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Places of order, order in place. Police forces' spatialities and practices

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Introduction

Armelle Choplin et Marie Redon

From *policing* to policed territories

- 1 Today, countless news reports and reality TV programs stage the work of the police forces, creating the illusion that they are following them in action. However, these broadcasts provide almost no information on the spaces where the interventions take place, or on the relationship between those spaces and the agents responsible for keeping public order. In other words, the spectators are made to watch “on-the-ground” action without being provided with an understanding of this very “ground”. In this issue, we will look into the police forces' spatial practices, their representation of space and the impact these practices and representations may have on the production of territories. Based on an empirical, field-based approach and on geographical interpretation, this issue aims to document what space concretely means to those who are supposed to maintain public order.
- 2 After Michel Foucault, the question of order and its legitimacy has inspired a rich line of studies on devices of surveillance and spatial – or social – control that act upon space (Crampton, Elden, 2007). The question is all the more relevant in the current neo-liberal context of privatizations, widespread private surveillance bodies and technicized surveillance tools (Brenner, Theodore, 2002). Although a number of social issues, such as those affecting the suburbs, minorities or migrants, are often very clearly spatially marked, fear of crime tends to result in those issues being stripped of their political dimension (Bigo, 1996, 2008; Garland, 2001; Mucchielli, 2008). Starting from this theoretical background, the contributions to this issue took on a practical approach in order to highlight police agents' relation to space. The papers therefore focus, beyond

policing or the actual control and surveillance of society, on the spatialities of police forces. Following in the tracks of Didier Fassin (2011) who drew up an ethnography of police forces, we wanted to produce an analysis of the *polices* in charge of policing space. The use of the plural “polices” reflects our intention to take into account, beyond just police forces, the diverse entities that fulfill a policing purpose and are responsible for maintaining public order: the *police* and *gendarmerie* in France, but also more broadly the different army bodies, private militias, neighborhood watches and surveillance firms which are becoming increasingly widespread.

- 3 We received a high number of submissions for this issue: this reflects the growing importance of the space-police relationship, as well as highlighting the relative scarcity to date of studies on the topic. Currently, the most complete range of studies directly addressing the topic is to be found in the German-speaking (Belina, 2006, 2008; Eick et al., 2007; Glasze et al., 2005) and English-speaking (Evans et al., 1992; Fyfe, 1991) realms. Steve Herbert produced pioneering analyses of the links between police practices and space in his study of the Los Angeles police (Herbert, 1996, 1997, 2003). More recently, Mustafa Dikeç opened up this geographical approach to theoretical analysis, using the distinction established by Rancière (1990) between *polis* – the politics of the people – and *police* – the politics aimed at keeping public order – to cast a new light on the case of the French suburbs (Dikeç, 2007).
- 4 In French-speaking countries, geography seems to have stayed away from such themes, except for a few studies that opened up the field of “criminal geography” (Camilleri and Lazerges, 1992; Rémy, 2000) and more recently Melina Germes’ research on “sensitive” districts and police discourses (2011). This can appear surprising, in a context where studies on the police and *gendarmerie* have proliferated in other disciplines like history (Denys, Marin, Millot, 2009; Houte, 2010; Chevandier, 2012; Deluermoz, 2012), anthropology (Fassin, 2011), or political science and sociology (Monjardet, 1996; Dieu, 2000; Jobard, 1995, 2002; Brodeur, 2003; Loubet del Bayle, 2006; Ocqueteau, 2006).
- 5 This issue therefore presents us with an opportunity to open up a few perspectives on the role of policing bodies as active players in the creation of space, on the spaces they produce and the tools they have at their disposal in order to understand ever-changing territories.

From heterotopia to crime mapping, from place to networks

- 6 By interrogating the relationship between space and order, this issue investigates the places of spatial and social regulation. Two articles look into the interaction between places seen as regulation tools and the space that surrounds them. One very interesting example of the representations of space developed by police forces is provided by the *Centre National d'Entraînement de la Gendarmerie française* (national training center of the French *gendarmerie*) in St Astier. The center, analyzed by Anthony Goreau-Ponceaud and Emilie Ponceaud-Goreau, contains a fictional town built especially to be used as a training ground. A typical heterotopia, the center is a tool designed to teach about the protection of social order, where *gendarmes* are trained to fight trouble-making “adversaries”. On a symbolic level, this place can also be seen as an anti-world of sorts: not illegal but

marginal, not in opposition against but in symbiosis with dominant systems (Brunet, 2009).

- 7 Marie Redon and Delphine Grancher's article addresses a "classic" heterotopia and a specific "space of exception" (Agamben, 2003): a prison located in Guadeloupe (French Antilles). Prison's traditional discontinuity is augmented by insularity. Prison facilities are first and foremost defined by their extra-territorial status (with rules and a temporality of their own). However, when located in an overseas, insular space such as Guadeloupe, are these arbitrary institutions more closely connected to faraway Metropolitan France, or to the surrounding Caribbean space? The judicial and penitentiary specificities of the French Overseas departments, as well as the region's record-breaking crime rates, reflect a discontinuity in public order between mainland France and Guadeloupe. The authors also highlight a number of common issues affecting both prison facilities (reinsertion, the question of electronic tagging) and public safety: in a context where disorders and threats have become less static, increasingly evasive and sometimes virtual, the closed system of heterotopia has become insufficient.
- 8 Today, the entire range of preventative measures has come to form an apparatus: the most adapted response to security threats does not reside anymore in creating a controlled, closely monitored space but an efficient network. The idea is not to react but to anticipate, thanks to a body of tools that shape up new ways of policing space (or attempting to police it). Several contributions to this issue highlight how maps, statistics, geographic information systems (GIS) and other new technologies – including GPS tracking and Web 2.0 – have become key elements of police practice. English language literature has extensively looked into the links between security, surveillance and new technologies, as noted by Mélina Germes who delivers a strong literature study, covering a range of topics including crime mapping (Manning, 2008; Crampton, 2009). Her detailed study of police mapping within the French *gendarmerie* reveals how deeply IT has reshaped the work of the police forces. Her paper brings a contribution to the geography of police forces by showing how *gendarmes* don't just use existing tools in their everyday work, but also create and use their own maps for the purpose of territorial control.
- 9 The spatial data thus produced is used for "geo-prevention" purposes. The diffusion of geo-referenced data across different departments and services is supposed to help with the authorities' decision-making processes. A testimony by J.G., a serving police officer in Paris (in the "Sur le métier" section) echoes Melina Germes' article on practices and uses of mapping. The policeman explains that the Paris *préfecture* provides its agents with a common in-house mapping device in order to channel geo-referenced data. As for Jorick Perrin (in the "Sur l'image" section), he mentions research bodies such as the National monitoring center on crime and penal responses (*Observatoire National de la Délinquance et des Réponses Pénales* or ONDRP) that publish an annual "geography of crime in France". These examples show how the police forces produce their own vision of space, closely correlated to public policies with their "geographical priorities" and "geo-prevention" activities.
- 10 The relationship with new technologies is ambiguous. On the one hand, those appear to bring about improved efficiency. The control room of the Paris *Préfecture*, equipped with dozens of screens and the PVPP software (*Paris Préfecture Video Prevention*), offers 24/7 surveillance, with the intended effect of improving safety in the French capital. However, IT can also offer a way of challenging the role of the police forces. Goreau-Ponceaud interviewed some *gendarmes*, who mentioned a "technological war" between them and

the protesters: at large protests, the use of video and photo-enabled mobile phones by protesters disrupts the *gendarmes'* strategies, forcing them to be more mobile, flexible and responsive.

- 11 Finally, it needs to be stressed that these new geo-localization and mapping technologies are tools that can easily be manipulated for the benefit of a given political or media agenda (Perrin, in the “*Sur l’image*” section). Like any other form of representation, the language of maps needs to be looked at with all the more caution that it is performative: the choice of a set of indicators and boundaries over others can for instance act in favor of a political party by modifying electoral boundaries (a practice called “gerrymandering”). A similarly critical outlook must be adopted when looking at the growing technicization and surveillance of space, as highlighted by Lefèvre and Perrin – for instance in cases where small villages acquire CCTV systems although no crime has been observed. These new tools are said to facilitate a better maintenance of order, but what sort of order we are talking about?

Policing urban space

- 12 This issue investigates ways in which territories, especially urban ones, are increasingly ruled by a securitarian approach. This approach goes hand in hand with the rise of discourses that stigmatize certain areas, often located at the periphery of cities that want to see themselves and be perceived as orderly, blotting out the social and political issues that generate social conflict in the first place together with so-called “marginal” practices. A number of contributions therefore chose to focus on cities, which are seen as a highly criminogenic environment. In doing this, they echo other publications that address related issues: those include the excellent issue “*Pratiques de sécurité en ville*” (“Practices of security in cities”) of the journal *Justice spatiale – spatial justice*, coordinated by M Morelle and J Tadié (2011), looking into the role and workings of security services in cities. Criminal opportunities are said to be facilitated by the urban environment’s density and anomie (Lefèvre). The concentration of individuals, crimes and offenses in those spaces is said to call for increased resources and surveillance, as shown by numerous studies on the “ecology of fear”, using the example of Los Angeles (Davis, 2000; Flusty, 1994) or other cities (Coleman, Sim, 2000; Adey et al., 2013). The current trend is towards “oversecurization” (Ninnin) and the “ordopolis”, to quote Gabriel Fauveaud. According to him, the “ordering” of cities involves “*police forces that support the preservation of the social order and economic system required for the production and accumulation of wealth*”. International competitiveness and capitalist attractiveness both require an ordered urban space, in times when cities provoke fear and anxiety. In this context, every metropolis tries to change its image by policing its center as well as its periphery.
- 13 Today just as yesterday, cities are seen as “policing spaces” that need to be patrolled, controlled and cleaned out (Denys and Milliot, 2003). Urban redevelopment and renewal projects multiply in the North and South alike: Hausmann’s model has made it to the Tropics (Davis, 1992). The police forces work alongside those projects by chasing unwanted populations away from strategic spaces. In other words, they contribute to the “cleansing of public spaces” (Mitchell, 2003) and to the criminalization of poverty (Wacquant, 2009). These “urban facelifts” are all the more important and desirable for public authorities when the centers in question are about to host a mega-event like the

football World Cup or the Olympics in Rio (Ninnin), or more generally tourists, as is the case in Quebec. In those cases, urban social order is imposed rather than negotiated. It tends to exclude and marginalize the poorest populations, in this case nomadic ones. This geography of repression answers the population's demand for secure spaces, also required by the public authorities to support their city's attractiveness.

- 14 Other spaces such as urban peripheries, margins and the suburbs, seen as “dangerous”, have become the focus of securitarian attention – not to say obsessions. In France, in the CNEFG training center of St Astier, a city and its suburbs (symbolized by housing blocks) have been recreated to teach police agents to work in the urban setup of the margins (Goreau-Ponceaud and Ponceaud-Goreaux). Brazilian *favelas* are perceived internationally as criminogenic spaces that call for the creation of specific control devices: the infamous UPPs (Peacekeeping Police Units). The field work undertaken by Justine Ninnin in the Rio favelas of Vidigal and Rocinha reveals conflicting spatial representations of order: the inhabitants of affluent areas tend to stigmatize the favelas, seen as unsafe places. However, the inhabitants of a favela perceive a form of “community safety” in this area, making it a safe place for them. The margins of Phnom Penh (Fauveaud) or the periphery of Lima (Boutron) are other spaces seen as “sensitive”. They are “criminospaces” in the two senses of the term: they are affected both by higher crime rates and by a deficiency of the police forces, which often cause greater instability. Gabriel Fauveaud describes how urban “chaos” in the urban margins of Phnom Penh, instead of being targeted by “ordering” policies, provides the opportunity for police officers to regulate space through informal and corrupt practices such as bribery: this creates a visible paradox, where chaos is the result of these officers' actions. Faced with these actions, citizens sometimes get involved and take the protection of public order into their own hands. This local “policarization”, with community watch patrols and the privatization of community police, against a background of residential privatization and declining public services, is now well known and has been analyzed in other places (Bénit-Gbaffou *et al.*, 2012; Didier *et al.*, 2012). Camille Bouron investigates the mechanics of this process in Lima, where such initiatives were fostered by the public authorities themselves, who encouraged the citizens to contribute to public safety. Since the late 1990s, Peruvians have been encouraged by the public authorities to assist the police in its work by forming neighborhood militias for community safety (JVSC).
- 15 France is also affected by the debate surrounding “community policing”, under the influence of the Anglo-American model of citizen involvement. Local security contracts (CLS), created in 1997 to bring together different stakeholders on a given territory around the fight against crime, show a tendency towards the co-production of security. “*Since 2007, in every Paris arrondissement, the Mayor has been required to work in close collaboration with the prefect, police commissioner, school heads and social workers. The job also increasingly involves working with housing bodies, associations and local residents who are holding the police accountable*” (interview with a police commissioner in the 18th arrondissement of Paris, November 2011). Looking back at the creation of municipal police forces, Igor Lefèvre shows how the Mayors have become new representatives of the “police” and how their remit has been expanded to include a greater co-production of public safety. In parallel, a lucrative market has emerged for private surveillance companies guarding public buildings. This brings up the question of the limits of the spaces to be policed, and of the relevance of zones of action: what boundaries should be assigned to each order-keeping body?

Blurred spaces and jurisdictions

- 16 Spatial reconfigurations can lead us to reconsider the efficiency of the allocation of “soldiers of the law” across the French territory (Luc, 2010), between rural, urban and peri-urban areas, but also across the different entities. Looking into the spatial logics of the spread of crime, two articles question the weight of metropolises over rural spaces (Lefèvre, Perrin). Starting from the example of the area of influence around the Toulouse metropolis, Igor Lefèvre demonstrates how corridors of urbanization set along the main roads become new spaces of itinerant crime. With his cartographical study presented in the “*On image*” section, Jorick Perrin reveals the correlation between urbanization and delinquency, and highlights a shift towards the countryside. Both papers demonstrate how large-scale urban sprawl and peri-urbanization can lead us to reconsider the types of intervention suitable for these new living spaces. Political leaders are now faced with the question of deciding who should intervene: the police or the *gendarmerie*?
- 17 The overlap between the policing forces’ respective remits and areas of intervention, and the articulation between their respective territories, are an old and recurring concern – especially at a time when France’s administrative divisions are being challenged and the rationalization of resources has become a key issue. For instance, in response to the fragmentation of the Paris neighborhood of Belleville which is split across four *arrondissements* (10th, 11th, 19th and 20th), a local security brigade (BTS) has been created in 2011 to police the intersection. In addition, the flow of people, data and goods tends to clash against measures that are organized along obsolete delineations, which are ill-adapted to the global shape of modern criminal networks. “*We do sometimes arrest illegal cigarette peddlers outside of the Barbès underground station but unfortunately, our unit is unable to work its way up the line of contraband, as it operates outside our territorial remit. They work on a much larger scale. The issues are transnational, with new modes of a-territorial crime. Our tools are obsolete, and the timescales involved in the judicial system are different from those of the political world*” (interview with a police commissary in the 18th *arrondissement* of Paris, November 2011).
- 18 While widespread urbanization has been disrupting and posing challenges to the different bodies’ jurisdictions, similar phenomena can also be observed in the police officers’ everyday lives. Interviews in our “*On the job*” (“*Sur le métier*”) section reveal how in Paris, many police officers are commuters because they cannot afford to live in the capital anymore. They are forced to live in the suburbs, which goes against the idea of a local community police. While some police officers are having to live outside the city where they are working, the *gendarmes*, who are required to move frequently, also have a singular relationship to the territory: for a given period of time, an area they barely know becomes their living and working space. In the case of Guadeloupe, studied by Marie Redon and Delphine Grancher, the police vs. *gendarmerie* divide also reflects the relationship to mainland France, which a majority of the *gendarmes* are from.

A narrative of police spatialities

- 19 Except for the “*On the ground*” (“*Sur le champ*”) section, we chose to dedicate the entirety of this issue of *EchoGéo* to the “*polices*” by injecting their own point of view into each of

the sections. We decided to reflect the voices of *gendarmes* and police officers by asking them the same “geographical” questions: by doing this, we are hoping to bring a new perspective on the everyday reality of police spatialities (“On the job”, or “*Sur le métier*”).

- 20 Our “*Sur l’écrit*” (“On writing”) section looks into geographical approaches in crime literature, a topic that been widely explored except for this specific aspect (Mesplède, 2003; Rosemberg, 2007). Marine Berger’s paper undertakes to decipher South African society and its evolution through eight Deon Meyer novels. The city of Cape Town is analyzed with a geographer’s keen eye through the South African writer’s well-documented testimony. The city appears as a character in its own right, in the ever-shifting context of post-apartheid years. The metropolis’ great diversity of communities and social backgrounds in a time of globalization provides both a backdrop and a source of inspiration for Meyer. As for Michel Bussi, a geographer and a writer of *romans à clefs*, he gave us an interview where he delivers an inspiring observation: for a novelist, “*the advantage of being a geographer perhaps resides in an ability for being slightly out of place*”. While a professional practice of space might help distance oneself from it, at the same time being a novelist allows the writer to “*transform ordinary spaces by loading them with emotion*” rather than just describing – or attempting to describe – their reality. In this respect, crime novels and mystery fiction might offer an alternative to police reality TV shows with their static and anxiogenic representation of the spaces we live in.

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