

BOOK REVIEWS

SPACE, KNOWLEDGE AND POWER: FOUCAULT AND GEOGRAPHY, edited by Jeremy W. Crampton and Stuart Elden. Hampshire UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2007.

Michel Foucault has said that “Geography must indeed necessarily lie at the heart of my concerns” (Foucault 1980, 77). It would seem that Foucault’s writings and lectures concerning issues of power, knowledge, sexuality, the rationalities and techniques of government and the methodologies of unraveling them are equally at the heart of many human and political geographers. Indeed, Foucault’s influence on spatial studies and theory can be surmised from the continued engagement and development of his ideas by leading scholars such as John Agnew, Stuart Elden, Chris Philo, and Nigel Thrift to name but few.

That said, I have approached *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography* with a mixture of apprehension and excitement. Apprehension as my explorations of questions regarding human spatiality had not, as of yet, led me on a direct path with Foucaultism. Thus my base knowledge of his writings is somewhat sketchy and haphazard. Excitement as this volume is said by the publishers to be “the first to engage Foucault’s geographies in detail from a wide range of perspectives” and as one commentator states “the book will immediately become an essential text for all geographers and everyone interested in Foucault’s understanding of space and its broader influence in the social sciences and social and cultural theory” (see back-cover). The editors in their introduction put forth that the “book provides a series of challenges, appreciations, critiques and developments concerning the relation(s) between Foucault and Geography” by offering “a comprehensive overview of Foucault’s engagement with geographical concerns and geography’s engagement with Foucault” and opening up a “new range of themes and questions for the continuation of that engagement”. Taking this prelude the collection of essays, some being translations of Foucault’s own writings, others a theoretical engagement or empirical application of his broad conceptualizations, present a good opportunity to get more thoroughly acquainted with Foucault.

The volume is organized into six sections and a short introduction by the editors. Part one presents a translation by Stuart Elden of questions posed by Foucault to the editors of the French geography journal *Hérodote* in 1976 following an interview with him on the occasion of the journal’s first issue publication. The four questions are used as a focal point of Foucault’s engagement with geography and vice versa and

ask: What are the relations between knowledge, war and power? What does it mean to call spatial knowledge a science? What do geographers understand by power? And what would the geographies of medical establishments (implantations) understood as ‘interventions’ look like? Foucault admits that these questions are not ones that he poses from knowledge that he might have but rather inquiries that he asks for himself.

Foucauldian novices might find the questions somewhat hard to grip with and the pure translation without any narration drives the reader to look for a theoretical framework and answers in the following pages. Yet the next six chapters of part two of the volume, each a translation of Francophone geographers’ responses to the questions (published in 1977) are not direct answers to Foucault as much as they are an attempt to relate space, scale, spatial knowledge and geography to matters of power, strategy, war and history. Part three brings together newly commissioned responses from Anglophone Academia. Here David Harvey and Nigel Thrift put forth their critic of Foucault’s work specially his regard to space as absolute non-dialectic, and his unfavorable position towards phenomenology. Two other contributors, Sara Mills (a scholar of feminist theory and linguistics) and Thomas Flynn (a philosopher) deal more directly with the questions Foucault asks and further reveal the relations between power, knowledge and spatial arrangement as well as between power and strategy.

Part four begins with Stuart Elden’s chapter in which Foucault’s encounter with *Hérodote* and the questions rising from it are situated in the context of his different projects and forming perspectives on discipline, biopower, knowledge and genealogy. Next Matthew Hannah shows, using Foucault own methodology of Archaeology, how Foucault’s ideas have been imbedded in the discourse of Anglophone geographers. Keeping in line with the dichotomy of Anglo/Franco-phone engagements with Foucault, the following piece by Juliet Falls explores the reasons for the more limited hold he had on French geography. Concluding this part Claude Raffestin asks if Foucault could have revolutionized geography. Making a case that “the geographer is blinded by visible forms and only reproduces natural or human morphologies without being entirely conscious of the practices and knowledge that condition his vision” he calls for a reflective Archaeological inquiry into that which shapes the geographical gaze. In retrospect I see this section of the volume as perhaps the most welcoming point of entry to the entire text, situating ideas and clarifying concepts that are dealt with time and again throughout the work.

Part five presents a sample of Foucault’s original works along with a reprint of ‘Questions on Geography’ the interview held with *Hérodote* editors. These include two very illuminating lectures he gave in Brazil, one on the development of the hospital as a mechanism of economy and discipline, the second a wonderful overview of his development of the notion of power. The two following chapters present Foucault’s review on certain literary texts and a piece written to accompany Paul Rebeyrolle’s series of paintings.

The final part of the volume is more empirically oriented, revealing how geographers make use of Foucault's ideas in their studies. The different contributors cover a range of questions and themes, starting with Margo Huxley's chapter on governmentality and the use of space in the exercise of power. Next, Gerry Kearns explores the development of medical geography while Jeremy Cramptone points to racial cartographies as geographical knowledge shaping Europe boundaries following WWI. David Murakami Woods introduces surveillance studies and suggests that Actor-Network Theory can be of benefit in the development of a post-Foucauldian understanding of power. The incorporation of Foucault in the postcolonial discourse or counter-discourse of modernity and Subaltern studies is discussed by Stephen Legg, while Philip Howell writes about the multiple spatiality of sexuality as biopolitics which take the form of geopolitics. Mathew Coleman and John Agnew jointly are also concerned with geopolitics, in this instance the contemporary coexistence and multiplication of forms of government as opposed to the periodization of modern/postmodern and the binaries of territorialization/deterritorialization, national/global, and identity/difference. The last chapter by Chris Philo also concludes the volume as a whole with a discussion on Foucault's series of lectures 'Society Must be Defended' and the archaeologies of knowledge with emphasize on subjugated and local knowledge.

In the end, this collection of texts, lectures, engagements, interpretations, critics, and developments throw a wide net over the different ideas, concepts and influences Foucault had impressed on geography. As such it is without doubt an important contribution to the ongoing dialog between geographers and Foucault's work. However, the absence of concise introduction to Foucauldian concepts at the opening, as well as the choice to devote parts one and two of this volume to the exchange between Foucault and *Hérodote* is telling. Although I have found many chapters to be enlightening and thought provoking, it would be difficult to regard the collection as a springboard for geographers seeking to get acquainted with Foucault. It aims for upper-level audiences and as such it will certainly continue to be a valuable source of insight.

References

- Foucault M. (1980) Questions on Geography: Interviews: The Editors of the Journal *Hérodote*. In Gordon, C. (ed.) *Michel Foucault: Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1792-1977*. Brighton UK: Harvester Press, pp. 63-77

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