

4 QUESTIONS ON GEOGRAPHY

Interviewers: the editors of the journal *Hérodote*.

Your work to a large extent intersects with, and provides material for, our reflections about geography and more generally about ideologies and strategies of space. Our questioning of geography brought us into contact with a certain number of concepts you have used—knowledge (*savoir*), power, science, discursive formation, gaze, *episteme*—and your archaeology has helped give a direction to our reflection. For instance the hypothesis you put forward in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*—that a discursive formation is defined neither in terms of a particular object, nor a style, nor a play of permanent concepts, nor by the persistence of a thematic, but must be grasped in the form of a system of regular dispersion of statements—enabled us to form a clearer outline of geographical discourse. Consequently we were surprised by your silence about geography. (If we are not mistaken, you mention its existence only once in a paper about Cuvier, and then only to number it among the natural sciences.) Yet, paradoxically, we would have been astounded if you had taken account of geography since, despite the example of Kant and Hegel, philosophers know nothing about geography. Should we blame for this the geographers who, ever since Vidal de la Blache, have been careful to shut themselves off under the cover of the human sciences from any contact with Marxism, epistemology or the history of the sciences? Or should we blame the philosophers, put off by a discipline which is unclassifiable, ‘displaced’, straddling the gulf between the natural and the social sciences? Is there a ‘place’ for geography in your archaeology of knowledge? Doesn’t archaeology here reproduce the division between the sciences of nature (the inquiry and the table) and the

human sciences (examination, discipline), and thereby dissolve the site where geography could be located?

First let me give a flatly empirical answer; then we can try and see if beyond that there is more that can be said. If I made a list of all the sciences, knowledges and domains which I should mention and don't, which I border on in one way or another, the list would be practically endless. I don't discuss biochemistry, or archaeology. I haven't even attempted an archaeology of history. To me it doesn't seem a good method to take a particular science to work on just because it's interesting or important or because its history might appear to have some exemplary value. If one wanted to do a correct, clean, conceptually aseptic kind of history, then that would be a good method. But if one is interested in doing historical work that has political meaning, utility and effectiveness, then this is possible only if one has some kind of involvement with the struggles taking place in the area in question. I tried first to do a genealogy of psychiatry because I had had a certain amount of practical experience in psychiatric hospitals and was aware of the combats, the lines of force, tensions and points of collision which existed there. My historical work was undertaken only as a function of those conflicts. The problem and the stake there was the possibility of a discourse which would be both true and strategically effective, the possibility of a historical truth which could have a political effect.

That point connects up with a hypothesis I would put to you: if there are such points of collision, tensions and lines of force in geography, these remain on a subterranean level because of the very absence of polemic in geography. Whereas what attracts the interest of a philosopher, an epistemologist, an archaeologist is the possibility of either arbitrating or deriving profit from an existing polemic.

It's true that the importance of a polemic can be a factor of attraction. But I am not at all the sort of philosopher who conducts or wants to conduct a discourse of truth on some science or other. Wanting to lay down the law for each and

every science is the project of positivism. I'm not sure that one doesn't find a similar temptation at work in certain kinds of 'renovated' Marxism, one which consists in saying, 'Marxism, as the science of sciences, can provide the theory of science and draw the boundary between science and ideology'. Now this role of referee, judge and universal witness is one which I absolutely refuse to adopt, because it seems to me to be tied up with philosophy as a university institution. If I do the analyses I do, it's not because of some polemic I want to arbitrate but because I have been involved in certain conflicts regarding medicine, psychiatry and the penal system. I have never had the intention of doing a general history of the human sciences or a critique of the possibility of the sciences in general. The subtitle to *The Order of Things* is not '*the archaeology*', but '*an archaeology of the human sciences*'.

It's up to you, who are directly involved with what goes on in geography, faced with all the conflicts of power which traverse it, to confront them and construct the instruments which will enable you to fight on that terrain. And what you should basically be saying to me is, 'You haven't occupied yourself with this matter which isn't particularly your affair anyway and which you don't know much about'. And I would say in reply, 'If one or two of these "gadgets" of approach or method that I've tried to employ with psychiatry, the penal system or natural history can be of service to you, then I shall be delighted. If you find the need to transform my tools or use others then show me what they are, because it may be of benefit to me'.

You often cite historians like Lucien Febvre, Braudel and Le Roy Ladurie, and pay homage to them in various places. As it happens these are historians who have tried to open up a dialogue with geography, in order to found either a geo-history or an anthropogeography. There might have been occasion for you to make contact with geography through these historians. Again in your studies of political economy and natural history you were verging on the domain of geography. Your work seems to have been constantly bordering on geography without ever taking it explicitly into account.

This isn't a demand for some possible archaeology of geography, nor even really an expression of disappointment, just a certain surprise.

I hesitate to reply only by means of factual arguments, but I think that here again there is a will to essentiality which one should mistrust, which consists in saying, 'If you don't talk about something it must be because you are impeded by some major obstacle which we shall proceed to uncover'. One can perfectly well not talk about something because one doesn't know about it, not because one has a knowledge which is unconscious and therefore inaccessible. You asked if geography has a place in the archaeology of knowledge. The answer is yes, provided one changes the formulation. Finding a place for geography would imply that the archaeology of knowledge embraces a project of global, exhaustive coverage of all domains of knowledge. This is not at all what I had in mind. Archaeology of knowledge only ever means a certain mode of approach.

It is true that Western philosophy, since Descartes at least, has always been involved with the problem of knowledge. This is not something one can escape. If someone wanted to be a philosopher but didn't ask himself the question, 'What is knowledge?', or, 'What is truth?', in what sense could one say he was a philosopher? And for all that I may like to say I'm not a philosopher, nonetheless if my concern is with truth then I am still a philosopher. Since Nietzsche this question of truth has been transformed. It is no longer, 'What is the surest path to Truth?', but, 'What is the hazardous career that Truth has followed?' That was Nietzsche's question, Husserl's as well, in *The Crisis of the European Sciences*. Science, the constraint to truth, the obligation of truth and ritualised procedures for its production have traversed absolutely the whole of Western society for millennia and are now so universalised as to become the general law for all civilisations. What is the history of this 'will to truth'? What are its effects? How is all this interwoven with relations of power? If one takes this line of enquiry then such a method can be applied to geography; indeed, it should be, but just as one could equally do the same with pharmacology, microbiology,

demography and who knows what else. Properly speaking there is no 'place' in archaeology for geography, but it should be possible to conduct *an* archaeology of geographical knowledge.

If geography is invisible or ungrasped in the area of your explorations and excavations, this may be due to the deliberately historical or archaeological approach which privileges the factor of time. Thus, one finds in your work a rigorous concern with periodisation that contrasts with the vagueness and relative indeterminacy of your spatial demarcations. Your domains of reference are alternately Christendom, the Western world, Northern Europe and France, without these spaces of reference ever really being justified or even precisely specified. As you write, 'Each periodisation is the demarcation in history of a certain level of events, and conversely each level of events demands its own specific periodisation, because according to the choice of level different periodisations have to be marked out and, depending on the periodisation one adopts, different levels of events become accessible. This brings us to the complex methodology of discontinuity'. It is possible, essential even, to conceive such a methodology of discontinuity for space and the scales of spatial magnitude. You accord a *de facto* privilege to the factor of time, at the cost of nebulous or nomadic spatial demarcations whose uncertainty is in contrast with your care in marking off sections of time, periods and ages.

We are touching here on a problem of method, but also on a question of material constraint, namely the possibility available to any one individual of covering the whole of this spatio-temporal field. After all, with *Discipline and Punish* I could perfectly well call my subject the history of penal policy in France—alone. That after all is essentially what I did, apart from a certain number of excursions, references and examples taken from elsewhere. If I don't spell that out, but allow the frontier to wander about, sometimes over the whole of the West, that's because the documentation I was using extends in part outside France, and also because in

order to grasp a specifically French phenomenon I was often obliged to look at something that happened elsewhere in a more explicit form that antedated or served as a model for what took place in France. This enabled me—allowing for local and regional variations—to situate these French phenomena in the context of Anglo-Saxon, Spanish, Italian and other societies. I don't specify the space of reference more narrowly than that since it would be as warranted to say that I was speaking of France alone as to say I was talking about the whole of Europe. There is indeed a task to be done of making the space in question precise, saying where a certain process stops, what are the limits beyond which something different happens—though this would have to be a collective undertaking.

This uncertainty about spatialisation contrasts with your profuse use of spatial metaphors—position, displacement, site, field; sometimes geographical metaphors even—territory, domain, soil, horizon, archipelago, geopolitics, region, landscape.

Well, let's take a look at these geographical metaphors. *Territory* is no doubt a geographical notion, but it's first of all a juridico-political one: the area controlled by a certain kind of power. *Field* is an economico-juridical notion. *Displacement*: what displaces itself is an army, a squadron, a population. *Domain* is a juridico-political notion. *Soil* is a historico-geological notion. *Region* is a fiscal, administrative, military notion. *Horizon* is a pictorial, but also a strategic notion.

There is only one notion here that is truly geographical, that of an *archipelago*. I used it only once, and that was to designate, via the title of Solzhenitsyn's work, the carceral archipelago: the way in which a form of punitive system is physically dispersed yet at the same time covers the entirety of a society.

Certainly these notions are not geographical in a narrow sense. Nonetheless, they are the notions which are basic to every geographical proposition. This pinpoints the fact that geographical discourse produces few concepts of its own, instead picking up notions from

here, there and everywhere. Thus landscape is a pictorial notion, but also an essential object for traditional geography.

But can you be sure that I am borrowing these terms from geography rather than from exactly where geography itself found them?

The point that needs to be emphasised here is that certain spatial metaphors are equally geographical and strategic, which is only natural since geography grew up in the shadow of the military. A circulation of notions can be observed between geographical and strategic discourses. The *region* of the geographers is the military region (from *regere*, to command), a *province* is a conquered territory (from *vincere*). *Field* evokes the battlefield

People have often reproached me for these spatial obsessions, which have indeed been obsessions for me. But I think through them I did come to what I had basically been looking for: the relations that are possible between power and knowledge. Once knowledge can be analysed in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition, one is able to capture the process by which knowledge functions as a form of power and disseminates the effects of power. There is an administration of knowledge, a politics of knowledge, relations of power which pass via knowledge and which, if one tries to transcribe them, lead one to consider forms of domination designated by such notions as field, region and territory. And the politico-strategic term is an indication of how the military and the administration actually come to inscribe themselves both on a material soil and within forms of discourse. Anyone envisaging the analysis of discourses solely in terms of temporal continuity would inevitably be led to approach and analyse it like the internal transformation of an individual consciousness. Which would lead to his erecting a great collective consciousness as the scene of events.

Metaphorising the transformations of discourse in a vocabulary of time necessarily leads to the utilisation of the model

of individual consciousness with its intrinsic temporality. Endeavouring on the other hand to decipher discourse through the use of spatial, strategic metaphors enables one to grasp precisely the points at which discourses are transformed in, through and on the basis of relations of power.

In *Reading Capital*, Althusser poses an analogous question: 'The recourse made in this text to spatial metaphors (field, terrain, space, site, situation, position, etc.) poses a theoretical problem: the problem of the validity of its *claim* to existence in a discourse with scientific pretensions. The problem may be formulated as follows: *why* does a certain form of scientific discourse necessarily need the use of metaphors borrowed from scientific disciplines?' Althusser thus presents recourse to spatial metaphors as necessary, but at the same time as regressive, non-rigorous. Everything tends on the contrary to suggest that spatial metaphors, far from being reactionary, technocratic, unwarranted or illegitimate, are rather symptoms of a 'strategic', 'combative' thought, one which poses the space of discourse as a terrain and an issue of political practices.

It is indeed, war, administration, the implantation or management of some form of power which are in question in such expressions. A critique could be carried out of this devaluation of space that has prevailed for generations. Did it start with Bergson, or before? Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic.

For all those who confuse history with the old schemas of evolution, living continuity, organic development, the progress of consciousness or the project of existence, the use of spatial terms seems to have the air of an anti-history. If one started to talk in terms of space that meant one was hostile to time. It meant, as the fools say, that one 'denied history', that one was a 'technocrat'. They didn't understand that to trace the forms of implantation, delimitation and demarcation of objects, the modes of tabulation, the organisation of domains meant the throwing into relief of processes—historical ones, needless to say—of power. The spatialising

description of discursive realities gives on to the analysis of related effects of power.

In *Discipline and Punish*, this strategising method of thought advances a further stage. With the Panoptic system we are no longer dealing with a mere metaphor. What is at issue here is the description of institutions in terms of architecture, of spatial configurations. In the conclusion you even refer to the 'imaginary geopolitics' of the carceral city. Does this figure of the Panopticon offer the basis for a description of the State apparatus in its entirety? In this latest book an implicit model of power emerges: the dissemination of micro-powers, a dispersed network of apparatuses without a single organising system, centre or focus, a transverse co-ordination of disparate institutions and technologies. At the same time, however, you note the installation of State control over schools, hospitals, establishments of correction and education previously in the hands of religious bodies or charitable associations. And parallel with this is the creation of a centralised police, exercising a permanent, exhaustive surveillance which makes all things visible by becoming itself invisible. 'In the eighteenth century the organisation of police ratifies the generalisation of disciplines and attains the dimensions of the State.'

By the term 'Panoptism', I have in mind an ensemble of mechanisms brought into play in all the clusters of procedures used by power. Panoptism was a technological invention in the order of power, comparable with the steam engine in the order of production. This invention had the peculiarity of being utilised first of all on a local level, in schools, barracks and hospitals. This was where the experiment of integral surveillance was carried out. People learned how to establish dossiers, systems of marking and classifying, the integrated accountancy of individual records. Certain of the procedures had of course already been utilised in the economy and taxation. But the permanent surveillance of a group of pupils or patients was a different matter. And, at a certain moment in time, these methods began to become generalised. The police apparatus served

as one of the principal vectors of this process of extension, but so too did the Napoleonic administration. I think in the book I quoted a beautiful description of the role of the Attorneys-General under the Empire as the eyes of the Emperor; from the First Attorney-General in Paris to the least Assistant Public Prosecutor in the provinces, one and the same gaze watches for disorder, anticipates the danger of crime, penalising every deviation. And should any part of this universal gaze chance to slacken, the collapse of the State itself would be imminent. The Panoptic system was not so much confiscated by the State apparatuses, rather it was these apparatuses which rested on the basis of small-scale, regional, dispersed Panoptisms. In consequence one cannot confine oneself to analysing the State apparatus alone if one wants to grasp the mechanisms of power in their detail and complexity. There is a sort of schematism that needs to be avoided here—and which incidentally is not to be found in Marx—that consists of locating power in the State apparatus, making this into the major, privileged, capital and almost unique instrument of the power of one class over another. In reality, power in its exercise goes much further, passes through much finer channels, and is much more ambiguous, since each individual has at his disposal a certain power, and for that very reason can also act as the vehicle for transmitting a wider power. The reproduction of the relations of production is not the only function served by power. The systems of domination and the circuits of exploitation certainly interact, intersect and support each other, but they do not coincide.

Even if the State apparatus isn't the only vector of power, it's still true, especially in France with its Panoptico-prefectoral system, that the State spans the essential sector of disciplinary practices.

The administrative monarchy of Louis XIV and Louis XV, intensely centralised as it was, certainly acted as an initial disciplinary model. As you know, the police was invented in Louis XV's France. I do not mean in any way to minimise the importance and effectiveness of State power. I simply feel that excessive insistence on its playing an exclusive role

leads to the risk of overlooking all the mechanisms and effects of power which don't pass directly via the State apparatus, yet often sustain the State more effectively than its own institutions, enlarging and maximising its effectiveness. In Soviet society one has the example of a State apparatus which has changed hands, yet leaves social hierarchies, family life, sexuality and the body more or less as they were in capitalist society. Do you imagine the mechanisms of power that operate between technicians, foremen and workers are that much different here and in the Soviet Union?

You have shown how psychiatric knowledge presupposed and carried within itself the demand for the closed space of the asylum, how disciplinary knowledge contained within itself the model of the prison, Bichat's clinical medicine the enclave of the hospital and political economy the form of the factory. One might wonder, as a conceit or a hypothesis, whether geographical knowledge doesn't carry within itself the circle of the frontier, whether this be a national, departmental or cantonal frontier; and hence, whether one shouldn't add to the figures of internment you have indicated—that of the madman, the criminal, the patient, the proletarian—the national internment of the citizen-soldier. Wouldn't we have here a space of confinement which is both infinitely vaster and less hermetic?

That's a very appealing notion. And the inmate, in your view, would be national man? Because the geographical discourse which justifies frontiers is that of nationalism?

Geography being together with history constitutive of this national discourse: this is clearly shown with the establishment of Jules Ferry's universal primary schools which entrust history-geography with the task of implanting and inculcating the civic and patriotic spirit.

Which has as its effect the constitution of a personal identity, because it's my hypothesis that the individual is not a

pre-given entity which is seized on by the exercise of power. The individual, with his identity and characteristics, is the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces. There is much that could be said as well on the problems of regional identity and its conflicts with national identity.

The map as instrument of power/knowledge spans the three successive chronological thresholds you have described: that of measure with the Greeks, that of the inquiry during the Middle Ages, that of the examination in the eighteenth century. The map is linked to each of these forms, being transformed from an instrument of measurement to an instrument of inquiry, becoming finally today an instrument of examination (electoral maps, taxation maps, etc.). All the same the history (and archaeology) of the map doesn't correspond to 'your' chronology.

A map giving numbers of votes cast or choices of parties: this is certainly an instrument of examination. I think there is this historical succession of the three models, but obviously these three techniques didn't remain isolated from each other. Each one directly contaminates the others. The inquiry used the technique of measure, and the examination made use of inquiry. Then examination reacted back on the first two models, and this brings us back to an aspect of your first question: doesn't the distinction between examination and inquiry reproduce the distinction between social science and science of nature? What in fact I would like to see is how inquiry as a model, a fiscal, administrative, political schema, came to serve as a matrix for the great surveys which are made at the end of the eighteenth century where people travel the world gathering information. They don't collect their data raw: literally, they inquire, in terms of schemas which are more or less clear or conscious for them. And I believe the sciences of nature did indeed install themselves within this general form of the inquiry; just as the sciences of man were born at the moment when the procedures of surveillance and record-taking of individuals were established. Although that was only a starting-point.

And because of the effects of intersection that were immediately produced, the forms of inquiry and examination interacted, and as a consequence the sciences of nature and man also overlapped in terms of their concepts, methods and results. I think one could find in geography a good example of a discipline which systematically uses measure, inquiry and examination.

There is a further omnipresent figure in geographical discourse: that of the inventory or catalogue. And this kind of inventory precisely combines the triple register of inquiry, measure and examination. The geographer — and this is perhaps his essential, strategic function — collects information in an inventory which in its raw state does not have much interest and is not in fact usable except by power. What power needs is not science but a mass of information which its strategic position can enable it to exploit.

This give us a better understanding both of the epistemological weakness of geographical studies, and at the same time of their profitability (past more than present) for apparatuses of power. Those seventeenth-century travellers and nineteenth-century geographers were actually intelligence-gatherers, collecting and mapping information which was directly exploitable by colonial powers, strategists, traders and industrialists.

I can cite an anecdote here, for what it's worth. A specialist in documents of the reign of Louis XIV discovered while looking at seventeenth-century diplomatic correspondence that many narratives that were subsequently repeated as travellers' tales of all sorts of marvels, incredible plants and monstrous animals, were actually coded reports. They were precise accounts of the military state of the countries traversed, their economic resources, markets, wealth and possible diplomatic relations. So that what many people ascribe to the persistent naïveté of certain eighteenth-century naturalists and geographers were in reality extraordinarily precise reports whose key has apparently now been deciphered.

Wondering why there have never been polemics within

geography, we immediately thought of the weak influence Marx has had on geographers. There has never been a Marxist geography nor even a Marxist current in geography. Those geographers who invoke Marxism tend in fact to go off into economics or sociology, giving privileged attention to the planetary or the medium scale. Marxism and geography are hard to articulate with one another. Perhaps Marxism, or at any rate *Capital* and the economic texts in general, does not lend itself very readily to a spatialising approach because of the privilege it gives to the factor of time. Is that what is at issue in this remark of yours in an interview: 'Whatever the importance of their modification of Ricardo's analyses, I don't believe Marx's economic analyses escape from the epistemological space established by Ricardo'?

As far as I'm concerned, Marx doesn't exist. I mean, the sort of entity constructed around a proper name, signifying at once a certain individual, the totality of his writings, and an immense historical process deriving from him. I believe Marx's historical analysis, the way he analyses the formation of capital, is for a large part governed by the concepts he derives from the framework of Ricardian economics. I take no credit for that remark, Marx says it himself. However, if you take his analysis of the Paris Commune or *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, there you have a type of historical analysis which manifestly doesn't rely on any eighteenth-century model.

It's always possible to make Marx into an author, localisable in terms of a unique discursive physiognomy, subject to analysis in terms of originality or internal coherence. After all, people are perfectly entitled to 'academise' Marx. But that means misconceiving the kind of break he effected.

If one re-reads Marx in terms of the treatment of the spatial, his work appears heterogenous. There are whole passages which reveal an astonishing spatial sensibility.

There are some very remarkable ones. Everything he wrote on the army and its role in the development of political

power, for instance. There is some very important material there that has been left practically fallow for the sake of endless commentaries on surplus value.

I have enjoyed this discussion with you because I've changed my mind since we started. I must admit I thought you were demanding a place for geography like those teachers who protest when an education reform is proposed, because the number of hours of natural sciences or music is being cut. So I thought, 'It's nice of them to ask me to do their archaeology, but after all, why can't they do it themselves?' I didn't see the point of your objection. Now I can see that the problems you put to me about geography are crucial ones for me. Geography acted as the support, the condition of possibility for the passage between a series of factors I tried to relate. Where geography itself was concerned, I either left the question hanging or established a series of arbitrary connections.

The longer I continue, the more it seems to me that the formation of discourses and the genealogy of knowledge need to be analysed, not in terms of types of consciousness, modes of perception and forms of ideology, but in terms of tactics and strategies of power. Tactics and strategies deployed through implantations, distributions, demarcations, control of territories and organisations of domains which could well make up a sort of geopolitics where my preoccupations would link up with your methods. One theme I would like to study in the next few years is that of the army as a matrix of organisation and knowledge; one would need to study the history of the fortress, the 'campaign', the 'movement', the colony, the territory. Geography must indeed necessarily lie at the heart of my concerns.