

ANDRE-LOUIS SANGUIN

## END OF GEOGRAPHY OR REVENGE OF GEOGRAPHY? HUMAN SOCIETIES BETWEEN A SMOOTH, SPIKY OR FLAT WORLD

*Abstract* – Submitted in the course of the last years, the end of geography theory, the flat world theory and the revenge of geography theory gave rise to an intellectual debate among the North American geographers. The paper scrutinizes the constituent elements of these theories within the context of the digital revolution and the explosion of place. This debate refers to the very last boundary of geography, namely the deterritorialization in a borderless world and the rise of cyberspace. The primacy of a double-sided geography creates a dialectic of new territorialization.

*Keywords* – borderless world, cyberspace, death of geography, deterritorialization, digital revolution, distance, flat world, Internet, place, revenge of geography.

When the world entered the post-Soviet era at the outset of the 90s, two American thinkers launched two theories which went round the world. In 1992, the economist Francis Fukuyama, professor at Johns Hopkins University, predicted the *end of history*, i.e. the reach of a worldwide consensus about democracy which would put an end to ideological conflicts. In 1996, Samuel Huntington (1927-2008), professor at Harvard, theorized the *clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*: in the post-Soviet world, the rifts would not be ideological but civilizational with a strong religious substratum. It should be noted that *spaceness* was relatively absent in both strongly mediatized theories. In the same period, Richard O'Brien, economist-in-chief of the banking giant *American Express*, announced the *end of geography* (O'Brien, 1990, 1992). This would give some explanation by the new information technologies which would make it obsolete due to the money markets world interconnections. Their location has been removed from the stock exchange's physical rooms towards the more transitory sites of phone and computer networks. O'Brien was followed by Greig who considered that the end of geography was justified by the standardization of culture and communications within the international system (Greig, 2002). In 2005, Thomas Friedman, a *New York Times's* famous columnist, stated that the world had become flat due to an invasive, inexorable and general globalization. When using the idea of equalizing

and flattening of the world's surface, Friedman tried to show how more and more people can connect, play, compete and collaborate thanks to the fantastic power which is granted by Internet. According to Friedman, the equalizing and flattening forces empower people to reach farther, more quickly, more profoundly and more cheap as ever before. *The world is flat*: we mean that this new equalizing power which is Internet gives to more and more people the tools and the ability to work, to inquire and to relax. This new process is not only an economic one but also a cultural one (Friedman, 2007).

However, the end of geography theory and the flat world theory seem to ignore four uncircumventing and strong geographical realities: local scale, regional scale, distance and non-ubiquity of the human being (Morgan, 2004). Both theories immediately launched a violent intellectual debate among North American geographers and social scientists. Then, between 2009 and 2012, this debate took a new turn with the publishing of *The Revenge of Geography*, a paper followed by a book written by Robert Kaplan, editor of the Washingtonian monthly *The Atlantic*. Kaplan rehabilitated an old truth: from the Pharaohs Egypt to the 2011 Arab Spring, geography has been the central factor of the fate of nations. According to Kaplan, geography examines like a scalpel the international relations and conflicts that globalization fails to explain. The twenty-first century does not see the end of history but the return of history and geography describes well how many old fault lines will once again reemerge. The Kaplan's theory emphasizes another key reality: geography remains today, as it has been throughout history, one of the most powerful drivers of world events. In other words, the planet's geophysical configurations, as much as the flow of competing religions and conflicts, shape human conflicts, past and present (Kaplan, 2009, 2013). It is advisable to scrutinize in depth the significant elements of these three theories.

## **1 – Digital Revolution and Explosion of Place**

All this debate refers to the ultimate frontier of contemporary geography, namely the deterritorialization and the cyberspace. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the implosion of Soviet Union, the key issue which is asked for geography is, as a matter of fact, the *deterritorialization in a borderless world*. This issue refers to the rearrangement and restructuring of spatial relations as a consequence of political, material and technological transformations which occurred since 1989-1991. Thus, in the everyday life, has the territory lost its meaning and its power? Within a concrete contemporary sight, territory means the conjunction in an operational system of all patterns concerning public administration, military institutions, political regimes,

social structures, transport and communications networks (O'Tuathail, 2000). For the common citizen, territory is made of a triangle which links power institutions, place materialization and collective psychology idealization. The enthusiasm of a lot of population categories for the new information technologies may be explained by a disillusion facing the State and by a disenchantment facing the national territory. Clearly speaking, the power of material political territory is today corroded by the cyberspace's political power (Spiegel, 2000).

Cyberspace is another geography (Kitchin, 1998; Brunn, 2000). It is the geography of an inmaterial space of *heterotopic* type (a place other) where the phenomenons of location are not thought as in the physical-geographical space (Crampton, 2004). The cyber-spatial places are associated with addresses. Those addresses are sent back to other addresses in a networking to infinity. The cyberspace is a geometrical, transcendent and irradiating space according to the words of Antonio Casilli. It is also a psychological space, a kind of laboratory of individual identities which build there and rebuild there (Casilli, 2010).

Instead of deterritorialization, the key question is whether we are witnesses of a *reterritorialization* through rearrangement, restructuration and relacing between territories, technologies, states and markets in another scale. It is advisable to put back the deterritorialization before three simple questions: 1/ to whom is benefiting the deterritorialization?; 2/ what social class is promoting the deterritorialization?; 3/ for whom is this borderless world? The response to these questions would allow to reasse rhetoric and metaphors.

Of course, for the majority of people living in developed countries, the possession of a personal computer made Internet entered into home and everyday life for all matters concerning information, leasure, bookings, bank transactions, online purchases, social networks, relations with public administration (Hamel & Sampler, 1998; Nixon & Koutrakou, 2007). Notwithstanding, the distance carries on being a deterrent important factor either in the exchanges between sellers and shoppers or between providers and beneficiaries of private and public services (Hortascu, Martinez-Jerez & Douglas, 2009). Clearly speaking, when aiming at some goods and services, the consumers prefer by far the local scale and the local contact. It is certain that Internet and the new management system alter the connection of companies with their space and their market but they do not disrupt them. In fact, the choices of companies location remain geographical choices. The advent of e-commerce reinforces the necessity of efficient and quick transportation. This kind of activity therefore leads to an effort of space mastery. The best example is given by the important role played from now on by aircargo

companies like FedEx, UPS, DHL, Cargolux among other (Lasserre, 2000). It is yet too early to establish a serious state of the art about the possible or real effects of cyberspace upon the explosion of places. The human territoriality and the dynamics of human life which are both based on the traditional relation space-place can be transcended by the new communication technologies. However, it is clear that electronic spaces and materially territorial spaces are jointly produced by the same societies. The new information technologies are enlisted in a subtle and complex mixture of human actors and technical artefacts. In other words, the social-spatial life of individuals is subtly and continuously recombining in new time-space complexes which are always contingent but difficult to be generalized (Graham, 1998).

## **2 – End of Geography and Advent of a Flat World?**

The end of geography theory which was developed by O'Brien in 1990 and 1992 devotes itself to show that explosion of communication technologies has moved places and people closer. If the world is round, its shape seems to assume less and less importance for some sectors of economic activity. In spite of a general trend towards a greater mobility of exchanges, it is obvious that the medium- and long-distance trips are not the rule for the majority of the world population: when capital and information travel at Internet speed, manpower suffers from an extremely reduced mobility.

An old rule is existing about human affairs: market is always located where prices are fixed. Now, according to O'Brien, this place was the stock exchange where merchants and brokers pushed and shoved. From now on, this same place is located in a computer chip whose geographical coordinates are difficult to identify. According to O'Brien, it is there that the end of geography is located. Through this expression, he understands the end of the nation-state's role as a conductor of economic life. In other words, the concept of nation-state has become outmoded in the financial and economic field (O'Brien, 1990, 1992). When dwelling over a properly cultural dimension, Greig theorizes the end of geography as follows: either the extension of digital revolution increases the cultural exchanges and, in fact, decreases the homogeneity of each country; or this same expansion favours the development of cultural diasporas far from their native countries (Greig, 2002). What is certain it is that we are witnessing a relative *death of distance*. More and more airlights, more and more low-fare airlines, more and more high-speed trains have compressed the duration of travels. The huge investments which are realized in the implementation of fiber-optic submarine cables and telecommunications satellites result in the

kingdom of instantaneous communication. From now on, the latter allows the transfer of informations and financial amounts on the only mouse button of a laptop keyboard. According to Cairncross, the death of distance, as a factor of communications cost, will probably be the most important driver which will shape the society during the first half of the twenty-first century. With unknown proportions up till now, this death of distance will affect the decisions concerning work places, jobs of all kinds, concepts of national borders and sovereignty as well as foreign trade patterns (Cairncross, 1997).

The planet Earth has known three eras of globalization: 1492-1800, 1800-1998, 1998-. The first globalization (1492-1800) was implemented by Christopher Columbus whose discoveries allowed the starting of trade between the Old World and the New World. It required the strength of human arms, horses, windmills and, at last, steam engine. The second globalization (1800-1998) was the fact of companies which became multinational by their markets and their manpower, namely Dutch and British companies as well as those which were dynamized by the Industrial Revolution. In a first stage, this globalization was propelled by steam navigation, railroad, telegraph, then later by electricity, oil, phone, nuclear power, high-capacity plane, satellites, computer, fiber-optic cable and the Web's first version. The third globalization begins in 1998 with the starting of Internet and e-commerce. Friedman gives the name of *flat world platform* to this third globalization which he defines as the product of convergence between three elements: personal computer, fiber-optic cable and work flow software (Friedman, 2007). The first one allows each individual to become the author of his own content under a digital shape. The second one allows individuals to reach contents more and more digitalized everywhere in the world, with a modest indeed non-existent cost. The third one allows individuals to collaborate anywhere, everywhere in the world, with the same digitalized content without taking distances among them. This platform convergence appeared around the year 2000. This third globalization differs from previous ones which were essentially led by individuals from Europe and America. In fact, even if China was the world biggest economy in the eighteenth century, Western countries, companies and explorers were those which globalized the system. In so far as it shrinks and flattens the world, the third globalization is driven not only by individuals but also by groups of individuals which are not any more Whites and Westerners. According to Friedman, the ten forces which have shrunk and flattened the world are the following: fall of the Berlin Wall, Web's public use from 1998, work flow softwares, downloading, subcontracting, outsourcing, supply-chaining, just-in-time transportation, zero stock, self-education through access to search engines (AltaVista, Bing, Google, Lycos, Voila,

Yahoo, Yandex). The anabolic process of this development is based on hardware, instant messaging, file sharing, phone calls by Internet, videoconference, infography, wireless new technologies (Friedman, 2007).

Friedman illustrates this third globalization with some concrete examples. In the field of good transport and long-distance mail, UPS, headquartered in Louisville (Kentucky), handles 13,5 million parcels per day with the help of 88.000 trucks, vans, tractors and motorbikes. It is the object of 7 million tracking requests on an average day. Regarding the long-distance transport, UPS has a 270 aircrafts fleet connecting 766 destinations. Consequently, UPS Airways is the eight largest airline in the world. From now on, the passengers of Southwest Airlines, the first American low-fare company, can download and print their boarding pass at home, what improves the firm's productivity and lowers the costs. JetBlue Airways, another low-fare American airline, is the very illustration of teleworking and outsourcing of its activity. Even if its headquarters are located in Forest Hills (New York State), its entire booking system is located in Salt Lake City (Utah) where its 400 agents are housewives working at home 25 hours per week. All the biggest American computer manufacturers outsource their entire technical support to a company located in Bangalore, a city which is nicknamed the India's Silicon Valley. Their computers are assembled in different just-in-time factories which are scattered in Asia, Latin America, Europe and United States. Friedman notes that economies of China, India and other outsourced countries enjoy a faster growth than countries which have not get into this process as Mexico and other great Latin American countries. Only countries and organizations which have vigorously entered into the world's flattening process carry on innovating, growing and favouring the imagination.

Nevertheless, the Friedman's *flat world theory* can be the subject of criticism. First, it is a question of theory which is only secured according to an American point of view and this American-centering ends up becoming frustrating. Second, Friedman completely ignores the negative aspects of the third globalization and flattening of the world. He completely evades some key issues. What about all these world populations who are outside the third globalization? What about countries which are excluded from this process? What about the destruction of local cultures when everything begins to dissolve itself into a generalized Internet culture? What about the work's exploitation, corruption and environmental damages due to this flattening and smoothing of the world? If each human being is willing to take part of this third globalization, he will need a laptop. Now, such is not the case. The Friedman's flat world theory fits only with a non-majority part of the planet, namely the part whose territories are equipped with electricity

lines and phone lines. Without electricity and phone, it is impossible to use the computer and Internet. Besides, on account of illiteracy, great poverty, lack of democratic regimes, whole populations of the planet cannot buy a laptop and, therefore, have no access to Internet. The vision of a flat world is the one of affluent countries and not the one of countries of dictatorship and poverty.

### **3- Neither Smooth nor Flat: The World is Spiky!**

The economic topography of the planet is far from corresponding to Friedman's flat world. In many respects, the economic landscape is neither smooth nor flat. On the contrary, our world is extraordinarily spiky. In terms of economic engines and highly efficient innovations, few regions play a major role in the globalized economy. The planet Earth is rather the object of an economic mapping which is made of peaks and deep valleys. Clearly speaking, the highest peaks carry on climbing while valleys are stagnant. A concrete example is enough to illustrate this contrast: the comparison of the world population distribution map with the night satellite photo of light emissions. The world population map shows a very unequal distribution with bright peaks and dark valleys. Five megalopolises have 20 million inhabitants each, 24 have more than 10 million, 60 have more than 5 million and, finally, 150 are housing more than 2,5 million each. The largest peaks are first in Asia then in Europe and lastly in North America. Now, the photo of emission by night of light concentration, taken from a satellite, shows a radically contrasted situation. The peaks are concentrated first in North America, then in Japan and South Korea and lastly in Europe. Such context means that population and economic activity give spiky maps but it is the innovation as a driver of economic growth which is the most concentrated. In the matter of creation and innovation, the rest of the world is a steppe at best and a desert at worst (Florida, 2005).

Another example which is indicative of a spiky world is the world map of patents and trademarks which are registered in the *Intellectual Property World Organization* (300.000 patents distributed in 100 countries). The figures are eloquent. Among 170.000 patents which were registered in 2002 in the US, 90.000 came from Americans, 35.000 from Japanese and 11.000 from Germans. The other ten most innovative countries (European Union, Taiwan, South Korea, Israel, Canada) shared the remaining 25.000 patents. In terms of patents and trademarks, the rest of the world is also a steppe at best and also a desert at worst. A map using data supplied by IPWO (a subsidiary of the UN) and *U.S. Patent and Trademark Office* shows a world

which is made of innovative peaks and dark valleys. Tokyo, Seoul, New York and San Francisco are racing at the top regarding the patents competition. Boston, Seattle, Austin, Toronto, Vancouver, Berlin, Stockholm, Helsinki, London, Osaka, Taipei and Sydney remain in the pack. In fact, only few places produce the majority of innovations in the world. We have to understand that innovation remains a difficult field in the absence of a critical mass of financiers, company executive men and scientists who are supported by world renowned universities and big flexible companies.

It is advisable to add to this world innovation map another map, namely the location of the top 1200 scientists who are the most quoted among the key disciplines. In fact, the scientific advance upon the frontline of knowledges is even more geographically concentrated than patents and trademarks innovation. It is not any more a question of a handful of countries but a question of a handful of cities, more or less a dozen in the world, essentially located in the US and, subsidiarily, in Europe. The scientific designers congregate in the big cosmopolitan centers because those offer them a range of amenities. But the scientists and innovative companies congregate also due to the powerful advantages of productivity, scale economies, outsourcing of knowledges which such density brings. The innovation, the economic growth and the prosperity which are present within these cosmopolitan cities attract a critical mass of talented researchers come from elsewhere (Florida, 2005).

The connection between all these metropolises creating innovation and science has reinforced the mobility of the world *creative class* which is made of 150 million people more or less. They participate in the globalized technological system which allows them to freely migrate from a big world metropolis to another one. These metropolises constitute a relatively limited club: London, New York, Paris, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore, Los Angeles, San Francisco.

Friedman's flat world theory ignores the increasing division between rich countries and poor countries which constitutes, like it or not, the basic feature of the globalized economy. The flat world theory depicts a developed world which transfers its economic development to China and India. In fact, both countries are the most populated of the planet (1,3 billion inhabitants in China and 1,2 billion inhabitants in India) and they combine not only the advantages of reduced production costs but also their ability for top technologies and entrepreneurial energy. These advantages allow them to efficiently be competitive in terms of industries and jobs.

Friedman's flat world theory absolutely does not evoke the insidious tension between these performing peaks of full growth and the sinking valleys. The Friedman's flat world is a world where Africa is dropped back to the trap door and where Latin America and Russia are



pushed into a misty background. This flat world generates from now on a political boomerang against globalization which violently manifests itself, notably among entire brackets of EU's population. This spiky globalization wreaks havoc in the poorest countries of the planet. In China, cities like Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen, Dalian are surrounded by vast impoverished rural areas. Within those areas, the per capita income is three times less than that of the flat world's Chinese megalopolises. It is the same pattern in India where megalopolises like Bangalore, Hyderabad and Mumbai enjoy per capita incomes five times higher than those of the Indian countryside. Either in the Chinese case or in the Indian case, the third globalization defined by Friedman generates destabilizing political tensions.

Although this planet be cartographically made of rised peaks and deep valleys in terms of innovation and science, it generates human tribes which are geographically scattered but they are so antagonistic that they seem to the Hobbes's Leviathan. Florida therefore considers that the third globalization has not an effect of *world's smoothing* as Friedman would want it but rather tends to increase the contrasts at all levels. The creative class and the knowledge society are located in the Triad's countries. It helps to reinforce not only their domination but also a polarizing process on all spatial scales (Florida, 2002, 2004, 2005). In this world neither smooth nor flat but rather spiky, De Blij distinguishes three key categories of population which he names the *locals*, the *mobals* and the *globals* (De Blij, 2009). The *locals* make up the immense majority of world population. They are the individuals who will die relatively close to their birthplace. They are the hundreds of million farmers of Asia and Africa great hydrographic basins who are living a way of life not much different from their distant ancestors. The third globalization did not affect them or very few. The *mobals* are the transnational migrants who are risk takers (qualified professionals, legal and illegal immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, mafiosi, revolutionaries, terrorists, prostitutes...). The *mobals* are makers of change due to their very realistic perceptions of opportunities to be seized and needs to be satisfied. They are estimated 200 million people more or less. The *globals* are the members of the creative class of the world biggest metropolises. They intensely live the third globalization as well as the flat, smooth and borderless world. They are estimated 150 million people. The *globals* essentially live in North America, European Union, Japan and Australia. They constitute the basic customers of departure centers of big international tourism towards distant destinations (Florida, 2005; De Blij, 2009).

In addition of a world population which is classified into locals, mobals and globals, it happens that the world is partitioned into a globalized core area and a periphery. The *globalized core area* is the very urbanized and prosperous globe's part which is made of North America,

European Union, Australia-New Zealand duo and Japan-South Korea-Taiwan-Singapore quadriga. The *periphery* is made of the rest of the world, i.e. roughly Asia, Africa and South America. More or less 15% of the world population resides within the globalized core area where they earn 75% of the world annual income. Therefore it means that the remaining 85% of the planet population only earn 25% of the world annual income. If we use this annual individual income index, it therefore suggests that we are in a world which is absolutely neither smooth nor flat when the well-to-do enjoy a per capita annual income twenty times higher than that of the non-well-to-do. The juxtaposition of the globalized core area and the periphery creates a spatial thrust in which the core area attracts millions of mobals and where the remittances sent by the mobals to their native home are able to feed whole families in Mexico, Turkey, India, China, the Philippines, Black Africa, Maghreb and elsewhere (De Blij, 2009).

#### **4 – Revenge of Geography and Rough Power of Place**

For the supporters of the flat world theory, maintaining that places play a role in human mosaic's shaping considered as obsolete, aggressive and deterministic. Nevertheless, like it or not, the Earth continues on being an uneven field from a physical and cultural point of view. The power of places and the fate of nations are fastened by many links ranging from physical area and natural environment to durable culture and local tradition. The power of places creates a topography which is made of peaks and valleys from privilege to privation. From personal security to public health, from compulsory religion to coercive authority, the world remains a *mosaic of places* which presents wide combinations of challenges facing its proper inhabitants (De Blij, 2009). The world is neither smooth nor flat when all humid intertropical areas from Mexico to Indonesia are affected by dengue hemorrhagic fever and bilharzia while the remainder of the world is spared. The world is neither smooth nor flat when we consider the recent earthquake epicenters map and the recent volcanic activity map. Full masses of the planet are free from it and they don't know and never will know both key natural hazards. The world is neither smooth nor flat when we observe the Indian Ocean and Pacific Island microstates which risk to disappear for ever due by the effects of the sea-level rise. The world is neither smooth nor flat when we examine the world child mortality map and the world maternal mortality map. Africa, Central Asia, Monsoon Asia, Latin America appear as cursed areas while North America, Europe, Russia and Australia are little or not affected by both scourges.

If it is true that the world spectacularly changed during the last fifty years, Friedman's third globalization only concerns a minority of the planet Earth's inhabitants, namely the *globals*. The power of geography and place still holds the vast majority of us in its thrall. Our mobility suffers constraints, our cultural knowledge is maladjusted, our resources are limited, our health is often endangered, our hopes are weak and vague. We have to know that more than one billion human beings are the poorest among the poorest, the sickest among the sickest. Another one billion human beings are living to the point of shortage. The proclamations of a smooth, flat and flattened world certainly can delight the Florida's *creative class* which lives in the areas of the great metropolises which are the champions of the third globalization; most probably not the populations living outside those privileged areas (De Blij, 2012). First published in the form of a paper in 2009, then in the form of a book in 2012, *The Revenge of Geography* of Robert Kaplan has been at the origin of a violent intellectual debate among the Anglo-Saxon world social scientists (Kaplan, 2009, 2012). Geography is a great enemy and, for political leaders, forgetting geography is not without risks. In other words, forgetting geography has been one of the consequences of the Berlin Wall fall: the world is not flat and the politicians who ignore geography afterwards rediscover it at their own risks. An appropriate attention paid to geography leads to realism and pragmatism, as opposed to idealism and optimism. Kaplan therefore revisits the theory of Sir Halford Mackinder (1861-1947) in his work *Democratic Ideals and Reality* published in 1919. This book was a warning for the designers of the Treaty of Versailles and its associates. The analysis performed by Mackinder legitimately can be perceived as a *lesson of geographical realism* in so far as it offsets the considered utopian ideas of President Woodrow Wilson and designers of the League of Nations. That's why Mackinder considered that *democratic ideals* play against employment while they are compared to *reality*. In his work, Mackinder thought that the calls for *universalism* and *equality of nations* are trivial because, in an inherent way, access to space and natural resources is unequal (Mackinder, 1919). Kaplan takes over this postulate when considering that a pure idealism can bring unexpected and undesirable consequences in the absence of a geographical realism. According to Kaplan, geographical realism means identifying and accepting the strengths which escape from our control and which curb the human activity: culture, history, traditions, ethnic, religious and cultural particularisms. In the geographical realism, a key question of international relations is asked for: *who can do what, to whom?* From all unpleasant truths which are at the root of realism, the most brutal, the most cumbersome and the most decisive of all is geography (Kaplan, 2009, 2012). Far from taking away importance to geography, the globalization does nothing but reinforces it. In fact, the strong comeback of localisms which are

rooted in specific landscapes is better expressed by a recourse to the map and, therefore, to geography. Google Earth and Google Maps allow individuals to become their own cartographers when literally putting themselves on the map. The citizens therefore have now encouragements to muddle the borders of their governments with the demarcation of their own communities, either imaginary or real.

Kaplan perhaps develops a too classical notion of geography who he perceives as a combination of space, topography and latitude. He also stresses the physical maps. The Kaplan's ideas about the revenge of geography immediately aroused a deep intellectual controversy coming from Anglo-Saxon geographers. According to this group of critics, the distinction realism-idealism revisited by Kaplan is a fabric of nonsenses (Morissey *et al.*, 2009). Retaking this idea from Mackinder, Kaplan makes relive the classical old imperialistic anxieties and updates Mackinder to the twenty-first century. Among all factors which shape the political behaviour, geography is the most deterministic. The Kaplan's geography is similar to economy for a marxist. *You can build your own story but you must live with your geography*, Kaplan seems to say. His detractors reply that they are real people with real stories and real geographies who fall everywhere under the look of the great strategists. *The Revenge of Geography* is also considered as a too much Anglo-Saxon book which implicitly defends a kind of hierarchy of civilizations: more you are far removed from Anglo-Saxon worths, more your society is inferior. Too much attached to a Victorian view of the world, Kaplan neglects to highlight the role played by human beings in the emerging of a new geography, namely this new geological era which is nicknamed *Anthropocene*. This process goes too further than the simple climatic change. The paradox of Anthropocene lies in the recognition that human beings are from now on capable to artificially generate life while simultaneously their activities have generated such decline of the land diversity that science talks about the sixth great extinction of life on the Earth. The globalization is a physical force which builds new environments and, by the fact, new geographies (Morissey *et al.*, 2009).

## **5 - Primacy of Geography, A Double-Sided Janus**

Why does geography matter more than ever? Such is the key issue formulated in 2012 by Harm De Blij (1935-2014), one of the guardian figure of the contemporary American geography. If his argument especially deals with the US, it also applies to the G8 countries populations. The major idea of De Blij is the following: Americans form one of the most illiterate society of the planet regarding geography, in a time when the power of the US can affect countries and peoples

around the world. This *geographical illiteracy* played a significant role in the collapse of the American foreign Policy in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. It now forms a risk for the country's national security just as the American power is declining. Within the social-environmental contexts, the geographical prospects are crucial in the formulation of politics. Unfortunately, they are often absent from the speeches of the politicians (De Blij, 2012). The usefulness of geography is nowhere better illustrated than in the story of Tilly Smith, this 10 years British schoolgirl at the time of the December 26, 2004 tsunami in Thailand. Tilly was vacationing in Phuket, Thailand with her parents and was on Mai Khao Beach when she saw the water suddenly recede into the distance. She remembered what she had just been taught by her geography teacher, Mr. Andrew Kearney, at Danes Hill Prep School in Oxshott, south of London: the deep wave of a tsunami sucks the water off the beach before it returns in a massive wall that floods the entire shoreline. Tilly alerted her parents and they ran back and forth, warning beachgoers of the danger and urging them to seek shelter on an upper floor of the hotel nearby. About 100 people followed her advice; all survived. Of those who stayed beyond, none did (De Blij, 2009).

In no way geography is the basis on whatever determinism in the light of the Marx's class struggle or the Ratzel's organism. It is clear that each century has its own geographical perspective. Regarding the twenty-first century, the geographical perspective is that of a closed system, namely a world already divided where we observe a violence among the distribution of lands and markets. Each class, each disaster is indirectly felt in the antipodes and can come back like a boomerang from the antipodes. The grammar of geography is anchored in the reality. Geography has to remain close to history because history is better understood through geography and because geography is better taught through history. However, it is clear that the notions of time and space change according to technology. From first irrigation systems of the Ancient Times till Internet, the humanity has reinvented its world. In the same way we cannot handle calculations without a mastery of algebra, likewise we cannot deconstruct the human conventions of time and space, as we do it today, without knowing what has been firstly constructed (McDougall, 2003).

The events will continue to shape history and the location will continue to structure the relevance and the role of geography. Even if cyberspace has transformed the layout of our world, this same technology allows us to increase our responsible perception of the environment within which we live, to measure our impact on the surrounding *milieu*, to follow the traces of our movements, to create more facts, to perfect more and more complex analyses and, lastly, to develop new sources of added value (Gray, 1996). Those technological advances are far from

signifying the *end of geography*. Geography at the beginning of the twenty-first century is very different from the scientific discipline which existed at the end of WW2. Equipped to integrate a lot of huge datas, it makes us able to create integrative solutions which have the power to transform our way of life and our way of work (Morgan, 2004; Nixon & Koutrakou, 2007).

## 6 – Concluding Remarks

Cyberspace is a *social space* where people can meet under new terms of *meeting* and *personalization*. The collapse of the space-time relationships and the evolution of new social spaces *without space and without place* (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, MySpace) question the importance of geographical places to such an extent that some people believe that geography and time are not any more borders. Cyberspace is deeply *anti-spatial* since we cannot describe its shape and its proportions. Even better, we find things in the cyberspace without knowing where they are located! In a certain way, the de-spatialization carried out by Internet destroys the key of the geocode (Akos, 2009). Conversely, this new kind of communication is dependent on the spatial links of the real world, on the geographical position of access points, on the materiality of the fiber-optic cables, on the WiFi outside cables and phone wires. When the access to Internet has better quality in a place or when it is absent in another one, it is still the evidence of the importance of geographical position and location.

Cyberspace technologies can emphasize the competition between geographical places making possible the access to spots which offer the lower salaries and the better work force. The new economic geography leads to the same conclusion about the role of cyberspace in the location strategies of companies. In many cases, cyberspace favours the trends towards centralization through its connection to infrastructures of telecommunications and to the social environment of great metropolises. Likewise, the services which can be decentralized will rather settle in regions with an appropriate manpower and good conditions of transport. The new technologies of communication make easier the world strategies of big industrial companies (Colgate, Google, McDonald's, Coca Cola) but the consumers do not go shopping according to a world strategy. They just want the better prices and the better services within the area they know the best, namely their own neighbourhood. Google suffers a state censorship in China and faces up the confidentiality right in Germany. And so, Google of which the finished product has no physical shape was suddenly rooted in geographical places (Quelch & Jocz, 2012). Internet and mobile phone have transformed the marketing process when lowering the physical barriers of

places. As the example of Google in China and in Germany demonstrates it, geography still matters in practice even if the cyberspace markets are theoretically exempted from the borders of traditional geographies. Indeed, the political borders which are associated with laws, regulations, taxes and trade agreements rule the sales clerks and their digital or physical products. Relatively few online transactions are crossing the national borders.

The concept which proclaims the *end of geography* concentrates on the equalizing effects of the third globalization while the concept which proclaims the *revenge of geography* accepts the point of view of the spatial differences which are present in local, regional and national contexts. Both tendencies (levelling and differentiation) make up the permanent dialectic in the national economies. Geographers have the task to pay attention to the general public about these two concepts and to declare that geography matters more than ever but under different points of view (Akos, 2009).

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André-Louis SANGUIN  
University of Paris-Sorbonne  
al.sanguin@orange.fr