Foucault Studies

Introductory Essay:
Foucauldian Spaces
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The second meeting of the Foucault Circle outside of North America, and the first in the Southern Hemisphere, was held in June 2016 in Sydney, Australia. The conference was hosted by Ben Golder and Paul Patton at the University of New South Wales. From our perspective as inhabitants of the Northern hemisphere whose participation in the conference marked our first visit to the South, the theme of this special section, *Foucauldian Spaces*, seems very appropriate. Given the disorientation and intense jet lag that result from either losing or gaining a day over the course of one's journey, time perhaps more obviously defines trans-hemispheric travel. Indeed, time implicitly frames one's experience of the opposite hemisphere: arriving in and returning to different seasons, the sixteen-hour time difference between the east coast of the United States and Sydney, the length of one's journey mark time and its passage.

And yet seasons, time zones, the duration of an airline flight also mark space in important ways. Perhaps most obviously, experiencing the place and space of Australia in winter, when we were there, and during the summer would be very different. But – again, perhaps more subtly – awareness of the time difference, of how far away from home one in fact is, of the fact that one has lost (or gained) a day during the course of one's travels – also shapes one's experience of the space one now occupies. Despite the fact that neither of us encountered the vast expanse of the outback, with which even many Australians are unfamiliar, space in Australia/Australian space felt different to us. On an immediate and personal level, Dianna was aware of a difference in light and color: both held an intensity that made space – be it an overcast and chilly Sydney or a hot, sun-drenched Great Barrier Reef – feel vibrant and dynamic. For Joanna, having spent two weeks in Darwin and Cairns prior to the conference, the contrast between the rough, magnificent landscape of the north and northeast compared to the urban sprawl of Sydney required its own conceptual transition between the space of holiday and work. At the same time, while we both found Australian space beautiful, we were nonetheless acutely aware of Australia as a place (like the U.S., albeit of course in different ways) in the process of navigating the space of its own complex and sometimes ugly and painful history. Australia (again, like the U.S.) is a space simultaneously colonized and colonizing, where the sociopolitical and economic legacy of that history shapes the present in crucial yet frequently invisible or at least

unacknowledged ways. The reality of Sydney as a spectacular city where only extremely wealthy and mostly white people can afford to live, as well as the sentiment, expressed by some whites we encountered, that Aboriginal people should either conform to white society or not expect to enjoy its benefits were startling in both their familiarity and strangeness: familiar in that many white people in the U.S. say such things, but strange in that here in the U.S. these kinds of comments refer more often to people of Hispanic and African descent than to persons indigenous to the land. Australian space for us was thus in part framed by an experience of making sense of the world in which it is impossible to simply subsume the strange under the familiar, as well as in which one is regularly denied the sort of complacency of thought through which such subsuming is able to occur.

Foucauldian critique, of course, makes the familiar strange. It does so in part by making visible that which, in its familiarity, fades into mere background; foregrounding the familiar, making it unfamiliar, therefore requires reevaluation of what we think we know. Critique confronts us with the whole of our reality, and it does so in ways that open that reality, that present, to analysis without reducing it to, and therefore merely "legitimating . . . what is already known."[1] Through such confrontation, critique thus elucidates normalizing relations of power that make the merely familiar appear as the natural and necessary, and which, in doing so, produce and pathologize the strange, the marginal, and the merely unintelligible. A particularly pernicious effect of normalization is the extent to which it can, through reproducing prevailing conditions to the point where they become experienced as not merely familiar but both fixed and given, convince us that we (at least possess the capacity to) understand "the way things are" sufficiently to develop and uncritically rely upon certain techniques for identifying, analyzing, and countering oppression and injustice. Normalization, in other words, fosters complacency even in our efforts toward counter-normalization, as such efforts manifest both individually (that is, with respect to the relation we have to ourselves) and more broadly (with respect to the relations we have to others and the world). Within the context of unfamiliar space in which the strange is ubiquitous, one may feel more compelled to grapple with rather than reduce or disavow it; it follows, then, that it may well be easier to point to the normalization that characterizes other spaces than that which is unique to and pervasive within our own. A challenge with which Foucault's work confronts us is how to inhabit familiar space differently – how, without the benefit of a critical perspective gained through leaving them, we can unsettle the spaces we traverse on a daily basis and, hence, our experiences of those spaces; how, in other words, we can constitute, understand, and relate differently not only to the world and other people, but also to ourselves. "The individual," Foucault writes, "with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces," as well as of "the problems of regional

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[1]   Michel Foucault, "Introduction," *The Use of Pleasure*: The History of Sexuality, Volume 2, (New York: Vintage, 1990), 9.

identity and its conflicts with national identity."[2] Yet Foucault also reminds us that critique entails precisely "the art of voluntary insubordination . . . reflected intractability . . . desubjugation of the subject."[3]

Consistent with the experiential and more overtly philosophical concerns described above, then, the contents of this special section address less space as such than the phenomenology of space broadly construed: how we constitute, experience, and navigate space; how we are constituted and constitute ourselves within it; and how we relate to others and the world within it given these various experiences and modes of constitution. Each of the individual papers that follow critically deploys and/or reconceptualizes an aspect of Foucault's work that engages and offers particular insight into the construction, experience, and utilization of space; through this deployment/reconceptualization, each author unsettles prevailing understandings of and modes of relating to and within a familiar space. They do so, specifically, by looking behind the curtain of the familiar to analyze the networks of power which shape the respective spaces of white suburban, post-Apartheid South Africa; Baltimore, Maryland in the wake of the death of Freddie Gray, an African American man who died at the hands of the police; and spaces of dissent generally and Zuccotti Park, the central meeting place of Occupy Wall Street, more specifically.

Charles Villet examines and expands Foucault's notion of heterotopia in his essay addressing the space of white suburbia and the particular construction of white identity formed within that space in post-Apartheid South Africa. Villet shows that while the six principles of heterotopia Foucault delineates in his essay, *Of Other Spaces*, characterize conditions within contemporary South Africa, they do not sufficiently elucidate the phenomenon of white suburbia. Villet thus expands Foucault's concept of heterotopia, pushing it beyond place or space and into phenomenological terms that explore how people experience space and place. He focuses, specifically, on how South African suburban whites experience alterity and otherness, despite their seclusion behind the circled wagons of gated and patrolled suburban communities. Apartheid, no longer a national policy, remains the goal of suburban whites within what Villet calls a postcolonial heterotopia constructed in their nostalgic attempt to preserve a white-dominated social order decimated by the end of Apartheid. Villet explains, "despite the end of Apartheid, which was a rupture of the *white* order of things, whiteness as the norm lives on in the suburbs as a place of retreat for whites who no longer dominate politically." While we may not hold much sympathy for those who constructed and benefited from Apartheid politics, understanding their experience, particularly how they constitute and thus relate to themselves as victims within their economically privileged suburbs, sheds light on power relations within South Africa. Villet

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[2]   Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 74.

[3]   Michel Foucault, "What is Critique?", *The Politics of Truth*, eds. Sylvère Lotringer and Lysa Hochroth, (New York: Semiotexte, 1997), 32.

invokes Glenn Albrecht's concept of *solastalgia*, or being homesick while at home, to explore how suburban whites internalize violent crime, specifically attacks on isolated white farmers, inflating their sense of existential threat with false reports and fake news, akin to the effects of Fox News viewership and Russian propaganda on the 2016 U.S. presidential election. An expanded sense of heterotopia, then, holds promise for understanding how one's privilege becomes invisible to oneself.

Neoliberalism was a regular topic of both presentation and discussion at the Foucault Circle meeting in Sydney. These presentations and discussions reflect the ambiguity with which Foucault wrote concerning neoliberalism in his College de France course, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, despite not reflecting unmitigated support for it. While some presenters argued for the benefits of a Foucauldian neoliberalism, others found much to critique. In her essay, Joanna Crosby analyzes the 2015 death of Freddie Gray in Baltimore, Maryland; the civil unrest that followed; and the vagaries of persecuting the drug war in order to illustrate the devaluation of human life entailed by the neoliberal embracing of human capital as a measure of human worth. After Gray's death, people in Baltimore rose up in nonviolent and violent ways, protesting decades of systemic racism, including the caprice integral to the prosecution of the war on drugs, such as trifling with stop-and-frisk policies resulting in the arrest of twenty percent of the city's population. Crosby examines the city's problems through the lens of neoliberal policies, specifically the concept of human capital through which *homo oeconomicus* builds value. She traces Foucault's concern with *homo oeconomicus* from *The Order of Things* to *The Birth of Biopolitics* in order to locate what Foucault saw as a potential alternative to a sovereign or disciplinary self; for him, *homo oeconomicus* looks like a purely rational actor, making choices based on self-interest. Neoliberalism involves the proliferation of "market values" beyond the realm of economics and into all aspects of life, leading to the characterization of human beings as "enterprise units." Foucault thought this might allow policy decisions to be made using a cost-benefit analysis instead of relying upon the diagnosis of deviant individuals, thereby reducing the value of their existence to their market contribution or return on investment; such valuation may work for those who actually build capacity, however it leaves those who are unable to gain skills and knowledge as capital expenditures.

Sylvain Lafleur's essay presents two of Foucault's lesser known notions, "justice fonctionnelle" (functional justice) and "stratégie du pourtour" (strategy of the perimeter), in order to interrogate the role of legislators in regard to the policing of political dissent. Lafleur begins by providing an overview of these two notions, and then situating them within the context of Foucault's *oeuvre*, paying particular attention to Foucault's perspective on the nature and function of law. Lafleur proceeds by elucidating the normalizing effects of ostensible "openness" and "flexibility" of the legal apparatus – specifically, the police, the courts, and the relationship between the two. He shows that the law's scope and ability to intervene within society and thereby manage the population has increased, along with its capacity to mask its own effects of power. Analyzing specific U.K. and U.S. laws governing

the right to public assembly, Lafleur shows that police increasingly have the power to redefine the legal nature of public space, in part through making arrests without having to show criminal intent (*mens rea*) on the part of protesters. In the name of security and safety, law thus circumscribes as criminal not merely acts or speech, but also spaces and the bodies that inhabit them. 'The strategy behind the "Anti-Occupy Wall Street Law,"' Lafleur writes, 'allows . . . the establishment of a breach "on the spot," and the criminalization of unwanted individuals standing in restricted zones, public or private.'

The decision for the Foucault Circle to meet in Sydney was motivated in part by a desire to provide an opportunity for a large group of Foucault scholars from the Northern and Southern hemispheres to meet in person and engage in intellectual dialogue. As a dialogue, the roundtable exchange between Lynne Huffer (Emory University, USA), Steven Ogden (Charles Sturt University, Australia), Paul Patton (University of New South Wales, Australia), and Jana Sawicki (Williams College, USA) tangibly conveys a sense of the productively critical intellectual engagements that characterized the conference. Indeed, the round table participants address many of the themes and problems addressed by Villet, Crosby, and Lafleur, and which we also address in our introductory remarks. Their respective insights into whether and in what ways the Foucault Circle conference itself could be considered a Foucauldian space are particularly illuminating. Huffer, Ogden, Patton, and Sawicki do not merely, as we do in our Introduction, draw upon Foucault's work for the purposes of thinking about space, they take on the question of what, if anything, can be said to make a space specifically "Foucauldian." In doing so, they draw attention to the exclusive, exclusionary, and hence normalizing character of academic space generally and conferences more specifically. Huffer refers specifically to how Ben Golder's opening remarks acknowledging that the conference was taking place on colonized land "disturbed" her "unconscious assumptions—about myself, my trip to Australia, my own knowledge practices." "I suddenly saw myself," Huffer relates, "sitting with ghosts, called to acknowledge the settler logic that brought me there. The specters remained there, hovering, throughout the week, unsettling the space of the Foucault Circle."

Our question about whether and in what ways "prison" continues to be a Foucauldian space, and our request that participants respond bearing in mind mass incarceration in the United States and Australian "offshore processing" of asylum seekers and refugees, elicited provocative responses. Jana Sawicki notes, for example, that while "it is easy to imagine [Foucault] deploring mass incarcerations, detention centers, offshore processing and so forth . . . perhaps his critical response would have required a different mapping of power relations than that with which he was operating in the 1970s." "Prisons," Sawicki observes, "do not necessarily resemble detention centers or offshore processing sites. One has to identify their different functions, see how they draw upon extant techniques of power, and invent new ones in order to develop strategies for resisting them." Similarly, for Paul Patton, "the very existence of offshore detention centres such as Manus Island . . . complicates the distinction that Foucault draws between sovereign and

disciplinary power." While Patton sees the detention centers as being "a kind of prison," from his perspective they are ultimately strategically and politically, "closer to the spectacular displays of capital punishment" which "sought to deter by fear of consequences" – in this a kind of "limbo with no prospect of settlement in the promised land of freedom and opportunity."

Responses to our final question, in which we asked participants to reflect on the status of neoliberalism in light of our current reality, were equally compelling. "Arguably," Steven Ogden asserts, "under neoliberalism, all forms of power, including pastoral power, are harnessed to achieve economic goals." Through analyzing Donald Trump's inauguration address, Ogden elucidates a political reality in which "neoliberalism, which appeals to economic self-interest, conceals trends leading to a "reduction in real choices." "On the basis of a mix of economic self-interest and fear of the other," Ogden argues, "Trump implicitly demands obedience. In the face of terror, the good shepherd can do whatever he needs to do. After all, obedience is prized, and there is no salvific alternative."

This special section, like the conference from which it originates, makes clear the continued relevance of Foucault's work for navigating (our experience of) the spaces of our present.

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