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**An Interview with Alain Reynaud**  
by Bernard Bret  
(11 april 2011)

**with extracts of Alain Reynaud, 1981, *Société, Espace et Justice*, Paris, PUF, 263p.**

Translation: Sharon Winkler Moren

JSSJ : Alain Reynaud, thank you for welcoming us. In 1981, you published a book under the title *Société, Espace et Justice* [translation: *Society, Space and Justice*], with Presses Universitaires de France that made an impression on many geographers and others working in social sciences. We therefore felt it would be interesting, 30 years after this work appeared, to hear what you had to say on some of the points dealt with in it. The themes addressed were completely new at that time. The first question will therefore pertain to how your book was received in geography in France and abroad.

Alain Reynaud: Reception was quite mixed, with reservations and rejections, which was relatively normal at a time when there was a great deal of tension among geographers. There was also, I realized later, a genuine interest on the part of a certain number of colleagues. As for the reservations, these pertained to the new forms of geography that were in the process of being established.

JSSJ: The theme was groundbreaking, at least in geography in France. It was better known among certain economists, such as Samir Amin and André Gunder Frank. In geography, some were concerned with inequalities (remember that Yves Lacoste's book on the geography of underdevelopment had come out in 1965), but from a very different approach, which did not include the concepts of centre and periphery.

AR: Exactly. Samir Amin's book had interested me a great deal and in the 1970s, I wanted to work in this direction, but as a geographer. The theme summarized some of the concerns at the time. For me, it was a matter of dealing with the spatial aspect, trying to go in depth from the geographer's perspective by fine-tuning a broader vocabulary than the simple centre-periphery contrast. Later, the tensions among geographers caused me to somewhat withdraw and led me to become interested in topics of historical geography like ancient China. I was unexpectedly led to apply the concepts of centre and periphery to a very distant past. China of the Spring and Autumn Period – the name of the period between the 8th and 5th centuries B.C – was an unusual area for geographers!

JSSJ: Which undoubtedly validates the idea of centre and periphery as a model that is applicable to quite diverse configurations.

AR: Yes. In the case of China, it was by taking into account the long length, two and a half centuries, and trying to grasp the evolutions, transformations and reversals in spatial organization.

JSSJ: These concepts were also more familiar to certain historians, who you of course cite, like Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein. If we stay in the field of geography but outside of France, English-language geographers had shown themselves to be more sensitive than their French colleagues to the theme of spatial justice. What was the response to your book among geographers in these countries?

AR: There was hardly any response at all from the Anglo-Saxons. On the other hand, there was a translation into Italian.

JSSJ: Which is very fine, obviously, but Italian is not a great language for communication on a world scale. The fact remains that many of your readers were surprised that your work had not had a greater impact and new editions in French.

AR: The first run of 1,800 copies was sold out in a few years, and, it's true, there were no more printings.

JSSJ: Thank you all the more for having agreed to JSSJ reprinting a few excerpts with their English translations.

AR: I'll go back over the context when it appeared. The work that I did was in keeping with geography of the time, where the topics were land use and development, where regional inequalities were raised and (human) desertification was a hot topic. In a certain way, I had placed myself in a broader movement. But what I was doing could be disturbing for two reasons. The first was the degrees of spatial scale in play, since I was forever moving on the same page, in the same paragraph, indeed, in the same sentence, from one degree to another by going from the urban neighbourhood to the world. At this time, geography was preferentially concerned with the smaller degrees of spatial scale, i.e., the regional and even the local. We were accustomed to dealing with one degree of the spatial scale, and one degree at a time. Accordingly, in the eyes of many colleagues, my approach did not appear to be very serious. The second reason was clearly my willingness to conceptualize and theorize. This caused a great deal of concern among geographers claiming that their work was concrete, practical, a position that was beginning to be debated but still had many followers.

JSSJ: While allowing that there are a number of legitimate geographers, the idea that conceptualizing is considered frightening in the social sciences is nonetheless astonishing ....

AR: Of course, but that was a state of mind that existed for a long time in geography. However, since the late 1960s, a shift was occurring, with the period of greatest tensions being the early 1980s. The matter was finally resolved in the 1990s: today, geographers work on an extreme variety of themes from equally varied perspectives, but they tend to accept one another without wanting to exclude those who may move away from a dominant line.

JSSJ: You say you were in sync with the issues being discussed then, but the fundamental originality of your work was precisely to systematize observations in an explanatory model, in other words, to go on to conceptualization.

AR: Yes, that is an underlying tendency of mine but it was not the rule. I had been faced with this problem in physical geography and geomorphology in particular, which had been my main area of interest during my studies. Suddenly, I wanted the equivalent in human geography.

JSSJ: How do you perceive the revival of the theme of justice in geography? The question had not been abandoned by English-speaking geographers, but in France, even though your work stood out without however having the effect it might have deserved, there is the impression that not much happened afterwards until just the last few years.

AR: It seems fairly normal to me to see the theme of spatial justice rekindled at this time, as we are in an era where inequalities, particularly spatial inequalities, are growing. So, social scientists again want to reflect upon them. Of course, inequalities existed thirty or forty years ago but they were tending to diminish, socially and spatially, and we were in a period of was strong growth. Today, there is hardly any growth, at the very least in the most developed countries, and the inequalities are worsening.

JSSJ: All the same, in the 1970s and 80s, the inequalities were great and other social sciences besides geography were exploring them.

AR: Of course, but to write the book, I was basing myself on numerous books and articles on geography. In other words, the themes I was working on were between the lines or explicit in many publications. What didn't exist was the systemization in a model with a well thought out vocabulary for translating the various aspects of the situation and its multiple nuances.

JSSJ: This effort to name the situations and understand how the model evolved had a huge significance.

AR: The favourable reception that some of my colleagues gave this work showed that the need existed in the field.

JSSJ: There is nonetheless a point to be clarified. The concept of justice as implied in your work consists of the equality among individuals and therefore, from your perspective, among territories. From reading your work, it seems that the search for justice is the search for equality among socio-spatial classes through compensatory mechanisms. This remains a distributive justice point of view tending to equalization of conditions. Do you still see the matter in this way, or can spatial differentiation possibly reveal inequalities that would be beneficial to everyone and which thus would not be contrary to fairness? This is a theoretical reflection but one that may help to qualify the various actual configurations. To place the question in the centre-periphery model again, is a periphery necessarily in an inequitable situation compared to the centre?

AR: In some cases inequality may not be felt. One may be very well be satisfied with the territorial setting one is living in and not be aware of the peripheral situation one is in. To speak about "centre" and "periphery", things must be seen from higher up, unless you're in an extreme situation with very difficult living conditions. A difference only becomes an inequality if it is perceived, felt and experienced as such.

JSSJ: Of course, how a fair or unfair situation is felt by people is fundamental, but we can qualify a situation as being fair or unfair through analysis without having experienced the situation ourselves. The question remains therefore asked on a theoretical plane of knowing if inequality necessarily involves an injustice. Which brings us back to wondering what exactly justice is. Does it merge with equality or not?

AR: The purpose of seeking socio-spatial justice is never, it seems to me, arriving at perfect equality of territories. Rather, it is a matter of mitigating existing inequalities because the spontaneous trend is the aggravation of inequalities, which may end up being counterproductive for those who find themselves in the most favoured situation, since when inequalities are pushed to the extreme, whether they are social or territorial, they generate tensions and immobilization. Personally, I have the impression that we have a problem of regional inequalities pushed to their extreme with Ivory Coast. Some say that it's more complex because there have been internal migrations toward Abidjan. Regardless, there is definitely a North-South contrast that led to armed conflicts and a civil war. And this contrast is also found in neighbouring countries. Nigeria in particular comes to mind.

JSSJ: Your book sets out territorial redistributions as a partial remedy to inequalities. How can the present crisis and particularly the "Nanny State" crisis negatively impact this redistributive justice?

AR: With regard to the Nanny State crisis, the redistributive mechanisms put in place in the 1950s still exist but are weaker, bearing in mind the weak growth and deficits of States and territorial collectives. But even during the heyday of the Nanny State, these mechanisms were

nothing but corrections to the spontaneous evolutions initiated by the economic decision makers. So, in the United States, the industries of the Manufacturing Belt shifted towards the South from the 1960s through the 80s. I had studied Arkansas in this regard. This shift was not related to State intervention. Businesses simply saw that it was in their interests to move to the South (lower wages and no unions). Today, we're witnessing a shift of industries from the United States and Europe toward emerging countries. The mechanism is the same but on another scale: it is in businesses' interests to move to Indonesia, Vietnam or China.

JSSJ: With this major difference: there is a border between the country of origin and the destination.

AR: Without any doubt. Crossing political borders is of particular importance that some people seem to have forgotten when they claim there are no more borders. Clearly, there still are. Today, we observe a definite sort of masochism on the part of developed countries which at times give the impression of wanting to emphasize this offshoring. Supranational interventions such as those of the WTO go in the direction of accepting this mechanism, not toward wanting to reject it or slow it down but rather toward speeding it up.

JSSJ: When you reject the statement that there are no more borders, I'm totally with you. This cliché is complete idiocy. What is true is that borders function differently now. They're no longer walls that isolate and would block international flow, however, they are still the boundaries of territorial laws, particularly tax and social laws. Instead of putting a halt to international flow, they increase it, as there would be no reason to go offshore if legislation were the same everywhere on a worldwide scale.

AR: Exactly.

JSSJ: Globalization was already underway in 1981 but it has developed since. Has this overturned the centre-periphery model configurations to the point of seeing the scales differently, and have some of the concepts that you had developed, such as the isolate or the blind spot, remained relevant?

AR: I do not believe that the model is outdated.

JSSJ: The general model, certainly not. The question is one of the currency of certain forms identified thirty years ago.

AR: The "isolate" and "blind spot" seemed to me to be starting and end concepts. It's a starting concept because the first organized groups of humans were generally far apart from one another and had weak means of communication; they lived in a closed circuit. The term "isolate" must be used here. In the case of Ancient China, the passage from isolates to connections of growing importance over time and leading to contrasts of the centre and periphery type is greatly felt. Regarding the "blind spot", this is a variation of the "isolate", with a low-density population and weak internal organization. It's an end concept because the "blind spot" can also be the end of evolution when the dominated periphery has gone on to the neglected phase, then de-structured; some would say desertified. This then brings us to the residual "blind spot", which we had examples of during the 1980s and 90s in some fragments of what was called "la France du vide" [tr. empty France].

JSSJ: The model, precisely because it is a model, provides an effective grid for interpreting quite varied situations.

AR: It seems to me that what I was suggesting in my findings has happened, namely, the dominated peripheries becoming integrated peripheries. What has happened in the last thirty years? Unquestionably, the growing importance of very large cities everywhere in the world, in other words these megalapolises, that Paul Valéry was already calling immense

cities in the 1930s, and which the poet Emile Verhaeren named tentacular cities in the late 19th century. These very large cities, which are increasingly numerous, are both world cities and city-worlds. They affect how the world functions but they are also worlds unto themselves. These cities took on extreme dimensions and after awhile, they fine-tuned. They tended to get rid of activities that had become unimportant to their scale, considering their other roles. They thus sought an outlet in the peripheries, which became integrated, with a reversal in the flow of capital and finally, migration. In France, in the 1950s and 60s, the cities surrounding Paris experienced multiple benefits from the transformations of Paris, including universities, industries and services. But these benefits are not always of the highest level, which means that the universities tend to specialize in undergraduate programs, services were the transfer of bank records and today are call centres. Another example that was striking to me is Shanghai. Prior to the 1978 upheaval in China, Shanghai appeared to be a dominant centre penalized by government power, which distrusted this metropolis that had formerly been linked to the capitalist world and for this reason, had a poor brand image. After 1980, Shanghai very quickly became a hyper-centre and has gradually de-industrialized, outsourcing to the Yang Tse Kiang delta. On the world scale, industrial outsourcing to emerging countries at first was able to appear to be a phenomenon integrating formerly peripheral countries, but we are now beyond that and are perhaps witnessing a major redealing of the cards: former dominant centres (Europe, the U.S., Japan) in a state of relative stagnation and former peripheries perhaps finally transforming themselves into dominant centres. The expression emerging countries is in danger of becoming obsolete over the years – i.e. once they've emerged. Some of these regions and cities become genuine centres. If we are looking for a city that in the 21st century would properly symbolize what Fernand Braudel had eloquently illustrated with Venice in the 15th and 16th centuries, Amsterdam in the 17th and London in the 18th and 19th centuries and then New York in the 20th, it would be Shanghai. Every time there is a shift from one dominant centre to another, the former continued to exist but no longer at the top of the hierarchy.

JSSJ: The other major transformation in recent years is the collapse of the Soviet block. We are familiar with the scenario and the interpretation that has been given by some, when Francis Fukuyama wanted to interpret this as the end of history, starting from the moment when the market economy spread everywhere. This was undoubtedly a bit simplistic as it's hard to see why history would stop. That said, how do you see Russia among emerging countries? Does it really make sense to place Russia in the same category as Brazil or India?

AR: That is in fact a problem. Russia at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century could call to mind Brazil or Mexico at the same time.

JSSJ: Meaning Mexico during the period from 1875 to 1910 when Porfirio Diaz was in power and which corresponded to a modernization perceived by some people there as a threat to their collective identity.

AR: The evolutions in Russia were somewhat the same as those in Mexico and comparable to what happened later in Iran. In all cases, rapid industrialization propelled from outside and a governing class that was turned inward, in other words, a situation that was not in tune with the internal realities and which culminated in a revolution. The 1917 Russian Revolution is highlighted but not enough attention has been given to the revolution that took place in Mexico from 1910 to 1920 and which resulted in the establishment of an original regime led by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (IRP), a name that is not correctly understood from the outside. The original feature of the Soviet Union was that of being a dominant centre from a political perspective, in the same capacity as the United States, but with a fragile economic base. Between those two, Western Europe had economic power comparable to that of the United States but was politically nearly non-existent. Only the United States had

everything. Today, Russia has lost its political weight, a portion of its territory and its population. It is somewhat betwixt and between.

JSSJ: Its ability to recover is a credible and even likely scenario. But in its current situation, it would seem highly questionable to count it among emerging countries.

AR: Russia is a special case. Since the fall of the USSR, Russia has been living off its raw materials and energy resources.

JSSJ: Russia's economic profile is that of a well-off country, which is contrary to the idea of an emerging country. Truth be told, Russian is coming out of a collapse.

AR: China as well was coming out of a collapse but has overcome it. In the USSR, after the Stalin years, there was no economic boom and the problems were such that when Gorbachev attempted a complete overhaul, he failed and it all exploded. In the case of China, a few months after Mao's death not only had China transformed itself, it had transformed the world, too. After several decades of Maoism and terrible ordeals, China was able to turn around in very little time.

JSSJ: Another point to be examined among the changes to discuss is decentralization. How do you see this from the spatial justice perspective? If it is a means for bringing citizens closer to power, decentralization can be interpreted as an advance in democracy but doesn't it also include the risk of producing territorial selfishness from the time that budget responsibilities are brought to bear on the regional or even local scale? This can paralyze the central government's discretion and limit its role as redistributor.

AR: Yes. There, too, the scales must be played on. Every time a territory has financial autonomy, this is a problem for transfers and redistributions among comparable territories. The hesitations occur at all scales, expressed by the idea Every man for himself. Agglomerations are the typical example. If there is a geographical object that appears to be unquestionable, it's indeed the agglomeration. We know fairly accurately where it stops. It is visible on the map and on the terrain. In France as elsewhere in the world, agglomerations are made up of 5, 10, 20, 50 communes or even more, which remain independent from one another. Of course, they have ties, but despite the cooperation between neighbouring communes, this municipal splitting interferes with spatial justice, that is to say, the automatic equalizations and impede democracy, i.e. direct elections. Exactly like at the European scale, those in charge are obliged to consider composite majorities, resulting in this case from the figure of representatives of each of the communes. In the United States, in the outlying areas of the agglomerations, where there is no communal splitting but just counties, there are subdivisions whose residents request a special status: that of a minimal city which only takes charge of certain public services. Result: low taxes for favoured populations, the rest being provided by the county – where the standard of living may possibly not be as high. So this is a matter of making the poor pay! Another example illustrating the role of government limits involves urban planning regulations. In Los Angeles, an immense urban blot, the communal boundaries are highly meaningful; when you go from one commune to another, the landscape often changes brutally simply because the regulations for urban development change. If the regulation prohibits, for example, building on a lot smaller than 1500 square metres, it's obvious that the choice was made to exclude middle and modest incomes. Although different, other municipal measures are the result of the same concern: rejection of the poor. In France, why else would communes thus prefer paying a fine rather than abiding by the quotas set by law for social housing?

JSSJ: So, there are centres that try to get rid of their peripheries, or at least the burdens that they could cause. On a different scale, don't these phenomena have convergences with the practices of micro-State tax havens like Monaco or Liechtenstein?

AR: There are comparable mechanisms.

JSSJ: Decentralization can therefore put up barriers against redistribution mechanisms. On the other hand, it can consolidate existing collective identities that are felt to a greater or lesser degree. This leads to another question. Your work envisions an essentially economic justice, in other words, the redistribution of property. Can this concept be extended to other areas besides the economic, that is, specifically the recognition of collective identities? For example, we can think about the fate of minorities and immigrant populations in Europe or elsewhere. Even supposing that the material conditions provided to them are fair, and it's far from being the case everywhere, does the recognition of their identity as a group come under socio-spatial justice?

AR: Yes, it's possible but there is less importance placed on this. This assumes that a group is gathered in the same area. Often, ghettos are left to their miserable fate and considered dangerous. In the same way as dangerous classes were spoken of, there are dangerous areas. In any case, the government is not really that interested.

JSSJ: In 2006, in speaking about the configurations that the centre-periphery model takes, Pierre Veltz remarked that today the centres can choose their peripheries without being restricted to their immediate surroundings. How do you see that?

AR: It's a phenomenon of deterritorialization. The large metropolises end up becoming indifferent to what's going on around them and more interested in what's going on far away. Thus, in the 19th century, Chicago was indeed the Midwestern metropolis. Then Chicago became a world city and suddenly, what happened in the Midwest was of much less interest to Chicago. Management of the Midwest is entrusted to more modest cities, whereas Chicago concerns itself with relations with London or Shanghai.

JSSJ: By the same token, might we then suggest that Paris is more concerned about what happens in other world cities and major economies of the world than by what goes on in Brie or Champagne?

AR: Yes. The situation is no longer that of the 19th century where cities attracted men and resources primarily from the nearby regions.

JSSJ: This observation is essentially an answer to the argument heard occasionally that globalization would invalidate the centre-periphery model because current relations should be pictured more in networks than in spatial continuity. Criticism of this type seems to have misunderstood what a model is.

AR: Yes. That being so, although distant ties are necessary, so are those nearby. In the case of Paris, relations are on a world scale, but Paris also has a role in France and finds itself in the heart of a region that is, moreover, less important geographically than the region around Lyon.

JSSJ: What you're saying is an invitation to pursue a multi-scale process that expresses centre-periphery relations on a world scale and relations that operate on regional and local scales. This form does not call the model into question. It is based on it and explains current configurations.

AR: There are two things that mustn't be confused: the fact of living in pleasant conditions and the fact of deciding. Certain urban phenomena tend to become homogenized. This

means that in France, the small cities no longer have the provincial allure they had in the 1950s and 60s. Rural spaces are host to well-off retirees and have the advantages of living conditions comparable to those of the large cities, indeed, better, because there is less stress. On the other hand, decision-making and innovation are just as unequally distributed as yesterday, and perhaps moreso. Who designs the products? Developed countries and very large cities. Who manufactures them? Countries and cities on the periphery. Who consumes them? Everyone. I am struck seeing that it no longer automatically says on items made in but occasionally designed in (California, for example) and assembled in (China, for example).

JSSJ: Your remark is along the same lines as the work by Laurent Davezies entitled *La République et ses territoires* [tr.: *The republic and its territories*] which develops the following idea: mobility in the broadest sense (travel from home to work, tourism, changes of residence related to the life cycle) lead to distinguishing the places where wealth is produced and the places where it is consumed. The former are centres and the latter, peripheries but peripheries where life is often better than in the centres. Therefore, the model must be considered not only through production as measured by GDP but also by consumption.

AR: This does not fundamentally change the inequality in decision-making power.

JSSJ: Of course, but saying that Paris has decision-making power no longer allows us to say that the Parisians have, on average, a favoured position compared to those in the country. This statement has become obsolete considering the prices of land and real estate, in addition to many other material constraints. Thus, penalizing Paris to support the provinces goes counter to actual living conditions and places the burden of risk on the capital even though it is no longer in competition with Toulouse or Lyon but with London or Tokyo. Suddenly, it's making the provinces that benefit from Paris' vitality bear some risk, too. This conclusion means that socio-spatial justice requires that centres like Paris must be strengthened even if equitably redistributing the wealth produced is then necessary.

AR: It's the idea that support has to go to that which is working best.

JSSJ: It's taking territories' competitiveness into account.

AR: There is something to be said for this idea but we have to be careful that this is not done at the expense of already weak territories. It's true that some areas are host to well-off retirees. This is the case for the Côte d'Azur, Périgord (with many English), the Costa del Sol and more. These people bring resources, wealth. Moreover, they take trips to their country or region of origin where they have kept ties. Certain places can thus be qualified as "associats", to use my term. But the phenomenon is really not significant as it only involves well-off populations.

JSSJ: This fits in with the question just asked about the point of knowing if spatial justice is necessarily achieved through equalization or if strengthening certain centres for producing wealth that will be consumed elsewhere is not more beneficial to everyone.

AR: That can be more effective. It all depends on the size of the transfers. If the transfers are massive, you end up weakening the centre, which becomes counter-productive. At any rate, that's not the current trend. Social and territorial redistributions are instead being reduced; social redistributions because the coffers are empty, and territorial redistributions because decentralization makes now-autonomous territorial communities contribute to the expenditures.

JSSJ: We come across this recurring matter regarding development: Should certain places be favoured with the intention of creating hubs of development or should favour be "sprinkled" about in concern for equality?

AR: This is ineffective as there cannot be spatial indifferenciation. Concentration is justified therefore, but you have to know how to stop. In the distribution of roles, all are not equal. Reims would like to make us believe that the city has become a French metropolis, from whence the official name Reims métropole [tr.: the metropolis of Reims] to designate the agglomeration community, and even a metropolis on a European scale. Now, all you have to do is refer to a recent study by the National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies somewhat naively reproduced by the city paper, to see that it's no such thing: 20% of the working population of Paris are employed in decision-making jobs, 15% in genuine provincial metropolises and – 7% in Reims; in other words, scarcely more than in Amiens. The truth is that Reims remains primarily a satellite city of Paris.

JSSJ: There's nothing ultimately wrong with that, after all, and it gives the city a useful role that benefits its citizens. Conversely, wanting to operate in a niche that is unsuited to the city in consideration, isn't that missing the mark or putting the wrong foot forward?

AR: In any regard, it's harbouring a great deal of illusions.

JSSJ: Another aspect of spatial justice to be considered is citizenship.

AR: Citizenship is exercised through elections. Now, the electoral boundaries are often ill-suited to reality, added to which is the pressure exerted on the elected officials by the technocrats. Last year I read something by two scholars in the field of development in Bratislava that, faced with the incompetence of the voters and the elected, structures should be created "to avoid the dominance of the political powers over the administration and technical implementation"<sup>1</sup>!

JSSJ: This is pleading in favour of technocracy, power to the technicians, against democracy and power to the people!

AR: And this was said in a country where democracy is recent! Of course, these authors say they want popular participation but add that the associations do not translate the wishes of the people and are not competent. If we come back to voting, the problem with indirect elections remains in intercommunalities. Add the problem of low voter turnout for municipal elections. If those voting are representative, in other words, if they are a sample in the statistical sense, they would translate the collective sentiment. But this is not the case and to the extent that some categories of the population vote more than others, sociologically and spatially, democracy itself is what's at risk. In Reims, there is 50% voter turnout for municipal elections but 70% in the periphery, while the Croix-Rouge peripheral neighbourhood only has 20-40% voter turnout, according to the offices. Fractions of population, and similarly, territories, are not represented.

JSSJ: There is also the problem of how electoral districts are carved. It's a great classic of electoral geography but is worth recalling as it results in not all voices having the same statistical weight.

AR: In the United States electoral districts are fairly regularly redrawn to take demographic changes into account.

JSSJ: Yes, however the problem remains of boundaries "made-to-measure" and suspected of favouring one camp or another.

AR: That's true. It's the problem of gerrymandering...

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<sup>1</sup> Translator's note: Quoted in English in the French text. SWM

JSSJ: One last question but it's double. Regarding knowledge, does the concept of justice seem to you to be an effective grid for interpreting and analyzing territories? With regard to action, can geography help produce more justice?

AR: That's a broad question! With regard to the first, the concept of justice can drive arguments based on geography. Simply stated, if government gave up intervening, we would be studying something that no longer exists, except if we were to study the opposite - spatial injustice. With regard to the second, which has been a question that has been around since the 1960s, geographers can present their supported information, and then it's up to the politicians to do what they think is best. The idea of geographers imposing their ideas would crop up only to lapse into technocracy.

JSSJ: But like others, geographers can make a useful contribution to civic debate.

AR: No doubt, but I will contemplate the question differently and cautiously. Let's look at recent social movements in France. During the debate on the "first hiring contract" proposed by the Villepin government in 2006, we heard many scholars give their opinions. Outcome: the economists came out strongly in favour, whereas the sociologists were strongly against. This means that the economists aligned themselves with business and the sociologists with employees. What value should we place on the social sciences when there are such greatly opposed points of view, neither of which can claim to be objective?

JSSJ: The social sciences are not exact sciences. Thank you very much for this discussion.

### **Society, Space and Justice, extracts**

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"Examining the concept of socio-spatial class alongside that of socio-economic class (or social class, if we wish to remain faithful to the vocabulary in use) presents a dual benefit: on the one hand, the use of the adjective "socio" roots this concept in society and prevents the frequent but unproductive opposition of social and spatial; on the other hand, this concept invites unification of the theory of social space differentiation at all degrees of the spatial scale.

A social group living on a space thus forms a socio-spatial class. The definition given by Armand Frémont of social space does not only apply to a "[translation] relatively limited but not isolated" space but pertains in different ways and with various nuances, to all degrees of the spatial scale: "a rather strong combination of people's relationships with each other and people's relationships with places is marked by a distinctive consistency of which the men and women in the group are clearly aware."

By giving our attention to anthropologically "primitive" societies, very strong ties can frequently be observed between a population and the territory it occupies. According to Joël Bonnemaïson, in the New Hebrides "[translation] each group does much more than coincide with its territory; it 'is' this territory. In the ideology of the traditional society there is an absolute identification between man and the soil and thence, a territorial fixation ideal." In Madagascar, Jean-Pierre Raison speaks about geographic societies, the definition of which is somewhat like the concept of socio-spatial class, as "[translation] the belonging to a given place expresses belonging to a social unit defined as much by space as by family relations."

Without reaching these extreme forms of attachment to places, where in certain cases people cannot leave their territory without giving up their identities, belonging to a same socio-spatial class ordinarily leads to two consequences: on the one hand, an at least partial trend to cultural

homogenization, and on the other, the self-definition of the social group in relation to the other neighboring groups in terms of interiority, identity and frequently, superiority. Without emphasizing purely local anecdotal parochial squabbles, one need look no further than the way in which Parisians of all socio-economic origins easily speak of "provincials", who give it right back to them with the proverb "Parisiens têtes de chiens, parigots têtes de veaux" "[translation] Parisians, dogs' heads, Parisians, calves' heads"<sup>2</sup>. To say nothing of the stereotypes that every people uses to describe neighboring peoples.

Regarding urban socio-spatial classes: the Greek cities of the 6th to 4th centuries B.C.; Nuremberg, Genoa, Venice and Florence in the late Middle Ages; or Vienna in the late 19th century.

To properly use the concepts of center and periphery, it must never be forgotten that these are no more than relative concepts and thus are adaptable to all degrees of the spatial scale. This means that Athens has a center and a periphery as a city. And if we wanted to push the analysis, there is no reason why we couldn't seek centers and peripheries on the scale of Athens' neighborhoods. But on the other hand, Athens is the indisputable center of Greece. At the same time, Greece is located on the periphery of Europe and therefore before long, on the periphery of the European Economic Community. However, despite its lag compared to France, the Federal Republic of Germany or Benelux, Greece is much closer to industrialized countries than to developing countries and therefore on the world scale, is part of the center.

By the same token, when the center of a nation essentially corresponds to an abnormally over-grown city (Mexico City, Mexico; Athens, Greece; Lima, Peru), its strengthening at the expense of the national periphery (the regions furthest behind) translates into the growth of its own periphery in the form of marginalized, underequipped neighborhoods, and at the extreme, Third World shantytowns.

This is not playing on words nor is it finding that the concepts of center and periphery are meaningless; it is being aware that similar mechanisms function at every level of the spatial scale. [scan 6]

### **The types of combinations between center and periphery**

There are two major possibilities, both of which involve the concept of retroaction, typical in the general theory of systems. Either there is positive retroaction, i.e. reciprocal actions that maintain and accelerate the procedures described in the previous chapter, and the chasm between center and periphery is exacerbated because the strengthening of the center correlatively results in an absolute or relative weakening [scan 8] of the periphery. Or there is negative retroaction, i.e. actions in the opposite direction which slow down, or even reverse the process at issue, and the periphery is in a position to make up for a portion of its lag; at times this occurs at the center's initiative, at others, at the periphery's own.

Two components are of fundamental importance here: the flows of capital and the decisions on how this capital is used. The center willingly uses the capital it produces to its own benefit, but it can make use of capital originating in a dominated periphery, people then following the capital almost automatically; similarly, a greater or lesser share of the center's capital can be invested in an integrated periphery, limiting or reversing migratory movements in one fell swoop. As for the periphery, sometimes it allows its capital to leave without protest; at times the periphery is not even aware of it, and sometimes the periphery endeavors to invest its capital on the spot for its own development, having to make use of capital coming from the center but being in control of its use. In short, the periphery may be "passive" or "active" to use Jean-Paul Deler's words in a slightly different sense.

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<sup>2</sup> Translator's note: This is simply a rhymed taunt that country people use to mock Parisians. SWM

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## **The phenomena of pure domination or the periphery at the service of the center**

### *Dominant center and dominated periphery*

The phenomenon of concentration to the benefit of the center and at the expense of the periphery appears at every degree of the spatial scale. Lively city centers compared to the under-equipped neighborhoods in the periphery is a common situation. The growing weight of certain metropolises compared to the "regional deserts" has raised concerns. Preserving, or at times even exacerbating, the gap between industrialized countries and under-developed countries has often been condemned.

But it is with regard to the structuring of a nation into regions that evolution diverging from the center and from the periphery is likely to become greatest, the migratory flows and the flows of capital not being halted by the existence of political borders.

The mechanisms were examined in the preceding chapter. There is no need to repeat them; they must just be given their temporal depth. Everything depends on how quickly the losses of the dominated periphery mount up. If the pace is slow, there is some chance that the situation will hold steady over the decades, the center gradually strengthening and the periphery possibly maintaining a stable population thanks to high birth rates. Emigration toward the center, which affects farmers first and foremost, even then acts as a safety valve by preventing excessive pressure on the land.

At this stage, socio-spatial class-consciousness has not generally been greatly asserted by the population of the dominated periphery. The domination is not really felt, although it exists. The departures are voluntary or in any case, easily accepted, the drain of assets is sufficiently slow and subtle not to give rise to disapproval and bias goes in favor of the culture of the center. In France, for example, the population of the dominated periphery, namely the West and the South, continued to grow during the 19th century and it is generally considered that the population was at its peak during the second half of the century. Then, the population began to shrink without the phenomenon gaining an alarming speed, at least at first.

However, if the pace picked up, the life forces of the dominated periphery were in danger of attack, which corresponds with a new sub-model.

### *Overgrown center and abandoned periphery*

When the mechanisms that produce differentiation between center and periphery have been operating for a certain amount of time, the gap grows with regard to population numbers, and both production and growth rates. The ultimate phase of evolution for the living area is overgrowth and congestion; for areas on the periphery, it's the oft-used expression 'desertification'.

The abandoned center can empty itself in the most physical sense of the term. In the past, Ireland whose population fell from 8 million in the mid-19th century to 4 million by the end, and more recently, Corsica, which had roughly 270,000 inhabitants in 1881 and probably scarcely 170,000 in 1960 (i.e. half of what it would've had if its migratory balance had not been drastically negative for a century) provide some extreme examples. But this general decline, which makes Corsica a good example of abandoned periphery, is further exacerbated by the region's internal organization, which remarkably illustrates at this degree on the scale also, the center-periphery model. Recently, the extreme north and south and the relatively dynamic areas located on the coastline are where the population and activities have been concentrated, thus playing the role of center, whereas the interior inexorably empties to the benefit of the "center" and continental France. "[translation] Skeleton villages and phantom hamlets" (Janine Renucci) multiply in what has become the periphery of a periphery.

In the face of such situations, the population in marginal areas often loses all faith in itself, does not try to react and gives up in resignation. At times, a significant portion of the population in the abandoned periphery appears to favor greater centralization. Guy Burgel notes how in the periphery in Greece, the small cities and rural areas wish to deal directly with Athens due to ongoing distrust of the regional capitals whose predominant role they refuse to recognize. "Athenian centralism seems as much driven by provincial will to Athens' benefit, as by a process of colonization of the province by the capital."

But quite frequently, the population of the abandoned periphery – or at least what's left of it – becomes aware of both its backward situation and the underlying mechanisms at the root thereof. The population rejects the forced exile of its last children in the name of the right to “live and work in the country” and places responsibility on the center for the periphery's decline, such as in the case of eastern Quebec. Often, the recovery of its culture (particularly its language), now appreciated in response to the culture of the center, is a means for re-finding its identity, even if at the cost of equivocal, backward-looking nostalgia. The center, which has fed itself at the expense of the periphery, now loses interest because there is nothing left to be taken from the periphery, and this is the sense in which the periphery is abandoned. The periphery tends to become an isolate, turned in on itself because the ties with the center are very weak, and if desertification has gone beyond irreversible thresholds, the periphery will in fact become a blind spot.

With regard to the living space, if a number of peripheries have thus been emptied, living space is in serious danger of being congested and becoming an abnormally enlarged center. At the same time, an oversized center struggles to reconcile everything when exercising decision-making and creative responsibilities but also production duties - forward-looking and common alike. Excessive growth results in diseconomies of scale and negative externalities. The overload of road systems multiplies the losses of time. There is a danger that the disadvantages of concentration and centralization will outweigh the benefits.

### **The redistribution of tasks between the center and the periphery, or unequal sharing**

In some cases, there is a reversal of the direction of flow and the living area sends a portion of its capital and inhabitants to work in the fringe area, which becomes an integrated periphery. Depending on the volume of the flow and the nature of the achievements, two sub-types can be distinguished: on the one hand we find the integrated and exploited periphery, developed from an abandoned periphery or a blind spot, involving flows of little magnitude to the nearly exclusive benefit of the center's inhabitants; on the other hand there is the integrated and annexed periphery, developed primarily from a dominated periphery or an isolate, involving high-volume flows from which the inhabitants of the fringe area derive certain benefits. But both sub-types of integrated periphery remain in a situation of dependence vis-à-vis the center and it is in this sense that the redistribution of tasks corresponds to an “unequal sharing”.

#### *Dominant center and integrated and exploited periphery*

In most industrialized and developing countries, growth goes hand in hand with a growing need for natural resources. The centers are therefore on the lookout for mining and energy properties to satisfy the needs of their industry, but also “landscape properties” to provide rest and recreation to their populace.

With regard to the mining and energy properties, the dominated or abandoned peripheries that had been developed previously can no longer provide the desired products in sufficient quantities. Therefore, new spaces must be looked to. The states that have such spaces, which are generally located at the limits of the inhabited areas, attempt to develop them themselves but generally turn to the most powerful industrialized countries for capital and technicians. There is no shortage of examples: in Brazil, the Amazonia is a multi-national paradise; in Canada, the far north is host to American capital; in the United States, Alaska; in Sweden, the entire northern part of the country; in the USSR, central and eastern Siberia, which Japan was called upon to develop; in Africa, the countries of Sahel and Zaire; in China, the entire western part of the country, Qinghai and Xinjiang in particular.

The designation integrated and exploited periphery refers to a very particular situation, especially typical at the upper degrees of the spatial scale. In all cases, this type of marginal area is characterized by a very low indigenous population, a difficult environment, outstanding scenery, abundant natural resources (particularly forests), metals and especially rare metals (uranium), and energy resources (coal, hydroelectricity, petroleum). These resources justify massive investments, gigantic worksites and new infrastructure, which brutally and drastically impact the fate of these socio-spatial classes. One word sums up these environments: fragility. Fragility as regards the human environmental interaction,

as the aboriginals – Eskimos, Lapps, Indians, Asian nomads and the farmers, hunters and gatherers of Africa – are catapulted suddenly into the most advanced technological world with all the resulting risks of a too-rapid acculturation. And the fragility of the natural environment, as the ecosystems are subject to the consequences of heedless development, solely concerned with short-term profitability.

These flows toward the exploited periphery, i.e. in the opposite direction compared to the cases contemplated previously, have little effect on the center – or centers – at their origin. The center finds useful, perhaps even indispensable additions to its inhabitants' development or quality of life but the center's organization is not upset.

*Hypercenter and the integrated and annexed periphery.*

It is rare that the mechanisms of domination speed up to the point of reaching total desertification of the dominated periphery. At one time or another, in an assortment of contexts and for various reasons, a reversal of flow occurs that is of much greater scope than in the case of the exploited periphery, particularly migratory and capital flow.

On the scale of the city, and especially the larger cities, the center often loses a portion of its resident population, which prefers to settle in the periphery, i.e. in the suburbs, occasionally even in rural communities from whence the frequently used term "rurbanization". The phenomenon is so general and commonplace that there is no point dwelling on it. But the city, considered as a whole, also loses a portion of its industries. Although the head offices may willingly remain, the production units have set up shop elsewhere. The movement is spontaneous, as observed in New York, London and Johannesburg. In fact, in all cases, the lack of space and the high price of urban property prompt manufacturers to leave in order to update their factories while also achieving a financially attractive operation.

The area on the fringe, which benefits from these moves, then becomes an integrated and annexed periphery, whose characteristics are appreciably different from those of the preceding types. On the national scale, the periphery's migratory deficit is mitigated and may even go over to the plus side. In the United States, the South is a prime example: from 1940 to 1959, the balance was -3,500,000 individuals; from 1960 to 1975 the balance was +2,500,000 individuals. In France, the most recent census (1968-1975) confirmed the trends hinted at in the preceding census (1962-1968).

The reversal of flows of capital is no less clear. In the integrated and annexed periphery, modern agriculture, industry and tourism are often the work of firms from outside the region, originating in the center. Thus, in the state of Arkansas, located in the southern United States, 62% of the 200,000 industrial jobs this state had in 1973 reported to an out-of-state head office, primarily in the cities on the northeastern seaboard of the United States, i.e., their center. In Italy, in the space of a few years Sardinia has gone from being a dominated periphery on the way to becoming abandoned, to being an integrated periphery: petroleum refineries and resorts stretch along a coastline that not long ago was half deserted.

If such processes become generalized, does this result in a decline for the center? When a dominated periphery loses a share of its capital and activities to the benefit of the center, it is weakened, but the reverse is not true. The center that invests a portion of its capital in the integrated periphery and locates a share of its everyday activities there, derives additional power, since it maintains control of the subsidiaries created. It becomes a hypercenter, that is, a refined center, which in the best conditions, acts as coordinator, serves as a driving force and commands. All studies on the geography of decision-making show the power to command exercised by certain cities in the center, where corporate headquarters are clustered, and whose production units are scattered throughout the integrated and annexed national and/or international periphery. Far from being a mark of the center's weakening, investment in the integrated periphery is a sign of vitality, expansionism, the desire to "conquer" – in a word, "imperialism", to take up a term with distinct political connotations and which applies most especially to the relationships between the center and the periphery on the world scale.

For the integrated and annexed periphery, the arrival of capital and migrants from the hypercenter is an inkling of socio-spatial justice, in other words, a start to redistribution in favor of the more disadvantaged socio-spatial partner. But this socio-spatial justice is nonetheless inadequate.

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### **The reversal in the direction of relations : declining center and periphery counting on its own strengths**

The periphery can also become aware of its backwardness and try to make itself heard. There are several options open to the periphery. Many voices can rise to dismantle the mechanisms of backwardness and condemn under-industrialization, perhaps even de-industrialization, as well as the decline of agriculture, demanding assistance from the state or alternatively, to reject major projects imposed from outside, such as an oil refinery or nuclear power plant, for example, which seem to do more harm than good. Or, the periphery can attempt to transform its image in order to be more attractive to companies seeking a rewarding location, by dangling genuine or supposed advantages in front of them. On the national scale, Ireland and South Korea very actively strive to attract businesses. On a regional scale, Bavaria, the various states in the southern United States and just recently in France, the Ardennes and Aquitaine regions, are attempting to simultaneously play on two opposing themes: growing vitality and the preservation of a quality of life based on tradition. But in every case, the claims and image changes are only palliatives. While passivity leads to nothing, awareness is only the first step before attempting to better take charge of one's fate by "counting on one's own strengths".

In fact, not all peripheries are sinking into an inexorable decline, of which desertification would be the final inevitable phase and the peripheries who escape from this prospect do not automatically become the dependents of a hypercenter seeking the benefits of decentralization. In a certain number of cases, areas that have long been on the fringe are demonstrating remarkable vitality without outside help, without natural resources and without large cities. Enough studies are stressing this type of evolution that there is an attempt to identify a periphery counting on its own strength model. The expression "counting on its own strength" is Chinese in origin. Its heyday was the late sixties and once it became an ideal, it became a slogan before becoming set in dogma until 1976. The expression must be very broadly interpreted here to refer to a socio-spatial class in a dominated periphery situation that shows its ability to check its decline through the will and initiative of at least some, if not all, of its inhabitants'.

### **What it is: the transition from dominated peripheries to integrated peripheries**

A leitmotiv has pervaded the chapters of the second part as, at every degree of the scale, a major trend has been affirmed for the last two decades. The integrated peripheries are replacing the dominated peripheries and as an aftereffect, the hypercenters are taking over from the dominant centers. In the city, lively suburbs with services and jobs extend the refined centers. Through rurbanization, the countryside gets a second wind in response to the cities that were stifling them a short time before. Marginal regions that once were abandoned reverse their net migration and welcome decentralized factories. Peripheral nations and former colonies become the location of choice for transnational firms.

Everywhere, two antithetical processes are in contrast to one another which can be summed up by saying that "expiration gives way to inspiration" or again, that "explosion arises out of implosion". Behind the images of implosion and inspiration, a dominant center has to be imagined that, like a black hole, traps the flow of people, capital and goods to its own benefit, concentrates them and territorializes them. In some way, the flows are deterritorialized in the periphery and reterritorialized in the center. Nothing escapes from this type of center, which becomes increasingly attractive the bigger it gets. The process has often worked over the course of history but, while also still current, increasingly during our time it is moving aside for action headed in the opposite direction. In fact, through the process opposite to explosion or expiration, a center emits flows that are deterritorialized in that they are leaving the center but are reterritorialized in the integrated peripheries. The center, which has become a hypercenter, now coordinates and controls these flows from a distance.

As for the integrated periphery, dependence becomes more subtle, because the signs of renewal and restarting mask their specific operating contexts in the eyes of many. The hypercenter, for its part, is

placed under the sign of quality instead of quantity. It's no surprise then if the population decreases in the downtown areas compared to the rest of the agglomeration, plateaus in the cities compared to the surrounding countryside, diminishes in certain living regions like the northeastern United States and stagnates in central nations, like what has happened in Japan and the Federal Republic of Germany. Thus, across the scale, the consolidation of decision-making power, financial hegemony, cultural outreach and the ability to innovate no longer necessarily go hand-in-hand with demographic growth.

**About the author: Bernard BRET**, UMR 5600 Environnement, Ville, Société, Université Lyon 3 Jean Moulin

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