

Introduction*

Beat Kümin

After a period of marginalization by socio-economic and cultural priorities in the second half of the twentieth century, political history, once the undisputed flagship of the study of the past, is experiencing a sustained renaissance. Originally restricted to diplomatic relations, (military) power struggles and the deeds of social elites, the field's definition has expanded to the negotiation and enforcement ('politics') of all binding rules ('policies') within the institutional framework of any territorial unit ('polity').¹ As a result, the discipline has engaged with a growing range of human exchange and an ever more diverse spectrum of agents. State formation, to take a classic theme from the early modern period, now appears less like a linear campaign orchestrated from above, but a protracted dialogue between centre and periphery, innovation and tradition, shared values (like peace, order and the common good) and fiercely contested priorities (articulated in lawsuits and representative assemblies).² The latest readjustment of perspectives owes much to the cultural turn of the last few decades, when the historical sciences in general moved their focus from 'hard facts' – dates, reigns and quantifiable entities – to 'softer' issues like identities, perceptions and representations. This shift prompted interest in new topics like communication structures and the construction of meaning by individuals and social groups. Numerous programmatic works dedicated to 'political culture', a 'new political history' or 'historical policy research' underline the stimulating quality of these fresh departures.³

* I would like to thank James Brown, the members of the 'Social Sites Network', participants of the 2005 workshop on 'Political Space' and the seminar audience of the 'Centre for Renaissance and Early Modern Studies' at the University of York for their comments and suggestions on various aspects of this introduction.

¹ Andreas Rödder, 'Klios Neue Kleider: Theoriendebatten um eine Kulturgeschichte der Politik in der Moderne', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 283 (2006): 657–88, esp. 677–8.

² See the plurality of approaches featured in the 'European Science Foundation' project *The Origins of the Modern State in Europe, 13th to 18th Centuries* (7 vols, Oxford, 1995–2000), and Michael Braddick, 'State Formation and the Historiography of Early Modern England', *History Compass*, 2 (2004) [<http://www.blackwell-synergy.com/loi/hico>; consulted 10/9/2007].

³ Conceptual reflection is particularly intense in German-speaking Europe: Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger (ed.), *Was heißt Kulturgeschichte des Politischen?* (Berlin, 2005); Ute Frevert and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt (eds), *Neue Politikgeschichte. Perspektiven einer historischen Politikforschung* (Frankfurt a.M., 2005); Luise Schorn-Schütte, *Historische Politikforschung. Eine Einführung* (Munich, 2006). On the reinvigoration of the field in

The early modern period, to sketch some of their preliminary conclusions, featured a dynamic political system distinct from both the feudal and personalized bonds of the Middle Ages and the dominance of parties, opinion polls and electronic media of modern times. Between the fifteenth and early nineteenth centuries, face-to-face interaction through rituals and ceremonies was increasingly complemented (but not superseded) by recourse to writing and the use of print, particularly in the larger territories. Defence and the administration of justice continued to serve as principal legitimizations for rulers, but alongside a paternalistic concern for the ‘common good’ became ever more prominent, prompting unprecedented regulatory activity by the emerging ‘police state’ and closer interaction between centre and periphery. In spite of tendencies towards oligarchization, common people exercised influence through local government positions, petitioning and various forms of resistance. Political practice in general remained characterized by notions of personal honour and *ad-hoc* solutions rather than ideologies and blueprints. There was no neat separation of powers between legislative, executive and judicial authorities and the ‘public sphere’ consisted of temporary or thematic intensifications of debate among more or less narrowly circumscribed groups (reaching far down the social scale in exceptional moments like the German Reformation or the English Revolution) rather than informed and institutionalized reasoning among the aspiring bourgeoisie (as from the eighteenth century). International relations involved agents, networks and cultural transfers well beyond diplomatic channels. Major wars and peace congresses like that of Westphalia in 1648 produced a European state system based on the balance of power, while constant rivalry between its leading players fostered processes of centralization, bureaucratization and fiscalization. The princely court – represented in its archetypal form by Louis XIV’s palace of Versailles – symbolized dynastic glory and facilitated not so much a disciplining of the aristocracy, as an ongoing negotiation of interests between monarchs and the new service nobility of household officials, administrators and army commanders.⁴

Another prominent ‘turn’ in the humanities and social sciences, however, has as yet had a more limited effect on the field. In spite of a host of conceptual reflections, dedicated conferences and specialized studies, the potential of ‘space’

the Anglophone world see Susan Pedersen, ‘What is Political History Now?’, in David Cannadine (ed.), *What is History Now?* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 36–56.

⁴ General trends emerging from e.g. Wayne te Brake, *Shaping History: Ordinary People in European Politics 1500–1700* (Berkeley, 1998); Jan Glete, *War and the State in Early Modern Europe* (London, 2002); Jeroen Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles: The Courts of Europe’s Major Dynastic Rivals, 1550–1780* (Cambridge, 2003); Rudolf Schlögl (ed.), *Interaktion und Herrschaft: Die Politik der frühneuzeitlichen Stadt* (Constance, 2004); Dagmar Freist, ‘Öffentlichkeit und Herrschaftslegitimation in der Frühen Neuzeit’, in Ronald Asch and Dagmar Freist (eds), *Staatsbildung als kultureller Prozess* (Cologne, 2005), pp. 321–51; see also Beat Kümin, ‘Review Article: Political Culture in the Holy Roman Empire’, *German History* (forthcoming c.2009).

as an analytical category for political history remains to be fully explored.⁵ While operating with territorial concepts like ‘counties’ and ‘courts’ as a matter of course, political scientists have tended to privilege issues of power and chronology, fearing perhaps that greater sensitivity to space would inescapably reduce the role of human agency and time.⁶ And yet, pioneering work on the integration of these dimensions has been conducted. Closer scrutiny of civic ceremony in Italian Renaissance cities, for example, reveals how ritual performances – particularly processions by dignitaries along carefully chosen routes within the communal topography – helped contemporaries to perceive towns not just as physical, legal and social units, but also more abstract political spaces:

In Venice ... the annual processions of the doge served as a living representation of the supposedly unchanging constitution of the regime. A dozen times a year or more, the leading office holders participated in lengthy processions ... through the streets of the city, always winding their way back to the great basilica of St Mark where these hard-headed politicians humbled themselves before their protector saint. ... The order of procession defined the legal relationship between the various political and bureaucratic offices within the Venetian hierarchy.⁷

In an attempt to promote more sustained engagement with spatial dimensions, the academic network ‘Social Sites – *Öffentliche Räume – Lieux d’échanges* 1300–1800’ dedicated its first workshop in 2005 to the theme of ‘Political Space in Pre-industrial Europe’. The present volume unites a selection of papers presented at the Warwick gathering in November 2005 as well as a number of additionally commissioned contributions.⁸ The network pursues two principal objectives. One

⁵ For initial orientations see Jürgen Osterhammel, ‘Die Wiederkehr des Raums: Geographie, Geohistorie und historische Geographie’, *Neue politische Literatur*, 43 (1998): 374–95; Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift (eds), *Thinking Space* (London, 2000); Martina Löw, *Raumsoziologie* (Frankfurt a.M., 2001); Denis Cosgrove, ‘Landscape and *Landschaft*: Lecture Delivered at the “Spatial Turn in History” Symposium’, *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute Washington*, 35 (2004): 57–71.

⁶ An observation made in the report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences: *Open the Social Sciences* (Stanford, 1996), p. 26. I owe this reference to James Brown.

⁷ Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 235. ‘Why ... did Florentines expend such energy in a formal behaviour that moderns tend to dismiss as mere spectacle? The answer is that contemporaries believed that in these rites they witnessed the political process at work. Inhabitants participated to be part of that process. Rather than being theatre, the formal public life of this city articulated the changing order of things, and was part of that change.’ Richard C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (Ithaca, 1991), pp. 213–14.

⁸ For information on network initiatives, related scholarly activities and a bibliography of spatial approaches to the premodern period see the ‘Social Sites’ website: <http://go.warwick.ac.uk/socialsites> (consulted 10/9/2007).

is to promote greater awareness of evolving spatial uses and perceptions in the past, both on the macro-level of humanity's place in the (meta-)physical order, including the move from a geo- to a heliocentric cosmology in the course of the Renaissance, the rejection of Purgatory as an intermediary place between earth and heaven during the Protestant Reformation and the changing balance between local and global markets in the wake of European expansion, and on the micro-level of personal situation within a locality or social centres such as churches, market squares or public houses.⁹ As the example of the Italian *piazza* – an architectural complex, ritual space and social construct with ever-changing functions (not just over the centuries, but also depending on climate, season, religious calendar and economic cycle) – demonstrates, studies of the latter require a combination of spatial with a range of other apposite approaches.¹⁰ A second network objective is to test the viability of theoretical models for the early modern period. Spatial approaches have a long academic pedigree, including seminal contributions by Georg Simmel (with particular reference to the phenomenon of borders) in the early and Henri Lefebvre (on the social production of different levels of space) in the late twentieth century, but the turn of the millennium saw a sudden surge of systematic investigations into the spatiality of human exchange in disciplines ranging from archaeology to literary studies.¹¹

One common denominator of most of these works is the emphasis on the 'relational' constitution of space. In contrast to 'essentialist' understandings, which endow given units – a town, *pays historique*, region or even vast geographical landscape such as the Mediterranean¹² – with specific characteristics shaped by environmental and socio-economic structures, more recent conceptualizations envisage space as the dynamic product of interactions between locations, objects and human agents, that is to say as situational syntheses dependent on mental

⁹ Helge Kragh, *Conceptions of Cosmos – From Myths to the Accelerating Universe: A History of Cosmology* (Oxford, 2006); Will Coster and Andrew Spicer (eds), *Sacred Space in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2005); Donatella Calabi, *The Market and the City: Square, Street and Architecture in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2004); Renate Dürr and Gerd Schwerhoff (eds), *Kirchen, Märkte und Tavernen. Handlungs- und Erfahrungsräume in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt a.M., 2005). See also the forthcoming proceedings of the network workshops 'Social Space and Religious Culture' (eds Susanne Rau and Gerd Schwerhoff) and 'Sites, Places, Spaces' (ed. Wolfgang Kaiser).

¹⁰ Mario Isnenghi, *L'Italia in Piazza: I luoghi della vita pubblica dal 1848 ai giorni nostri* (Bologna, 2004), esp. pp. 19–29.

¹¹ Georg Simmel, 'Soziologie des Raumes', in Rüdiger Kramme et al. (eds), *Georg Simmel. Aufsätze und Abhandlungen, 1901–1908* (vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main, 1995), pp. 132–83; Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, 1991; 1st French edn, 1974). In addition to works cited in note 5 above see also Matthew Johnson, *An Archaeology of Capitalism* (Oxford, 1996), and Bernhard Klein, *Maps and the Writing of Space in Early Modern England and Ireland* (Basingstoke, 2000).

¹² The latter e.g. in a classic text of the French *Annales* school: Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (London, 1973).

perceptions and the networks in which individuals find themselves. According to one prominent voice:

Space can be seen as a relational ordering of living beings and social goods. ... [To] include human beings in the conceptualization of space is unusual and initially renders reflection about spaces more difficult. But it is necessary, because ... people ... display the distinctive property of being able to position themselves and to leave their positions. Moreover, they influence the construction of space through facial expressions, gestures, language, etc. ... Social goods, too, exert external effects, for example through odours and noises, thus influencing the possibilities of spatial construction. [...]

Two basic processes of space construction are to be distinguished. First, space is constituted by the situating of social goods and people ... We shall call this process spacing. Spacing means erection, building, or positioning. Examples are the display of wares in a supermarket, ... the networking of computers [etc]. Second ... the constitution of space also requires synthesis, that is to say, goods and people are connected to form spaces through processes of perception ... or recall.

In the day-to-day activity of constituting space, synthesis and spacing are concurrent, since action is always processual.¹³

In such a conceptual framework, space no longer appears as an inert shell or ‘container’, but as a relational construct and, in turn, a factor with a potential to shape subsequent forms of human exchange.¹⁴ Applied to an early modern example, inexplicable or miraculous events would have been experienced very differently by contemporary witnesses, depending for example on their location, religious beliefs, knowledge of comparable events, personal networks, mindsets (local-customary as in the case of pious peasants or ‘universal-critical’ as for a Humanist like Erasmus) and specific attributes of the place (a street corner, church or open field). Once ‘synthesized’ into a holy site by popular consensus or Church endorsement, the

¹³ Martina Löw, ‘The Constitution of Space’ (lecture delivered at the University of Paris I on 14 March 2005 [accessible at <http://raumsoz.ifs.tu-darmstadt.de/>, consulted 11/9/2007]). For a fuller account see her *Raumsoziologie*, esp. the summarizing theses on pp. 271–3.

¹⁴ Using somewhat different terminology, Thomas F. Gieryn places similar emphasis on the ‘agentic’ notion of ‘place’ as a ‘constituent element of social life’: ‘A Space for Place in Sociology’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26 (2000): 463–96, esp. 463. Differences in the definition of key terms like ‘place’ and ‘space’ complicate interdisciplinary work in the field and some form of standardization – perhaps by using ‘location’ for a specific geographical point, ‘place’ for a site constituted by the interaction of particular agents, objects and atmospheric elements and ‘space’ for the various physical and mental relations between all relevant factors – would be highly desirable.

previously unremarkable spot could turn into the focal point for activities like pilgrimages, thus shaping subsequent social exchange.

Among other opportunities, a refined spatial methodology offers the chance to move beyond the binary models that have tended to structure discussions in the field. Inspired by anthropological studies, for example, religious historians sought to demarcate the sacred and the profane (with liminal areas in between); drawing on sociological work, students of gender relations drew firm lines between the private and public spheres; while political scientists prompted historians of resistance to contrast locations of power with subversive ‘social sites’. Perceptive and highly stimulating as investigative tools, none of these polarities really stood the test of historical verification, an exercise more likely to reveal overlaps, situational differences and conflicting perceptions.¹⁵

The principal aim of the Warwick workshop was to utilize spatial approaches and insights for the study of politics in the past. What, if anything, can recent theories and/or reconstructions of pre-modern spatial perceptions and practices contribute to our understanding of decision-making processes? Is it possible to combine investigations of political space with due sensitivity to changes over time?¹⁶ Does a closer focus on the spatiality of human exchange provide ‘value added’ not only with respect to ‘conventional’, but also the ‘new’ political history? The network’s anticipated answer to all of these questions, of course, was affirmative: common sense alone seems to suggest that key themes like church-state relations, military planning, colonialism and diplomatic encounters must have been affected by variables like personal connections, metaphysical beliefs, spatial mobility and geographical knowledge. Given the limits of one single project, however, thematic, regional and chronological priorities had to be set.

The focus of this volume thus lies on two broad themes, ‘political sites’ and ‘spatial politics’, with particular – but not exclusive – reference to England and German-speaking Europe. Two principal research questions guided the authors’ investigations:

- *Where* did political exchange take place?
- *How* did spatial dimensions affect political life in different contexts?

¹⁵ For critical assessments of such polarities see Nicholas Vincent, ‘The Pilgrimages of the Angevin Kings of England, 1154–1272’, in Colin Morris and Peter Roberts (eds), *The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 12–45; Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1993), esp. pp. 240–41; Susanne Rau and Gerd Schwerhoff, ‘Öffentliche Räume in der Frühen Neuzeit. Überlegungen zu Leitbegriffen und Themen eines Forschungsfeldes’, in Susanne Rau and Gerd Schwerhoff (eds), *Zwischen, Gotteshaus und Taverne* (Cologne, 2004), pp. 11–52; and the essay by James Brown in this volume.

¹⁶ Explicit attempts to combine the two analytical variables in Jon May and Nigel Thrift (eds), *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality* (London, 2001).

In terms of regional coverage, concentration on England and the Holy Roman Empire allows examination of different constitutional environments – one associated with a strong centre and growing parliamentary powers, the other with political fragmentation and absolutist tendencies – and heterogeneous confessional settings – one with an idiosyncratic (eventually ‘Anglican’) state church, the other with institutionalized (if long explosive) co-existence of Lutheran, Catholic and (from 1648) Reformed territories. Here again, however, polarities apply only to a point: representative elements were by no means absent in the German-speaking lands, as the examples of the Imperial Diet and numerous quasi-autonomous city-states illustrate, while the Church of England failed to integrate substantial numbers of Catholics and Protestant Nonconformists.¹⁷ Chronologically, the perspective extends from the later Middle Ages right up to the eighteenth century, an extended period for which there is as yet no satisfactory terminology. ‘Pre-industrial Europe’ has been used here to highlight the volume’s emphasis on the centuries preceding full-scale industrialization of the continent, without denying the existence of ‘advanced’ forms of production before that point or claiming to cover the entire time-span covered by the phrase. While most of the authors approach the issues from a historical point of view, contributions from the fields of sociology, cultural geography and political science reflect the interdisciplinary character of current spatial research.

Following a ‘Preface’ by *James C. Scott*, who kindly agreed to open the workshop with observations from a different chronological and regional perspective,¹⁸ the volume is structured into three parts: I. ‘Political Sites’, focusing on locations of political exchange; II. ‘Spatial Politics’, engaging with a range of different practices and constellations; and III. ‘Outlook’, offering two more general assessments of the field.

Part I begins with *Henry J. Cohn*’s study of the locations of German Imperial Diets. Every few years, the amorphous phenomenon of the ‘Empire’ penetrated the walls of a (more or less) mutually agreeable host city. Through representatives of all estates and elaborate rituals such as investitures, the ‘German Nation’ acquired a tangible shape and political agency. The ceremonial entry of the Emperor, requisition of urban infrastructure, temporary suspension of immunities and the presence of foreign troops, to name but a few examples, fundamentally transformed the townscape for months on end. Intricately designed and lavishly furnished palaces, as *Ronald G. Asch* shows in his comparative survey, allowed the display of monarchical might and the control of access to the sovereign. Non-peripatetic rulers had to strike a delicate balance between openness and distance and develop ways to remain symbolically present in the provinces they no longer visited. Far from

¹⁷ For recent surveys see Peter Wilson, *From Reich to Revolution: German History 1600–1806* (Basingstoke, 2003); Raingard Eßer, *Die Tudors und die Stuarts 1485–1714* (Stuttgart, 2004).

¹⁸ The name of the network, of course, alludes to his seminal concept of ‘social sites’: James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, 1990), pp. 108–35.

being mere ‘theatres’ of power, princely courts allowed the negotiation of interests, with nobles seeking advancement through dedicated service, the forging of factions and the construction of patronage networks. Aristocratic residences and presence simultaneously transformed nearby capital cities. Further down the architectural hierarchy, divergent political forces intersected in public houses, too. In contrast to the conventional emphasis on disorder and subversion, *James R. Brown* highlights their use as surveillance sites in an English urban community. Delinquent behaviour was not only prohibited by Parliamentary statutes, town mandates and licensing regulation, but publicans, staff and patrons themselves can all be found ‘looking and listening’ for evidence of crimes, immoral acts and seditious language, be it in drinking lounges, back rooms or even bedchambers. The prevalence of informal policing in drinking establishments suggests limitations to the popular negotiation of political authority in early modern towns.

Voluntary associations are identified as pillars of civil society by *Peter Clark*. While meeting in ‘real’ places (often in fact inns and taverns), they helped to create wider political spaces through the discussion of news, administrative training, public works and personal networks. In comparative perspective, English clubs and societies – according to Clark’s bold thesis – appear much more diversified and autonomous than either their continental equivalents or religious confraternities, perhaps because of higher urbanization rates and a less interventionist government on this side of the Channel. In the relatively peripheral location of Cumbria, meanwhile, parliamentary enclosure saw outsiders imposing national norms on a distinctive local environment characterized by a high proportion of open commons. *Ian D. Whyte*’s contribution traces the resulting increase in spatial awareness, especially regarding boundaries, and the loss of customary political and recreational sites. Drawing on a rural case study and a yeoman’s diary, furthermore, he finds sociability in indoor venues more socially homogeneous than in outdoor arenas, which allowed for greater mixing of different groups.

Part II opens with a reminder of the importance of ‘real’ political space for the governance of a territory. In a wide-ranging analysis of links between central authority and local landowners in medieval England, *Christine Carpenter* points not only to variables of distance and terrain, but also to the significance of tenurial geography (for example the number, size and distribution of major estates) and the structure of local communication networks, often based on gatherings of noblemen and gentry in locations such as their own houses, town halls and parish churches. Drawing on theoretical work on the predominance of face-to-face communication in pre-industrial politics, *Alexander Schlaak* examines a series of conflicts in a German Imperial Free City. The adoption of a spatial perspective reveals how particular sites were used, marked and violated in the course of these disputes and how the opposing parties exploited the fundamental variables of absence/presence and internal/external sources of power. Changing ecclesio-political constellations in English parishes between the late fourteenth and early seventeenth centuries are the focus of a collaborative essay by *Steve Hindle* and *Beat Kümin*. Charting the positions and strengths of numerous forces on both sides of the communal

boundary as well as in the metaphysical sphere, it observes adjustments in several basic polarities (men vs women; better vs lower sort; laity vs clergy) as well as a dramatic shift from purgatory and penitential incentive towards external secular authority as the principal power source in parish life.

Zooming in on the 1640s, *David Zaret* casts new light on the explosion of popular political debate during the English revolution. Faced with a near-unanimous consensus that discussion of public affairs outside established arenas like Parliament or town halls smacked of sedition and libel, printed petitions obscured their origins in locations like private or public houses. Adopting deferential tones, they purported to be spontaneous grievances and helped to build an 'abstract' public sphere by rendering 'real' place invisible. Vague and imprecise space, by contrast, is the theme of *Andreas Würgler's* scrutiny of early modern maps of the Swiss Confederation. Neither its own members nor the major European powers could agree on the exact extent of this complex network of sovereign republics, allies and associated territories. Depending on confessional affiliation and a range of other variables, the contours of certain boundaries varied significantly. Maps, furthermore, were used for representative purposes (marginal decorations often featured cantonal crests, historic scenes and landscapes) as well as the transmission of geographical information. Invented spaces, finally, form a principal theme in the discussion of bogus kings and officials by *Tobias B. Hug*. Dynastic uncertainties, an embryonic bureaucracy and the lack of reliable means of identification facilitated the assumption of false identities and the usurpation of power at all levels of the English polity. Avoiding the few well-controlled sites where they might be detected, impostors appropriated official symbols and language to further their own personal and financial interests.

The volume concludes with two commentaries in Part III. *Bernard Capp* offers a review of the contributions from a historian's perspective, while *Mike Crang*, an exponent of the cultural geography movement, provides an assessment of the implications of varying spatial approaches for our understanding of pre-industrial political processes.

Does 'space' constitute a fruitful new tool for political history? The essays and commentaries in this collection hope to provide some early indications. With a view to the 'Social Sites' network objectives, that is the study of spatial perceptions/practices in the past and the applicability of current theoretical concepts, at least, the project yields valuable insights.

It demonstrates, for example, that pre-industrial Europe featured a much wider range of political sites than is usually assumed: not just princely courts, town halls and meeting-points of representative assemblies, but open fields as well as the back rooms of provincial public houses. This differentiation surely relates to the amorphous quality and versatility of specific places or spaces, as seen with regard to the circumscription of the Swiss Confederation, the sites of revolutionary petitioning and the imaginary claims of territorial powers by bogus officials. Spatial dimensions, furthermore, emerge as key features of political life, be it in terms of proximity to rulers, the presence or absence of key agents, periodic

manifestation of Empires, a growing preoccupation with borders and shifts in political constellations within local communities.

As for theoretical concepts, some contributors insist on the primary significance of 'real' physical space (layouts of buildings, topography, distance, communication infrastructure, landholding patterns) and warn against the potential overstretch of yet another fashionable 'turn'.¹⁹ The examples of English petitions, associations and surveillance, however, all illustrate ways in which specific activities undertaken in 'real' topographical locations connected people with the wider political spaces of local government and more abstract notions like religious ideals and the emerging public sphere.²⁰ Most importantly, perhaps, the studies substantiate the extent to which political spaces acquired meaning through processes of relational constitution. These involved agents (from courtiers down to poor widows), places (like market squares and parish churches), objects (such as uniforms or drinking vessels) and atmospheric elements (among others: time of day, seasons of the year, dynastic instability, presence of strangers). Changes in the constellation resulted in modifications of spatial experience: this is why representations of royal might like massive palaces could easily turn into symbols of decline (i.e. if rooms, courtyards and gardens remained empty or fell into disrepair) and why convivial exchanges over a drink often metamorphosed into conflicts about personal honour or sometimes, if unsympathetic ears listened in, accusations of subversion.

Many avenues remain to be explored. One rewarding approach might be scalar analysis, that is the systematic study of the respective positions, vertical ordering and interrelations of multiple spatial units. Such investigations, according to Neil Brenner, are unlikely to reveal stable pyramid shapes, but rather ongoing processes of production, contestation and rearrangement of specific configurations, in other words mosaics of different spatial hierarchies. Yet partial and temporary fixations of scalar relationships (resulting in certain constraints on subsequent evolutions) can be achieved by powerful historical agents such as the state. Given the fraught and dynamic relationships between princely courts, regions and local communities in the early modern period, such a model opens intriguing possibilities for political historians.²¹

For future work, therefore, enhanced sensitivity to spatial variables offers new ways to look at familiar sources and promises to deepen our understanding

¹⁹ See the summary of the plenary discussion in the workshop report by James Brown and Christian Hochmuth: <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/tagungsberichte/id=981> (consulted 12/10/2007).

²⁰ Cf. the proceedings of the first 'Social Sites' network initiative, a panel on the relationship between microspaces and the wider world, in Dürr and Schwerhoff, *Tavernen*.

²¹ Neil Brenner, 'The Limits to Scale? Methodological Reflections on Scalar Structuration', *Progress in Human Geography*, 25 (2001): 591–614, esp. 591.

of political issues, whether they relate to individuals, social groups, economic structures or the mentalities and perceptions of people in the past.