

Space and politics

by S.M. FINER,

Gladstone Professor of Government and Public Administration
All Souls College, Oxford.

★

Esteemed colleagues : I must confess that I am not sure as to what a « keynote » address is really the supposed to do : unless it be to act something like the starter's gun in the recent Olympics. Obviously, it must relate to the major themes of this conference, viz, time and space. Mistakenly perhaps, I first sought inspiration from the titles of the papers to be delivered at this congress. I have been stricken with a sort of awed admiration at the ingenuity with which some participants have managed to introduce, as a contribution to the study of Space, topics which are not merely appealingly exotic, but which, at first glance, would appear to bear no relationship to the concept whatsoever ! But of course, this is to be expected. At the most superficial level, all things (excepting the *ideas* of *Plato*) happen in Time and in Space and hence all things can be considered under one or other of these aspects. More specifically, Space is a very plastic concept. Within the short time allocated me, I can do little more than to illustrate this fairly obvious point. But first, like my predecessors, I also have a duty to perform : I too extend a welcome. In this country, former Chairmen of the Political Studies Association automatically succeed to the Presidency of the Association. This is a formal and honorific position. By my great good fortune, it has fallen to me to be the President in this year when the PSA is the host association. I extend the warmest welcome to you all and hope the Congress will live up to the lively promise foreshadowed by the illustrious names and the galaxy of topics contained in our programme.

Given the constraints of time, and the extent of the concept of Space, this keynote speech finally became an almost technical problem : to pack the largest number of sub-concepts into the smallest number of categories. Surveying *Space* as the theme it struck me that its principal aspects could be subsumed under three main headings : Space as Cognition, Space as Affect, and Space as Conation (or striving).

A. SPACE AS COGNITION seems to subdivide into three, each one the subject of many Papers at this Congress. First there is what I will call *Conceptualised Space*, Space « in the mind's eye » as it were ; it might almost be called *Space as Metaphor*. By this I mean the trick by which we all of us perceive — and manipulate — non-spatial data in spatial terms. The simplest example is the way in which, immemorally, Time has been perceived as Space : envisaging the lapse of time by the transit of the sun, by the burning-down of a length of candle, by the movement of hands on a clock. This is the progenitor of « Spatial Modelling » of political data, and an entire Session of our programme is devoted to it.

Third (I shall revert to the Second in a minute) — *third* comes what I shall call *Conventional Space*, of if you will, *Publicly Demarcated Space*. The delimitation of parks ; of city zones ; of states themselves, fall under this heading, the most obvious and the least subtle of all the many aspects of Space. Here again, an entire Session has been devoted to the precise topic of « spatial boundaries ».

It is in between Conceptualized Space and Conventional Space that there lies and enormously fruitful area of intellectual refinements on the otherwise crude concepts of Conventional Space. It is the field the Geographers have assiduously and successfully cultivated, and it is clear from some of the papers I have been able to read, that participants in this Congress have been busy familiarising themselves with what the members of our fellow discipline, the Geographers, have elaborated. Conceptualised Space is the intellect modelling non-spatial data in spatial terms. By contrast, what I am now talking about is the intellectual modelling of spatial data themselves in spatial terms. I would call this *Technical Space*, or even, *Geographers' Space*, since it is they who have done most of the exploration. To illustrate by three examples which are vital to our own particular discipline, the concepts of *Raum* and *Lage* ; of Formal and Functional space ; of the distinction between the societal definition of territory and the territorial definition of society. The first of these is the crucial distinction between space as area, or (in some cases) territory ; and space as *location*. The second is the distinction between spaces which each share common and identical characteristics, such as arable land, desert tracts, or in another field and one of central importance to ourselves, a unique political authority : this is *Formal Space*. And it contrasts with what the Geographers call *functional space* : this is space identified by *interactions* between *Foci*. Its sub-variables comprise physical distance, time-distance, perceived distance, economic or cultural complementarity. The boundaries of various types of functional space need not and usually do not

coincide. Nor will any functional space necessarily coincide with *formal space*. This often results in a tension; and this can generate political activity and hence, my third heading, Space as *Conation* or *Striving*. And there is yet another distinction the Geographers have drawn: that between situations where the behaviour of a society defines the location and extent of territory — as in many headless societies and tribal bands — and those, perfected by our present world system of territorial states, where it is territory that determines the location and extent of a society.

B. I now turn to the next main category: from Space as Cognition to SPACE AS AFFECT.

Men are not *indifferent* to territory. We do not have to accept the notion, which at bottom amounts to simple assertion, of a biological drive to acquire and hold territory such as Ardrey has stated in his book *The Territorial Imperative*. We have no known means of demonstrating that the personal «space bubbles» which psychologists have shown to be maintained by individuals, are also the collective attribute of an entire community, and it appears very unlikely. It is arguable as to how far the sentiment that «one's home is one's castle» is a manifestation of personal space, or how far a desire to preserve the inviolability of one's dependants and one's physical possessions. (The distinction is itself an interesting example of the two concepts of space, as cubic area or as the location for a number of possessions.) What is beyond question is that territory exercises an often formidable appeal to individual emotions, and for two quite obvious reasons: first because it is so often the location of a familiar and desired pattern of life, and second because it is the thesaurus of resources to maintain this life. That a mystique of territory, a *blut und boden* ideology should be erected on these bases, that territory, and the community should be reified into a Goddess called Roma or Athene or a France, England or Scotland merely demonstrates that you can make an ideology out of pretty well anything, rather than that territory is somehow super-special. But the emotive power of these territorial ideologies has certainly been super-special and has drenched the globe in blood and tears almost since the first syllable of recorded time.

When we contemplate our own distinctive subject matter we intuitively divide it into domestic and foreign affairs, *internal* and *external* relationships, events, wars and the like, into *higher* units of authority and *lower* units. We intuitively conceive of *boundaries*, and also of *hierarchy*. Both of these relate to a primal concept, the primordial *affectual* concept, of *mine-thine*. The formation of the territorial state

involves the simultaneous manipulation of space by first, forming boundaries, and secondly, forming territorial hierarchies : and the root of this is most elegantly expressed in the *Pensee* of Blaise Pascal which runs : « Mine, thine. - this dog is mine, said these poor children ; here is my place in the sun. There is the beginning and the image of the appropriation of the whole globe. »

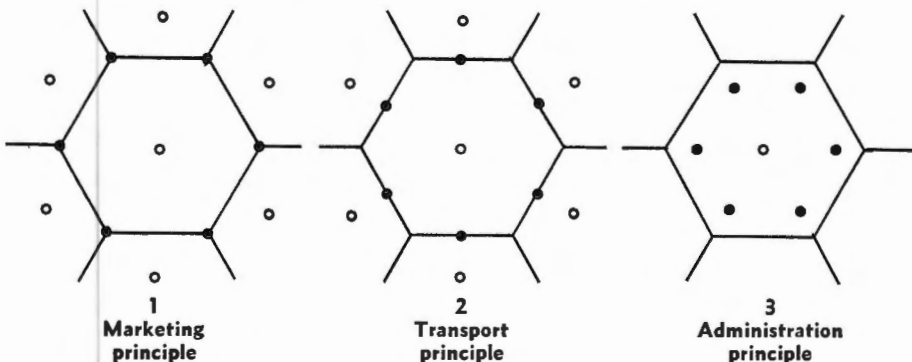
1. The *formation of the territorial state*, may be conceived as a process of combining horizontality of space with the dimension of verticality. The political authority, the prince is first concerned with extending and holding lands, as territory : this is the phase of *Expansion*. We may think of the early Capets of Francia in relation to the other Provinces of the *Regnum Francorum*. Once held by the Prince, their natural, but above all their human resources are *exploited* by him : by slave labour, forced labour and by taxation. So verticality is introduced. This is the phase of *Exploitation*. Where the political authority is a dynasty, we have the Prince's State or Dynastic State, exploited as the personal Estate of the Sovereign. But as the locus of political authority moves downward from Prince to landed oligarchy and from this to the Demos itself, so, in theory at any rate, the resources of the territory become *collective*. At this stage, the concern shifts from extracting resources from the subject to the *provision* of resources for the citizen. This is the stage of *provision*, and hence collective defence of the territory which houses it. This leads therefore to even greater concern than ever with holding the territory — or even expanding it : the phase of territorial *consolidation* or *expansion*.

2. *Externality and internality* presuppose the existence of such a process : because both presuppose a boundary. Even today, the concepts of what is external and what internal can be highly relative. In a Federal State, like Canada, the relationship between one Province and another Province is External. Likewise the relationship of the Province to the Federal Government is external. But from the viewpoint of Ottawa, the relationship to a Province may appear External as in, say, civil law ; or internal, as in Foreign Relations, where Ottawa represents the Confederation as a whole vis a vis other territorial states. This underlines the fact that what is internal/external, what is mine/thine can only be established when we have first established what items are comprised under « mine » and « thine ». Our concern is the division of political authority. When unlimited authority lies on one side of the line and equally unlimited authority lies on the other, we have the model of the modern sovereign state. Where this is not so, as in the division of authority inside Federal States, the external/internal

distinction is confused. And this was pre-eminently so in the European Middle Ages, where the political system consisted of discreet and not altogether comparable quanta of political authority, property-claims and obligations of all kinds shared between disparate and not always even contiguous units, over an undelimited space. This is why it is much more exact to perceive the 100 Years War as an internal war in which a feudatory King-Duke was at war with his overlord the King of the Franks, than a national war between the Kings of two territorial polities, England and France.

3. *Hierarchy in Space* goes apace with the acquisition of horizontal space, ie Area. An area which is the seat of, or the jurisdiction of superior political authority comes to be perceived as « a higher » territorial unit : so France is a higher unit than the Department and this in turn is a higher unit than the Commune.

There is a *fourth* stage in this model of the formation and perfection of the territorial state. It derives from that aspect of space which is not area but, as I mentioned before, is *Location*. Professor Gottman, one of our distinguished participants, has stressed in his lectures on *The Significance of Territory*, the rival concepts of territory as a bounded and inward-looking area, and territory as a means of egress, a sort of spring-board. The ideal boundary then is the one that prevents ingress, and facilitates egress. When space is considered as *raum*, this generates the quest for economic and/or strategic boundaries — and we should note that these themselves are not necessarily the same by any means. When space is considered as *lage*, ie *location* then the territory's aim is to maximize its benefits from lying astride a trade route or a military route : but by the same token, the greater its importance in either of these respects the greater the military threat to its existence, since it becomes a *strategic* area to its neighbours who will seek therefore to incorporate it in their *raum*. The boundaries



that result from maximising one advantage rather than another will be different and are, indeed the subject of a classic geographical demonstration.

This diagram represents maximum utilization of space on three different principles. The first is the *marketing* principle: it allows space to be packed with the largest number of hexagonal market areas and market places. The second is the transportation principle: it contains as many places as possible on a direct route between the larger town. In both, all towns are located on the *boundaries* of higher-order units. In the third, or administrative-principle model, however, while some marketing efficiency is perceived, all lower-order towns are within the market area of the superordinate area-unit; thus.

It must be obvious, given so many kinds, qualities and different dimensions of what we generically call *Space*, that one overriding imperative will power a drive to establish one ideal boundary, and a different overriding imperative will power a drive to establish another: Equally, no one boundary is likely to be ideal for all desired purposes. This brings me to my third and final category: Space as *Conation* or *Striving*.

C. CONATION.

A large number of separate sessions are dedicated to the political effects of unsatisfactory boundaries, and the unsatisfactory politics of seeking other and better ones: notably those dealing with administrative versus functional boundaries within states and those dealing with boundary disputation between them. Suppose we are looking at the global scene: the *meum-tuum* affect, at work on the several possible boundary-partitions will lead to a striving for change in the existing patterns. We can conceive of the global possibility as a spectrum. At one pole, the principle of *Meum* triumphs. « All is *mine* » Were this to be wholly satisfied, the consequence would be a global imperium where all boundaries are *internal* but space is intensely *hierarchical* — subject to one superior location. At the other pole, all is *Tuum*. Since nobody claims exclusive territory, this is utilized in commonalty and equality. The paradigm case is that of the primitive hunting band. Here there is neither boundary nor hierarchy.

What we have today is a confusion of the two. Seem by a Venusian, our world scene is by no means dissimilar from Western Europe in the Dark Ages. It is a confused polyarchy where spatial boundaries are clear-cut only at the most local level and become more and more shadowy and nominal as the level of political authority is higher, so that at its peak, say the Holy Roman Empire, it is almost entirely fictional — not unlike the UN today. At the same time, the core

area, West Europe, is laced with functional groupings and movements — the Church, the Communes for instance, which coexist, qualify and flow in and around the pygmy territorial ones.

Today we have much the same scene, but on a global scale: and the geographers' distinction between formal and functional space has attained a very salient significance. At the formal level, we have 159 sovereign territorial states ranging in power and wealth and area from the USSR to Trinidad and Tobago. These coexist in uneasy balance and their territorial integrity is often threatened by internal secessionist movements. These formal spaces do not coincide with functional spaces within them: hence the economic, cultural and ecological drives for secession. By the same token however they are inadequate to deal with other aspects of functional space like pollution, nuclear fall-out, and the control of natural resources, or of population. These two sets of factors have generated the conflicts which on the one side clamour for still more and still smaller territorial units and on the other cry that the sovereign state is obsolete. These instances of territorial authority are however all based on the principle of « *Meum* »: « this is mine, this is my place in the sun ». Around and across them flow other organisations more akin to our paradigm case of the primitive hunting band on the principle of *tuum*. They are religious: like the Roman Church — « *quod ab omnibus, quod ubique, quod semper* »; or ideological — like the communist movements — « the working man has no country »; or (the latest in the demonology) the multinational corporation. There was strife between the formal and the functional concepts in the Middle Ages as the princes who sought to create territorial states battled against guilds, communes, and the universal Church. The battle is resumed today, but on a global scale.

I have now reached my close. If I have learned anything from this brief exercise, it is the simple moral that space is something perceived: that it is perceived in many different and contradictory ways; that what is perceived is an object of cupidity and desire: and that consequently it is not the least surprising that we are often in conflict with ourselves as to which of two or more territorial distributions we should choose, but more lethally, what we are in conflict with our neighbours. Some may find this a sombre conclusion. There is however another and quite light-hearted way to regard it; and as this is a festive occasion, it is the one with which — for this opening address at any rate — I commend to you all. It is the famous dialogue in the *Hunting of the Snark*, where the Bellman, the captain of the ship, expounds to the crew his own personal philosophy of Space.

« What's the use of Mercator's poles and Equators New Lines Tropics, zones or Meridian lines ? »

So the Bellman would cry — and the crew would reply.

« They are merely conventional signs ! »

