

Book reviews

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Space, knowledge and power: Foucault and geography,
edited by *Jeremy W Crampton and Stuart Elden*

Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007, 377 pp, ISBN 978-0-7546-4655-6

Michel Foucault might just be the most influential external theoretical reference point in contemporary human geography. Of all the key thinkers whose work has been enrolled in the project of spatialising social theory, it is Foucault who has been the most widely used and the most productively deployed. Yet this is the first volume dedicated to explicitly elaborating on the relationship between Foucault and big-G Geography. The aim of the volume, the editors suggest in their introduction, is to open up to question just what the relationship between Foucault and geography might be, and to deepen the appreciation for the contexts from which his work emerges and is made available to us as of potential interest.

The book's starting point is the well known interview 'Questions on geography', in which Foucault engaged with French radical geographers. While this interview, translated and published in English in 1980, has been much read and cited in Anglo-American geography, parts 1 and 2 of this volume make available for the first time the afterlife of what was actually a rather frustrating exchange. The original interview is republished here (although why the editors placed it as chapter 19 of 27, rather than upfront, is not very clear). Although the interview is often cited as the place where Foucault seems to acknowledge that 'geography' and 'space' are terribly important to him, the general thrust of the exchange reveals a failure to align horizons, which Foucault keeps telling the geographers that they should do to the archaeology and genealogy of their own discipline for themselves rather than complain that he hasn't done it for them. Now, it turns out that Foucault followed up the first interview with four questions directed to the editors of radical journal *Hérodote*. This brief text, barely a page long, provides the opening chapter of this volume, and it is a priceless gem. Foucault's questions focus on what his interlocutors mean by strategy, how they think about the epistemology of geographical knowledge, what they think about the geography of medicine and related fields. But it is his third question that is wonderful to read: 'Could you outline what you understand by power?' Foucault asks the geographers. Across three decades, this question is still the one that is provoked every time geographers cite Foucault as an authority on 'power', and it

is delightful to see Foucault himself ask it of those who would seek to make use of his work. Perhaps more fundamentally, he also asks whether the geographers 'think one can reply to the question: who has power?' This too is a question that is still to be addressed in a proper fashion in much of the theoretical commentary on Foucault's work, since the force of the implication in the question is rather disturbing to the habits of politicised reading through which Foucault is routinely made intelligible to us.

Part 2 of the volume consists of the translations of the responses to these questions by francophone geographers that were initially published in 1977. These responses tend to confirm the sense one has in reading the original interview that the frames of meaning through which Foucault and his Marxian interlocutors attempted to communicate were not quite aligned. Part 3 of the volume consists of four commissioned essays by anglophone commentators, written from the perspective of 30 years on from the original interview and the exchange that followed. This section of the book is a little odd: the two non-geographers, Sara Mills and Thomas Flynn, do engage constructively with the questions laid out in Foucault's short note published in chapter 1. The two geographers, David Harvey and Nigel Thrift, do not. Harvey picks up on Foucault's relationship with Kant, which is well enough known and rather more complex than Harvey implies. In Harvey's view, Foucault does not have an adequately 'dialectical' view of space and time, which is not a surprise. Thrift finds that Foucault did not invest enough time on a set of topics that are the main focus of his own work (affect, things, space), and also bemoans the fact that Foucault had a critical attitude to phenomenology. Thrift simply reasserts the value of phenomenology, without pausing to consider what might be at the core of Foucault's concerns. In their lack of 'charity' towards Foucault's project, and in insisting that outside theorists must always conform to the imperatives of geographical theorising ('Always spatialise!'), these two contributions inadvertently confirm the tenor of Foucault's complaint in the original interview with French geographers.

Part 4 of the book, titled *Contexts*, is perhaps the most interesting and thought-provoking section of the collection. Stuart Elden provides a compelling argument for thinking of the moment of the interview with geographers, 1976, as a pivotal one in Foucault's career, as a whole set of new perspectives and concerns came into view and crystallised into subsequent work on political rationality and practices

of the self. The significance of this work, Elden suggests, remains to be fully thought through in geography (and elsewhere, one might add). Matthew Hannah gamely tries to use Foucault's categories of archaeological analysis to reconstruct the reception of histories of 'Foucault' in geography. This is a great chapter, because it's the one that anyone with an interest in Foucault, or social theory generally, and who came of age in geography in the last three decades can place themselves in, and see their own education reflected in Hannah's interpretation of the insights of the various informants who provided their own recollections of 'becoming Foucauldian'. And disagree with! The archaeological framing does not quite work, however, and one thing that is not given enough credit in Hannah's interpretation is the extent to which Foucault has often circulated around disciplines as the preferred option of a binary pairing: Foucault as the source of a story about subjection that is not Althusser's; Foucault as the source of a materialist, power-full understanding of the worldliness of words that is not Derrida's; Foucault as the source of a historical narrative of the emergence of modern political formations that is not Habermas's. In so far as geography's 'Foucault' accepts these prior framings, Foucault's stature in the discipline is also the index of a progressive narrowing of intellectual curiosity (in this respect, at least, Thrift's point about phenomenology might have something to it). In contrast to Hannah's chapter, Juliet Fall and Claude Raffestin (in an essay from 1997) both provide fascinating accounts of the difficult relationship, or lack of one, between Foucault and francophone geography.

These four chapters sketch the outlines of something like a geography of theory, which in many ways honours the most important legacy of Foucault, as a theorist of knowledge. It is notable, however, that with the exception of Hannah's use of archaeology, very few of the essays in this section, or in the volume generally, actually reflect directly on the methodological protocols of doing a reconstructive historiography of contemporary knowledge formations that Foucault bequeathed us. For example, the understandings of 'context' and of 'authorship' deployed here are pretty conventional. This issue is at the centre of the current boom in Foucault-publishing, as more and more untranslated and unpublished texts are made available on the market. Part 5 of this book presents four more of these texts, along with the reprint of the original interview. These pieces, on the hospital, on power, on aesthetics, and on space, are interesting enough, but I'm not sure they add anything dramatically new to the understanding of Foucault's thought that cannot be gleaned from already published sources (nothing quite as dramatically disorienting as Marx's *Paris manuscripts* has appeared, or seems likely to). The 'new Foucault', exemplified by the publication of the transcripts of a decade's worth of his lectures from the 1970s and 1980s, is meant to dramatically change our sense of this theorist. A whole field, Foucault studies, has grown up around this proliferation of new texts. But in large part, this work is taken to confirm the dominant interpretation of 'Foucault' as a theorist of

power. This is the concept that is central to anchoring and orienting all discussion and exposition of Foucault, and it is this framing that most deserves to be submitted to archaeological-genealogical-deconstructive critique. Most of the essays in this book, for example, largely accept Foucault's own terms of reference as correct – his own historical narrative of the emergence of new modalities of discipline and regulation, his own account of existing approaches to power or the state – and then apply them. And none take seriously the degree to which, seen from a distance, Foucault might be best interpreted as part of a broader post-Gauchist turn in French thought, defined by an acknowledgement of liberalism as one untranscendable horizon of our times, and do not consider just how this would disrupt the prevalent reception of Foucault in the English-speaking academy as a *radical* thinker (see Donzelot and Gordon 2008).

The final section of the book, part 6, consists of eight chapters tracking the variable deployment of Foucault's ideas in geographical research. This includes chapters by Margo Huxley on governmentality (thankfully free of any mention of 'neoliberalism', under which sign the concept of governmentality is so often mangled); Gerry Kearns on Foucault's potential to transform medical geographies; Jeremy Crampton on the use that can be made of Foucault's work in understanding relationships between race, mapping, and territorial formations; David Murakami Wood on Foucault's importance to understanding that the politics of surveillance is not exhausted by a clichéd model of panopticon discipline; Stephen Legg on Foucault's influence in postcolonial theory; Philip Howell on geography of sexuality and queer theory after Foucault; and Mathew Coleman and John Agnew on why Foucault's thought remains full of potential when it comes to throwing light on contemporary geopolitics when compared with simplified approaches, exemplified in this case by Hardt and Negri's *Empire*. Chris Philo provides the last word with a detailed discussion of one set of Foucault's recently translated lecture courses, entitled 'Society must be defended'. This is the course that has perhaps most resonance for geography at the moment, because it contains lots of spatial and territorial stuff, and it's about modern concepts of war. Taken as a whole, these eight essays indicate that anglophone geography has done what Foucault originally challenged his interlocutors to do themselves – deployed his concepts to do the genealogies of their own favoured objects of analysis. They also show that there is more than one 'Foucault' at work in geography. If the Foucault at work in studies of neoliberalism is really Althusser, then the Foucault at work in postcolonialism is heavily inflected by the mediation of Edward Said; the Foucault at work in research on sexuality inflected by the mediation of Judith Butler. It is telling, perhaps, that Said and Butler only crop up in these respective chapters, suggesting that a degree of division still exists across different fields of Foucauldian-inspired research when it comes to acknowledging the diverse implications of Foucault's ideas.

To sum up, this book is a feast of insight and arguments, a long-overdue statement of just how fecund Foucault's work has been in geography, and just how much potential there remains to be drawn from it. And best of all, from now on whenever I am confronted by someone going on about how this or that phenomenon shows the operations of 'power', or how this or that theorist does not think adequately about 'power', I will have at my disposal Foucault's own admonishment to his interlocutors back in 1976: 'Could you outline what you understand by power?'

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Reference

Donzelot J and Gordon C 2008 Governing liberal societies – the Foucault effect in the English-speaking world *Foucault Studies* 5 48–62

Spaces of colonialism: Delhi's urban governmentalities, by Stephen Legg

Oxford: Blackwell, 2007, 254 pp, \$89.95 (hardback) ISBN 978-1-4051-5633-2, \$39.95 (paperback) 978-1-4051-5632-5

One objective of this book, drawn from the author's PhD research, is to critique the conception that the governing of colonial Delhi was separated into the neo-classical, orderly spaces of New Delhi, and the organic, traditional spaces of 'Old' Delhi. *Spaces of colonialism* is ambitious in that it seeks not only to offer a new comparative urban history of the two Delhis, arguing that the rationalities and apparatuses of colonial rule were more similar than previous studies have suggested, but also to critique the continued presence of colonial thinking in urban geographies today. The book seeks to include rather than repress the liveliness of urban space and to highlight the forms of resistance that greeted the display of colonial power embodied by New Delhi, while also discerning the fragmentary and at times contradictory nature of the colonial project. While the opening pages move through these important aims rather quickly, this is undoubtedly a project worth signing up to.

The main strength of this book is its conceptual rigour. Legg draws on Foucault's recently translated 1978 lecture series (Foucault 2007). These lectures shed light on the degree to which sovereign, disciplinary and biopower intersect and overlap, prompting a broad re-assessment of governmentality. After a thorough review of the governmentality literature, Legg does some work in adapting it to a colonial context, pointing out, for example, how biopower had very different characteristics outside the 'liberal' West. He also brings a geographer's emphasis to the importance of different spatial formations and points to the excessiveness of place; perspectives which are lacking from much of the governmentality literature. Legg demonstrates in the three empirical chapters how place itself resists power, while

simultaneously being re-worked by the various apparatus of government. Overall, however, those not already committed to governmentality, as an analytic frame may wish for a broader justification or placing of this approach. A sceptical reader may also be alienated by the dense technical language used in theoretical discussions, which occasionally serves to obscure, rather than draw out, the point of the book's stories. More importantly, perhaps, was a sense that the empirical material was being used simply to illustrate the author's conceptual ideas. Occasionally, theoretical expositions put the story of Delhi into the background, as the vehicle for a theoretical agenda, rather than as the main story. The book, then, contains two voices that are not always successfully integrated: the first, a conceptual, literature review mode; the second, a densely empirical, archival mode.

Each of the three empirical chapters provides an analysis of a particular landscape of ordering – housing, policing and urban improvement. This structure works well, though the reader unfamiliar with Delhi will be on a steep learning curve, as few pages are devoted to a general introduction. Chapter 2 explores the relations between material space and discursive ordering in New Delhi's residential sphere. Much effort went into planning an orderly segregation of New Delhi: accommodation was allocated to government workers according to wage bracket (and by extension along racial lines). The idea, more complex and contested in practice, was that as people were promoted through the ranks of the civil service they would also move through the city, gravitating westwards towards the heart of colonial power. The government was ultimately unable to track this messy and changing spatial hierarchy, its ordering vision thwarted by the 'seething multiplicity of the world it had created' (p. 66).

Chapter 3 examines discipline, arguing that the government was by turns both violent and powerful, but also fragile and ignorant. The chapter includes an extended discussion of the Communal Riot Scheme, where the authorities constructed abstract diagrams in an attempt to control potential spaces of dissent throughout the city, among other disciplinary tactics. A growing faith in calculation and planning mirrored a shift in thinking about Indian identity, from being untrustworthy to outright seditious. In the end, the liberal approach of policing, that of imposing a grid of norms of conduct through space, was a failure in colonial Delhi, encapsulated by the government's violent response to the 1942 Quit India campaign.

While the need for a docile, productive and self-regulating population led to the rise of biopolitical government in the West, similar interventions were problematic in India. Chapter 4 examines how the Delhi Improvement Trust was hampered in its efforts to both statistically enframe and materially improve sanitation in Old Delhi by a colonial ethos of financial stringency. The colonial government was laissez-faire, reluctant to invest and more interested in separating and containing the native population, ultimately only undertaking urban improvement when disease or overcrowding became political problems.