

Introduction: Lost Geographies

It might seem odd to suggest that geography is something that we can lose. It may seem even odder to suggest this can happen around power and its relationships, especially as geography and power seem to run together in so many ways. The connection of geography with power, if one thinks about it, is pretty much a familiar one. Most political disputes over land and territory, in Europe and beyond, where borders have been torn up and redrawn by coercive states or countries subjected to the dominant force of neighbouring governments or ethnic groupings, have geography at their core. Closer to home, the gated communities which have sprung up in major cities to enable the affluent to live behind high walls and electronic gates are an integral mix of geographical and economic constraint. Then there are those unsettling moments when you find yourself on the receiving end of a blunt decision or insensitive instruction taken by some far-off government agency or impersonal corporation and can only begin to wonder where such powers at a distance really come from, let alone who lies behind them. Or the times, in a public space perhaps, where you are made to feel that your every movement is under observation, subject to surveillance of some kind, yet are quite unable to say whether this is actually happening or that anyone is really directing things.

Yet the argument of this book is that however familiar the association of geography with power, we have lost the sense in which geography makes a difference to the exercise of power. For all that someone like the French philosopher Michel Foucault might have told us about power turning up more or less everywhere because it comes from everywhere, the landscapes of power that are familiar to us have, to my mind, limited rather than extended our understanding of power. In a world where it has almost become commonplace to talk about power as networked or concentrated, distributed or centralized, even decentred, deterritorialized or radically

dispersed, it is all too easy to miss the diverse geographies of power that put us in place.

As I see it, power is not something that is simply extended over short or long distances, or something which radiates out from an identifiable central point, or something which engulfs places in ways that are all pervasive. Power is not some 'thing' that moves and it does not traverse and transect places or communities, so that we may be forgiven for thinking that it is all encompassing. Power, as I understand it, is a relational effect of social interaction. It may bridge the gap between here and there, but only through a succession of mediated relations or through the establishment of a simultaneous presence. People are placed by power, but they experience it at first hand through the rhythms and relationships of particular places, not as some pre-packaged force from afar and not as a ubiquitous presence. The diverse geographies of power that I wish to foreground work through relations of proximity and reach to bring the far-off into people's lives and also to make the close-at-hand sometimes feel remote.

It is this grasp of what geography can do that has been lost, or rather perhaps I should say it is this particular geography of power that is waiting to be understood for the first time.

Much of this book is given over to reminding us of the difference that geography can make to the exercise of power: that power in its various guises takes effect through distinctive relations of proximity and reach, and in so doing exercises our lives in ways that are not always so familiar. Only by turning over some of our familiar assumptions about geography and power can we glimpse some of the many ways in which power puts us in place. It is in this sense that geography matters to our relationships with those who exercise power and, turning this around, what power is matters to what can be said geographically about its exercise.

For my part, I wish to press this claim through two lines of argument. The first is that in the rush to see power as something which turns up more or less everywhere, I think that we have lost sight of the *particularities* of power, the diverse and specific *modalities* of power that make a difference to how we are put in our place, how we experience power.

Believing with Max Weber and Hannah Arendt that power is never power in general, but always power of a particular kind, I take such acts as domination, authority, seduction, manipulation, coercion and the like to possess their own relational peculiarities. The glib sense in which power is believed to be all around us has not only proved to be a source of distraction in this respect, it has also to my mind minimized the experience of what it means to have had a brush with power. A world of difference separates dominant relationships which restrict choice and close down possibilities from those which, for instance, secure assent, manipulate outcomes, impute threats or seduce through suggestion and enticement. I want to bring such

differences and distinctions back to the fore, not only to underline the kinds of confrontation that power can and does take, but also to weave them into a more geographically curious dialogue of power.

For the second part of my argument is that I think that we have lost the sense in which power is *inherently* spatial and, conversely, spatiality is *imbued* with power. Much of what I take to be the diverse geographies of power has been lost to our understanding precisely because the likes of domination, authority and seduction have not been thought through in terms of how they are exercised, whether close at hand, at a distance, through a succession of relationships or established simultaneously.

Authority, for instance, is a peculiarly distinctive act, as anyone who has ever been mocked or undermined whilst trying to exercise it will readily testify. Authority, whether it be the discipline laid down by a teacher early on in life, or later by a managerial figure of some kind, works through recognition in an attempt to secure the willingness of others to comply. Such authority can be geographically far-reaching or it can be exercised close at hand, but the more distant it is, the greater the possibility for both the position and the act to pass unrecognized. Presence and proximity matter to authority in a way that to mock or to poke fun at, say, a dominant force like a multinational firm with a monopolistic grip on the market does not. It does not take long to realize that lives subjected to domination may quite easily be constrained and controlled either at arm's length or at close quarters. There is, it is important to stress, nothing predetermined in a spatial sense about any of this, nothing to suggest that authority will falter at a distance; it is merely that, given the type of relation that authority is, presence and proximity will inevitably matter to its exercise.

Maybe the sense in which closeness matters to authority has only ever been acknowledged in a matter-of-fact way, but I do none the less wish to claim that we have lost sight of such spatial references, and in so doing impoverished our understanding of power. It seems that much easier to see the association between power and geography through the odd tall fence, high wall and exclusionary boundary marker than it is to recognize that the many and varied modalities of power are themselves constituted *differently* in space and time. Paradoxically, the more attention that has been paid to the spaces of power, its flow, circulation, diffusion, displacement even, the less we know, it seems to me, about how geography affects the workings of power. Somewhat ironically, we now have a richer spatial vocabulary of power than hitherto, but a poorer grasp of the difference that geography makes to the *exercise* of power. As such, a good deal more has been obscured than revealed.

This book tries to show how things might look if we stop treating power as uniform and continuous over space and start to think through the diverse geographies of power's proximity and reach, and how these play across one

another. In this topological landscape, fixed distances and well-defined proximities fail to convey how the specific relational ties of power are established. For that, we need to be a little more curious about power's spatial constitution and not get lost or distracted in familiar spaces.

Before we adopt this geographically curious pose, I should first say a little more about what I take power to be.

Situating Power

Part of the familiar baggage of power can, I think, be traced to a particular view of it that is surprisingly hard to shake. Though many of us might like to distance ourselves from it, the sense in which power is out there ready to be wielded or clung on to or flaunted is deeply ingrained. It is almost inconceivable to imagine our lives separate from those bodies, institutions and figures who have this thing called power at their disposal. It is just part of the durable architecture of social life: some people have it but choose not to use it, whilst others use it and even abuse it.

We may dismiss such tangible images, preferring instead to think about power as something exercised rather than held, but that will not prevent such images from registering in our minds the next time some event or character upsets the balance of order. It is the figure of the slick chief executive who, in a bid to amass even greater wealth and fortune, inflates the company's size to buy influence and exploit trading loopholes; it is the bureaucrat who knows how to turn the rule-making machinery to their advantage and admit no discretion; or, more graphically, it is a modern-day battleship carrier group steaming over the horizon towards us at a rate of knots. Equivalent in height to something like a twenty-storey building, it is not difficult to see how such battleship formations could arouse a mixture of awe and fear among those looking on. Weber and Arendt may well have been right to stress that there is no one 'thing' called power, that the concept itself is 'amorphous', but that will not stop most of us from acting as if there were such an embodied entity.

Even if we cannot shrug off such thoughts and images, however, that does not mean that we have to believe in power of the sort that only moves people and mountains. To suggest that power is a *relational effect*, that it is an outcome of social interaction not something designed to put a blunt stop to it, does not convey quite the same convincing impression as a manipulative chief executive, but it is more in line with what we have been saying about power turning up more or less everywhere. If power is something that exercises us in particular ways, through various modalities, then we need to understand why it is misconceived to equate massed resources and capabilities with power.

Size and ability are perhaps among the more obvious reasons why we should think of resources as power. The bigger the capabilities at our disposal, whether measured by financial muscle, skills, information, contacts or sheer fire-power, the greater the assumed power. Why this should be so is not entirely clear to me, as indeed it was not to Anthony Giddens, or to the American sociologist Talcott Parsons before him or, for that matter, the able Florentine Niccolò Machiavelli back in the sixteenth century.

Resources may be misused, incompetently applied, mobilized for all the wrong reasons and, perhaps worst of all, simply wasted by a misguided yet otherwise well-meaning bunch of individuals. Those in charge may make a string of bad decisions, or those nominally in control may pool all available resources, yet to no avail. What can go wrong may well go wrong, and if it does not it may succeed only partially or hardly at all. In short, power as an outcome cannot and should not be 'read off' from a resource base, regardless of its size or scope. Power in this sense is no more to be found 'in' the apparatus of rule than sound is to be found 'in' the wood of musical instruments. It is, as suggested, a relational effect, not a property of someone or some 'thing'. Resources can increase in size and you can lose them or they may simply evaporate, but I am not convinced that power can do any of these things. Power, it seems to me, is often disguised as resources and in that sense we need to disentangle the two; we need to distinguish clearly between the exercise of power and the resource capabilities mobilized to sustain that exercise. I draw this distinction as the basis for a more thorough examination of the specific relational ties through which power establishes itself.

These ties, broadly speaking, take one of two forms: either *instrumental*, where power is something that is held over you and used to obtain leverage, or *associational*, where power acts more like a collective medium enabling things to get done or facilitate some common aim. The contrast is significant because it is what we experience when power is exercised either *over* or *with* others. Whereas the former is always exercised at someone else's expense, excluding them or putting them in their place in ways that constrain, the latter represents a means of enablement where all those taking part may benefit in some way. If we think of the former as the archetypal view of power, an action rooted in conflict where one side subjects the other to its will, the latter, unaccustomed view of power is rooted in mutual action and holds out the prospect of empowerment for all those involved. As a convenient shorthand, one involves the exercise of 'power over' others and the other the 'power to' act.

The shorthand is not mine alone; it has a long and varied history as it has been adapted to the concerns and interests of diverse scholars (see Allen 2002). I use it as a guide more than anything else to return our attention to

the *particularities* of power, those relationships around us that we experience as constraint, which sometimes touch us in ways that are often hard to pinpoint, and those we experience as enabling through various forms of association.

Authority, as I have said, is a peculiarly distinctive act which works through recognition. Once claimed, whether by doctors, teachers and lawyers or just plain ordinary managers, it has to justify itself in the eyes of those around them. It is conceded, not imposed, and even to those in professional office, where the position goes with the job so to speak, authority is 'lent', and only for so long as recognition lasts. Compliance is always conditional and anyone thinking that a rule book is all the legitimacy that is necessary is one day likely to be in for a rude awakening. I stress this distinctiveness not because I am vexed by deep semantic anxiety, but to avoid the easy reaction to talk of power being everywhere, which is to slide between power, authority and domination *as if* they are the same thing in terms of their effect.

Authority, as an instrumental act, is exercised like *domination* at someone else's expense, but it does not involve the imposition of a form of conduct so that submission is the only possible option. Nor does authority involve the *manipulative* concealment of intent, or the *coercive* threat of force to exact compliance, or the *seductive* arousal of this rather than that line of interests. It is these differences that I want to bring back to the forefront of discussion, as well as those between *negotiation* and *persuasion*, for example, which can speak to a less confrontational agenda of power.

Inevitably, there will always be some slippage of meaning as far as power is concerned, but that does not take anything away from the fact that different modalities of power work through distinct relational ties. Omnipotent chief executives and bureaucratic monoliths, as well as any number of 'exclusionary' arrangements, will no doubt continue to carry the day in terms of the durable architecture of power, but the powers all around us are powers of a particular kind – with quite specific effects. And, unlike so-called blocs of power, they are inextricably spatial.

From Spatial Vocabularies of Power . . .

When we turn to existing vocabularies of space and power, the diverse geographies of power that I have in mind elude our grasp more easily, if anything. As previously mentioned, a major part of the argument of this book is that our new-found appreciation of all matters spatial has served to obscure rather than reveal much of the difference that geography makes to the exercise of power. In part I, I devote considerable attention to the spatial vocabularies of power employed by different writers, with an eye

to the explicit spatial characteristics that each employs within their broad frameworks of meaning.

The astute reader will notice the absence of certain key writers on power, most notably the political sociologist Steven Lukes but also C. Wright Mills and the neo-Machiavellian elite theorists Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, and the reason for this is quite straightforward. Only those writers who possess more than a nominal sense of space in their writings on power have been included. It was never my intention to produce an A-to-Z of power from the political theorist Thomas Hobbes onwards. There are other texts available which admirably provide such coverage. The coverage I seek, in contrast, ranges from those writers with little to those with a rather fertile *spatial imagination* of power.

At the barren end of the spectrum, Max Weber, for instance, talks about the powers of command and their distribution, although where space appears as little more than a complication to its delegation or distribution. On a more engaged basis, Anthony Giddens speaks about distanced forms of power, where relationships stretched over space represent a more modern, facilitative means of securing outcomes, and Michael Mann blends authoritative and diffuse techniques of organization to show how overlapping networks of power can achieve far-flung goals of one kind or another. Manuel Castells, too, provides an engaging account of how power flows through complex systems of networked interaction.

No assessment of power relations, space and spatiality would be credible, however, unless it included the work of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. Foucault's attention to constitutive detail, where the arrangement of spaces which make up institutional complexes, like the prison or the clinic, are seen as integral to the ways in which particular forms of conduct are secured, lies behind much of the recent fascination with everyday spaces of power. His interest in the art of dispersed government too, where entire populations are said to come under the sway of a broad range of immanent techniques oriented towards the production of new subjectivities, has also proved to be influential. And Deleuze, with his co-writer Felix Guattari, has written about deterritorialized apparatus of rule in ways that have attempted to convey the pervasive nature of contemporary power. Indeed, a diagrammatic sensibility, where power is seen to constitute its own organization yet produce itself relationally from point to point, is common to the spatial vocabularies of Foucault and Deleuze.

For all such writers, space in one way or another is implicated in relationships of power; it is significant to their realization or actualization. Some vocabularies are a little more stilted than others in the way that they represent spatiality and some more challenged than challenging in their view of space, but there is none the less a spatial imagination to reckon with, especially in the writings of Foucault and Deleuze. Yet for all their labours, I think that,

for different reasons, they fall short of an appreciation of the inherent spatiality of power and, relatedly, that spatiality is itself imbued with power.

Such a principal lack, in my view, is evident in the case of Weber and indeed wherever power is represented as a ‘thing-like’ property capable of extensive reach. The possession of power identifies its location – it is in the hands of someone, marshalled by somebody, concentrated in some institution – and in a comforting sort of way its extension or distribution over space is taken for granted. There is a kind of homely promise that nothing much really happens between here and there to cause us to worry about what moves exactly or what, if anything, is distributed. Even in the more interesting contemporary landscape of a territorially reordered world where political governance has to negotiate a more complex institutional geography – between, say, global institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, footloose multinationals and the now ubiquitous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) – power still seems to be regarded as something which shifts across borders or is redistributed between sites of authority without too much difficulty. It may well be that there has been some redistribution of rights and responsibilities between global actors, but it strikes me that for much of the time what passes for power is some pre-formed capacity that is more or less transmitted intact across the landscape. Geography, it would appear, is little more than a minor disruption to the general exercise of power.

In the systematizing hands of Mann and Castells there is rather more to space and spatiality than this, and yet they too, in my view, rely upon an equally unproblematic account of how power ‘travels’ or flows through the multiple networks that comprise society. True, they both produce rich accounts of networked interactions in their writings, where power (re)-sources are organized in a loose or tightly orchestrated fashion, but it is hard to get away from the fact that power, for them, is something that is generated at different sites across the networks and projected with relative ease between locations. Because power is considered to be a ‘fluid’ medium, it is almost as if they wish to suggest an analogy with the circuitry of electrical energy, where networks transmit power as a matter of course through any number of connected circuits. Indeed, perhaps because a view of social space which foregrounds the circulation and flow of power is only too recognizable, it appears almost pointless to question it.

But if, as argued, power is not some ‘thing’ or attribute that can be possessed, I do not believe either that it can flow: it is only ever mediated as a relational effect of social interaction. Put another way, power is not a uniform or continuous substance transmitted across tracts of space and time; it is always constituted in space and time.

This is the kind of appreciation that both Foucault and Deleuze bring to an understanding of power and spatiality. Subjects are constituted by the

spacing and timing of their own practices as much as they are by those who seek to shape their conduct. As an immanent force which constitutes its own organization, not one imposed from above or from the outside, power is seen as coextensive with its field of operation. Power is practised before it is possessed and it is this that gives rise to the roundaboutness of power, not some facile notion that it is a shadowy force lurking in the murky recesses. The spaces of the everyday are the sites through which subjectivity is immanently produced.

Or, rather, the commonplace institutional spaces of education, health, welfare, work and correction provide the settings through which power is exercised. But how such arrangements work outside of the walls of the institution, in the context of a widely diffuse and disparate population, seems to me to demand an altogether different spatial imagination. If the art of dispersed government is to mean anything at all, I would argue that we need to go beyond the spread of 'certainties' outwards to consider the more mediated relations through which the far-off is brought within reach. More than that, we need to be a little more curious about power's spatial constitution in a landscape that does not assume fixed distances, well-defined proximities and effortless reach.

... to Power's Spatial Constitution

In part II, I hope to be able to show what we have lost that is geographical in relation to power. For instance, I consider Weber's grasp of the subtle distinctions and modalities of power to be insightful, yet what is gained in analytical strength is lost by his less than convincing view that power is simply impelled outwards. If he had problematized the spatial in the way Foucault endeavoured to do, then a more coextensive notion of power's twists and turns might have been possible. Equally, if Foucault had reflected a little more on the difference between domination and authority, and how they in turn differ from the practice of manipulation or the act of inducement or the art of seduction, then a more nuanced account of spatiality and power might have been attainable.

But this is merely wishful thinking. In part II, I somewhat ambitiously aim to blend the two lines of analysis – to show how spatiality is constitutive of power relations not only in general, but also in the particular ways in which, say, seduction takes advantage of existing attitudes and expectations to reach an audience or domination works to constrain a disparate population. Without a grasp of the particularities of power we cannot begin to understand the difference that geography makes to its exercise. Even if we accept Foucault's immanent conception of power, as I broadly do, it is important to bear in mind – lest we lose sight of it – that power relations

have long been experienced through a variety of different modes and that they are always already spatial.

As I see it, there is no spatial template for power, but that does not mean that power assumes some kind of undifferentiated spatiality. Authority, to press the point, works through relations of proximity and presence if it is to be at all effective in drawing people into line on a day-to-day basis. The more direct the presence, the more intense the impact. The same goes for coercion, that most certain imprint of power, where the threat of force holds only for as long as people feel restrained by its possibility. Manipulation, in contrast, is a one-sided affair where the concealment of interests gives its application significant spatial reach, as do the modest, suggestive qualities of seduction, which leaves open the possibility for people to reject or remain indifferent to its pervasive exercise. For seduction is a hit-or-miss type of power, where the possibility of refusal is built in, so to speak. Domination as an act of blanket constraint is different again in terms of both its social and spatial constitution, as is the reward-based nature of inducement, and so on and so forth.

To belabour the point, though, the issue is not one of detailing the geographical aspects of power, but, as I have said, one of grasping the *particular* ways in which modes of power take effect. There are no pre-formed strategies of domination back at base waiting to be unleashed or off-the-peg seductive acts in the catalogue available on request. There are only power's mediated relations, which may draw the more or less dispersed lives of people closer through real-time technologies or reach out to them through a succession of relations and practices. Either way, the relationship between proximity and presence plays across the gap between here and there in different ways depending upon the *specific* ties of power in question. It is in this sense that I suggest geography makes a difference to what we experience as power and to how it is exercised.

Or rather, I should say that this is only the half of it.

When you are placed *within* a tangled arrangement of power relationships, the all too familiar spaces of the office, the workplace, the estate or the community, even the 'breathing spaces' we thought were our own may look and feel quite different. Thinking about how power reaches into our lives gives us a different vantage point from being immersed in its cross-cutting arrangements. In this topological landscape, the close-at-hand can be made to feel just as distant as the remote elsewhere, as people move in and around one another closing down possibilities, smothering choices and broadly making us feel that we do not belong – as if we were part of someone else's space. This is the kind of dominant presence that Henri Lefebvre frequently portrayed in his work, but there is, I think, more going on in the name of power in such places than certainly he would have credited.

In attempting to unravel the rhythmic and routine complexity of familiar spaces, however, Lefebvre did provide another angle on what it means to talk about the roundaboutness of power. Through the constant succession of movement and activities, the manner in which they are performed and the style in which they are executed, places take on a life of their own, with certain groups able to superimpose their presence on others. In the entangled nature of people's lives, places, on this account, take their shape through dominant or controlling rhythms that seek to suppress the routine traces of others. Exclusion in this context has less to do with closed doors and high walls, and rather more to do with spaces constructed by dominant groups in their own likeness – through a series of rituals and gestures, moods and attachments, as well as accumulated styles and meanings. The composition of space, the partition and layout of particular uses, also serves as both a resource and the means through which power is exercised.

There are resonances with Foucault's diagrammatic sensibilities here, perhaps more than Lefebvre was prepared to acknowledge, but what characterizes such power-laden spatial circumstances, in my view, is the diversity of power relations which exercise us. If we were to probe many a familiar space, institutional or otherwise, domination is unlikely to be the only powerful presence. Spaces may be laid out for temptation in a seductive way through a combination of suggestive practices, inclusive designs and enticing layouts, or they may be subject to manipulation by groups constructing them in their own likeness, which conceal or disguise their true motives. Ritualized ways of doing things, say in the familiar setting of the school, the clinic, the bank, the law courts, the church or the mosque, may be conducted in a manner that lends weight to the figures who work there and give them authority. The buildings themselves, in the case of the law court for instance, may serve as a symbol of authoritative values 'demanding' recognition and respect. Once inside its walls, the rhythm of activities, the lulls and outbursts, may generate their own coded style of authority. And so on.

For my part, it is not that I wish to convince you that all places are saturated with the fixture and fittings of power. On the contrary, particular places may play host to a variety of cross-cutting arrangements of power, or such traces may be strikingly absent. But if power has a presence at all, it has it through the interplay of forces established *in place*. People are placed by power, but not as the result of some massed force transmitted intact by some central administration from up the road or even from the other side of the globe. The arrangements of power we find ourselves exercised by may well arise from ideas and events hatched elsewhere, but that, as I understand it, is merely another way of saying that the presence of power is more or less *mediated* in space and time.

In fact the most challenging aspect of all this is to try to understand the diverse geographies of power that seek to put any number of us in place; that is, the different ways in which relations of proximity and presence play across the gap between here and there to bring the far-off within reach, yet for others make the nearby seem closed off and distant. Whether on the receiving end of some biotechnology giant intent on introducing genetically modified materials into the food chain, or subject to the controlling rhythms of an institutional force which makes you feel 'out of place' in your own familiar surroundings, or seduced into thinking that the politics of privatized welfare has much to offer, it matters that we understand *how* power exercises us. For it is through this varied understanding, where we are able to recognize the powerful and not so powerful forces that face us, that the possibility for *empowerment* lies. It is in this sense that a less familiar understanding of geography and power can hold out the prospect of alternative, more collaborative, paths to action and social change.