

Home, Street, City: Farge, Foucault and the Spaces of the *Lettres du cachet*

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Introduction

In the 'Introduction' to *Le désordre des familles*, Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault note that the project was a combination of their individual research interests: "One of us studied Parisian street life in the eighteenth century; the other, the procedures for administrative imprisonment from the seventeenth century up to the Revolution".¹ In that research, both were led to the archives of the Bastille, held in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal. It was there that the letters they analyse in the book were found.²

In terms of the research interests, the second reference is of course to Foucault, and his famous *Surveiller et punir*, a book we know in English translation as *Discipline and Punish*.³ While the subtitle of that work is *The Birth of the Prison*, this is both the prison in the obvious sense and the figurative sense of the soul as the "prison of the body".⁴ Foucault's examples, of course, range far wider than the prison, and encompass the factory, the school, the workshop and, especially, the army. While wide ranging, his books, both in this 1975 work and his earlier studies of madness and clinical medicine, had tended to focus on institutions of one kind or another. But in his lectures and collaborative research conducted in and beyond his Collège de France seminars he had widened the lens to look at wider social settings. This can found, for example, in his work with Félix Guattari's Centre d'Études, de Recherche et de Formation Institutionnelle (CERFI) on public utilities and infrastructure; projects developing from that research on public health; his edited report *Politiques de l'habitat* and his famous lectures on governmentality.⁵

The wider setting is a major theme of Farge's work too. The reference in this text is to her study *Vivre dans la rue à Paris au XVIII^e siècle* [Paris Street Life in the Eighteenth Century], which appeared in 1979,⁶ but Foucault was initially led to her work by her first book *Delinquance et criminalité: Le vol d'aliments à Paris au XVIII^e siècle* [Delinquency and Criminality: Food Thefts in Eighteenth-Century Paris], which he cites in *Discipline and Punish*. This was a rare citation of one of his contemporaries.⁷ Farge was also one of a number of historians involved in the 1978 discussion of Foucault's work collected in Michelle Perrot's *L'impossible prison*.⁸ In these early writings, as well as in many of her subsequent works, Farge develops a thorough-going analysis of the details of Parisian life: individual, family and collective. While Farge would, occasionally, focus on what she and André Zysberg called "the everyday theatre of violence",⁹ she is often as interested in the mundane, the prosaic details of daily life rather than the extraordinary. In this she perhaps balanced Foucault's regular interest in the baroque, the macabre and the

grotesque. Indeed, Farge would go on to use some of the letters she and Foucault collected for, but did not include in, *Le désordre des familles* in her contribution to the multi-volume *Histoire de la vie privée* [History of Private Life], edited by Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby.¹⁰

Bringing together Foucault's interests and Farge's was productive, since in combination they were able to situate the work in relation to wider themes. From Foucault's work, these encompassed the history of European society, and the transition from sovereign regimes of the early modern period to the disciplinary or punitive societies that emerged, in Foucault's terms, in the eighteenth century. From Farge, the rich detail of everyday life in Paris adds colour and detail to the broader socio-political transitions. While Foucault's archival work is often underappreciated in assessments of his work, Farge's career has been built on such labours, and her standing in this area is undisputed. In combination, a historically minded philosopher at the end of his tragically shortened career, and an archival historian much earlier in hers, use the letters to open up a range of topics. While the explicit focus of the work is on the family, and especially matrimonial and parental relations, the letters and their analysis provide a valuable insight into workings of power and questions of space.

Sovereignty and Power

As the letters had the king's seal, it is tempting to see them as examples of the autocratic power of the *ancien régime*, and they could certainly be used in that way. But as Foucault shows in his lectures *The Punitive Society*, we should see the letters less as examples of state or royal power, but rather as the power of those who request them: "individuals, families, religious groups, esteemed citizens [*notables*], legal persons (notaries, etc.), and corporations".¹¹ This, then, entails a different model of analysis:

While being part of this pyramid rising up to the king, *the lettre de cachet* operates in an opposite direction to that of royal arbitrariness. The letter, which is the instrument of a sort of capillary and marginal counter-investment, rises back up the 'parajudicial' State apparatus. It should be noted that the points at which these counter-investments by the *lettre de cachet* take place are, in a way, socially important places in that they become relays and diversions [*dérivations*] of power: we see these letters requested and authenticated at the level of communities like the parish—an administrative, fiscal, and religious unit, and, at the same time, the place of the formation of a sort of consensus that asks power to respect its morality, order, and regularity—the family, the corporation. These places are exchangers [*échangeurs*] between power from above and power from below.¹²

The notion of an 'exchanger' is like an electrical junction box, or a switcher between these different modes of powers. Foucault had used similar language to examine the way that medieval ordeals or tests had functioned as a "mechanical operator [*opérateur*] of the law, a

switch or commutator [*commutateur*] of force into law, a *shifter* that enabled the transition from force to law”.¹³ These topics of examination then, whether the medieval ordeal or the *lettre de cachet* allow an analysis of wider socio-political relations. Examining the relations would therefore look at the “localized micro-powers”, between people, and the actions of more lowly administrators.¹⁴ This is crucial, because “the *lettre de cachet* was a way of regulating the everyday morality of social life, a way for the group or groups—family, religious, parochial, regional, and local—to provide for their own police control and ensure their own order”.¹⁵

The letters are thus examples of the “codified description of deviance”, “the banality of the everyday”.¹⁶ The analysis therefore follows the earlier work of Frantz Funck-Brentano, who argues that rather than being “a means of oppression at the hands of a royal power”, the king actually “enforced a limitation on their use”. The letters should be better understood as a “spontaneous outburst from the underbelly of the people”.¹⁷ Nonetheless Funck-Brentano tends to focus on elites in his work on the letters, and when Farge and Foucault develop his line of analysis, they follow it more to its conclusion. Thus they suggest that reading of the material highlighted not “the rage of the sovereign... but rather the passions of the common people”.¹⁸ Central to those passions are “family relationships – husbands and wives, parents and children”.¹⁹ Indeed the book is structured around two main parts, each framed by an introduction, and then an extensive dossier of letters. The first part on marital relations was largely the work of Farge; Foucault took the lead on the part on parental-child relations. Some of Foucault’s late 1970s and early 1980s interests can be glimpsed here and there: one of the initially planned volumes of the *History of Sexuality* had been on children; another on women; and the Malthusian couple a projected focus of the volume on races and populations.²⁰

Farge and Foucault’s project is therefore directed towards understanding “the concrete functioning of a power mechanism”, though they underline that this is not “an anonymous ‘Power’, oppressive and mysterious”, but rather “a complex web of relationships between multiple partners, an institution for control and sanction”.²¹ The use of *lettres de cachet* enabled people to bypass standard judicial procedures, as well as publicity, so they were used by both for reasons of poverty and privacy. As such, the letters are not so revealing of the political administration of the time as they are of the internal working of families, the relation between men and women, adults and children. These are the ways through which the family institution fits into the “greater administrative apparatus [*appareil*]”.²² While the wider analysis of power that appears in this book is a possible avenue of inquiry, the focus here will be on the spaces at multiple scales which are revealed and analysed by the letters, themselves a site of power relations. This is what Farge and Foucault call “a fascinating peek into the landscape of everyday life for the lower classes in Paris”.²³

Spaces of Disorder: From the Home to the Street

The spaces of family disorder analysed in the book come from a close reading of the documentary material, out of which “a landscape begins to take shape”.²⁴ This is a point Farge elaborates in her wonderful study of the working practice of the archival historian: “Beneath the archives lies an organised topography [*le relief s’organise*]. You need only know how to read it, and to recognize that meaning can be found at the very spot [*endroit*] where lives have involuntarily collided with power”.²⁵ The relation between space and power in more general terms had been crucial throughout Foucault’s work. It is there in the analysis of the architectural design of the asylum, the clinical hospital and the prison; from the design of factories, boarding-school dormitories and military camps; to public health campaigns, the policing of urban space and governmental regimes in ‘spaces of security’ through the wider society. Space, for Foucault, is historically produced and entirely permeated by power relations, while at the same time histories are always also geographies, and power relations are determined by the spaces through which they operate, shape and are constrained. While Foucault does provide some short pieces which are principally focused on space – his ‘Of Other Spaces’ lecture from 1967, and interviews with the geographers of *Hérodote* review in 1976 and with Paul Rabinow in the *Skyline* architecture journal in 1982 – a spatial attunement permeates almost all his historical work.²⁶ As Foucault said in that 1982 interview, “space is fundamental in any form of communal power, space is fundamental in any exercise of power”.²⁷

These spatial relations are an important focus of Farge and Foucault’s work in this volume, though the spaces examined tend to smaller scale than institutions and the wider society. As such, the volume provides rich insights for Geographers and others interested in questions of spatiality, and in a different register than most of Foucault’s work. Given the focus on family relations it is perhaps not surprising that the smallest scale analysed in the work is the home. After the individual body, this often seen as the most immediate and intimate type of social space. One example given concerns the importance of beds, looking at the case of a man who had sold those of his family: “An essential, and singular, piece of furniture, even when you had nothing, you still had your bed, whose symbolic function cannot be ignored”.²⁸ As Farge notes elsewhere, even though lodgings opened directly onto each other, and there was “very little intimacy in the modern sense of the word... conjugal space [*lieu*] did exist and the man wanted to see it respected just as much as the woman”.²⁹

One of the things that becomes clear is that the relation between man and wife, parent and child, cannot be easily separated. There were precious few individual spaces available at this time. Farge and Foucault therefore suggest

The frequent conjunction of elements related to economic existence alongside others related to personal attitudes demonstrates the manner in which the conjugal bond was also a place [*lieu*]. It was the place of socio-economic establishment as much as it was the place of sexual and emotional understanding. The place of the body, of the heart,

and that of social roles cannot be separated as neatly as one might wish; the couple was the intersection of these spaces [*espaces*], an expectation of harmony between them and a certainty that they were tightly interdependent on one another.³⁰

We shift, here, between spatial terms in an almost metaphorical sense to more concrete ones. It might appear that thinking of marriage as a place or site is just an expression, without a grounding in social, physical location. But, unlike many of the structuralist thinkers who used spatial language to express looser dynamics of thought, Foucault almost always connected his use of terms with analysis of concrete spatial phenomena. This comes through in this work, both in Foucault's parts and those by Farge, and is a central theme of so much of Farge's independent work. One of the section titles in the first part – the section largely by Farge on the husband-wife relation – is entitled “masculine spaces, feminine spaces”.³¹ But the space of the home is also a major theme in the section led by Foucault on parent-child relations:

At the other pole of motives for imprisonment was the behavior of children within the internal space of the family. In a number of dossiers, the house appeared as a place of war, of extreme violence, of brutality. Two themes come up time and again, more often than not in conjunction with one another: insults, oaths, threats, blows, on the one hand, and, on the other, theft, robbery, money extorted by cunning or by force. Large sums were rarely involved, as the protagonists were by and large poor. By far the most commonly described situation was theft, under threat, of a little money or a few belongings; the scoundrel has created an atmosphere of terror in the home, he hits and he takes. For boys, drunkenness was very often pointed to as the reason for this behavior; he comes home drunk, he steals so that he can continue to get drunk.³²

In her book *Fragile Lives*, Farge describes a typical Parisian apartment building as an “anthill [*termitière*]", “a profusion of shops and workshops [*ateliers*] intersected by passages and alleyways and packed to the roof with lodgings and dormitories, it lays bare its secrets and wounds, it offers scant refuge but nonetheless affords some sleep and rest of a kind, albeit without comfort and with practically no privacy”.³³ She elsewhere examines how the workshop was “an intermediary place between the inside and the outside”, a traditional workspace for artisans, but also their apprentices, who were either members of, or who often lived with, the family. Such workshops were directed toward the outside, for sales and trade, and for the coming and going of other workers; but they were all linked to the family dwelling.³⁴ Given this collective nature of housing, and the frequent blurring of domestic and work spaces, truly private space remained largely unknown, and elsewhere Farge notes that even reading early 18th century police orders did not shed much light on what happened “in houses and hearts [*coeurs*] while they do give a glimpse into workshops, markets, the street and the river” as wider, public spaces of the city.³⁵ This is a theme Farge regularly returns to: “the confusion existing between public and private space and the impossibility of distinguishing between ‘open’ and ‘closed’ in a

situation where each space communicated with the next, opened out onto another, or overlooked and was overlooked by everyone else, offering no protection at all”.³⁶

This confusion of public and private space is important, and helps to understand some of the challenges of the work Farge and Zysberg had pursued in their analysis of Paris’s ‘theatres of violence’.³⁷ The blurring of spaces means that there were precious few safe environments, little privacy or security. The loss of anything straight-forwardly ‘private’ means that so much life is lived in the collective, and as might be expected given Farge’s earlier work, there are many revealing insights into life in “the street, the tavern [*le cabaret*], the workshop”³⁸ to be found in her work with Foucault. This comes through especially clearly in the geography, both of relations and spaces, of these letters.

Distant members of the family, the innkeeper from the street-corner, the merchant grocer from the ground floor, or the tenants from across the hall were the principal signatories. In order to render a petition more convincing, one would do well to convince the parish *curé*, an influential person in the neighbourhood [*quartier*], or the primary leaseholder, that feared, honoured and hated guarantor of Parisian buildings.³⁹

The examples given provide, as Farge suggests in her work on the street, “a materialisation of space more than a detailed urban geography”,⁴⁰ a flavour, details, illustrations, rather than a comprehensive, totalising account. Far from a weakness, this provides both colour and nuance, an approach to be followed rather than a theory to be applied. Foucault has, in particular, suffered from this, where the theoretical tools and approaches he developed to analyse specific questions and interrogate discrete questions are now torn from their context and applied indiscriminately. The detailed historical and archival work which underpins Foucault’s work is often foregone in an attempt to apply his concepts. Farge, then, both here and her other independent work is much closer to Foucault’s approach than many Foucauldians.

The Police and the City

At the time of the letters analysed, Paris was “half urban, half rural”,⁴¹ with countryside poorly integrated into the expanding urban fabric. As Farge notes in a separate study: “Paris in the eighteenth century was a complex city: the use of its space by its inhabitants, everyday behaviours and urban practices are themes which researchers are trying to identify and model”.⁴² This comes through in much of Farge’s subsequent work, but also in collaborative research projects that developed out of the CERFI work Foucault had been involved with in the early-mid 1970s. Two reports were published by CORDA [Comité de la Recherche et du Développement en Architecture]. One was led by Bruno Fortier: *La politique de l’espace parisien (à la fin de l’Ancien Régime)* [*The Politics of Parisian Space at the End of the Ancien Régime*]; the other by Foucault: *Politiques de l’habitat (1800-1850)* [*Politics of Habitat (1800-1850)*].⁴³ ‘Habitat’ is understood in that work not just as what we would now call public space,

but also the general context of living space and especially the intersection of these spaces, in places such pavements, roads and crossroads. As such the work provides some important insights into how police mechanisms expand from the local and small scale to wider and larger social networks, extending to the organisation of the city.

One of the striking conceptual distinctions in the Farge and Foucault book comes from contrasting understandings of space and time. As Farge and Foucault note in the section on parents and children the unruly poor body could be disruptive of both types of dominant ordering:

It would be interesting to compare this notion of disturbance [*dérangement*] with that of dissipation [*dissipation*], which would be so frequently employed in the nineteenth century in the moralizing of the poor. Dissipation fundamentally came down to temporal behavior; a “dissipated” laborer did not know how to prepare for the future, he spent his paycheck as soon as he got it, he did not practice thrift, anticipate the possibility of illness or the threat of unemployment, did not make provisions for old age or the education of his children. To counter dissipation, the poor must be taught the continuity of time, the accumulation of small profits, in short, the economy of life. Disturbance, for its part, involved primarily spatial behaviors. It would seem that these forms of behavior alarmed parents beyond anything else. The future was only invoked in the form of troublesome consequences down the line: crime, death, ruin, and sometimes, albeit rarely, the difficulties that the bad behavior of certain children would cause for the establishment of their siblings. In contrast, the pressure point for the conflict between children and parents was located at the boundaries of the family space.⁴⁴

While today it might be tempting to see ‘boundaries’ here in terms simply of behaviour, the point is surely a more concretely geographical one. What goes on in the family home, and what outside is a recurrent issue for parents, but at a time where the private/public line was blurred, with the permeation of the spaces, this was even more the case. This spatial question, as Farge and Foucault underline, is “not easy to delimit precisely”, because it stretched from the home to the neighbourhood [*voisinage*], and to a wider reputational space where behaviour might be reported back. Farge and Foucault suggest it is notable that it is often the most proximate who sign requests.⁴⁵ For this reason, among others, it makes sense that they concentrate on the family relations exposed by the *lettres de cachet*, though neighbourhood relations run as a constant theme throughout. With young people, the spaces they inhabit might be wider still, with some of the letters written due to behaviour nearby, but others apply to their short-term absence such as not returning home for the night, or more continual roaming.

The boy’s presence in the home was excessive, but as soon as he left he entered a domain full of risks where the worst could happen and from which the family sought to

retrieve him, so that they might reestablish their control over him. As for girls, although she may have left home and settled elsewhere, either with a married man or in semi-prostitution, she caused trouble for the family through her bad reputation, gossip and scandal. These were neither fully internal conflicts (as would be opposing one's parents in the matter of marriage, refusing to work, or disputes of personal interest), nor clean breaks (which would perhaps have been more acceptable if they were definitive). These were comings and goings, the back-and-forth of a pendulum, drawing away and then coming back through disappearances and returns, false exits and noisy re-entrances.⁴⁶

In the wider social spaces, another key factor is the 'police', not to be confused with the current organisation of that name, but a much wider public policy apparatus, the emergence of what we might now call a political administration, or that Foucault elsewhere describes as a "program government rationality".⁴⁷ In this work, they describe its tasks as including "overseeing the provisioning of Paris to regulating the height of signs, from punishing blasphemy to clearing the streets of prostitutes, from banning assemblies to dissecting corpses".⁴⁸ While the police is a significant theme in Foucault's work, from *History of Madness* through *Birth of the Clinic* to his 1970s Rio lectures on social medicine, it is also a major focus of Farge's work.⁴⁹ Indeed, Colette Pétonnet describes the focus of Farge's early eighteenth century work as looking at how "the roads, bridges and fields of Paris were a perpetual theatre of the overflowing of life which the police tried to control".⁵⁰ The police are trying to make sense of, to control, and to improve the spaces of the city. Political administration here is a spatial administration, an organisation of the city into discrete areas, zones and individual roads, in which the life of the city and the dreams of the bureaucrats are in constant tension. We might think of the famous plague town that introduces the chapter on 'Panopticism' in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, but the administration of spaces of the city goes far beyond such extraordinary measures. A key concern, just as it is in Foucault's 'governmentality' lectures, and his work on public health and habitat, is the question of circulation – the flow of goods, capital, people, waste and resources. This is a key theme in Foucault's 1972-73 lecture course *The Punitive Society*, but is also important in his analysis of the *Nu-pieds* revolt and its repression in 17th century Normandy in the 1971-72 course *Théories et institutions pénales*.⁵¹

This is a Paris, remember, before Baron Haussmann's massive renovation in the nineteenth century, a Paris of crowded medieval streets, markets and houses, with filthy sewers and regular cholera epidemics. As one nineteenth-century reformer described it: "Paris is an immense workshop of putrefaction, where poverty, pestilence and illness work in concert, where neither air nor sunlight penetrate. Paris is an awful place where plants shrivel and die, where, of seven small children, six die a year".⁵² Like this eighteenth-century reality, Farge and Foucault continually challenge any straight-forward distinction between private and public space, with a blurring that is more akin to a frontier than a boundary, as they move between

the home, the workplace, the street, the neighbourhood and the wider city.⁵³ As a result of family and social situation, what we might now think of as distinct modes of life were intertwined.

Precarious living conditions [*conditions d'habitat*], socio-economic instability, lodgings, workshops and shops were open to the outside, permeable to everything that seeped in from the porous outdoors, to the point of symbiosis, creating particular spaces opaque to order, but interwoven out of webs of complicity, solidarity and conflict whose violence was almost equal to their forces of cohesion. No one could claim to be absent from the lives of others, and the experience of this lack of privacy [*promiscuité subie*] provoked behaviors both of integration and of rejection.⁵⁴

The question of 'habitat' is crucial here, a collective living that continually overflows any barriers that might be drawn; while at the same time the same happens in reverse, and the outside intrudes into the domestic. The notion of '*promiscuité*' is telling here – an abundance of relations, endured or suffered by those who have no choice. So much of the book is to do with matter out-of-place, disorderly bodies in the family home, outside of it, at the threshold of the city or beyond. Concerns with vagabonds and the itinerant, along with those who do not subordinate themselves to a routine, a rhythm of times and spaces, run through the police concerns, and the letters collected here.

These are many forms of excess that share as a common trait that they were committed outside of the traditional geography of the spaces of labor and family. In lives already marked by itinerancy [*l'errance*], the search for work and lodging, rhythmized by instability and long journeys on foot across the capital both day and night, bad conduct would be additional roaming on top of what was already required, adding disreputable absences to the habitual ones, further reinforcing these scattered lives, by bursting in a spectacular manner the already tangled map of their habitual trajectories. Bad conduct was necessarily linked to different uses of spaces, shattering their precarious coherencies.⁵⁵

Ultimately the sanction could be to imprison, or detain someone in a hospital or asylum. There is, however, relatively little said about the prison in this collection, perhaps because Foucault had so extensively discussed it elsewhere.

Most of these cases are what we might call "conflicts at the threshold." At the threshold of adulthood, at the threshold of the house; at the threshold between dependence and independence. Naturally, these provoked two contradictory reactions, definitive expulsion—let us be rid of this child and never hear her spoken of again—or complete re-absorption—we are willing for her to come back to us, but on the condition that she

has repented and will behave herself. Of the two, the second solution was often seen as preferable.⁵⁶

Yet imprisonment did happen, as did requests for exile, sending to the Islands – penal colonies, mainly in the West Indies – a place from which few returned and almost no correspondence was possible:

Being sent to the Islands had a profound resonance in the imagination of the lower orders. Invisible but real, the Islands were a “non-place” where the mark of the wrong done disappeared in silence. It was on the horizon of this whole system of punishment as the ultimate threats, the one that would be invoked when patience had run out, after so many promises of improvement had showed themselves to be empty. Not the least of the paradoxes was that the establishment of moral discipline and the improvement of these exiles, many of whom were never to return, was one of the concerns most frequently invoked—if not one of the most important—by the governor.⁵⁷

Not all exile was so far afield. One example is the case of Gilbert Dolat, who was held at the Bicêtre hospital in the southern suburbs of Paris, and later exiled and told to remain thirty leagues from the city. His family gave him clothes and money so he could go to Orléans, but he sold his belongings, spent the money, and remained in the capital. He was later rearrested and returned to the hospital.⁵⁸ The political problem of vagrancy, vagabondage and itineracy is central to the historical texts Foucault interrogates in *The Punitive Society*, and *Discipline and Punish* perhaps does fully not reflect the work done in its preparation. Foucault spends some time in *The Punitive Society* examining the Physiocrat Guillaume Le Trosne’s 1764 text *Mémoire sur les vagabonds et sur les mendiants*. This text is only briefly mentioned in the subsequent book.⁵⁹ Foucault suggests that for Le Trosne, vagabondage is not merely begging, but a matrix or network of crime and delinquency, disruptive to working rhythms and spaces, since bodies may not be fixed in a particular place or available at the right time to provide labour for production. Le Trosne discusses different ways that this mobile, undisciplined bodies might be controlled, fixed in a location and forced to conform to a more ordered labour chronology.

As Farge explores in her wider work, imprisonment might fix an individual in a location in a way that their life generally did not allow: “Pickpockets, the common soldiery, beggars, ladies of fortune, accomplished thieves, ringleaders and poor devils, they were all there”.⁶⁰ Farge and Foucault’s independent work here is mutually reinforcing, even though Farge’s book *La vie fragile* was published after Foucault’s death, and there is no record that she attended his 1972-73 lecture course. Farge’s example here is of the register kept by Inspector Poussot, of arrests in the Les Halles area of Paris between 1738 and 1754.⁶¹ She highlights the way that the register is paradoxical – individual lives are fixed for a brief moment, but also for historical eternity, in this written record, even though it is clear that these are people in a state of “incessant movement”. After the arrest they “might escape prison, be set free or transferred, recaptured

or eternally at large, ‘roaming the countryside’, according to the expression of the period”.⁶² We might think of the lives in the *lettres de cachet* in a similar way. We likely know nothing of the individuals who wrote, or who are named in, these letters before or after, but this fleeting moment of their existence is inscribed on a page, filed away, waiting for a reader in the future. First, Farge and Foucault in the archive; then their contemporary French readers; now those of us who pick up the translation.

Conclusion

The spatial concerns, of the police as a political and spatial organisation, and the lives of those who petition or who are directed by letters, range from the body to the home to the street, the neighbourhood and the wider city. There is little insight in these letters, or their analysis, to the larger scale territorial organisation of France, which was undergoing its own transformations at this time. Farge and Foucault move the emphasis from seeing the letters as a shift from sovereignty to a different kind of power, and instead focus on the micro-physics of familial relations. In a similar way their spatial focus is on the smaller scale, the more everyday geographies of the city, rather than wider territorial organisation. Yet we could recall Foucault’s claim in the ‘Space, Knowledge and Power’ interview that one of the objects of the science of police was to scale-up the organisation of the city to the wider scale of the territory as a whole, developed on “the premise that a state is like a large city; the capital is like its main square; the roads are like its streets... the police become the very *type* of rationality for the government of the whole territory”.⁶³ As I have argued elsewhere, Foucault can be historically misleading in his understanding of territory, but the insights of his work have nonetheless proved enormously valuable for me as I have pursued a history of the concept and practice.⁶⁴ The key has been that the same kinds of technological and calculative rationalities that he sees as crucial to the emergence of the concept and practice of population are, at the same time, transformative of territory.

One thing that comes through clearly from Farge’s work, both generally and in this collaborative work with Foucault, is the individual and collective lives of people in Paris. That is a common focus of her labours, removing the accumulated grime of history, the dust of the archive, in order to reveal the biographies beneath. Foucault did not always work that way. *Discipline and Punish*, for example, after the execution of the regicide Damiens in its opening pages, rarely mentions individual criminals or victims of crime. Yet some of Foucault’s other writing does focus on individual lives – the cases he examines in *The Abnormals* lectures of 1975, for example, developing themes explored in his early Collège de France seminars, which also provided him with the case of Pierre Rivière; his later work on the story of the hermaphrodite Herculine Barbin; and the planned project on ‘the lives of infamous men’, which is the direct antecedent of the collection with Farge.⁶⁵ Foucault said, at various points, that he intended to publish further dossiers of cases from the archives. One mentioned in several

places is a dossier of further accounts of hermaphrodites, some of which is preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. The archivist has become the archived.⁶⁶ Unfortunately the materials there relating to the Farge and Foucault book are not yet available.⁶⁷

The letters thus, in Farge and Foucault's words, provide us with an insight into a "strange theatre in which violence, misery and tribulation were expressed through the ceremonial obligations owed to authority".⁶⁸ Foucault's interest in the *lettres de cachet* dates back to the late 1950s and early 1960s, and they are briefly discussed in *History of Madness* and from time-to-time in his lectures,⁶⁹ but it was to be decades before he finally published on them. Farge recalls that Foucault originally had thought of just publishing the letters, without commentary, and it was her suggestion that they needed explanation that led to their working together.⁷⁰ While it is of course possible to see this book as a continuation of Foucault's interest in the micro-physics of power, his project on the 'lives of infamous men', and his own analysis of spaces, Farge's role in the work is arguably the more significant. At the time the book appeared, Foucault's own focus, both in his lectures and planned publications, was on pagan and Christian antiquity. He anticipated returning to more modern or contemporary concerns following the completion of that work, but of course did not live to undertake this.⁷¹ The book has closer parallels to Farge's own writings, in that it directly related to the historical period she has focused on, and is closer to her model of historical work and documentary presentation.⁷² It is not only related to her 1970s publications *Delinquance et criminalité* and *Vivre dans la rue à Paris au XVIII^e siècle*, but she has continued to explore related issues in her work ever since.⁷³ It is to be hoped that this long-overdue translation and attention leads more Anglophone readers to her own remarkable work.

Notes

¹ Arlette Farge and Michel Foucault, *Le désordre des familles: Lettres de cachet des Archives de la Bastille au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris: Julliard/Gallimard, Collection Archives, 1982; reprinted in Folio Histoire, Paris: Gallimard, 2014, p. 7. Page references are to this second edition. *Disorderly Families: Infamous Letters from the Bastille Archives*, edited by Nancy Luxon, translated by Thomas Scott-Railton, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming, ms. p. 33.

² For her account of working with Foucault, see Arlette Farge, "Travailler avec Michel Foucault", *Le Débat*, No 41, 1986, pp. 164-167; Keith Gandal and Paul Simmons, "La vie fragile: An Interview with Arlette Farge", *History of the Present*, No 2, 1986, pp. 23-24; Laurent Vidal, "Arlette Farge: 'Le parcours d'une historienne'", *Genèses*, No 48, 2002-3, pp. 115-25; and Arlette Farge, "Souvenir d'un dérangement", *Le magazine littéraire*, No 435, 2004, pp. 52-54. Her most extensive discussion of his work can be found in *Les lieux pour l'histoire*, Paris: Seuil, 1997. For a discussion of their work together, see David

- Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, London: Hutchinson, 1993, pp. 452-6; and Stuart Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade*, Cambridge: Polity, 2016, pp. 192-4.
- 3 Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir – Naissance de la prison*, Paris: Gallimard Tel, 1975; translated by Alan Sheridan as *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, London: Penguin, 1976.
- 4 Foucault, *Surveiller et punir*, p. 38; *Discipline and Punish*, p. 30.
- 5 See, among other works, François Fourquet and Lion Murard, *Les équipements du pouvoir: Villes, territoires et équipements collectifs*, Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1976 [1973]; *Généalogie des équipements de normalisation: Les équipements sanitaires*, edited by Michel Foucault, Fontenay-sous-Bois: CERFI, 1976; *Politiques de l'habitat (1800-1850)*, edited by Michel Foucault, Paris: CORDA, 1977. The wider social issues are also explored in Foucault's lecture courses, notably, *Sécurité, Territoire, Population: Cours au Collège de France (1977-1978)*, edited by Michel Senellart, Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 2004; translated by Graham Burchell as *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978*, London: Palgrave, 2008. For a detailed discussion of all this work, drawing on published materials and archival documents, see Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade*, Ch. 4; and *Foucault: The Birth of Power*, Cambridge: Polity, 2017, Ch. 6.
- 6 Arlette Farge, *Vivre dans la rue à Paris au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris: Julliard/Gallimard, 1979. See p. 10 for her debt to Foucault.
- 7 Arlette Farge, *Delinquance et criminalité: Le vol d'aliments à Paris au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris, Plon, 1974, cited in *Surveiller et punir*, pp. 91 n. 4, 92 n. 3; *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 311 n. 2, 77.
- 8 "Table ronde du 20 mai 1978", in Michelle Perrot (ed.), *L'impossible prison: Recherches sur le système pénitentiaire au XIX^e siècle: Débat avec Michel Foucault*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1980, pp. 40-63 (reprinted in *Dits et écrits: 1954-1988*, edited by Daniel Defert and François Ewald, Paris: Gallimard, 1994,, Vol IV, pp. 20-34); translated by Colin Gordon in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 73-86.
- 9 Arlette Farge and André Zysberg, "Les théâtres de la violence à Paris au XVIII^e siècle", *Annales: Économies, sociétés, civilisations*, Vol 34 No 5, 1979, pp. 984-1015, p. 1012.
- 10 Arlette Farge, "Familles: L'honneur et le secret", in Philippe Ariès et Georges Duby (ed.) *Histoire de la vie privée Tome 3: De la Renaissance aux Lumières*, Paris: Seuil, 1986, pp. 581-617.
- 11 Michel Foucault, *La société punitive: Cours au Collège de France (1972-73)*, edited by Bernard E. Harcourt, Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2013, p. 130; translated by Graham Burchell as *The Punitive Society: Lectures at the Collège de France 1972-73*, London: Palgrave, 2015, p. 127.

- 12 Foucault, *La société punitive*, pp. 133-4; *The Punitive Society*, p. 131; translation slightly modified.
- 13 Michel Foucault, “Verité et formes juridiques”, *Dits et écrits*, Vol II, p. 567; “Truth and Juridical Forms”, in *Essential Works Volume III: Power*, edited by James D. Faubion, London: Penguin, 2000, p. 39, translation modified. ‘Shifter’ is in English in the French. The medieval ordeal is examined in detail in *Théories et institutions pénales: Cours au Collège de France (1971-1972)*, edited by Bernard E. Harcourt, Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2015. For a fuller discussion see Elden, *Foucault: The Birth of Power*, Ch. 2.
- 14 Foucault, *La société punitive*, p. 131; *The Punitive Society*, p. 128.
- 15 Foucault, “Verité et formes juridiques”, Vol II, p. 601; “Truth and Juridical Forms”, pp. 65-66; translation slightly modified.
- 16 Foucault, *La société punitive*, p. 134 and 134 n. a; *The Punitive Society*, p. 131 and 134 n. †). The first phrase comes from the manuscript.
- 17 Frantz Funck-Brentano, *Les lettres de cachet*, Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1926, p. 249.
- 18 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 8; *Disorderly Families*, ms. pp. 33-4. I have preferred “the rage of the sovereign” to “royal anger”.
- 19 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 8; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 34.
- 20 For a discussion of these planned books, of which the main traces can be found in lectures, see Elden, *Foucault’s Last Decade*, especially pp. 62-71.
- 21 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 347; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 275.
- 22 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 347; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 275.
- 23 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 8; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 33, translation modified.
- 24 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 12; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 36.
- 25 Arlette Farge, *Le goût d’archive*, Paris: Seuil, 1997, p. 41; translated by Thomas Scott-Railton as *The Allure of the Archive*, Yale University Press, 2013, p. 30; translation modified. Similar points are made elsewhere in her work.
- 26 References on power and space in Foucault’s work would be too numerous to make. For a wider discussion see Stuart Elden, *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault and the Project of a Spatial History*, London: Continuum, 2001, especially Chs. 4 and 5; and the essays and references in Jeremy W. Crampton and Stuart Elden (eds.), *Space, Knowledge and Power: Foucault and Geography*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.
- 27 Michel Foucault, “Space, Knowledge and Power”, *The Foucault Reader*, edited by Paul Rabinow, New York: Pantheon, 1991, p. 252.
- 28 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 33; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 58.
- 29 Arlette Farge, *La vie fragile: Violence, pouvoirs et solidarités à Paris au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris: Hachette, 1986, p. 56; translated by Carol Shelton as *Fragile Lives: Violence, Power and Solidarity in Eighteenth-Century Paris*, Cambridge: Polity, 1993, p. 43.

30 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, pp. 31-2; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 57; translation modified.

31 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 35; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 58.

32 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 196; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 152-3.

33 Farge, *La vie fragile*, p. 17; *Fragile Lives*, p. 9; translation modified.

34 Farge, "Familles: L'honneur et le secret", p. 587.

35 Arlette Farge, "L'espace parisien au XVIII^e siècle d'après les ordonnances de police", *Ethnologie française*, Vol XII No 2, 1982, pp. 119-26, p. 121.

36 Farge, *La vie fragile*, p. 28; *Fragile Lives*, pp. 19-20.

37 See Farge and André Zysberg, "Les théâtres de la violence à Paris au XVIII^e siècle".

38 Farge and Zysberg, "Les théâtres de la violence à Paris au XVIII^e siècle", p. 1006.

39 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 19; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 40.

40 Farge, *Vivre dans la rue à Paris au XVIII^e siècle*, p. 12.

41 Farge, "L'espace parisien au XVIII^e siècle", p. 124.

42 Farge, "L'espace parisien au XVIII^e siècle", p. 119.

43 Bruno Fortier (ed.) *La politique de l'espace parisien (à la fin de l'Ancien Régime)*, Paris: CORDA, 1975; Foucault (ed.) *Politiques de l'habitat (1800-1850)*,

44 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 193-4; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 151.

45 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 194; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 151.

46 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 198; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 154.

47 Foucault, "Space, Knowledge and Power", p. 241

48 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 412; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 273.

49 See, for example, Farge, "L'espace parisien au XVIII^e siècle".

50 Colette Pétonnet, "L'espace et les lieux de la ville", *Ethnologie française*, Vol XII No 2, 1982, p. 117.

51 See in particular *La société punitive*, p. 107; *The Punitive Society*, pp. 103-4 and *Théories et institutions pénales*, especially pp. 134-5, 185. For readings of these two courses, see Elden, *Foucault: The Birth of Power*, Chs. 2 and 3.

52 Victor Considérant, *Considerations social sur l'architectonique*, Paris: Libraires de Palais-Royal, 1834, p. 12. For a geographical discussion of Hausmann's urban reforms, see David Harvey, *Paris: Capital of Modernity*, New York: Routledge, 2003, especially Ch. 4.

53 See Nancy Luxon, "Editor's Introduction", *Disorderly Families*, ms. pp. 17-18.

54 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 424; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 280.

55 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, pp. 33-4; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 58.

56 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 199; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 154

57 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, pp. 200-1; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 155.

58 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, pp. 67-71; *Disorderly Families*, ms. pp. 84-6. He is called Filbert or Philibert in some letters.

59 Foucault, *La société punitive*, pp. 47-53; *The Punitive Society*, pp. 45-52; *Surveiller et punir*, DP 92, 104-5; *Discipline and Punish*, pp. 76-77, 88-89.

60 Farge, *La vie fragile*, p. 164; *Fragile Lives*, p. 142.

61 Farge, *La vie fragile*, p. 161; *Fragile Lives*, p. 138.

62 Farge, *La vie fragile*, p. 164; *Fragile Lives*, p. 142; translation modified.

63 Foucault, "Space, Knowledge and Power", p. 241.

64 I discuss this question in general terms in *The Birth of Territory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013; and in relation to Foucault in "Governmentality, Calculation, Territory", *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, Vol 25 No 3, 2007, pp. 562-580; and "How Should We Do the History of Territory?" *Territory, Politics, Governance*, Vol 1 No 1, 2013, pp. 5-20.

65 Foucault, "La vie des hommes infâmes", *Dits et écrits*, Vol III, pp. 237-53; "Lives of Infamous Men", in *Essential Works Volume III: Power*, pp. 157-75.

66 Foucault's dossier of material on hermaphrodites is discussed in *Foucault's Last Decade*, pp. 65-66, and is available at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Fonds Michel Foucault, NAF28730 (15), Folder 1. See also NAF28730 (13).

67 The typescript of their book is in NAF28730 (75), but it is possible more material can be found in as-yet inaccessible boxes. The available material is used extensively in *Foucault: The Birth of Power*. In my work in the archive I did discover an offprint of Farge's article "Les artisans malades et leur travail", *Annales, Économies Sociétés Civilisations*, Vol 32 No 5, 1977, 993-1006, with the dedication "En cordiale et modeste hommage, A. Farge". Foucault had indicated two texts on pauper medicine in the notes to follow up. See NAF28730 (7), Folder 5, Subfolder 1.

68 Farge and Foucault, *Le désordre des familles*, p. 422; *Disorderly Families*, ms. p. 279.

69 See *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique*, Paris: Gallimard Tel, 1976 [1961], especially pp. 142-3, 466-7; *History of Madness*, edited by Jean Khalfa, translated by Jonathan Murphy and Jean Khalfa, London: Routledge, 2006, pp. 125-6, 446-7. As well as the discussion in *La société punitive*, pp. 129-37; *The Punitive Society*, pp. 127-34, part cited above, see *Les Anormaux: Cours au Collège de France (1974-1975)*, edited by Valerio Marchetti and Antonella Salomani, Paris: Seuil/Gallimard, 1999, pp. 34-5; translated by Graham Burchell as *Abnormal: Lectures at the Collège de France 1974-1975*, London: Verso, 2003, pp. 37-38.

70 Farge, "Travailler avec Michel Foucault"; Vidal, "Arlette Farge", pp. 117-8.

71 Two examples would include his comments in his final Paris lecture course, where he anticipates the end of "this several years long Greco-Latin 'trip'" and then plans to return to some more "contemporary problems" (*Le courage de la vérité: Le gouvernement des soi et des autres II: Cours au Collège de France*, edited by Frédéric Gros, Paris: Gallimard/Seuil, 2009, p. 3; *The Courage of Truth (The Government of the*

Self and Others II): *Lectures at the Collège de France 1983-84*, translated by Graham Burchell, London: Palgrave, 2011, p. 2); and the plans at Berkeley to work with students on governmental practices in the early twentieth-century. See Keith Gandal and Stephen Kotkin, "Governing Work and Social Life in the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.", *History of the Present*, No 1, 1985, pp. 4-14; Keith Gandal, "New Arts of Government in the Great War and Post-War Period", archived at IMEC document E.1.29/FCL2.A04-06; and for a discussion, Elden, *Foucault's Last Decade*, pp. 200-1.

⁷² See, in particular, *Les miroir des femmes: Textes présentés par Arlette Farge*, Paris: Montalba, 1982.

⁷³ As well as works already cited, see especially Arlette Farge, *Dire et mal dire: L'opinion publique au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris: Seuil, 1992; translated by Rosemary Morris, *Subversive Words: Public Opinion in Eighteenth-Century France*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994; and *Effusion et torment le récit des corps: Histoire du peuple au XVIII^e siècle*, Paris: Odile Jacob, 2007, Ch. 3.