Human Scales

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Though it is highly debated in contemporary social science, the concept of *scale* is far from alien to our everyday experience. From childhood we become familiar with a variety of scales and how to use them, be they the scales to which our model buildings and cars were manufactured, the scales we learned in school to gauge distance between two points on a map, or the scales we tried to overcome with our friends as we tried to establish the superiority of our garage band. Albeit less commonplace, our rapid evaluation of the seriousness and likely tragic consequences of earthquakes such as those that shook Haiti and Chile in early 2010 are made possible through the summoning of the Richter and Mercali scales as commonly employed in the media vernacular.

Ubiquitous as the term may be, we tend to overlook the connection between scale and reality—especially with the advent of technologies such as video games, Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and electronic media such as the Internet. When scale is computed automatically for us, we are left to wonder why we were ever using the cumbersome paper map, the messy glue and plastic model kit, or the large photocopied stack of flyers that had to be plastered around town. In any case, we rarely double-check that a model's dimensions correspond exactly to the original object or that the distance indicated on a map corresponds to that displayed on the odometer.

THOMAS BRASDEFER

We know there is a scale, and we take for granted that it is correct. Similarly, when a *Los Angeles Times* headline states, "Chile's quake 500 times more powerful than Haiti's," (Wilkinson 2010) when the former was an 8.8 magnitude and the latter a 7.0 magnitude, we trust that the calculation is correct: even if further reading of the article actually refines the calculation to "512 times the shaking." We are certainly forgiving the approximation in the title on account of the extremely large multiplication we are being faced with and the sheer disquiet one can only feel about such destruction. In short, scales allow us to more tangibly experience objects at a distance. The loss in fidelity and minute differences are the price we are paying for having an understandable connection to this distance.

There are many reasons for scaling, first and foremost of which is consistency and accuracy of representation: model cars and airplanes are built to scale because we are interested in recreating the design of the life-sized object. From this perspective, there would be little or no interest in an absurdly misshapen model of an object. Maps would also be very frustrating if we had no point of reference in the landscape or in the map to use to gauge the places and distances we are trying to cover at a glance. By and large, it seems fair to say that scales are extremely practical instruments in their specialized applications, even though they are not entirely necessary to our daily lives. This could be said of most measurement systems because we often need to use arbitrary units in order to measure and comprehend the world around us. For instance, the same recipe may be expressed in metric or imperial units whether one is living in Europe or the United States. A lot of cooks, however, will not follow recipes by the letter (or indeed the numbers), and recipes will also use imprecise units such as "heaping teaspoons" and "pinches."

While it would be extremely practical to have a natural unit of measurement for every phenomenon that is the object of social

sciences, precise standards seldom apply to the study of human activities. This has led to the widespread use of *scale* in a variety of loosely associated contexts. An illustration of this quandary has appeared in the discussion on scale that has been agitating human geography for the last twenty years: what started with the opposition of two camps analyzing the world in either economic or social terms has culminated in recent research with attempts to eliminate the use of *scales* altogether. *Scale* has, by and large, become a contested concept. Nonetheless, in my work on American Indian language policies, I have found that scale may be the most appropriate concept available to comprehend the intersection of government jurisdictions in Indian country, especially with respect to language policy.

In this paper I seek to establish some guidelines for the use of scales in social sciences. My thinking is inspired by both the disciplines of geography and anthropology, related disciplines that seldom inform one another. I believe that regardless of the object of study, a proper understanding of how scaling works is necessary if we want to retain our interest in generalization without ignoring investigation of the unique. As such, American Indian languages present a very peculiar case in history: indigenous peoples of the United States are constitutionally the responsibility of the Federal government (Article I, Section 8), which has no authority on language policy (Amendment X). As a result, the power of indigenous language policymaking should belong to indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, since the 1831 Supreme Court decision in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, they have been judicially considered to be "domestic dependent nations" and subject to state law as soon as they step out of their reservations (and even more so if they lose federal recognition). What I am interested in is how the three levels of governmental authority are interacting, or in other words, what the different scales of power correspond to.

THOMAS BRASDEFER

I start this paper by tracing the history of the concept of scale with a focus on the particular input of political geographers. This discussion will serve as a stepping stone into the work of anthropologists who have tackled the issue of measuring human phenomena, with a special look at the approaches taken by linguistic anthropology. Finally I will provide my own vision of how scale can impact the lives of people with special respect to the languages of American Indian peoples in the United States.

SCALES OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

The different uses of the word *scale* mentioned in the introduction all pertain to a measurement system, a medium to visualize the extent of a concept. The term was used rather loosely until the second half of the twentieth century, as the amount of geographical material increased dramatically and prompted a debate on what exactly is meant by it. The discussion became more particularly ardent as social sciences turned more of their attention to the rise of international organizations and transnational exchanges.

Finding Scales

The first discussions involved two camps. One camp was lead by Peter Taylor (1982, 1988, 1994), a political and economic geographer who thought in terms of the units "world-economy," "nation-state," and "locality"; the second, by Neil Smith (1989, 1992, 1993) an anthrogeographer who was a proponent of "urban," "regional," "national," and "global" scales. While both systems divisions had the advantage of being both thematic and geographic, they very soon appeared to solidify in time and place ideas that could change in a heartbeat. These scales were nonetheless useful in terms of analysis: one phenomenon may be observable only on a local level, while others may

unfold differently all over the globe. Many realized, though, that these scales in thinking may be imposing locality artificially in a world where a company with headquarters on one continent may own factories on one or more others, and distribute its products to people worldwide. As economic and human contact are changing, so is the role of government both in understanding and regulating these spaces.

Anthony Giddens has suggested that before the modern era, time and space used to be "embedded" in place: there was no technology standing between us and time or space, and we could only apprehend our surroundings based on our own direct perceptions (Giddens 1990). However, the introduction of written languages, maps, and modes of long distance transportation made "possible the substitutability of different spatial units" and allowed our place to be different from our visible and concrete space. This phenomenon, which Giddens called *distanciation* uses arbitrary referents that relate apparently distant elements. For instance, administrative divisions such as cities and countries are given a common identity by their location in a central organization (executive, legislative, and jurisdictional) whereas rural areas maintain their distinctiveness in that the people identify only with individual plots of land and core family units (Giddens 1981). Scales are one of these referents: they enable us to have an idea of the limits of our city or country without having to experience it firsthand. One of the characteristic features of the modern world that Giddens and others have identified is the pervasiveness of government in ordinary life, as well as the role government plays in the development of our "created environments" (Giddens 1984). This is certainly echoed in Michel Foucault's view of power and discipline: in order to ensure social control, governments have had to create their own technologies as the rapidly expanding size of populations and the sprawling of cities reached

unmanageable extents (Foucault 1975). In other words, for govern-
mental technologies to be efficient, popular definitions of families,
estates, and cities do not matter as much as the space of government
created by political leaders. These created environments, or *locales* as
Giddens calls them, are containers in which power may be exercised;
they may be of various shapes and sizes, from that of a household
to that of a nation-state. It is notable that these locales exist and are
recognized mostly by virtue of the authority given to governments
and represent a mixture of landscape practicalities, landscape con-
straints, and power interests.

In the 1990s, the acceleration of globalization made it clear that
a fixed scale could not contain the smallest local areas, let alone the
larger world scale. Erik Swyngedouw (1997) argued, for example,
that social sciences needed to conceptualize a "jumping of scales,"
the idea that scales could be related without being in direct juxtapo-
sition. Swyngedouw noted for instance that an institution may devel-
op strategies to cater both to local markets and follow international
guidelines and still remain local. Such strategies effectively conflate
the global and local scales into one new "glocal" scale. In his attempt
to deconstruct the seemingly all-powerful concept of globalization,
Swyngedouw further points out that due to popular and scientific
use of the word *scale* researchers and end-users alike may have been
misled into thinking of scales as congruent, impermeable units: "the
scales are, of course, operating not hierarchically, but simultaneous-
ly, and the relationships between different scales are 'nested'" (1997,
169). Peter Taylor (2000) illustrated some awareness of this process
when he laid a renewed emphasis on "world cities," cities that have
gained more importance on the global scale than within the terri-
tory on which they are situated. As illustrated in modern economic
crises, economies are so linked in complex networks and interde-

pendent processes that one local phenomenon may be felt all around the world:

> To break free, we do not have to lessen our concern for states, but rather to see them as one important element in a nexus of power which straddles geographical scales. In fact, appreciation of the importance of interlocking scales is an important general mode of dismantling state-centric social sciences. (Taylor 2000, 28)

Arguably, this networking between scales could very well be a scale in and of itself: that of interconnectivity which would effectively negate the scales produced by associations of individuals. As a counterpart to this thinking, Sally Marston (2000) added that the influence of "patriarchy and the gendering of social relations of consumption and social reproduction" dismantled areal scales into observational units that need to take into account interpersonal relationships. In this view, spaces and places of our everyday experience are all relevant to scale, but they do not totally constitute it. Our challenge as researchers is thus to understand how a scale is formed—if only in discourse—and to clarify by whom and what it encompasses.

Refining scale

Lam and Quattrochi (1992) made important distinctions among three types of scales used in geographical study: (1) the *cartographic scale* connects elements on a map and elements in the lived world; (2) the *geographic scale* links all occurrences of one event into a coherent whole that can be isolated for study; finally, (3) the *operation scale* is how a scale plays out in action in the world. The cartographic scale is probably the most familiar example. It involves an absolute, numeral, measurement system as well as a relative measurement; it

THOMAS BRASDEFER

is supposed to be real-life represented on a map. Cartographic scales are the product of cartographers; geographic scales by geographers, and operational scales by operators (actors, agents). While the first two types of scales are important intellectually, they are the result of a choice, a mathematical and reasonable process. The operation scale conversely exists because of the agency and actions of society. Cartographic scales, once computed, are found in the key of our maps. Geographic scales, once our research agenda are set, can be found in our publications, the conventions we used in our work. Though we may be able to see what phenomena result from an operation scale, we may not know exactly where the scale begins or ends. David DeLaney and Helga Leitner noted this in their introduction to an issue of *Political Geography* especially devoted to discussing scale:

> The problematic of scale in this context arises from the difficulties of answering the question: once scale is constructed or produced, where in the world is it? Scale is not as easily objectified as two-dimensional territorial space, such as state borders. We cannot touch it or take a picture of it. (1997, 97)

In order to fathom their more intangible aspects, Kevin Cox (1998) introduced a new paradigm of scales that envisioned them in terms of their social construction rather than in terms of taken-for-granted assumptions about so-called reality. In this paradigm, geographic scales and operation scales are to be considered the product of a relationship between people and their surroundings. This is evident in what he calls *spaces of dependence* and *spaces of engagement*. Spaces of dependence are political boundaries, such as city limits, national borders, gated communities, which play an unavoidable role in organizing our experience even though they may represent apparently arbitrary fragmentations of space. Spaces of engagement

inevitably happen when highly mobile human beings are interacting with the world. The space of engagement is formed by a networking of human groups and entities, which may belong to any of the traditionally accepted geographic scales, but also may intersect and transcend all these scales. With this perspective, Cox is calling geographers to "liberate [them]selves from an excessively areal approach to the question" of scale (1998, 21). A similar argument was submitted by Erik Swyngedouw, who pointed out that scales are often the result of a negotiation process rather than a definitive geographical reality:

> Geographical configurations as a set of interacting and nested scales (the 'gestalt of scale') become produced as temporary stand-offs in a perpetual transformative, and on occasion transgressive, social–spatial power struggle. These struggles change the importance and role of certain geographical scales, reassert the importance of others, and sometimes create entirely new significant scales, but—most importantly—these scale redefinitions alter and express changes in the geometry of social power by strengthening power and control by some while disempowering others. (1997, 169)

The manner in which scales of government are traditionally explained could not illustrate this argument more literally: each center of authority in the hierarchy has powers that extend only so far as inscribed in law. When fireworks are forbidden within city limits, there is a clear material end to the scale of a city ordinance. Nevertheless, it is not rare for individuals to transgress this scale on occasion and break the law: this is an operation scale in which fireworks are certainly happening, albeit illegally. This may happen at any time and in any space or place regardless of what existing scales of power are

dictating. How can scales account scientifically for these moments that escape the traditional concepts of scale?

Undoing Scale

The most recognizable feature of scale is homogeneity: scales represent the interval between units of measurement. To continue the simile started in the introduction to this paper, there is no possibility of heaping scales or pinches of scales; they cannot be fragmented or distorted. Sallie Marston, John Paul Jones III, and Keith Woodward, have recently advocated a suppression of *scale* as a concept in favor of a flat ontology "composed of complex, emergent spatial relations." This is understandably an alternative to the pounding of scale into every researcher's shape of research:

> [I]t is necessary to invent—perhaps endlessly—new spatial concepts that linger upon the materialities and singularities of space. Manipulating a term from topology and physics, these consist of localized and non-localized event-relations productive of event-spaces that avoid the predetermination of hierarchies or boundlessness.… Instead, a flat ontology must be rich to the extent that it is capable of accounting for socio-spatiality as it occurs throughout the Earth without requiring prior, static conceptual categories. (Marston et al. 2005, 424-425)

Such a radical change has encountered a mixed reception: Arturo Escobar (2007) welcomed the initiative as a coherent effort within the trend in social sciences toward a "flattening" of social relationships. Conversely, Helga Leitner and Byron Miller (2007) refused to abandon scale, lest "we would be left with an impoverished understanding not only of the power relations that inhere in scale, but of the power relations that inhere in the intersections of diverse spatialities

with scale." Marston, Jones and Woodward proposed that instead of *scale* the concept of *site* be used, symbolizing a more palpable geographical occurrence with all its uniqueness and complexities. Furthermore, their site does not predicate any form of intent, whereas we usually have to create scales, sites happen.

The debate on scale in geography is still ongoing and obviously extends far beyond the scope of the present paper. We can nonetheless add to this discussion the work of anthropologists who have had to transcend common areal considerations in order to pursue their research.

The Scale of Ethnography

As communication between separate parts of the world has become increasingly accessible, geographical, logistical, and ideological constraints that used to be considered barriers have lost their importance. Appreciation of this "globalization" has undoubtedly been a great catalyst for social scientists to re-envision scale and re-assess their disciplines. In recent decades, researchers in feminist studies, communication studies, and information sciences have realized that they must transcend established geographical borders (the spaces of dependence mentioned above) for empirical reasons more so than philosophical ones: power disputes and other issues of social justice do not only happen in tribunals and courts, they happen every day at every level of society (Featherstone 1990; Lash and Friedman 1992). Here, too, the attention of anthropologists has shifted from finding peculiarities in remote islands to understanding such global phenomena as the fast-spreading alienation of individuals in their own lands.

In the introduction to their volume on critical anthropology, Gupta and Ferguson (1997) described anthropological research in the late twentieth century: "The ground seems to be shifting beneath

THOMAS BRASDEFER

our feet." This is to be taken literally and figuratively. Both the world and their discipline were undergoing drastic changes, forcing ethnographers to review their assumptions and "try to find our feet in a strange new world" (ibid.). Echoing this sentiment, Comaroff and Comaroff called ethnography in the modern world working on an "awkward scale" (2003). Somehow the tables turned, and anthropologists, who used to study the "exotic others," became faced with their own exotic otherness. Nonetheless, their disquiet was not unique. They were simply expressing the very same concern mentioned above for geographers: for scale to be a valid scientific tool, it needs to be able to account for "strange" and "awkward" moments in which we find ourselves in the field. After all, what we commonly call our *field* also has boundaries; these boundaries are set by our agendas, our informants, and ourselves. If an archaeologist surveys a site to be excavated in the landscape, what is the excavation site of the linguistic anthropologist? We cannot rope in all the speakers of a language, or even a sample population, in order to study them.

The Locus of Language

Language is an essentially human attribute; it is produced spontaneously and cannot be delimited by traditional borders: speakers of various languages are constantly crossing national boundaries, even speaking languages that do not necessarily correspond with their place in the world. How can language be constrained to a surveyable area? Languages themselves are volatile, today more than ever, and the speakers of languages are highly mobile. A surface enquiry of the English language would yield a variety of English languages spoken throughout the world. In terms of *scale* English is spoken virtually everywhere, yet not everyone speaks the same English. Language use was theorized using geographical terms relatively early in the

study of linguistics, following Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*. Neustupný spoke of *Sprechbünde* in which speakers of different languages will understand one another, by opposition to *Sprachbünde,* which relates only to speakers of linguistically related languages (Neustupný 1978; Romaine 1994). Interestingly, the German term *Bund* is versatile, indicating either a geographical area or a societal bond: a *Sprechbund* is then a speech bond or a speech area, and a *Sprachbund* is a language bond or language area. Neustupný also noted that those two areas overlap but seldom coincide. Focusing more narrowly on the speakers, William Labov spoke of a "speech community":

> The speech community is not defined by any marked agreement in the use of language elements, so much as by participation in a set of shared norms. These norms may be observed in overt types of evaluative behavior, and by the uniformity of abstract patterns of variation which are invariant in respect to particular levels of usage. (1972, 120-121)

For Labov, the norms of a speech community are negotiated in each discursive situation and may be different from those they learned in school. A speech community therefore shares the linguistic "reference points" needed to achieve efficient communication: it is a site of linguistic exchange. It may be tempting to equate speech communities with geographical boundaries in the modernized nation-states, but the best efforts of some nations to remain linguistic monoliths are thwarted everyday by the simple act of communicating. Besides, if a nation were to disintegrate tomorrow, its language will still exist regardless of the new political boundaries. Nations, on the other hand, only seldom tolerate mixed allegiances.

THOMAS BRASDEFER

Each utterance produces a new communication situation with-
out necessarily annulling those that came before. The same applies
regardless of size considerations, be it a whole language or dialect
or code. This is why linguists have been fabricating their own tools
(such as the speech community) in order to define their field of study.
But the speech community itself remains imperfect, with many ways
to distinguish them (Gumperz 1962, 1982; Hymes 1972; Bucholtz,
Liang, and Sutton 1999; and countless others)."

There are times when languages/scales and their features become
organically enmeshed to create a new language/scale without there
being any centrally planned intention for it to happen. For instance,
there may be no linguistic reason to abandon a language, but there
are often ideological incentives to do so. This case is best exemplified
in colonial and postcolonial occupations, such as when the Spanish
colonized Jamaica. Having used military force to exterminate the
indigenous population, they all but eradicated the indigenous lan-
guages on the island. Several years later, when the British settled the
island with a slave population from Africa, they did not immediately
attempt to impose the English language, and the Jamaican Creole
was created, incorporating elements of the English language as well
as various African and indigenous influences. Creoles and pidgins,
born out of the very specific linguistic foundations of their speak-
ers with substrates and superstrates of influences, are an embodi-
ment of "scales" as they happen spontaneously and with little or no
codification.

In the "globalizing" world, speech communities have trans-
mogrified into entirely heterogeneous and dislocated communities
meeting in immaterial places such as Internet Relay Chat, Instant
Messaging or message boards. Such politico-cultural ventures as
La Francophonie also transcend place by bridging French-speaking
peoples across continents, while claims to autonomy from peoples in

Pays Basque, Sri Lanka, or Palestine are questioning the validity of seemingly well-established historical boundaries across the world. Going even further in deconstructing linguistic boundaries, Alessandro Duranti attempted to dismantle the terminology of *speech communities*. Since there is no foolproof way to find the boundaries of a speech community due to the mobility of speakers and the mutability of language, Duranti (1988) argues that speech communities defy quantification because they are above all "emergent and cooperatively achieved" (Duranti 1988). It is notable that these are the same qualifiers used by Marston et al. to describe their flat ontology (2005, *supra*).

Speech communities represent the extent to which languages are spoken, much as scale can be widely summarized as the extent to which actions may take place. However we name them, and I believe each domain has its own lexicon, the quantification of cooperative action is of utmost importance to social scientists who may want to accurately describe a nation, a football game, or an aboriginal tribe. This is more crucially true if we look down the line and consider how our research may be used to inform policies.

SCALE, LANGUAGE, AND THE CASE OF (AND FOR) AMERICAN INDIANS

The linguistic situation of the United States is very particular, with hundreds of indigenous languages still alive in spite of receiving no official recognition. The absence of linguistic provisions in the Constitution relinquishes language issues to the responsibility of individual states. As a result, some of them have enacted measures to establish English as their official and only language. However, Native American tribes have an established constitutional relationship with the federal government that is distinctive, and laws called Native

THOMAS BRASDEFER

American Acts have been passed since the 1990s to protect their languages. One can see the potential areas of contention: Does the federal protection of indigenous languages interfere with state powers? Is the federal government allowed to pass language legislation when it applies to American Indians? If the latter were to pass their own legislation, would it interfere with both state and federal powers?

The very existence of indigenous peoples in the United States should be considered a challenge to traditional scales. Arguably, part of the specificity of the indigenous status is its recognition by the country in which they live, but one should not overlook the fact that indigeneity existed before said country even existed and thus has ideological roots just as much as modern national identities. In my view, scales exist before they are identified by researchers or the media; they are the result of prior organization. It has been pointed out before that the construction of scale is an eminently political process (Howitt 2003; Rankin 2003). Scales represent the actions of people with common interests, whether they be established by governments or industrial lobbies, flash mobs, or terrorist groups. Through their actions, they are looking to disrupt existing industrial, social, or geopolitical orders and activating a scale that was theretofore unrecognized.

Scale is evident not only in scientific discourse, but also in vernacular language. An example is the conceptualization of the landscape. In 2003, the *Squaw Peak* of Arizona Mountains was renamed Piestewa Peak in remembrance of the first US military woman killed in action and the first Native American soldier to die in Iraq. While the indigenous tribes of the area have another name for the peak, this change removed the offensive connotation of the former name. Those who choose to negate the indigenous frame of reference (or scale) may remain partisan to the name *Squaw Peak*, while those who recognize the importance of the indigenous scale in the area

(and nationwide) will be able to respectfully use the name Piestewa Peak.

Nowadays, few people think of Native American tribes as centers of authority in the United States. Even though tribal self-determination has been an official policy since 1975 (P.L. 93-638), few advances have actually been made to recognize the political power of tribes (Castile 1998, 2006; Clarkin 2001). Steven Silvern, looking specifically at the treaty rights of the Wisconsin Ojibwe, argued that Native American tribes in the United States are a "third geographical scale" (Silvern 1999). This peculiar position is double-edged as it is generally afforded by the federal government who has the final authority and ultimately holds a large part of tribal monies and land in trust (463 U.S. 206). Every occasion for the tribes to define their own scale can be seen as an assertion of tribal power, lest the Federal government maintain a stronghold on tribal power based on habit alone (Morrill 1999). Until 1975, most tribes had to rely entirely on the Federal government if they wanted any change on their reservation, and even after the policy changed, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was still reluctant to allow tribal power to be exercised (Deloria and Lytle 1984).

Even to this day, the US government has a crucial role in defining the indigenous scale, as only federally recognized tribes are allowed to exercise their right to self governance. Furthermore, even though tribes have the final decision on tribal membership, applicants need to receive approval from the BIA in the form of a Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood, which is based on tribal rolls that have historically been maintained by the Federal government (Thornton 1996). Language, on the other hand, cannot be determined by blood quantum. By enacting a language policy in favor of American Indian tribes, the US government has assumed its constitutional responsibility without encroaching on state rights. A proper understanding of the

American Indian policymaking scale informs us that its jurisdiction only extends so far as reservations do. Where does that leave the languages of non-recognized American Indian tribes? Since tribes with federal recognition are struggling to protect their own idioms, it seems unlikely that an unrecognized tribal group would find the resources to enact its own schooling programs, but they could certainly have an argument for their programs to receive governmental protection.

American tribes are often (re)presented in opposition to the modern world, the word *tribe* itself being still today associated with nearly pre-historical connotations. Quite to the contrary, I argue that in their quest to obtain their own set of laws and to build their identities from within the Western world American tribes set an example that should be followed by minorities and majorities alike.

CONCLUSION

There are many advantages to using scale in academic research: it is hermeneutically and heuristically useful, and it facilitates comprehension greatly for scholars and laymen alike. On a map, scale enables us to span the entirety of an area at a glance. In research, scale enables us to span the entirety of a phenomenon in one phrase. In many ways, research is often conducted on a certain scale, though it does not often bear this name. International cooperation has become a staple in our everyday lives, from manufacturing to telecommunicating, and the vocabulary of nations and boundaries is fast becoming obsolete. Scale allows us to recognize territories from their most tangible (cities, countries) to their most intangible (personal space, lands) applications. It drives us to take into account associations from their smallest (individuals, families, tribes) to their largest (pan-Africanism, pan-Arabism, pan-Americanism, pan-Indianism, social networks) extent.

In a modern world where distant locations are no longer synonymous with exotic others and where people living poles apart may have been raised in the same cultures, it is important to take into account both the location and the dislocations that are part and parcel of living in the contemporary world. The global scale is perhaps the best antidote to so-called globalization.

Much as *globalization* (or the scare thereof) has become a buzzword for policymakers and an excuse to erase local particularities and obfuscate regional differences, bringing in a multidimensional term such as *scale* values the local while still taking into account the global. Information Technologies use the term *scaling* to describe a system's ability to improve over time; scaling can only happen in a positive manner and what does not scale becomes obsolete. Unfortunately, it is more common nowadays to hear the expressions *scaling back* and *scaling down* in economics and finance, and the term has become laden with somewhat negative terms. In this sense, using Marston et al.'s concept of *site* may be a valid choice to avoid abuses of *scale* and lead to its expansion across the board of social science. I hope to have demonstrated that this is not an issue exclusive to geographers and that everyone will benefit from an improved taxonomy of human enterprises. It is urgent that we foster a link between the apparent homogenization thatv some people are striving to achieve and the deeper distanciations that result from fears of a totally uniform world.

THOMAS BRASDEFER

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