” while the Midwestern section was just embarking upon a period still dominated by *destructuring*, or *deindustrialization*, namely disinvestment from existing industrial capacity. The post-1982 recovery, however, seems to have slowed the decline in the Midwest

⁴United States Department of Commerce, *Census of Manufacturing, 1972, 1977, 1982*, Washington, D.C.; United States Department of Commerce, *Statistical Abstracts*, various years up to 1986, Washington, D.C.



Manufacturing Employment, Percentage Change:
 Fig. 6. Top Left, 1959-1964
 Fig. 7. Top Right, 1964-1969
 Fig. 8. Bottom Left, 1969-1974
 Fig. 9. Bottom Right, 1974-1979



Manufacturing Employment, Percentage Change: Fig. 10. Left, 1979-1983

Fig. 11. Right, 1983-1985/86

(Figure 11), but it nonetheless seems likely that in large part the restructuring of the Midwest still lies ahead.

In the genesis of the manufacturing belt in the nineteenth century there was a clear distinction between the urban-centered regions of the eastern seaboard, where manufacturing first emerged, and "the West" (now the Midwest) where manufacturing came later and developed on a larger scale [37]. The eastern and western regions were separated in the beginning not only by the Appalachians but by an entire cycle of manufacturing growth. It is possible that the contemporary mix of deindustrialization and restructuring perpetuates this largely inherited division, implying a reassertion in economic decline of those territorial boundaries laid down during the earliest periods of industrial expansion. In this scenario, the internal structure and substance of the Midwest and New England regions would have been transformed, and historical time squeezed like a concertina (the sequence of change speeded up), but the inherited regional boundaries retained; the Northern Core is split between a coastal region east of the Appalachians and an "industrial heartland" to the west. This is the division preferred by Markusen [33] who argues that the rapidity and severity of decline in the Midwest during the 1980s marks this region off from the Mid-Atlantic Region, which has experienced an amelioration of crisis and some growth

in the 1980s, as well as from New England which has undergone very rapid growth in the 1980s. Yet, the present data (Figure 11) suggests that, at least in terms of manufacturing jobs, decline since 1983 has been more severe in the eastern sub-region than in the Midwest, a reversal of the pattern for 1979 to 1983.

It may indeed transpire that the coalescence of the Northern Core was a fleeting reality, but it is also possible for a number of reasons that the fragmentation between the Atlantic, New England, and East North Central states in the 1980s is itself temporary, and that the inherited historical unevenness will continually be diluted. In specific terms and most obviously, the New England revival might prove to be short-lived [25], or the rapidity and severity of Midwestern decline may be sufficient to allow a relatively speedy restructuring to ensue. In order to evaluate these two scenarios more fully it is necessary to recall the earlier theoretical comments on the relationship between deindustrialization, economic crisis, and the constitution and differentiation of regions.

The opportunity for restructuring and the laying down of new regional constellations follows sustained disinvestment from the productive forces and the devaluation of fixed capital, which today in the Northern Core means deindustrialization. Disinvestment and devaluation, in turn, result from falling profit rates and

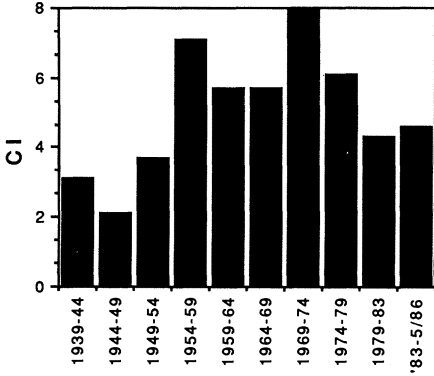


Fig. 12.

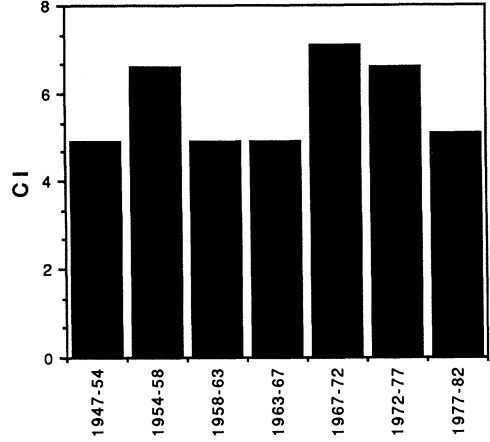


Fig. 13.

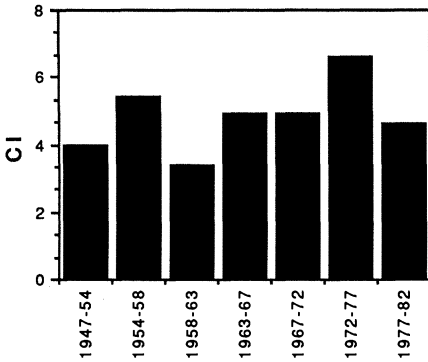


Fig. 14.

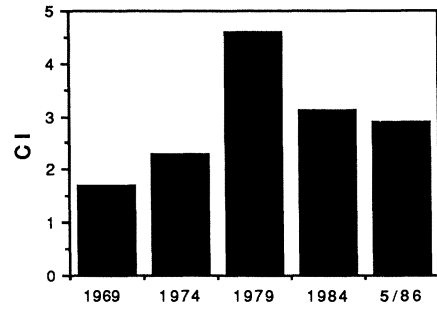


Fig. 15.

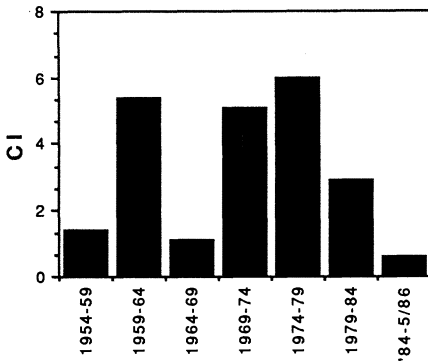


Fig. 16.

Coalescence Index:

- Fig. 12. Manufacturing Employment, 1939-1985/86
- Fig. 13. Value Added in Manufacturing, 1947-1982
- Fig. 14. Manufacturing Establishments, 1947-1982
- Fig. 15. Unemployment Rate, 1969-1985/86
- Fig. 16. Service Employment, 1954-1985/86

lead to broader crises of accumulation. These “violent and acute crises,” the “forcible devaluations,” and the “stagnation and disruption of the process of reproduction” prepare the economic ground for “a subsequent expansion of production”:

the cycle of interconnected turnovers embracing a number of years, in which capital is held fast by its fixed constituent part, furnishes a material basis for the periodic crisis. . . . But a crisis always forms the starting-point of large new investments. Therefore, from the point of view of society as a whole, more or less, a new material basis for the next turnover cycle [34: I, p. 254; II, p. 186].

Economically fixed within the turnover cycles of capital and in large part spatially immobile, fixed capital is peculiarly susceptible to these violent and periodic bouts of devaluation. Further, a devaluation of capital which begins in one discrete sector of the economy diffuses into others related by sectoral or geographical proximity; sectoral crises become generalized [27]. The greater the economic breadth and severity of crisis the greater is its geographical spread to include regional economies that may have been differentiated during expansion but which are now unceremoniously consolidated in decline. This obsolescence *en masse* of older regions provides a graphic illustration of what Marshall Berman calls dryly the “nihilism of the bottom line” [5, p. 123].

We can hypothesize, therefore, that the equalization of conditions and experiences dominates at the end of long cycles of expansion and the rude beginnings of crisis. The equalization of the profit rate is most extensive in this period, which is also characterized by the “convergence of industrial structure” [3, p. 21] and the “delocalization of the logic of the economic process” [12, p. 30]; it brings the “relative diminution of the previously dynamic regional and national differences within the Fordist core” [16, p. 199]. As the crisis deepens, however, equanimity quickly gives way to a “fight among hostile brothers” [34: III, p. 253] as the

owners of capital struggle to defend their own capitals against the predations of global devaluation. Echoing this vision precisely is the President of New York City’s Chemical Bank, Thomas S. Johnson, who recently voiced his fear that with an impending crisis, “there is the possibility of a nightmarish domino effect as every creditor ransacks the globe attempting to locate his collateral” [40]. The “desynchronization” [3, p. 18] that accompanies crisis is equally geographical in its expression.

The reduction of erstwhile separate regions to a common devalued denominator in the Northern Core, and the present differentiation and fragmentation of the same region, are only one aspect of regional transformation. Crisis, devaluation, and restructuring generally involve broader changes in the social as well as the material relations of production. As regards changes in the relations of production and reproduction, the translation from political and economic impulse to regional transformation is much more contingent: existing work skills in a region might be preserved as a basis for restructuring, or they may be abandoned as a means of shrinking the power of skilled workers; entire regions or only specific sectors and social groups may be subjected to high unemployment rates, as a result either of intentional strategy or unintentional outcome; unions may be destroyed, coopted into regional strategies for planned shrinkage, or actively built. In short, there is a political struggle over the uneven attribution of the costs of crisis, and one dimension of this unevenness is geographical. In particular, there is a strong effort on the part of employers to discipline the working class, both politically and economically, through layoffs, wage takebacks, runaway shops, plant closures, detrimental safety conditions and work rules, and union busting. If this political attack can be concentrated regionally, thus freeing up other regions for much needed expansion, so much the better. In New England, this disciplining of the working class was achieved over sev-

eral decades beginning seriously in the 1920s and 1930s [25] but only began in the Mid-Atlantic and East North Central states in the 1970s, a whole economic cycle later.

As regards the social relations of production, the process of decline in the latest period has been swift, widespread, and uneven. The first major abrogation of the post-war, labor-capital accords came in 1974-75 with layoffs and cutbacks resulting from deep recession. In late 1975, New York City began laying off thousands of public service workers in the wake of an almost fatal fiscal crisis, and thousands more were forced to take wage reductions. In 1979, Chrysler successfully extracted a takeback of over \$2 per hour from autoworkers, heavily concentrated in the East North Central states. In 1981, Reagan's direct intervention in the PATCO (air traffic controllers) dispute provided political sanction for an employers' offensive, opening the sluice gates for a flood of "austerity" demands, especially in the face of the 1980 and 1981-82 recessions. The Chrysler concessions were first generalized throughout the auto industry and then throughout the economy as a whole. In the steel industry, airlines, textiles, newspapers, machinery, meatpacking, retailing, transportation, and so on, takebacks became the norm in the 1980s, even in industries which remained profitable. The employers' offensive may have begun in response to economic constraints, but by the recovery of the mid-1980s it had become a generalized political strategy for capitalizing on the political weakness of organized unions. The willingness of politically bankrupt union leaderships not just to play along with the employers but actually to take upon themselves the major role of disciplining their own members was illustrated for all to see in 1986 when the United Food and Commercial Workers actively cooperated with the Hormel Meatpacking Company to defeat the striking rank and file workers of Local P-9 in Austin, Minnesota. Certainly there have been other regional experiences of decline

such as the energy industry of Texas, Louisiana, and Colorado, lumber in the Pacific Northwest, or the more recent recession in Silicon Valley, but they tended to be sector-specific. The most devastating effect of the employers' offensive on the working class has been in the deindustrialized Northern Core.

The question whether the Northern Core will endure as a coherent region running from Milwaukee and Missouri to Maryland and Maine or whether it will emerge from the current restructuring crisis as two or three or more smaller regions remains to be seen. There are at least three obvious possibilities emerging from the above analysis:

1. the reassertion of historical differences such as between distinct East Coast and Midwest economic structures [33] or perhaps between three distinct regions: New England, Mid-Atlantic, and East North Central [38];
2. the virtual dissolution of a regional scale based on systems of production; (This would result if the current fragmentation and differentiation continued, as might be expected with continued decentralization of corporate organization together with increasingly sophisticated means of communication and information processing. This is the alternative that Castells [12] seems to point toward.)
3. equalization in the qualitative and quantitative conditions of production reasserted as a result of the current restructuring. (We could expect to see a reconstruction of regional divisions at a much larger scale and the re-emergence of the Northern Core as a significant, if no longer leading, international regional "platform" for future growth.)

The outcome depends in part on the relative strength of the New England "recovery," the narrow economic and social base of which has already prompted caution [25]. Perhaps more fundamentally it depends on the progress of the employers' offensive focused most sharply on the industrial heartland and on

the uncertain response by the working class, unions, minorities, women's groups, and community organizations. While already accomplished briefly, the more permanent coalescence of the Northern Core will depend on the trajectory of political struggle in general and class struggle in particular. To the extent that there is a genuine shift of power relations, the geographical outcomes are obviously unpredictable. But to the extent that a restructuring succeeds in creating new conditions for expansion within a transformed capitalist framework, however, our theoretical argument would suggest the possibility that a new phase of capitalist expansion might be built on and through a geographical equalization at the regional scale, unmatched in scope and intensity even by the coalescence of the Northern Core.

CONCLUSION

This picture of regional decline fits with Keinath's broader examination of the "increasing divergence between core and periphery" [32, p. 222]. He argues that the movement of the economy into the "post-industrial age" is more regional than national and that major structural differences remain between the Northern Core and the southern periphery. Even in decline, the Northern Core is marked by intense industrial specialization in the manufacturing of durables, while the expansion of new industries in the so-called Sunbelt has led to a much more diversified regional economy. The specialization that marked the rise of the manufacturing belt is alien to the Sunbelt; industrial expansion in the Sunbelt is not creating a new manufacturing belt like its northern predecessor. The question, then, is whether the Northern Core will remain tied to its historical distinctness or whether it will break with this geographical specialization and, in the process, become less distinct as a region.

The continual restructuring not only of geographical space but of spatial scale is an integral part of the broader experience of uneven development; but the present

conjuncture differs immeasurably from the crisis of the 1930s. In the first place, while it too was regionally uneven, the Great Depression did not mark a permanent end to the expansion of industrial employment; although there were certainly regional shifts, industrial employment and output expanded rapidly again in the 1950s. The present restructuring crisis brings a very different promise: whatever reindustrialization does in fact take place [10], the United States will no longer dominate the international market as it has done, nor indeed will it be a major producer in some key areas—e.g., raw steel, electronic durables, machine tools, even computers and semi-conductors. Indeed, there is the added possibility that if the full cycle of uneven development comes to fruition, the U.S. will also lose its financial hegemony to Japan just as Britain lost to the U.S. by the time of Bretton Woods. The year 1986 marked a watershed in this process, as the first offering of yen bonds was made in the United States. Just as the old manufacturing core was the boiler house that propelled American capitalism to greatness in the very short "American Century," it is also the primary geographical scapegoat in American decline. To the extent that it provided the economic power with which to structure the American Century, the end of that century may be marked by the increasing obsolescence of much of the Northern Core, despite a temporary current revival.

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