

Political Geography

Territory, State, and Society

Kevin R. Cox

Blackwell
Publishers

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Preface

Like many books, this one began as an attempt to develop some reading materials for a course: reading materials that would complement what I was trying to do in the lecture room. This has been going on for quite a few years, during which time the materials have been refined, filtered, and, in many cases, discarded wholesale. That the book I was aiming to write should shed light on the world as we experience it today should go without saying. But beyond that, two major criteria guided the writing process.

The first was that the book should be organized relatively tightly around a coherent framework of ideas. A major problem with political geography has always been lack of coherence in its subject matter, and to some degree that continues down to the present day. From the viewpoint of the student coming to political geography for the first time, I have never thought that this could possibly be satisfactory. We learn by constructing, by trial and error, networks of relations between different ideas and logics; and it is the job of the teacher to communicate such a framework and facilitate the process of making connections. In this book the focus of political geography is on the twin concepts of territory and territoriality: territory as the object and territoriality as the practice. Given that the objective is to illuminate contemporary political geographies, the state has also had to figure prominently in the argument. Some concept of social process has then given life to territory, territoriality and the principle vehicle through which they are mobilized today, the state.

The term social process is clearly a very abstract one which could cover a multitude of different logics. In recent work on human geography one of the emergent distinctions in approaches to this question has been between political economy and the cultural, as, for example, in the recent collection *Geographies of Economies*, edited by Roger Lee and Jane Wills. I think that this is a helpful distinction in thinking about social process as it relates to human geography, and it provides the windows on the subject matter of political geography which are presented in the first and second parts of what is a three-part book. The third part re-examines the subject matter from the stand-

point of the state and brings the cultural, the economic, and the territorial together.

My second guiding principle in writing this book has been that it should embody an approach to the subject matter that is critical; critical not so much of other approaches in a direct sense but of the world those other approaches are supposed to shed light on: the world of public pronouncements, editorials, news reports, real historico-geographical events. Over many years of undergraduate teaching I have found that this is best achieved through an approach that foregrounds the structuring role of capitalism and of the logics of capitalist development and how they work themselves out over space. Capitalism is the fundamental structuring force in the world today. It is, therefore, insight into the logics of capitalism, and its characteristic ways and forms of development, that is crucial to making sense of those issues of territory which I believe to be central to an understanding of the political geography of the contemporary world.

This in turn has led to me to make copious use of sources that will be, at least in books oriented to an undergraduate market, unconventional to say the least. But I see no reason to apologize for the numerous references to articles in *New Left Review* or for references to those who have contributed so much to the tradition of thought, historical materialism, that that periodical represents: David Harvey, Eric Hobsbawm, Michael Mann, among many others. On the other hand, given this particular perspective, the informed reader may find equally surprising the use I have made of some of the more conservative financial publications, such as *The Wall Street Journal* or *The Economist*, and certainly their editorials and op-ed pages can leave much to be desired. But their news stories often stand in sharp counterpoint to that free market flim-flam, providing sober assessments, with a sharp eye for the significance of economic forces, of unfolding issues. So the critical approach embraced by this book comes far less from a self-conscious examination of other bodies of literature, and alternative theories, than it does from a perspective on territory, the state, and the social process underpinning them, that is itself critical. If students are slow to recognize this, then, the questions I pose to them throughout the text in the form of "Think and Learn" boxes should serve to get them back on the right track as well as helping to impart that overall sense of coherence which has been my other goal. On the other hand, for those instructors who feel that something is still missing, there is no reason why the book should not be used as a foil for exploring those alternative views.

As a result of my emphasis on capitalism and its logics some might expect my approach to be economic. I do not think that they will find this to be borne out in the reading. The cultural turn in geography and earlier interests in post-Marxist social theory have provided a challenge to us all. But historical materialism is a living body of thought which is constantly being reworked not only in the light of the necessarily contingent element assumed by the course of development but also with respect to the numerous intellectual challenges it has had to confront. It will, however, be for the reader to judge how successful I have been in responding to the claims that have been made. Indeed, while the book is primarily intended as a text I hope it

will also stimulate a wider audience interested in a fresh approach to political geography.

Finally we reach the point in the preface which typically begins "This book could not have been written without . . ." Certainly there are many people who have over the years stimulated me to think about the issues I have addressed in this book. Not least are former graduate students, including, and in no particular order, Kim England, Raju Das, Jeff McCarthy, John Agnew, Felicity Sutcliffe, Paul Herr, Karen Walby, Andy Jonas, Murray Low, Andy Wood, Mike Sutcliffe, Golden Mergler, and Andy Mair. They cannot know how important they have been in helping me reconsider and refine my ideas, and how as they learnt, I learnt too. Every academic should be so lucky! My son Gerard has also shown a growing interest in and appreciation of the sorts of argument embodied in this book. I am grateful to him for keeping me on my toes at the dinner table, as well as for joining me in my long-suffering support of the Cincinnati Bengals, and reminding me that there *is* modern jazz after the 1950s.

I should also pay tribute to a series of equally long-suffering geography editors at Blackwell. It was John Davy who originally suggested the project to me back in 1995. Jill Landeryou helped coax me along and brought me to the point of embarking on a first draft. And Sarah Falkus is the one who has presided over the final stages, with great intelligence and care. It was through her good offices that I had the benefit of two excellent readers in Jenny Robinson and Byron Miller.

I hope, however, that none of these will feel slighted if I express the burden of my debt as owing to David Harvey. His probing, critical intelligence, his creative reworking of the field of human geography, have been an inspiration not just to me, but to many of us, and for a long time. He is the one above all who has shown the way forward. And while I suspect he will not agree with everything written in this book or how I have gone about writing it, I hope he will appreciate it as a contribution to spreading the word about that historic-geographical materialism whose contours he has developed and explored. It is, therefore, to David Harvey, political geographer *sans pareil*, that I dedicate this book.

Kevin Cox
Ohio State University

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Chapter 1

Fundamental Concepts of Political Geography: An Introduction

Introduction

The simple answer to the question “what is political geography about?” is what it says it is about: politics and geography. But that is altogether *too* simple. Political geography is by no means the sum of its two parts. In political geography, “geography” is drawn on in selective ways: in ways which illumine the political. By the same token, “politics” is drawn on in ways which shed light on the geographic. Above all, political geography focuses on the twin ideas of territory and territoriality.

Territory and territoriality are the defining concepts of political geography in that they bring together the ideas of power and space: territories as spaces that are defended, contested, claimed against the claims of others; in short, through territoriality. Territory and territoriality mutually presuppose one another. There can’t be one without the other. Territoriality is activity: the activity of defending, controlling, excluding, including; territory is the area whose content one seeks to control in these ways.¹

But again, that only takes us so far. To understand territory and territoriality as opposed to describing what they are about, we need understandings of space relations and politics. As geographic concepts territory and territoriality have their roots, their conditions, in other spatial practices; in particular those relating to movement and those that have to do with the embedding of people and their activities in particular places – ideas that are fundamental to contemporary human geography. Likewise, in order to understand the political in political geography we need to come to terms with *the* central concept

1 Consider in this regard the definitions given by *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (1986). Territory: “A general term used to describe areas of land or sea over which states and other political entities claim to exercise some form of control” (p. 483); territoriality: “The attempt by an individual or group to influence or establish control over a clearly demarcated territory” (p. 482).

of modern political science, the state. The state is itself an expression of territorial power: it has an area over which it claims jurisdiction, it has boundaries and it has powers to influence movement and what goes on in any part of its jurisdiction. For any territorial strategy, any expression of territoriality advanced by a neighborhood organization, a business or ethnic group, or whatever, the state is, accordingly, of crucial significance.

This begs the question, however, of what motivates people to defend particular areas and so to seek out the help of the state. It also begs the question of why the state might be responsive. Territory itself has no substance and what motivate people are interests which are, by definition, substantive in character: they refer to things, perhaps symbols, that people want. In short we need some concept of what it is that drives people in their territorial activities and what produces conflict over territory. Ultimately it has to do with our relationship to the material world: our need to relate to that world if we are to survive. But that relationship is always socially mediated. It is always in and through others that we appropriate and transform aspects of that material world into forms which we can use. Concepts of social process, therefore, are central to understanding territory and territoriality. But specifically *what* social process are we talking about? In human history there has been a succession of highly diverse social formations. This book, however, has to do with the political geography of the specifically *contemporary* world. Accordingly our focus here has to be that highly dynamic force that we know as capitalism.

Now, this may sound as if the treatment is to be economically deterministic. This is far from my aim. Rather I recognize that social life is highly diverse; that it consists of many different conditions, without which it could not function. There is something that I will call the social process that is separate from capitalism. But capitalism is the energizing moment of that process and continually strives to mobilize those other conditions for its own purposes. And in this it is no different from previous forms of social life. Production is always the central pivot around which social life is continually being organized and shaped.

In the first major section of this opening chapter, therefore, the three principal ideas around which the argument in this book is organized are introduced: territory, the state, and the social process. The second part of the chapter is devoted to a consideration of some case studies through which I want to illustrate how these fundamental ideas can be applied. In a brief closing section I will then outline how the book as a whole is organized.

Fundamental Concepts

Territory

The core concepts of political geography can be stated quite simply: they are *territory* and *territoriality*. These ideas are inextricably interrelated. Territory is to be understood through its relations to those activities we define as terri-

torial: the exercise of territoriality, in other words. Robert Sack (1983) has defined it as activity aimed at influencing the content of an area. This means that activities of an exclusionary or, alternatively, of an inclusionary nature would be regarded as territorial and the area the content of which one wants to influence as the territory in question. This means that in addition to territory having associations of area and boundary it also has ones of defense: territories are spaces which people defend by excluding some activities and by including those which will enhance more precisely what it is in the territory that they want to defend.

In these terms examples of territorial activity are legion. Import quotas and tariffs are obvious cases in point as are restrictions on immigration. Sometimes the products whose movement is being regulated have a strong cultural content: the French government has tried to limit the amount of non-French programming shown on French television. This is not to say that exclusionary processes are limited to the level of the nation state so that the territory that political geographers focus on is that of the state's jurisdiction. Examples can be found at all manner of scales: the gated communities that have become common in the suburbs of many American cities, for example; or the green-belts which surround every British city of any size and which limit new residential development within their boundaries. And the latter example reminds us that *any* form of land use zoning is a territorial form of activity.

There are also activities or processes of a more inclusionary nature. People and organizations try to regulate the content of geographic areas by attracting in certain sorts of people or activity. The constitution of the state of Israel mandates that all Jews should be accorded full rights of residency in Israel if they should request it. A different sort of example has to do with the channeling of investment flows. For many years in the United States local and State² governments have implemented a variety of policies the goal of which has been to attract new investment inside their boundaries: investment that will, among other things, generate employment and add to the local tax base. This sort of activity is now becoming more common in Western Europe. The member states of the European Union have been especially active in competing for choice investments like those of the Japanese auto companies.

This is not to say that exclusionary and inclusionary forms of policy are unrelated. What is inclusionary for some may be exclusionary for others, and that may be the point of the exercise. Gentrification has been a common housing market process in neighborhoods close to the downtowns of major cities in both North America and Western Europe. As wealthier people move into an area so rents and housing prices tend to increase. This results in the exclusion of long-term, low-income residents who can no longer afford the rents. But this is a process the gentrifiers promote through trying to secure for the area various local government expenditures and regulatory policies that will make the area more attractive to the well heeled buyer. And one of the purposes of that is, through the medium of increasing real estate

2 Throughout this book I use State with a capital "S" to indicate US (and Mexican) States, and state with a lower case "s" to indicate the state as a universal concept.

values, to drive out the poor, who for various reasons are regarded as lowering the tone of the area, perhaps introducing a criminal element into the neighborhood.

The idea of territoriality is derivative of other concepts absolutely crucial to contemporary human geography. These are the related ones of mobility and immobility. Geography, bear in mind, is the study of objects, activities, institutions from the standpoint of their space relations (both internal and external), what we might call their various where-nesses. These include their accessibility relations with respect to one another, and their distributions.

One way of studying human geography is in terms of movements. This was a dominant theme in the spatial analysis school which dominated human geography for much of the sixties and which is still influential today. The point is that the reproduction of a particular distribution of objects – factories, houses, highways, airports, the people themselves – depends on various sorts of flow: movements of raw materials for the factories, movements of money with which to buy the raw materials, movements of labor among others. To the extent that the geography of movement changes then so will the distribution of houses, factories, and the like. As investment moves out to the suburbs, for example, so the form of the city changes: housing is added on the edge but we often find housing towards the center of the city being deleted. The shift of investment to the suburbs is a major reason for the fact of housing abandonment that is so apparent in some American central cities, like Detroit and Chicago.

But more recently, the converse of movement, the idea of settlement, of immobilization or embedding in a particular place, has come to be recognized as of immense significance. This is particularly so from the standpoint of understanding territoriality. It is certainly true that people move around. Residential mobility within cities is a fact of life and without it realtors would go out of business. And people also move over much longer distances, retiring from, say, New York or Montreal to Florida or from the United Kingdom to the Costa Blanca in Spain. In similar fashion firms move. They close or sell factories in one location and shift their operations elsewhere. But there are contrary tendencies as well. People, firms, organizations of all types get embedded in particular places: embedded in the sense that other places become costly substitutes for their current locations. People put down what are often referred to as “roots.” They buy houses in neighborhoods, and raise families. Their children marry and some, at least, will live in the same city. People also get locked into particular careers with particular firms: they develop skills which are appropriate to their particular employer but which have limited portability. So leaving the area, moving elsewhere, can mean a serious diminution of life chances, a deep sense of loss as one moves away from one’s loved ones and the familiar, or both. Even owning a house is a source of geographic inertia since buying and selling is such a protracted and time-consuming process.

In similar fashion firms develop collaborative relations with other firms in the same locality and these can be a source of competitive advantage.

Firms may share the same labor supply. A virtue of being located next to other firms manufacturing similar products is that when one of them is releasing workers another is likely to be hiring. So labor shortage is unlikely to be a problem in the area whereas moving to a city where the firm is the only one that has those sorts of skill demands is. In short, firms can get locked into areas not just through the productive relations they enter into with other firms but also through the way they may share with those firms labor reserves or suppliers.³

This means that people, firms, organizations may be very dependent on what happens in the area they happen to be located in. People buy houses in neighborhoods and see the house, to some degree at least, as an investment: an asset like stocks or bonds or a savings account on each of which they expect a return. In the case of investment in the house you live in the return is in the form of an increase in its value. But neighborhoods can change as some people leave and others move in, as undeveloped land is rezoned for gas stations or bars. In short, movements in and out can threaten investments in homes. Money has been invested in something which is difficult to move, which is literally embedded in the ground. If values are to be maintained let alone increase, territorial strategies have to be deployed: attempts to structure movements into the area by (e.g.) opposing the rezonings that will allow gas stations or bars or the conversion of existing owner-occupied housing into apartments.

As we have seen, firms likewise get immobilized, dependent on particular localities or those in them, and the continual flow of value through them. But the arrival of new firms in the area can threaten that flow of value and hence their profitability. The increased demand for labor that comes about can result in increased wage levels, particularly if the new arrivals are the branch plants of unionized firms. To the extent that labor shortages are moderated by in-migration then pressure may be transferred to the housing market, and as housing prices increase this too can exercise upward pressure on wages. Yet relocation by the firms so affected to areas where lower wages prevail will be difficult. It may be hard to persuade the workers on whose skills the firms depend to move with them, and training new workers will be a protracted and costly process. And it will certainly be hard to reconstitute elsewhere the collaborative relations with other firms so important to competitiveness.

As a result they can be expected to organize to defend their territory and the advantages it provides them. They may, for example, pressure city government to ease bottlenecks in housing supply so that the upward shift in housing prices can be contained: facilitate the speedier rezoning of

3 Firms may have specialized transport or marketing needs. If located alongside firms producing similar sorts of product demand may be such that these activities can be subcontracted to specialized suppliers able to operate at lower cost. Whereas if the firm is only one in the area with those particular needs it may have to (e.g.) purchase its own trucks, even though it may not need them on a continual basis.

land to higher densities, eliminate delays in servicing raw land with water and sewerage. And the policies that are bringing new firms into the area will also come under review: should city government be so aggressively courting firms to locate their branch plants there, for instance?

We will see in what ensues that territory and territoriality can assume more complex forms: that what is a territorial strategy for some is a threat to the territorial strategies of others. But the relation between mobility and immobility, of movement and embeddedness, is central to the emergence of territory as an issue: to the desire to influence the content of an area. And as we have seen from the examples above, territorial strategies typically draw in some way on the power of the state: its power over rezonings, over local economic development policy, for example. It is therefore entirely appropriate that the state should be our next focus of concern.

The state

For a start, notice how important the state and its various agencies are in regulating geographies: in structuring movements, in defending the interests of the more immobilized, the more embedded. Central governments everywhere regulate movements across their boundaries: movements of people, of commodities and of money. They may restrict imports in order to protect particular industries, their workers and the cities in which they are located from foreign competition. They may also restrict exports for a similar purpose: a duty on exports of American leather protects the shoe making industry by driving up its price to overseas producers at the same time as it lowers it for the American producer. Limits on immigration on the part of the more developed countries⁴ are the norm and so too is the regulation of foreign investment. In the latter regard there are often laws governing the takeover of firms by foreign corporations or foreign investment in certain sensitive industries like arms firms.

Likewise there are things that local government can do that impact on geographic change through their effects on movement. This is despite the fact that central branches of the state protect the freedom of movement of labor

4 Use of the term "more developed countries" raises an important issue for this text. The problem is one of differentiating between countries but not in a way that implies value judgments. The "First World/Third World" distinction clearly implies hierarchy and will not be used. Alternatives to "more developed"/"less developed" are "rich"/"poor" and "North"/"South". I am deterred from using the latter by virtue of its transparent inaccuracy. There are more developed countries in the South, like Australia and New Zealand, and less developed countries in the North, like Egypt or Pakistan. The "rich country"/"poor country" distinction seems no improvement on the "more developed"/"less developed" distinction since to define someone or someplace as poor is often (not always) to imply some sort of lack on their or its part. At least the term "less developed" implies a process of change towards the more developed pole. That gets us into the problem of whether development is a good or a bad thing but it nevertheless softens the sense of invidious distinction between countries. It is, therefore, the term that I will use in the remainder of this book.

and of commodities within national boundaries and so local governments cannot try to achieve their ends by interfering with them: protecting a major local employer by imposing restrictions on the sale of goods from competing firms elsewhere in the country, say. Rather there are other means of structuring location choice. Urban development, the siting of new housing developments, new industrial estates, and the location of new highways must invariably run the gauntlet of a local permitting process: public hearings, rezoning hearings, objections from national public health authorities, and so on.

Nevertheless, the relation between the state on the one hand, and power in society on the other, including power over geography, is not straightforward. Power comes in different forms. Immensely important in contemporary social life is the power of money. This is not something which is foreign to the state. This is because it itself draws on that power in persuading others to do what it wants: tax concessions, subsidies, various forms of duty, the threat of fines. But it is also a power that anyone participating in a market, or for that matter trying to purchase the favors of a legislator, draws on. The power of money is expressed among other things in what urban analysts call the competitive bidding process. The wealthy, by and large, live in the more desirable neighborhoods because they can afford to: they have the money to outbid other would-be purchasers.

Likewise there is the power of the normative. Norms are important in regulating family life and much else besides. It isn't just the power of money that makes us punctual for work; the fear that we will be fired if we don't turn up on time. We have been socialized into it from early childhood on: "do not be late for meals," "do not be late for school," "hurry, or you'll miss the bus." Again, this is something that the state can turn to its own advantage. It is a form of power that it employs through the schools. It is through the educational system, both state schools and the private schools – that are always regulated by the state – that certain rules of good citizenship are imparted. And through its public statements, if not always through its actions, it advocates the ideal of equality as a principle of social justice.

Yet in talking about the state and its relation to various forms of social power we need to bear in mind that the state form is not a universal. There have been societies which lacked states. Some of these exist at the present time in, among other places, the jungles of Amazonia or Borneo. And in many other so-called states, particularly in less developed countries, the power of the state, its ability to penetrate and regulate social life, is weak indeed.

But having said that, a case can be made for some sort of regulation in *all* societies. Government with the intent of harmonizing the activities of different people one with another has been an omnipresent feature of all social life: the household, kinship, and the various norms accompanying them, for example. And indeed today these regulatory mechanisms continue to play a role alongside more historically recent ones like the market. But what is characteristic of the present era is the role of the state as, in effect, the regulator of regulators: as the ultimate guarantor – and limiter – through the law, of the

social power of others, whether that of capitalists, husbands, and parents, or that of money in the abstract. In other words, there can be government without states; but states always entail government.

Territorial strategies are *always* exercises of power. To some degree they may depend on the direct exercise of state power: redrawing the catchment districts of schools so as to simultaneously include some and exclude others; or assigning additional police patrols to a neighborhood. Sometimes, on the other hand, strategies appear to be more private in character. This would apply to the gated community or the private school, both of which can have exclusionary intent. But ultimately they both depend on the state. Gated communities have to be legal, as do private schools. And even if private schools are legal the state can take steps to make them more or perhaps less attractive as territorializing options through the sorts of tax concessions it makes to parents (i.e. whether or not school fees are tax deductible).

But what is attractive about the state as a means of regulating space relations, as a vehicle for the various exclusionary and inclusionary policies different organizations, firms, political parties, residents' organizations push for, is its own territorial character. Consider the variety of possibilities here. Imagine, for example, a state whose power was not territorial in the sense of areal and bounded. What if (e.g.) people who were the citizens of different states were not as they are now, geographically segregated one from another, but geographically *integrated*? Imagine a situation, in other words, in which your next door neighbors, other people living in the same city or region as you belonged not to the same state but to different states: that American citizens lived in the same neighborhood alongside French, German, British, Mexican, Australian, Nigerian citizens *and* they were all subject to the laws of their respective countries.

While on the one hand this might have its advantages – it would make warfare a very difficult enterprise, for example, since “friendly fire” victims would be at least as numerous as enemy dead – it would also make the implementation of other, less lethal, territorial strategies highly problematic. An interest in remedying something like acid rain in response to the demands of people downwind of factories and power stations with high sulfur emissions would be extremely difficult to bring about. This is because it would involve so many independent sovereign powers in multiple, many sided, negotiations with one another: a high level of geographic fragmentation of power where what is needed to remedy the situation is a spatial centralization of power. In other words, what is required is states that respectively enjoy uninterrupted sovereign power over large, continuous areas that in terms of their shape are relatively compact: neither punctured, highly elongated, fragmented, nor indented (figure 1.1). And of course it is precisely towards the latter compact form that states in their jurisdictional geography tend. This is what makes them so appealing to those promoting territorial strategies of various sorts: it promises some sort of resolution of conflicts, though not necessarily in favor of them or their particular territorial projects as opposed to those of others.

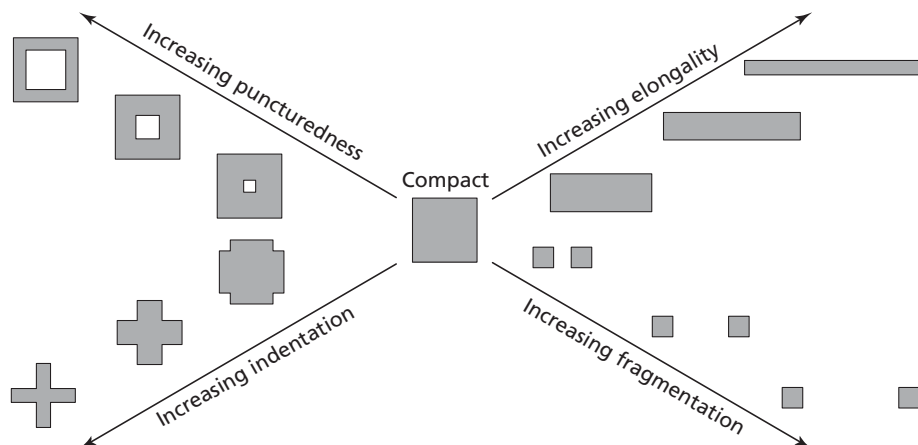


Figure 1.1 Deviations from compactness along four dimensions. Consider the compactness or otherwise of state forms and those jurisdictional subdivisions like the Canadian provinces, British counties, French *départements* and US states in terms of these different dimensions.

Source: P. J. Taylor (1971) "Distances within Shapes: An Introduction to a Family of Finite Frequency Distributions." *Geografiska Annaler*, 53B(1), 43. © Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography.

Think and Learn

In talking about the compactness of state jurisdictions I used the term "tend." Think of exceptions to the compactness rule. What states are elongated, punctured, indented, or fragmented? How would you judge the US or Canada in these regards? Peruse a world atlas in order to identify these deviations.

Significantly, the territorial principle is writ large in the geographic structures of states. The internal organization of the state includes a division into local and central branches and sometimes branches at a more intermediate level (regional or provincial governments, for instance) and these all tend to the same compact form, as a scrutiny of the geometry of the States of the US, the counties of the United Kingdom or the *départements* of France would quickly confirm. The territorial principle likewise extends to representation and to many state policies. The constituencies or Congressional districts that legislators represent are discrete, bounded, relatively compact areas. Compactness is viewed as a virtue to the extent that any serious departure from it is likely to be viewed with suspicion: as signifying, that is, some attempt to manipulate boundaries in order to guarantee a particular electoral outcome.⁵

5 So-called "gerrymandering".

Within state jurisdictions there are yet other partitions that relate not to representation but to actual policies: the land use zones of local governments; the Special Areas of the United Kingdom designated for assistance in attracting new employment; conservation areas, historical districts, urban renewal districts, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, etc.

None of this is accidental. One can say that it is this which makes the state so important to those with territorial interests. But it also reflects the significance of territoriality as an organizing principle of social life. People have territorial interests that they share with at least some people in the same area and which bring them into competition and conflict with those elsewhere. If these interests are to be expressed then it makes sense to organize elections through territorially defined voting districts.⁶ And if they are to be satisfied, then some policies at least should be territorially differentiating.

So it is important that the state's organization be through and through territorial: that there be local as well as central branches; that legislators represent geographically discrete districts; and that there be, for some policies at least, ways of making their incidence geographically differentiated in some way. This is a state in short that is appropriate to the expression and realization of interests of a territorial nature.

But a territorial form that facilitates the expression and realization of one territorial interest may be less satisfactory from the standpoint of others. Just as state policy is a stake, therefore, as people, firms, labor organizations, and so on struggle for policy outcomes enhancing to their neighborhoods, regions, industrial districts, and countries, so too is *the structure* of the state itself. We will see later that a major issue dividing people, firms, and other organizations has been the internal organization of the state in its territorial aspects: the degree to which, that is, the state should be a highly centralized one, one which reserves few powers and responsibilities for more local branches, as opposed to one that decentralizes a good deal of its power to more local or regional levels. Recently this has come to the fore in the UK with the implementation of some devolution of power to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. It is also of ongoing significance in debate about the future form of the European Union. But it is not just the territorial organization of the state that is contested. Modes of representation, how territorial they should be, have often surged to the fore as an issue. In the US Senate each State has two Senators regardless of population; so representation is by State rather than proportional to State population. But in Canada there is no such equality between the provinces. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the less populous provinces there are pushing for a US-style Senate.

The social process and political geography

What is lacking from this picture is some sense of what energizes the political process in a geographic context. It is not enough to refer to territorial inter-

6 Though we will see later that this is actually not a universal in democracies.

ests and projects in the abstract. They always have some substantive content. They are interests in particular things, practices, relations. Ultimately, as I remarked earlier, our interest has to be in relating to the material world: in harnessing its naturally occurring substances and forces in order to realize our changing needs for sustenance, shelter, affection, creative expression, etc. This is why no human science can ignore the relationship to nature, including, of course, our own nature. But this relationship is always socially mediated. It is always in and through our relations with others that we relate to nature (as in production, narrowly conceived) and our own nature (as in the socialization process). So our needs assume socially mediated forms. In the advanced industrial societies of today they become interests in profits, wages, property values, trade, labor, and housing markets: in other words interests in categories that only make sense given the existence of a capitalist society, and that are *entailed* by it.

Other stakes are less obviously related to capitalist development and the material objectives of those participating in it. These include demands as diverse as upholding the national honor, protecting particular landscapes from development, recognizing favorite daughters or sons by creating national holidays in their honor, or controlling the activities of white policemen in black neighborhoods. All these seem a little remote from money making and distributing among various claimants the wealth so produced. What ties them together is in part the symbolic: actions that recognize, accord respect (or disrespect, perhaps, in the case of the white policemen). What are at stake are less objectives of an instrumental nature (achieving them as a means to an end) but ones that are more consummatory in character, that by their very writing into law perform an important symbolic role for some people.

On the other hand, these different types of demand are not unrelated either. Struggles for recognition are often prosecuted through mobilizing the power of money. The recognition of Martin Luther King Day has been an issue in a number of the American States. One of the ways in which blacks and white liberals have sought to achieve their ends has been through influencing the location of national conventions. In other words, if Arizona refused to recognize Martin Luther King Day then various professional associations threatened to move their conventions, with all their implications for local hotel and restaurant trades, to cities in other States. Similarly, in South Africa the black boycott of white stores became a favored tactic in the dying days of apartheid.

Conversely, in more clearly economic struggles, struggles in which the ultimate stakes are ones of wages, welfare benefits, etc., leverage of a more moral sort may be resorted to: "our rights as British citizens" fairly cries out for recognition not on instrumental grounds but as an end in itself.⁷ In the United States blacks struggle for improved life chances through the educational system. One of their arguments is that they are disadvantaged through the

7 In other words, policies should be such as to recognize certain claims because to do so imparts respect and dignity to the people making them – as if the increased public benefits are a mere unintended consequence!

cultural bias of educational testing instruments, i.e. that those who are different are being marginalized, being treated unfairly. So cultural struggles are often conducted, at least in part, through the exercise of economic leverage and vice versa.

But what does this imply for how we approach questions in political geography? Does it mean that in thinking about the economic and the cultural, the material and the symbolic, and how they articulate with the politics of space, we should see them as *independent* sources of social power, as substitutable one for another depending on circumstance? There are several quite crucial points to bear in mind here.

First, any social process, indeed any action we perform in society, has a diversity of aspects. It is, for example, both material and ideal. A necessity of our existence is that we have to relate to the material world. We have to transform it into usable forms and then consume or experience the product. But in order to relate to the material world, to produce, to consume, or whatever the material practice is, we have to have some idea of what we are doing: how to cultivate, how to operate, how to cook, how to assemble. On the other hand, practice is a precondition for our ideas. It is in terms of those material practices that our ideas about them change and, for example, new technologies are developed.

Likewise, action is invariably both individual and social. People are irredeemably social creatures. They depend on others for (e.g.) the systems of communication like language through which they acquire ideas about nature and how to appropriate useful things from it; they depend on others through a division of labor. This socialized nature of what we do does not mean to say that we can read off individual thoughts and actions from a knowledge of forms of communication and the division of labor. These change and it is people who do the changing. They develop new modes of communication, new metaphors, perhaps, new roles in the division of labor. But they always do these things using the raw materials provided by the existing division of labor and existing forms of communication. Nothing is totally novel. So while people are indeed creative and can change things, can make a difference, if often only to infinitesimally slight degrees, they do not do it out of nothing. The resources they draw on are social in character and available to others, though perhaps not in the same sort of mix.

Finally, the social process is always cultural, always political and, one might add, always spatial. Culture enters in the form of the meaning systems through which we are able to interact meaningfully with others and with the material world in general. It is always political because some invariably have power over others by virtue of (e.g.) some skill or knowledge lacking but important to others. And it is always spatial because it requires connections over space with others and (again) the material world in its entirety. If we want to interact with others we have to get close to them. If we need water we need to move in the direction of the tap or the water fountain.

We can, in short, think of social processes in terms of mutually presupposing parts, though without consigning those processes to stasis, to stagnation,

to always reproducing what was there before and in the same forms. There is change. People are inventive, they come up with new ways of doing things; but only through a contact with the material world that is invariably socially mediated. Likewise this idea of mutually presupposing parts, how the material entails the ideal and vice versa, how the material practice entails the social and vice versa, should not lead us to the view that that is all there is to their interrelations. Some things are more fundamental than others, some aspects are more conditions than they are conditioned. As Marx and Engels (1845–6, p. 48) famously remarked:

we must begin by stating the first premise of all human existence and, therefore, of all history, the premise, namely, that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to “make history.” But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life.

The development of social and intellectual life as we know it today would have been impossible without a relation to the material world of a particular sort: one of control and the harnessing of natural forces to productive purposes, that enables people to be productive on a virtually heroic scale. Without it there would be no schools, universities, opera, libraries, foreign holidays, modern medicine, pensions, and so on.

One can, of course, retort that that development of productive abilities has in turn depended on particular social configurations, particular ideas and insights, and that is true. But not *any* meanings, social relations, power relations are effective in this regard. In organizing a hunt we would not give the role of coordinator to someone who had never hunted before. And mobilizing the power of steam or aerodynamics to productive purposes depends on getting the equations right.

The fact is, the material world – the world of physical, chemical, and biological objects and forces – has its own ways of acting. Material objects, as diverse as pylons and people, have their own powers and limitations. As far as people are concerned, it is by virtue of our own nature, our own material nature, that we can develop ideas,⁸ new social forms, and have, unlike other organisms, social and technical revolutions. But our nature is also limiting. These powers have to be deployed, as the quote above indicates, towards satisfying our material needs. As we develop new material needs so this necessity reasserts itself in new forms. And how we go about satisfying those material needs in turn depends on the nature of the material world outside us.

8 If you disagree with this emphasis on the material conditioning of thought consider what happens to a person’s powers of cognition and of thinking when the material character of the brain changes, as with Alzheimer’s or a tumor.

But this is to talk in very general terms. It applies to social life anywhere and everywhere. While the material is primary quite how it all works out depends on more concrete forms of social life and these change over time and space. Again, this is not to argue that all social forms are possible. They have to be such that material needs can be satisfied. Of those concrete social forms capitalism is one. We live in a capitalist society and this has distinct implications for the social process and therefore for the political geography of the contemporary world. Capitalism is, in fact, thoroughly consequential.

In the first place under capitalism the different aspects of the social process, the material and the ideal, the cultural, the political, etc., are separated out and *seemingly* take on lives of their own as independent forces. But only apparently. So, for example, some of our material relations, in particular those that require commodity exchange, are reconstituted as something that we start calling "the economic." One important consequence of this is that what goes on in the household is not defined as "economic." Housewives work – they cook, make beds, launder and a whole variety of other material practices – but since they don't get a wage for their work they are not defined as part of the economy, except, of course, when they make forays to the supermarket and purchase things, i.e. enter into commodity exchange.

Alongside the idea of a distinct economic sphere arise notions about the political, the cultural, the spatial as independent areas of social life with their own distinct logics. Likewise we come to see the material as separate from the ideal, as in books with titles like *Great Ideas that Changed the World*.⁹ In part this is a consequence of the division of labor subsequent to capitalist development. There are, for instance, not only assembly line workers who supposedly work only with their hands but also scientists who, it is believed, do their work with their heads. There are captains of industry who are classified as part of the economy but also politicians whose specialty is power and using it. Likewise the cultural appears in a (again, seemingly) separate form as art museums, folkways, ethnic groups with their own languages and practices, newspapers and the media, literature, and so on.

This appearance of separation, however, is misleading: everything we do involves both a material practice and some idea of what we are doing whether we work on an assembly line or in a research laboratory. Likewise art museums have their politics as much as corporations do and they also depend for their continued existence on a healthy economy. But things do *seem* to take on a life of their own and give credence to the view that there is a culture separate from an economy which is separate from the state which is separate from technology and other material practices and so forth. Indeed, the state may well act as if the economy didn't matter and the economy as if space relations were of no consequence. But the unity of these different aspects of the social process will – necessarily – reassert itself: states will go bankrupt as will firms in the "wrong" locations.

This suggests that the active, structuring process, what holds things together, what integrates, what drives the social process forward is capitalism

9 For example, Robert B. Downs (ed.) (1956) *Books that Changed the World*. New York: Mentor Books.