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The Whereabouts of Power: Politics, Government and Space

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Introduction

This may seem an odd moment to talk about the whereabouts of power. In today's global world the answer seems almost too obvious to bear contemplation: the mix of awe and fear that the United States generates in equal measure as the world's only hyper-power tells us pretty quickly where power lies. It is concentrated in the institutions of the US, in Washington, and propelled outwards seemingly at will. The example of a country with what some regard as 'too much power' provides an easy template for us to understand its location, its whereabouts, but the durable image of America's weighty institutions 'holding' power, it has to be said, is far from unique. The sheer concentration of decision makers, money or might, and sometimes all three, in the big corporations or vast state bureaucracies often give the impression that power may be 'stored' or held 'in reserve' – ready to be dusted down and drawn upon at will. In this somewhat exaggerated view, power is perhaps rather unthinkingly portrayed as something which radiates out from an identifiable central point, with a reach that appears almost effortless. As such, it gives us something to resist, to defy, and even run away from should the odds look distinctly unpromising.

All this, though, is a far cry from our new-found appreciation of the global roundaboutness of power. Rather than being located at the apex of anything, the sense in which power is believed to be all around us can leave you thinking that there really is no one out there pulling the levers of power. Michel Foucault (1984) takes us close to this view, in his belief that power turns up more or less everywhere, because it comes from everywhere. Michel Hardt and Antonio Negri have extended it in their bestseller, *Empire* (2000), where power is not so much wielded as diffused through an all encompassing apparatus of rule. And Naomi Klein (2001a and b) has befittingly put her finger on what is involved when she tells us that nowadays power is so everywhere, it seems nowhere. On this view, far from being something that is imposed from above or from the outside, power reaches so far into our lives that it is no longer really possible to discern its point of application, let alone begin to question its whereabouts.

In this paper, I want to argue that neither a centred nor a decentred view of power is particularly helpful in terms of understanding the spatial trappings of power. We do not have to believe in either power of the massed resources variety which hits us like a pre-packaged force from afar or its mirror image, the ubiquitous presence of power. Clearly, what form a centralized power is deemed to take, whether delegated or distributed to various authoritative locations, may shift, as indeed may a decentred account, be it of a networked variety or even a deterritorialized one, but, and this is what is often overlooked, the binary view of power remains nonetheless. And in so doing, it makes it all the more difficult to imagine things differently.

So, in line with a number of papers in this journal collection, I want to suggest that thinking about power as a *topological* arrangement – as a *relational effect* of social interaction where there are no pre-defined distances or simple proximities to speak of – may help us to avoid being caught in the all too familiar, yet shifting, binary of power. Reach, proximity and presence are not straightforward givens; they make a difference to the exercise of power, I would argue, precisely because the many and varied *modalities* of power are themselves constituted differently in space and time.

In the first part of the paper, I explore the shifting binary of power through its different centred and decentred realignments. This is done in part through a consideration of the rather stilted views of space and spatiality entailed in both views of power. In spelling this out, I try to show why, if we have to make a choice between a rather over determined, centralized view of power or its counterpart, a decentred, pervasive view of power, we effectively enfeeble ourselves politically by leaving little room for intervention and manoeuvre.

Following that, I document the practical example of recent government reorganization in the UK, where new styles of governing at a distance have taken hold in response to the alleged failings of bureaucratic centralized authority. Rather than take this reorganization at face value, I hope to show how an old fashioned concern with the different modalities through which power is exercised over space can suggest a more open, provisional political arrangement. At a minimum, I hope to recover the mediated

presence of power's many and varied relationships which underpin the possibility of political agency and, in Doreen Massey's words (in this collection), of taking responsibility for the openings that fall out of such an institutional analysis.

Binary geographies

It would be misleading to suggest that all that we ever have to work with are two caricatures of power: one where the sheer concentration of capabilities reveals its whereabouts and invites resistance to it and the other where radical dispersal reveals that power has no real whereabouts to speak of and thus pitting oneself against it is a pointless, if not demoralizing, option. Yet even if we tell ourselves that there is much more to power than this, it is surprisingly easy to fall back upon such ingrained conceptions.

It is hard, for example, to shrug off the idea that people 'hold' power, that size matters when it comes to resources like money and muscle, and that there really are mindless acts of authority carried out by faceless corporations on the other side of the globe. Once power is thought about as something which can be bestowed upon or vested in someone, or inscribed in them on the basis of certain structural relationships, the possession of power itself identifies its location. It reveals its whereabouts. Equally, if you think of power as a rather amorphous quality, constituted through a multitude of everyday practices which in true immanent fashion serve to govern our lifestyles, then it is easy to imagine its all encompassing and individualizing nature. It is so nowhere, it is placeless.

Around these two poles, as it were, what a centred or a dispersed arrangement of power looks like may fluctuate, on the one hand, between an embedded capability, a capacity for control or a command over territory, for instance, and on the other, it may morph from a networked to a fluid to a diffuse pattern in the space of one description. The point, however, is not that such shifting alignments are a sign of inconsistency (if anything they are a healthy indication of possibilities), but rather that their respective spatial implications limit the potential for political engagement in the exercise of

institutional power. Let me spell this out in a little more detail by, first, prising the binary apart.

The powers of the centre

The notion that power may take the form of a capacity or a capability which allows those who 'hold' power to realise their aims, even if they choose not to exercise that potential, is known as a dispositional quality (see Allen, 1997). The capacity to do something, on this view, is separate from the actual exercise of that power. This is how the idea of 'vested powers' or powers held 'in reserve' shore up their plausibility. Such capabilities represent latent rather than observable qualities of power. In practice, however, in the general run of the mill, the possession of power and its exercise tend to be conflated, treated as if they were one and the same thing.

Think, for example, of the biotechnology multinationals like the US firm, Monsanto or the Anglo-Swiss company, Syngenta who are assumed to be powerful on the basis of what they have done, or are alleged to have done, to world agriculture. Monsanto, for instance, is known for its aggressive tactics with host countries over the introduction of genetically modified materials and its attempts to dominate particular markets, regardless of the fact that, if anything, it has failed to make inroads into the prestigious European markets and, in organizational terms, is a shadow of its former self. By all accounts, the resources in its possession may well have been misused, wasted or used to nil effect, but this appears to have done little to dent the impression that Monsanto is still a 'giant' among companies in full possession of its far reaching powers. It is as if its powers are always already present, as a 'thing-like' substance capable of being marshalled and wielded at will. Of course, Monsanto is still able to threaten to exercise the use of its (diminished) resources, but its power is attributed to it on the basis of its past size and past performance. The power in its 'hands' is still assumed to be located at its headquarters – in this case in St Louis, Missouri – regardless of whether the company itself recognizes such 'leverage'.

In the case of bureaucratic power the logic is somewhat different, with power being 'held' on the basis of position within an organization rather than on institutional size or the resources attributed to the body (following Weber, 1978). The directors of a high-technology company, the professional experts in an oil multinational or the managers of an NHS Trust hospital in the UK would occupy their decision-making roles on the basis of their technical capabilities and competence to do the job. Authority comes with the position and with that position comes the limits of what an official may decide or prescribe to others. The discretion that an official may exercise, in relation to others who have to carry out their prescriptions or in relation to those on the receiving end of such demands, is clearly circumscribed. There is nothing monolithic about the capabilities involved; in so far as power is exercised, this happens in a downward fashion within the limits of the organizational rules.

The powers of the centre in this context are said to be delegated through a variety of bureaucratic positions and realized in the form of administration. In the case of less rigid organizational structures, power may be distributed over space to secure certain goals where, for example, a multinational corporation's financial and decision-making process may trigger an effective capacity for control across a world-wide system of markets and production locations. When an institution extends its powers across the social landscape in this way, it is as if its very capacity is transmitted, made up as it were of a pre-formed power which is then delegated or distributed according to the organization's specific goals. Once the measure of organizational power is drawn and its capabilities known, it would seem as if power radiates out from an identifiable centre and, allowing for an element of resistance or distortion in the decision-making process, unproblematic reach across the landscape is assumed. There is little or no curiosity about what happens *in between* the centre and its 'outposts'.

Of course, this is a rather simplistic top-down and centre-out spatial vocabulary and in 'real world' examples one would expect a somewhat messier, qualified account. Yet it is perhaps the very obviousness of this spatial vocabulary that enables it to underpin, in a rather understated fashion, commonplace examples of power and its workings.

John Agnew's (1994, 1998, 1999; see also Agnew and Corbridge, 1995) critique of 'state-centred' versions of power is one of the best illustrations of this distorting practice. At the core of his critique was the sense in which state territories had been reified as a fixed unit of sovereign space. In so far as convention distinguishes between an internal, domestic space in which governments exercise power in an orderly fashion over a defined territory and its peoples, on the one hand, and an external, international domain defined by the absence of order, on the other, the territorial state is represented as a homogeneous political community maintained and controlled from an identifiable centre. The state as the central actor guarantees social order through the distribution of its powers to select elites and bureaucratic authorities and thus effectively 'contains' society within its territorial boundaries. As such, the spatial organization of rule-making authority is portrayed as an almost effortless process whereby power is impelled outwards from an identifiable centre.

Even where power is no longer seen to operate in such a straightforward top-down or centre-out manner, as for example in David Harvey's (2003) recent assessment of America's institutions of power or James Rosenau (1997) and David Newman's (1999) accounts of 'multi-level' governance, I suspect that assumptions of centralized capabilities still pervade, despite the recognition in both analyses of a more diverse redistribution of power between institutions across the scales of geographical activity.

On the former, Harvey's account of the workings of contemporary US power in *The New Imperialism* echoes his earlier assessment of capital's domination from afar through its superior command over space and time (1982, 1985, 198X, 199X). But there is more to his recent analysis than the effortless manoeuvrings of capital. Taking his cue from Giovanni Arrighi (1994), he outlines two logics of power, one territorially based which involves the state as the main political actor orchestrating its powers to control the often highly charged environments in which capital accumulation takes place, and a second, capitalist logic predicated upon the flows of economic power across territorial boundaries in the endless pursuit of capital accumulation. The two logics combine yet each has a life of its own, one awkwardly fixed in territorial space, the other highly mobile, a fact which

builds into the system the potential for antagonism, and thus volatility and unpredictability. Political power, through its institutional arrangements, acts as the stabilizing force in the system attempting to order the haphazard movements of capital which comprise daily economic life.

For all its built-in tensions, however, in this account both political and economic power still nonetheless appear to operate in a top-down fashion, with the former constituted hierarchically across the geographical scales and the latter, in the context of the 'new imperialism', taking the form of a 'Wall Street-Treasury' complex at its apex. Where it departs from that mould is through the recognition that the rest of the world is not so much under the command of this power centre as 'networked and successfully hooked into (and effectively 'hooked on' usually by way of credit arrangements) a structured framework of interlocking financial and governmental (including supra-national) institutions' (2003, 134). The general picture, as Harvey goes on to say, is one characterized as a spatio-temporal world of flows networked through powerful financial centres and governmental institutions.

This more complex geography of power is also to be found in the 'multi-level' governance literature, where power is seen to flow upwards and downwards through the different scales of economic and political activity, both transnational and subnational. In such accounts, there is a greater recognition of the larger number of institutional interests involved, with multiple sites of authority dotting the political landscape, from numerous quangos and private agencies to local administrative units. In place of the conventional assumption that the state is the only actor of any real import, the institutional playing field is now shared with non-governmental organizations, multinational enterprises and other supranational as well as interstate organizations. Questions over the permeability of power in the face of the increased capacities of supranational institutions and its distribution through quasi-autonomous regional and local agencies have led to a more scalar vocabulary of power (see, for example, Brenner, 1998, Swyngedoux, 1997, 2000).

And yet, for all this talk of a redistribution or a shift in capabilities between the different levels of governance, the picture presented is often one of power more or less

exchanged intact between scales. In this revised account of political power there is more to consider then a simple top-down transmission of power, yet the vocabulary of power employed is still one of capabilities 'held' and the dispersion or distribution of powers between various levels and sites of authority. There may be more centres of power and authority to consider, more complex distributions to contemplate, but it is still hard to avoid the impression that governance is largely about a descending order of spatial scales, where those further up the scalar ladder are more powerful than those further down. The ability of those organized on a higher geographical scale to constrain or shape the activities of those operating below them has more than just an echo of the bureaucratic logic outlined earlier, although now of course there are more sites and more capabilities to consider in the equation. Even in the more subtle accounts of scalar transformation, where there are no pre-given scales nor simple redistributions of power etched into the landscape, the legacy of hierarchical *capabilities* nevertheless remains broadly intact (see for example, Peck, 2002).

Whether it is Harvey's institutionally networked world of powerful centres or a more fluid, multi-scalar configuration of power, the language remains that of capabilities, distributions, hierarchies and extensions over space. And it is this language which, as I see it, sets in motion an overblown sense of what centralized institutions are capable of bringing about at a distance. In the absence of any real reflection upon what happens between 'here and there', it is easy to succumb to an inflated sense of power's reach across the landscape. Belief in power as a set of capabilities which someone somewhere must have naturally leads to an enquiry as to its whereabouts. Once located, however, the enquiry almost invariably stops, and with it our ability, or so it would seem, to think about politics as anything other than an act of resistance against 'the powers of the centre'.

The roundaboutness of power

In much the same way, although for a contrasting set of reasons, politics is rendered largely impotent by a conception of power that foregrounds its all encompassing nature.

At its extreme, power on this view has no 'centres' to speak of, no defined territorial spaces to control or administer; rather it acts like a normalizing force that works its way through people's lives, shaping their very being in a way that seems to defy spatial definition. If this sounds implausible, in practice the idea that power does not show itself in any obvious way because it is implicated in all that we are and do is not so far fetched as it might seem.

If the former, 'centred' view of power separates the capacity held from the actual exercise of that power, a diffuse, immanent view of power conceives it as inseparable from what it can do. On this understanding, power is nothing outside of its effects and it makes its presence felt through the sets of relations and circumstances that one finds oneself within, not through any force imposed by a distant, authoritative centre. As such, the idea that we are under the control of a political or economic authority has less to do with the extent to which people conform or comply with its administrative pronouncements and rather more to do with the effectiveness with which we, as subjects, internalize their meaning. Whether localized in form, within for instance the walls of the shopping mall, the office or the factory, or wider in scope, across a more diffuse landscape of social welfare and healthcare programmes, power is thought to work through indirect techniques of self-regulation which make it difficult for individuals to behave in any other way.

This understanding of power is undoubtedly associated with the writings of Michel Foucault, where the techniques of power concerned – organizational, classificatory, spatial, representational, ethical – show up as an effect on the actions of others. There are no direct constraints on behaviour, no overt sanctions, only indirect techniques of regulation through which people freely fashion their own sense of self. The key to the operation of this more amorphous form of power is said to rest with how the different schemas take hold in the imagination and serve to influence the timing and spacing of activities, rather than with any general prohibition set down in advance. The channelled meanings and dispersed strategies within any one institutional arrangement thus rely for their effectiveness on the extent to which people are mobilized and positioned through

particular embedded practices, through specific points of purchase. If people, whether in hospitals or clinics, universities or prisons, or public-sector housing estates for that matter, accept the 'truth' of the arrangements in which they find themselves, then those self-same arrangements provide a guide as to what kind of behaviour is thought acceptable and which is not.

The broad idea for Foucault (1977, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1988a, 1988b) that power turns up everywhere because it comes from everywhere, takes its cue from the notion that power is coextensive with its field of inquiry, be it the many scattered sites of a multinational firm, a diffuse network of political agencies, or a single site such as a clinic, hospital or prison. In such spaces, the manner of inducement takes *place* through a social body, as opposed to being handed down from on high or from without. Subjects are constituted by the spacing and timing of their own activities as much as they are by those of others who seek to influence their behaviour. Indeed, their conduct is thought to be shaped as much by what they absorb and imagine the 'truth' of their circumstances to be as it is by the physical layout, distribution and organization of their surroundings.

In the context of embedded institutional practices which, say, deal with the regularities of prison life or those of the clinic or university, it is entirely plausible in my view that power may not show itself in the way that we all too easily assume. If not quite saturated with the trappings of power, there is a certain roundaboutness to its operation in such confined institutional spaces. The issue, however, is whether we can say the same if we extend the analysis across a widely dispersed and diverse population.

Foucault clearly thought we could, in his account of the art of dispersed government (1991, 2001) and Colin Gordon (1987, 1991, 2001) has done much to chart the shift from a 'micro' to a 'macro' canvas of power in Foucault's thought. With this realignment, though, we are left with few clues as to how the government of a diffuse population is achieved on a stable and continuous basis. If power does have such a remote yet immanent quality, capable of reaching into peoples lives because they alone bring themselves to order, we are being asked to accept this state of affairs with little understanding of the spatial and temporal arrangements involved.

One attempt to fill this gap in understanding and to further realign the meaning of what a decentred cartography of power might look like is to be found in Michel Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire* (2000). In contrast to the kind of imperialism that Harvey has in mind, *Empire* is not just another piece of shorthand for a US-style hegemony over world affairs. Rather, the title is intended to convey a decentred, deterritorialized apparatus of rule that has no transcendental centre of power, no historical equivalent to Washington or Imperial Rome. In the kind of rhizomatic topography of power outlined 'a series of national and supranational organisms united under a single logic of rule' (2000, xii) – orchestrated by (but not centred in) the US in coalition with any number of 'willing' states, transnational corporations, supranational institutions, and NGOs – exercise 'imperial' control through open, flexible, modulating networks in an immanent fashion.

Power, in this scenario, is not something that is wielded by the likes of a 'superpower' like the US, it is more akin to an all encompassing rule where things are 'bundled' together – free trade, open markets, human rights, democracy and freedom – and if you 'buy' one you buy them all. It is as if by donning a pair of Nike trainers or by drinking a coffee at Starbucks or by purchasing private education we buy into a 'lifestyle' package: one which constrains possibilities and leaves little choice for manoeuvre. In true liberal fashion, the logic works through difference, taking whatever identities are to hand and refashioning them to different ends. The inducements are so familiar that people take it upon themselves to absorb the surrounding lifestyle without, it would appear, the need to be 'walled in' by any institutional arrangement of power. In this understated way, power is thought to bring everywhere within the ambit of rule (see Allen, 2003b).

In this immanent landscape of power, then, we appear to have moved beyond the need to consider the institutional detail associated with a dispersed notion of government. Any concern for the detailed spacing and timing of activities, and how they channel particular patterns of behaviour, is lost in this topography where the production of new subjectivities is assumed to take its shape from the simple act of living. There is a striking absence of power's mediated relationality in this non-place of power, which is

mirrored in the political alternatives that Hardt and Negri perceive as capable of challenging the 'smooth space' of imperial rule. As spatially amorphous as the encompassing logic of sovereign power, the multitude, as a form of counter-Empire, is invoked as a political force capable of building a movement that takes politics through the new global sovereign order and out the other side. And because it no longer appears possible to discern power's point of application in this unmarked territory, the authors are forced to mimic a similarly spatially undifferentiated and unformed politics.

Ironically, what such a spatially ill-defined, dispersed conception of power shares with those who insist that someone must be running things from somewhere is an inflated sense of what power can do. Both seem to think that the lives of distant others can be brought within reach, albeit through different mechanisms and with a decidedly different sense as to the whereabouts of power. For those who do believe that power has no obvious whereabouts to speak of, no identifiable landmarks to target, political engagement of any form is rendered problematic. The generalized roundaboutness of power has the potential to flip over into an image of power as so pervasive, so all encompassing in its reach, that it leaves little space for political manoeuvre.

Neither here, nor there

Let me be clear about the nature of my argument so far. For one thing, I am not suggesting that there is no such thing as a 'centre' of political, economic or cultural power, merely that they are rarely that: a concentration of powers. Rather, they are invariably territorially embedded assets and resources – of money, information, people, ideas, symbols, technologies and such – which may be mobilised to great effect, misused, abused or simply wasted. Such resources are *not* power; they are the media of power, as Anthony Giddens (1977) and Talcott Parsons (1957, 1963) before him perceptively argued. Likewise, of course, relationships of power may take a spatially diffuse form, but there is *no* compelling reason why we should take their impact for granted, by judging their so-called effectiveness by their intended rather than their actual effects. An acceptance of the roundaboutness of power is not an excuse to gloss over *how* power is

actually exercised, whether close at hand, at a distance, through a succession of relationships or established simultaneously in real time.

As I see it, power is something that exercises us in particular ways, where the outcomes are *provisional* not determined in advance – precisely because what happens in between 'here and there' makes a difference to the workings of power. If we are forced to opt for either a centred or decentred version of power, or find ourselves shuffling between them in an attempt to blur their differences, it is all too easy to fall into misleading assumptions about effortless reach, fixed distances, well-defined proximities and unproblematic extensions over space. Whereas, in fact, it is only through an understanding of the diverse ways in which geography shapes the mediated presence of power that its provisionality becomes evident.

To run ahead of myself, a space for political engagement opens up when we understand the contingent manner in which power, in its different guises, exercises us. Relationships of authority, for instance, work through proximity and presence if they are 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 holds for coercive relationships, that most visible imprint of power, where the threat of force lasts only for as long as people feel constrained by its possibility. Manipulation, in contrast, is a distinctly one-sided affair where the concealment of intent gives it real spatial reach, as do the hit-or-miss qualities of an act of seduction, where the possibility of rejection and indifference are central to its exercise. Domination as an act of blanket constraint is different again in terms of both its relational character and its geographical reach, as is the reward-based nature of inducement and so on and so forth (see Allen, 2003a, for an elaboration of this argument). In short, there are no fixed distances, well-defined proximities or ubiquitous forms of rule when it comes to talking about such things as corporate institutional power or administrative government.

Equally, a more spatially-curious account of the whereabouts of power than that of centres, hierarchies and dispersions allows for more than a politics of confrontation between the powerful and the powerless, where the latter's ability to overcome the

‘greater’ or more pervasive power is always in doubt. A richer sense of how power puts us in place opens up the possibility for a richer spatial politics in relation to it. Perhaps a practical example of power’s mediated relationality will help to illuminate the point.

The whereabouts of government

The example that I have in mind is that of the shift in the UK towards a relatively new style of managerial government and away from traditional bureaucratic forms of administration. The shift towards a managerialist state where public sector institutions have been exhorted to adopt a more ‘businesslike’ stance towards service provision (in terms of efficiency and economy) has been well documented and I do not intend to dwell upon the detailed history here (see, for instance, Rhodes, 1994, 1996). Rather, my interest in this contemporary form of government reorganization stems from the fact that its varied interpretation reflects the binary geography of power that I have outlined in the first part of this paper and, more significantly in my view, it conveys the real difficulty of thinking outside of that binary.

It is not, I should stress, that I consider the recent organizational reforms of government to, in some way, mirror a simple centred/decentred dichotomy of organizational power. On the contrary, I chose the example of contemporary UK state governance because it is revealing of both the apparent reconfiguration of centralized authority, through its attempts to govern at a distance, and the ‘loss of authority’ assumed to flow from its dispersal to new agencies and non-governmental agents. Both poles remain in play in what has variously been described as a centred yet dispersed arrangement of powers. However, opinion seems to be divided over where power actually resides, with much depending upon how issues such as control, regulation, authority, accountability, discretion and autonomy are conceived and practised. Depending upon one’s point of view, either a more centre-out model of power comes into view or, conversely, a more dispersed, roundabout pattern of authority emerges to fill the framework of power.

Neither angle is particularly convincing, to my mind, principally because they fail to take into account the fact that power relationships are exercised through a variety of different modes, each of which is constituted differently in space and time. In distance terms, what is near and what is far is not simply a question of geometric measurement between fixed points; rather it is one of connection and simultaneity as individuals, groups and institutions interact across space in all kinds of powerful and not so powerful ways. As such, the *mediated* relations of authority, or of domination, or of manipulation or inducement, draw the lives of people closer through real-time technologies or reach out to them through a succession of relations and practices.

More to the point, the many different avenues of interaction that play across the gap between here and there not only comprise this topological arrangement, they also create the possibility for political intervention – for negotiation, appropriation, displacement, accommodation and, of course, resistance. In sum, the mediated relationships of power multiply the possibilities for political engagement at different times and spaces.

But, first, let's consider where government and authority are thought to be *placed* in the UK's reorganized state sector.

Centrally determined or radically dispersed government?

The shift towards a managerialist state as described by John Clarke and Janet Newman (1997) represents a significant change to the way that public services – in education, housing, health care and social welfare – have been organized in the UK. In the ideological context of the 1980s and 1990s where less government was held up by neoliberals and conservatives as 'a good thing', the role of the state was seen as less to do with the actual delivery of services and more to do with 'direction' – using its powers of command to determine a framework within which welfare services are delivered. As such, it represented an attempt to 'centre' governmental power in a way that was quite different from the more familiar rule-bound, hierarchical structures of supervision and control which characterize a bureaucratic means of governing at a distance.

Even in bureaucratic forms of government the possibility of micro-management from the top is not a realistic option and thus any attempt to administer a uniform standard of social welfare across the UK as a whole required the delegation of authority through a tiered hierarchy of post holders, where each official executed the instructions of the centre within prescribed limits of discretion. The exercise of managerialist authority at a distance, however, represented an attempt to constrain the activities of those operating below them in a less rule-bound, overly prescriptive manner. In place of direct forms of control, leverage is obtained through indirect means of regulation and resource constraints; instead of rigid discretionary limits to individual action, control is maintained through performance targets, monitoring practices and centrally determined pricing arrangements; rather than clearly-identified lines of authority, roles and responsibilities are re-distributed outwards to a variety of quasi-governmental agencies in the private, voluntary and informal sectors. The net effect of this tightly directed, yet loosely dispersed arrangement of power, according to Clarke and Newman and others, is a reconfiguration not a diminution of the state's centralized authority.

In this attempt to fill in some of the blanks in the way that state power attempts to bridge the gap between 'here and there', it is nonetheless still the case that the *capabilities* of government remain at the centre, with the networked bundle of agencies drawing their potential to act from those who fix the political and economic parameters. The voluntary organizations, partnerships, trusts, and commercial firms which comprise the new welfare delivery agencies may well be 'empowered' of sorts in the execution of their responsibilities, but they are held firmly in check by the contractual arrangements exercised by the centre. In this scalar reconfiguration of power, those at the centre retain power through their ability to shape and constrain the actions of semi-autonomous bodies at regional and local levels. Or so it would seem.

Another possible interpretation of these dispersed welfare arrangements is that the centre, quite simply, has lost its authority, not devolved it. On the face of it, the independent agencies may be subject to increasing centralized control over their financial and organizational resources, but the sheer ambiguity and complexity of what goes on at

the devolved level points to a rather different outcome. Paul du Gay (2002, see also 2000), for instance, is sceptical about the ability of those at the centre to 'steer' complex inter-organizational relationships between public and private agencies through one-dimensional instruments such as contracts, especially where issues of accountability are often fuzzy and far from transparent. He likens the attempt of government to 'steer' such intricate and often convoluted arrangements as more akin to a process of pulling 'rubber levers', where the centre exercises little in the way of effective regulatory control.

In the political context of semi-privatized forms of government where authority may well have been fragmented through the independent use made of devolved powers, it remains an open question as to precisely what kind of reconfiguration of power has actually taken place. Rather than a form of government at a distance where the centre fixes the limits of what is possible for the outlying agencies, the process of dispersal may have led to a more disjointed pattern of institutional authority. Little happens at a distance, it could be said on this account, because the authority of the centre has been compromised in its dealings with independent agencies who negotiate their own interests, reinterpret the lines of accountability, and exploit the ambiguities inherent in the evaluation and assessment process. This may not be a form of placeless power, then, but it is certainly a spatially diffuse and fragmented array of decision-making practices.

This may be an unduly exaggerated view of the dispersal of authority, however, as there is more than one way to read such a fragmentation of power across the landscape. Nikolas Rose (1994, 1996, 1999), for instance, has interpreted the pattern of government reorganization in the UK in a more roundabout, immanent fashion. Drawing upon the legacy of Foucault's thinking that people bring themselves to order through indirect techniques of self-regulation, Rose draws attention to the ability of 'dispersed' authorities to govern at a distance through a combination of normative, programmatic and institutional practices. On this understanding, the willingness of 'free' subjects to transform themselves in a certain direction holds the key to how control is exercised by an array of independent authorities (doctors, managers, planners, social workers and the like) at points remote from their day-to-day existence.

The act of transformation in this scenario works through a process of mobilization, enrolment and translation (borrowing from the work of Michel Callon and Bruno Latour), where the truth claims of a range of authority figures operating in places like the trusts, partnerships, firms and voluntary organizations set out the norms of conduct that enable distant events and people to be governed at arms length. Through a loose and flexible alliance between experts of different hues and colours an understanding is brokered which enables them to render thinkable and, in turn, promote a particular way of being. So, for instance, in relation to social welfare, the broad notion that we should respond to a 'hand up' not a 'hand out' from the state becomes a lived 'truth', endorsed by health professionals and managers as intuitively obvious and supported by a variety of reports, surveys, statistics and funding calculations which inscribe meaning in a more stable, durable manner. In this way, the welfare authorities attempt to make it difficult for people to think and do otherwise.

This, then, is not so much a government 'steer', or indeed a world of 'rubber levers', as a power that makes its presence felt through the circumstances that one finds oneself within. It is the unmarked territory of a centralized yet dispersed government.

Within each of these interpretations of contemporary government reorganization, then, authority is *placed* in different locations depending upon how issues of control, regulation, discretion and autonomy are conceived. Government as a practice, curiously enough, is always at a distance, yet control and regulation for instance may be considered either as a rule-bound, hierarchical affair, or as a parameter-setting exercise, or as an immanent process, or indeed as an absence which spills over into distortion, ambiguity and the exercise of arbitrary power. Moreover, the spatial corollary of these conceptions is an account of power that is variously top-down, centre-out, spatially undifferentiated or at best fragmented. Yet in each of these authoritative geographies it is neither the fact of distance, nor dispersal, which problematizes the reach of power, but, I would argue, the series of mediated relationships through which power is successively composed and recomposed. Power's whereabouts in what is, I hope to show, a more open, provisional

form of government turns on the different modalities in play and their diverse geographies of proximity and reach.

Proximities of government

One of the oddest claims of the accounts of government reorganization outlined above is that they all, in varying degrees, assume that the process of government rests upon the exercise of managerial *authority*. It is as if government officials, welfare professionals and managers in whatever field engage in little else in the pursuit of their aims and interests. Yet just because figures of authority are a necessary feature of government does not imply that that is all they exercise in the way of power. There are other modes of power exercised on a regular basis in the process of governing at a distance that do not at all resemble the types of deference and recognition that accompany acts of authority. Experts in whatever field of welfare, for example, may engage in acts of manipulation or seduction to win people over to their interests which have absolutely nothing to do with people conceding authority to them. What Rose, for instance, believes to be authority's effective reach over a widely diffuse population may well in fact be the result of a successive combination of indirect manipulation, extensive inducement, arm's-length seduction *and* proximate styles of authority by a scattered range of officials and agents.

Significantly, the shift towards a managerial state in the UK is not synonymous with a redistributed sweep of authority relations across the country. Indeed, the pattern of government reorganization described could only really take place on the basis of spatially diverse arrangements of power. In speaking, for instance, about the ability of the centre to constrain the actions of dispersed, semi-autonomous public and private bodies, the use of centrally determined pricing mechanisms and resource allocation models which leave them little choice but to comply is not an act of authority, but one of domination. It involves constraint and the removal of choice for those further down the line. It is difficult to know for sure how tight such arrangements are, of course, but for the centre to hold a firm grip over finance and resources does suggest that the levers of power are

made of something more substantial than rubber. Having said that, if such far-reaching constraints are to be maintained over time and not undermined through successive translation and mediation, the assent of the various outlying agencies is required – and for that to happen the authority of the centre has to be recognized. Without such recognition, no amount of parameter-setting would be an effective constraint in the long run. The levers would turn out to be made of rubber or some such pliable material after all.

In short, domination and authority are not the same thing and nor, as relational effects of interaction, are they exercised at a distance in the same way. In contrast to domination, authority is conceded not imposed; its constant need for recognition implies that the more direct the relationship of authority the more effective it is likely to be as a means of gaining compliance. Thus, in the dispersed welfare arrangements described, centralized authority may well be lost when exercised indirectly from afar precisely because proximity has a significant part to play in its successful mediation. 'Authorized' goals pronounced and passed down from the centre are one thing, their effectiveness at a distance quite another.

What for instance starts out as an authoritative statement on social welfare, educational reform, transport policy or housing management may well be manipulated by public and private agencies to serve a different set of interests from those intended by the centre. Faced with the constraint to deliver services within a particular financial framework, management may conceal their actual intentions or selectively restrict the kinds of information flowing from the centre in order to balance their needs against those of the centre. In so far as the more remote management are successful in manipulating the outcome, the authority of the centre is considerably undermined. Alternatively, such authority may simply be displaced by the more proximate authority of managers operating in the newly formed public, private and voluntary agencies which operate at or near the front-line of service delivery.

But there is no spatial fix to any of this, no spatial template which suggests that the authority of the centre will always be undermined or displaced. It may be exercised

through a succession of mediated relationships or by the establishment of an immediate presence through real-time technologies and its scope achieved, not by shifting geographical scale, but rather by a loosening of defined distance and times to establish a more proximate authority. As such, there is a range of possibilities to bring the far-off within reach.

So, for example, management and officials at the centre may work through strategies of inducement, using financial incentives to obtain compliance from those bodies who are formally independent and outside of bureaucratic reach. Over time, however, rewards of a material kind may lose their pull through re-negotiation and with it the remote power of inducement. In which case, something closer to coercion may run alongside acts of inducement, with the practices of monitoring performance and target setting used to secure acquiescence through the threat of contract termination. Threats tend to lose their credibility, however, if they are not followed through and fade if their presence is not maintained on an ongoing basis.

Alternatively, a more modest, suggestive form of power such as seduction – which seeks to motivate rather than calculate – may be exercised by managers and experts alike in an attempt to win hearts and minds. At best, such acts may shape the expectation of others, serving to captivate and to motivate both local management and publics, but crucially with an acceptance of the fact that the ideas and goals expressed may be met with indifference. In place of diffused expertise about the 'responsible self', there are suggested forms of behaviour which seek to take advantage of existing attitudes and values; in place of normative calculation based upon attitude surveys, there are appeals to the individual that, as Nigel Thrift points out (in this volume), work through affect to win people over to the broader picture. In this situation, it is precisely the modesty of such measures, the possibility that they may be rejected, which enables seduction to be effective at a distance and the 'authority of expertise' less so.

In this topological landscape, government at the centre may draw the more or less dispersed agencies closer through the establishment of proximities over distance, depending upon the modal powers in play. Equally, the powers exercised by the

mediating agencies, trusts, commercial firms and related bodies may cut across such governing relationships by, among other things, engaging in the manipulation of imposed targets, the concealment of their intentions, the displacement of distant authority, the renegotiation of financial inducements, or by simply remaining impervious to so-called threats of coercive action. The fact that power is mediated by diverse groups of professionals, managers, and experts at various points of interaction, through a variety of modal relationships, is precisely why what happens between 'here and there' is not accounted for by assumptions of straightforward extension or totalizing reach over space.

In seeking to grasp the whereabouts of government, therefore, it is not the simple language of centres, hierarchies and dispersions which reveals its presence, but rather the diverse, cross-cutting arrangements through which power is exercised (not possessed). With government initiatives in the UK such as the Public Private Partnerships (or the Private Finance Initiative as it is more commonly known), for example, where the boundary between state and market has been deliberately blurred, the whereabouts of power arises from a combination of far-reaching financial constraints, remote authority arrangements, complexly mediated incentives, distant shareholder interests, and more proximate relations of managerial influence and expertise. It is this cross-cutting mix of distanciated and proximate actions, where the effects of such mediated relationships are experienced in a variety of institutional settings, which gives rise to the provisional, yet connected, nature of government at a distance.

Spatial politics

There is more to all this than merely providing a spatial audit of power, however. A more spatially-curious account of the whereabouts of government which goes beyond talk of centrally determined outcomes or radically dispersed authority, to my mind, also holds out the possibility for a richer spatial politics. As implied earlier, the spatial implications of either a centred or a dispersed view of power, if adopted uncritically, limit the possibilities for political engagement. If it is accepted that government from the centre involves the extension outwards of a range of marshalled capabilities, such a view

has the potential to conjure up an oppositional force in its own image to resist the spread of certainties from the centre. Similarly, if the fragmentation of government has led to a disjointed pattern of institutional authority or a landscape where it is not entirely possible to identify its whereabouts (as it is we who do the work of internalizing power's meaning), the prospects, for political manoeuvre seem restricted.

In the former centralized account of authority, there is a beginning point and an end point to the exercise of power, with those on the receiving end in a position to directly oppose and resist the will of the centre, but apparently with little else of political consequence happening in between. Either the rules, regulations and constraints imposed by the centre on the semi-autonomous bodies operating further down the hierarchy are successful in meeting its goals or their organizational impact is minimized or deflected by the degree of resistance met. In the latter, more roundabout version of government, the radical dispersal of authority and the seemingly limitless variety of arenas in which people are said to bring themselves into line dilute the possibility for almost any systematic form of political intervention.

Neither account, it seems to me, offers much of a role for political agency in its broadest sense. In the more open, provisional account of government that I have sketched, the mediated relationships of power multiply the possibilities for political intervention at different moments and within a number of institutional settings. The cross-cutting nature of governing relationships as different bodies, partners, and organizations mediate the decision-making process, mobilizing resources independently of any central authority, produces a less certain set of spaces open to challenge. It is not that such spaces merely represent 'sites' of power, but rather that those managers, officials, and professionals who exercise power in a variety of different contexts and settings provide more of a honeycomb for politics – where individuals and groups can themselves mobilize to intervene, interrupt or modify the translatable goals of government.

The spaces of politics that I have in mind, however, are not bounded cells hollowed out within the structures of an over-regulated system, but the more porous, global spaces

that Doreen Massey (1999) has spoken about in the context of relational challenges and that Ash Amin (in this volume, plus 2002) has subsumed under a politics of connection. In much the same way that government is practised through a mix of distanciated and proximate actions, a richer spatial politics may also be constituted through the actions of those close at hand working in alliance with others more distant from the immediacy of power's presence. A kind of topology of political practice is possible whereby a process of collective mobilization is sustained through networked interaction at points distant in space and time. Political engagement as such mirrors, in an organizational sense, the mediated relationships of government which connect and multiply institutional settings. If government is joined-up, then so too is the political practice of those who appropriate, displace and thwart the exercise of power and its intended outcomes.

In one sense, few of these practices are particularly new organizationally and they merely reflect, as I see it, perhaps where we have been all along. Whilst much of the cross-cutting nature of governing relationships may now be more apparent though the growth of public/private partnerships and quasi-independent bodies, I suspect that a focus on the end point of distributional struggles has largely deflected attention away from the mediated settings of governmental power. Whereas, in the recent past, democratic forms of local accountability through representative groups engaged the institutions of welfare, most visibly at the delivery end point, the relative growth of the new delivery agencies has multiplied the organizations who represent themselves as 'clients', consumers and interested parties – from a range of parent, community and local 'user groups' to wider political groupings acting in the public realm (see Clarke and Newman, 1997). In health and welfare services, for instance, the greater potential for intervention at different moments of the decision-making and implementation process and within different agency contexts increases the possibility for new forms of political alignment, not all of which can easily be reduced to a resistance mould of politics.

If we move beyond a beginning – end point of view of the exercise of power and acknowledge instead the range of spaces for political intervention that a more provisional, differentiated arrangement of government entails, it is equally important to

recognize *how* power puts people in place. Arguably, power can only be engaged meaningfully if the ways in which it is exercised are understood – and why from here and not there. The erosion of choice, the closure of possibilities, the manipulation of outcomes, the threat of force, the assent of authority or the suggestive powers of seduction, and how they play across one another in different institutional settings, make a difference to what kinds of political intervention are appropriate and in what context. Thus if challenging the managerial state is simply posed in terms of a challenge to managerial authority and expertise, then arguably much of what happens in the exercise of government will pass unnoticed and unheeded.

If, in the context of a dispersed set of welfare arrangements, targets set by the centre are effectively manipulated by officials on the ground, there is little point in engaging the authority of such managers. A more precise account of how power operates is called for if such a process is to be engaged successfully. Equally, if at arm's-length the expectations of the general public are promoted in terms of welfare rights and responsibilities, it would be naïve to underestimate just how easy it is for individuals to walk away from such a seductive gesture. There is nothing 'authoritative' about such an appeal, and unless combined with inducements or coercive acts, there is little to be gained from mobilizing against what is, to all intents and purposes, an inflated sense of the reach of governmental 'authority'.

It comes down to the point, echoed by Massey (in this volume), that in the less certain arrangements of government which characterize the contemporary UK, it is crucial to know how power exercises us and how it attempts to put us in place. Otherwise, we are in danger of losing sight not only of the mediated nature of power, but also of what kinds of political intervention are possible in the circumstances that prevail. In sum, it involves a spatial politics that has a knowledge and a grasp of the whereabouts of power.

Conclusion

In trying perhaps a little too hard to draw attention to the limitations of a spatially-centred or roundabout notion of government and power, I inevitably run the risk of overstating my case. For it is not the idea that governmental resources and abilities may be centralized that I wish to draw into doubt, or the fact that power may be exercised in a spatially diffuse manner. Resources, as I have said, are not the same thing as power and the exercise of power is always already spatial. Rather, what I have attempted to convey is the sense in which power in its various guises is mediated relationally through space and time. Geography makes a difference to the workings of government, but not, I should add, each and every geography.

As I see it, familiar assumptions about power's effortless extension or its unproblematic distribution over a defined territory where distances are measured and proximities defined locally are less than helpful when it comes to understanding the scope and reach of power. In the more open, provisional forms of government that I have sketched, it is the ability to draw distant others within close reach or construct the close at hand at a distance which characterizes a topology of power relations. Power as a relational effect of interaction is traced through relations of connection and simultaneity which, in turn, open up spaces for political engagement that a centred or radically dispersed notion of government may fail to register. If we can imagine a geography of power without either contours or placeless effects, then we might also be able to draw upon a different cartography for our politics. This, in part, is what I take the aim of this collection of papers to be moving towards.

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