

# **Anthropologies of Modernity**

*Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics*

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## Foucault in the Tropics: Displacing the Panopticon

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*All my books... are, if you like, little toolboxes. If people want to open them, use a particular sentence, idea, or analysis, like a screwdriver or wrench, in order to short circuit, disqualify or break-up systems of power, including eventually the ones from which my books have issued... well, all the better!*

Michel Foucault, 1975<sup>1</sup>

*A name makes reading too easy.*

Michel Foucault, 1980<sup>2</sup>

### Testimonial

I first read Foucault in 1984, the year of his death. At Harvard such a reading could still feel like a subversive act; although widely present in bookstores and frequently referenced in oblique ways, Foucault's name did not feature in official course syllabi. His work (part of the heterogeneous assemblage of authors typed "post-modernist" by their opponents) circulated primarily among graduate students and junior faculty, those liminal enough to resent received wisdom and to embrace the promise of a different future. As an undergraduate one heard names, rumors of movements, all filtered through an atmosphere of institutional silence, one sufficiently disapproving to lend them a transgressive allure and hint at their potential significance. Prohibition bred curiosity, at least among those susceptible to it.

Foucault was particularly *not* taught in the Department of Anthropology, then a minor but resolute outpost of the British Commonwealth, and as such properly suspicious of things emanating from the wrong side of the Channel. Terms like structure and function hung ghostlike in the air, their influence acknowledged through their repeated repudiation. But it was in the context of an anthropology course that I followed my graduate student instructor's suggestion in response to a

paper and sought out a copy of *Discipline and Punish*. The encounter was riveting: even now I recall that reading in terms of its feeling, the rare excitement of unexpected revelation. I must emphasize, however, that this thrill was not a purely intellectual affair, the sort of temptation derided in rhetorical dismissals of cleverness or novelty as fashion. I also felt a distinctly empirical resonance, an impression that this work addressed human experience in what was then the most immediate of habitats: a vast, complex educational institution dedicated to the production of certain types of individuals. *Discipline and Punish* offered a reconfigured understanding of its operation, interrogating assumptions of modern life in a manner that appeared at once skeptical, antidisciplinary, and rigorously incomplete. Simply put, it was not contained; by repositioning familiar elements amid the strange, the text opened less predictable possibilities of thinking about the problems of the present I identified around me. Most precisely, it put functionality itself into question, suggesting that the productive effects of a social form might not be bound to its successful realization. From this perspective Foucault's work recast the project of anthropology as it had been introduced to me, raising suspicions about the object and the institution of its study even as it participated in them. Read by someone young and peripheral at the most established of North American universities, *Discipline and Punish* could seem like a deeply practical book.

### Introduction

In this essay, I will return to Foucault's work on the prison and consider it in relation to a historical form I later came to investigate, that of the penal colony, and its particular expression in French Guiana. Much has changed since the era of my first encounter with *Discipline and Punish*. The last few decades have witnessed its author's apotheosis in several sectors of the American academy, including cultural anthropology, and the emergence of interdisciplinary fields that feature frequent references to his writings, including colonial and postcolonial studies.<sup>3</sup> Yet as Ann Stoler noted in 1995, while Foucault's analytic framework has "saturated" work on empire, the engagement has generally remained one of applying given principles rather than one of sustained rereading (Stoler 1995: 1-2). The Foucault in circulation is frequently a digested entity, critical nutrients distilled and inert. While such may be the curse of any scholarly canonization, the memory of my formative encounter protests against it.<sup>4</sup> Returning to *Discipline and Punish* at a point when Foucault is a routine rather than marginal influence on the discipline of anthropology, my desire remains to read the text as a provocation, a point of departure, not a certain conclusion.

The task of this essay, then, will be to dislodge *Discipline and Punish* from its most familiar narrative boundaries. My immediate goal is to send elements of this text through an equatorial detour, exploring another lineage in the genealogy of the prison that Foucault forecloses. My larger goal in engaging in this exercise is

to situate Foucault's work relative to an anthropology conscious of colonial perspective, that is to say an understanding shaped by a politics of space grounded in displacement and inequality. Like Stoler's (1995) rereading of *The History of Sexuality* in order to resituate colonial tensions about race at the center of emerging European norms of desire, here I seek to broaden the geographic horizon of *Discipline and Punish* in order to disrupt the spatial vision of modernity presented in it. Foucault's spatial vision notoriously floats over the West, and yet often implies universality, as in the introduction to *Discipline and Punish* where the author announces the justification of his project as a "history of the present" (Foucault 1979: 30-31). A now copious body of work on the legacy of imperial projects within the formation of European modernity suggests an altered frame: whatever it may be and wherever it may be found, "the history of the present" must derive from more than western Europe and the United States alone. The stakes here ultimately involve the representation of modernity and its "outside," the shifting frontier of time, space, and value made particularly visible in colonial regimes (Mitchell 2000).

For this project of rereading I will circle a prominent and influential moment in *Discipline and Punish*: Foucault's rediscovery of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. Well digested through frequent citation, the Panopticon presents a knot between conceptual levels at the center of *Discipline and Punish* as well as a spectacular image of disciplinary power. Yet it also, as it happens, offers a historical trail straight to the work's geographic edge and a contrasting form of punishment in a penal colony. The penal colony provides an ambiguous object with which to unsettle the narrative limits of Foucault's analysis and resituate key elements of his account. In particular I hope to resituate the Panopticon in such a way that its spectacular clarity does not overshadow a more heterogeneous field of modern discipline, or lead us to overlook Foucault's theme of productive failure within the emergence of modern institutions. From a colonial perspective, questions of power and geography are unavoidable, and the very categorizations deployed to distinguish present and past themselves historical. Indeed, the gap between dreams and practices may be especially telling in a colonial context where anxieties feed into expertise (Stoler 2002). Such is the case with failure and function, I want to suggest, particularly within a form of discipline that incorporated geographic distance directly into its operation and applied geographic limits into its calculation of relative success. Reading the French penal colony back through *Discipline and Punish* raises the specter of an ambiguous zone of failure at the edge of European modernity.

### The Panopticon and the Penal Colony

As readers of *Discipline and Punish* know, Foucault found a key figure for his work in Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, a set of plans for a new, rational prison based on a principle of visibility. This "simple idea of Architecture," as Bentham

called it, sought to address a range of emerging social problems associated with crime and poverty by placing problem populations within a circular "inspection house" (Bentham 1962: 39). There they could be isolated in cells and exposed to continuous observation from a central tower, aware of their visibility and never certain of the eye of the inspector. In Foucault's reading, Bentham's "simple idea" locates a key mechanism of disciplinary formations of power and knowledge. The major effect of the Panopticon is to "induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault 1979: 201). Here the deterrent presence of surveillance and guards becomes further refined into the deterrent possibility of their existence; ultimately in modern societies it is individuals who learn to guard themselves.

The Panopticon emerges from Foucault's text as a pure instrument of modern power, recognized by both Bentham and Foucault as the physical expression of a principle. It is at one and the same time a historical object, an element of theory, and a diagram for a machine. Not an artifact of analysis, nor necessarily unique, its selection as a paradigmatic example is nonetheless particularly interesting.<sup>5</sup> Amid Foucault's technically inflected vocabulary it remains one of the most elaborated and precisely defined examples of the instrumental edge of discourse. Moreover, the Panopticon makes its appearance near the center of *Discipline and Punish*, and implies a pivotal movement through the text's narrative time: the very ambition of the device reveals the scope of disciplinary power, shadowing the future with a heroic present rather than past. It thus is a very modern moment, in the sense of modernity as an attitude rather than an epoch (Foucault 1984: 39). It is also classically framed within a European context, featuring the powdered head and excited pen of a prominent English philosopher. Here, then, we find Foucault at an interpretive height, firmly centered in the West.

What fewer readers of *Discipline and Punish* may realize is that Bentham's dedication to the Panopticon extended beyond a single text. Indeed, the scheme grew into a central obsession of his life and the focus of over two decades of negotiation with the British government as he sought to have the structure built and himself compensated for it (Hume 1973, 1974; Semple 1993). Moreover, this "simple idea" did not emerge from the head of the philosopher alone, but rather derived from a project in the Russian Empire undertaken by his brother Samuel Bentham in the service of Prince Potemkin. As part of an effort to improve naval manufacturing on Potemkin's estate in Krichiev, Samuel developed plans for an "inspection house," a structure that would, by its very structure, mediate problems of skill and discipline between imported English experts and local Russian peasants (Mitchell 1991: 35; Werrett 1999: 2).<sup>6</sup> The structure was never built, but Samuel's project inspired Jeremy, who had already been thinking about penal reform, and who made a trip to visit his brother in 1786.<sup>7</sup> Adopting (and acknowledging) his brother's plan, Jeremy removed its insight about visibility from the sweaty particularities of peasants and shipbuilding, and refined it into a universal principle, one applicable to prisons, poorhouses, schools, and hospitals, throughout Britain and the world. We will return to the significance of

abstraction later.<sup>8</sup> For now the simple historical observation I wish to make is that the philosopher's Panopticon, reborn as a central motif in Foucault's reading, rests on situated sketches of the engineer's inspection house. Before the prison we find another problem: ropes and timbers, busy hands and foreign experts, state power and private interests, all to be ordered in the name of an expansionist policy and profit.<sup>9</sup> Thus the most clarifying image of disciplinary power has an antecedent in a modernizing endeavor at the margins of Europe, and in this sense a potentially colonial genealogy. Unlike some of the historical debates surrounding *Discipline and Punish*, this observation does not frame Foucault's interpretation in terms of affirmation or contradiction, but rather complicates it, unsettling the geographic parameters of the argument.<sup>10</sup> The "birth of the prison" is no longer an affair of western Europe and North America alone. Faintly, in the minor key of footnotes, a trace of modernizing, expanding Russia travels along.

Following Bentham's story a little more leads us even further away from metropolitan centers. During his long struggle with the British government, the philosopher opposed his plan to the practice of transportation and the establishment of a convict colony in New South Wales (Jackson 1987, 1988). Bentham took a rather dim view of colonies in general, and efforts to solve the crime problem through colonization struck him as misguided and duplicitous. The Australian penal colony not only represented an obstacle to the Panopticon, it also offended his general sense of principled economy and reason. As he was to express in disgust about the Australian venture:

The ambiguous and indeterminate character of this establishment is a circumstance that may not have been of disservice to it in the way of defense against the attacks of reason. Ask if the Colony presents any prospect of paying its own expenses – oh, but it is an engine of punishment, to be substituted for the Hulks – Ask whether as an engine of punishment it is not an expensive one – oh, but it is a colony to boot, and a fifth quarter of the globe added to the British empire.<sup>11</sup>

The double logic supporting transportation, a shifting combination of empire and punishment, infuriated our utilitarian. Unlike his precise, universalizing inspection house, the penal colony remained inherently ambiguous, indeterminate, and inefficient. It was never only one thing.

Thus Bentham's historical Panopticon carries with it an interesting historical counterpart: the penal colony, an alternative solution to the social problems of immoral populations uncertainly justified by empire as much as any internal claim to efficacy. Along with elaborating his scheme, the philosopher expends ink on denouncing this rival, attacking it in the name of reason. Both these forms are European, and, at least in a historical sense, modern. But where the inspection house finds principle in architecture and proclaims itself as an enlightened break with the past, Australia's Botany Bay emerges as a more complex spatial reconfiguration, one derived from a plural algorithm that mixes the innovation in punishment with the geography of empire.

We will consider the particularities and possible implications of the penal colony form shortly. First, however, I want simply to recognize its historical significance relative to histories of punishment and emphasize its potential claim to modernity. Like confinement, the practice of exiling undesirable members of a population has a long and heterogeneous history. So too does the practice of forced labor, be it in a galley or a mine. And the combination of these two modes of punishment into the systematic transportation of people deemed guilty of common crimes to colonies emerged as a viable alternative to prisons and executions well before the end of Europe's eighteenth century. Nonetheless, the establishment of a convict colony in Australia marked a departure from earlier practices in terms of scale and administration.<sup>12</sup> In 1788, even as Jeremy Bentham returned from visiting his brother in Russia, the first fleet landed around the globe at Botany Bay. They were to be followed by many more, in an elaborate, evolving venture of penal colonization. Overall, some 160,000 convicts crossed the ocean before the final voyage in 1868, encountering not only a new land but also a new social order built around state-administered frontier labor (Hughes 1986). For all that the penitentiary system would eventually carry the day over transportation, in the short term Australia grew and Bentham's initial scheme met with failure. Furthermore, transportation would remain a viable penal option even after transportation to Australia ceased. In a case of particular interest to our discussion, the experiment in New South Wales inspired the planners of a French project. After several abortive ventures, the French established a penal colony in French Guiana in 1852, which remained operational in various iterations until the end of World War II. From a perspective located in the middle of the nineteenth century then, the penal colony could appear an active part of the future, not only a vestige of the past. Even as the penitentiary prison had begun to spread across continents (let alone schools, hospitals, and all the spatial configurations that Bentham had proposed to influence), the Panopticon was not the only machinery in sight.

### The Penal Colony Form

*The carceral network does not cast the unassimilable into a confused hell; there is no outside.*

Foucault 1979: 301

What then to make of this alternate form, of a distinctively colonial mechanism of punishment? Foucault does not offer much help with placing the penal colony. *Discipline and Punish* recognizes in passing that transportation constituted an alternative to detention, but suggests that the British abandoned the practice (well before they did), calls the French case a "rigorous and distant form of imprisonment," and suggests it accomplished little in terms of colonization or economy (Foucault 1979: 272, 279).<sup>13</sup> But what might it have meant to have a

"rigorous and distant form of imprisonment" located in an overseas extension of France and continuing until the mid-twentieth century? Is this colonial form simply the extension of the greater carceral system, an equivalent of the (Metropolitan) colony of Mettray (Foucault 1979: 293-296)? Or does geographic distance and location within empire have an effect on rigor relative to imprisonment? Following this margin of Foucault's thought back through its historical referent can further unearth the Panopticon's shadow twin. It will also carry us into the tropics, and a different scale of spatial alignment.

First I will quickly sketch the outlines of the substantive case.<sup>14</sup> While different French governments dreamed about and dabbled in deportation (before as well as after the Revolution of 1789), the closest parallel to Australia came into being under Louis Bonaparte, just after the short-lived Second Republic and the final abolition of slavery. France had long had a set of naval port prisons known as *bagnes*, descended from the practice of sentencing offenders to row in the galleys. These institutions demanded labor of their inmates, but under far less meticulous conditions than those of Bentham's project. Prisoners were generally held in communal cells under conditions that displayed few traces of Enlightenment reason.<sup>15</sup> Even as a number of colonial visionaries pined for a "French Botany Bay," penal reformers waged a campaign to close the *bagnes*. In the end both groups got their wish, and the *bagnes* were shifted overseas, most fatefully to French Guiana.<sup>16</sup> After a brief moment of official enthusiasm, death rates among convicts began to cast a pall over the project, and a Pacific outpost was established in New Caledonia in 1857, where it was hoped the climate would prove more conducive to European health. For a period between 1867 and 1887 French Guiana was reserved for prisoners of colonial origin. However, in the 1880s Freemasons and certain factions of the French government, seeking a harder line on crime and recidivism, helped popularize the image of New Caledonia as a "paradise" for its prisoners. After all, the death rate there was only 2 to 3 percent a year, less than a third of the Guiana statistic (Pierre 1982: 35).<sup>17</sup> Transportation to the Pacific ceased at the end of the nineteenth century, and convicts from all origins again returned to the Atlantic colony.

The operation distinguished several classes of *bagnards* within the *bagne*, each subject to different spatial controls and conditions of treatment in theory, and an even greater range of experience in practice. Those sentenced to hard labor for major offenses were usually placed in work camps, where the majority engaged in a variety of exhausting (but surprisingly unproductive) activities like logging and road-building, while keeping to timetable. Recidivist petty criminals lived in their own separate camps, as did the small number of political prisoners (most famously Alfred Dreyfus), who were not required to work.<sup>18</sup> Some prisoners were assigned as servants in or outside the penal establishment, while the most recalcitrant prisoners did time locked away in solitary punishment cells. The *bagne* also produced *libérés*, those who had served out their sentence but remained exiled in French Guiana, effectively sentenced to the most marginal forms of economic existence.

While conditions varied by period as well as classification and exact location amid the different establishments controlled by the penal administration, life in the *bagne* held little to recommend it. Disease was endemic, nutrition poor, violence common (both among prisoners and with the guards), and prospects bleak. Although escape remained a constant lure, it was also quite hazardous, requiring a lengthy journey through the forest or open sea. The *bagnards* languished, and many of them, perhaps half of the 70,000 total transported, died before completing their sentence.<sup>19</sup> In prison argot, the *bagne* was informally known as *la guillotine sèche*, the "dry guillotine." Despite a long history of attempts to reform it, the system remained in place until 1938, and then lingered on, its closure suspended, through a final episode of misery during World War II.

The sketch I have just given requires some amplification for analysis. First, we must note that it took time for this "dry guillotine" to take shape, and recall again that the French Guiana *bagne* grew partly out of a penal reform policy, the desire to close the old naval prisons and establish a better alternative. While we should not overestimate this will to reform, we should not underestimate it either. In the early years of the penal settlement, officials spent much time tracking the health and fortune of the convicts, and reporting their monthly statistics back to Paris.<sup>20</sup> When initial establishments on the mainland proved unhealthy, they tried other locations. When French Guiana as a whole seemed particularly deadly to European convicts, Paris shifted transportation of them to New Caledonia. Even in the later years, after that policy was reversed, after the camps for recidivists opened, and after the reputation of the enterprise grew to fit the name "Devil's Island," the French penal colony retained traces of reformist logic. However much sickness prevailed there was always an infirmary; however much the convicts lived in common each always had a carefully maintained file; however languidly demoralizing their punishment the camps always kept a timetable. Unlike the literal guillotine (also active in the colony), this instrument was never a matter of direct or efficient elimination.

Moreover, we must likewise note that this incarnation of the *bagne* grew partly out of a colonial policy, the desire to settle an undomesticated region of the empire where plantation slavery had failed. The dream of Botany Bay, of founding a tropical equivalent to Australia, floated not only through background studies to the project but into its early formation as well. The first arrivals were promised land (the governor announced that while they were working he would select "the most charming sites, the most fertile cantons"), in the expectation that once the establishment was up and running properly reformed criminals could become productive peasants.<sup>21</sup> A small number of women were sentenced to the colony, with the goal of encouraging convict marriages (imbued with the reformatory promise of domestic stability) and eventually a self-sustaining population. The experiment was not a success; while many did marry, many also died and few reproduced.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, traces of the colonial project survived, even after the transportation of women ceased and it was fairly clear that the *bagne* would never produce settler farmers. The labors assigned to convicts in the work camps

generally conformed to those of settlement, sawing trees, building roads, and those engaged in more domestic pursuits such as gardening or cleaning helped maintain presence on the land. The results may have been materially disappointing – the road in particular crept along at a pitiful rate – and of dubious value to the greater colony of French Guiana as a whole. But the double logic that so infuriated Bentham is quite apparent throughout. Like Botany Bay, the French penal colony responded to both penal and colonial criteria of valuation. In this case, however, it “failed” on both accounts more dramatically than the Australian prototype, while lasting even longer.

There is also an additional anxiety of note, one less apparent in either Bentham's Panopticon or his concerns about Botany Bay. Across different periods, in different configurations, race was a constant issue within the *bagne*. While not all of the convicts came from European extraction, the majority did. At the same time, here the penal colony was inserted into an existing and recognized colonial social order, one that posited Europeans at its apex. Even before the enterprise began, the fact that French Guiana had been a part (however minor) of the greater Atlantic plantation complex gave planners pause. What, they wondered, would happen to the racial hierarchies of the plantation system if white convicts landed amid black slaves? Indeed, the small planter class was one of the obstacles frequently cited as a source of opposition to the project prior to abolition, attached as they were to the “nobility of the epidermis.”<sup>23</sup> Race was also a technical category in the early phase of penal settlement. In keeping with environmental theories of the day, the administration allocated different food to prisoners of different racial categories, assigned them different tasks, and experimented with placing them in different locations to enhance survival. Europeans posed the greatest problem, as their constitutions were considered ill suited for life in the tropics, particularly when engaged in heavy labor. Despite efforts to “season” Europeans on the offshore islands (considered to be more salubrious) and to allocate the most burdensome tasks to colonial convicts, the administration failed to solve the problem of European mortality. Tensions over race continued throughout the later history of the enterprise, and provoked some of the international outrage over Devil's Island, where guards could have darker skin than prisoners.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the free civilian population surrounding the penal institution was largely composed of the descendants of former slaves. Thus within the restricted space of the *bagne*, the imperial order produced its own contradictory disruption. A minor inversion, but worthy of note: here the colonized could rule the colonizer.

What then to make of this alternate form, the penal colony, judging from its British and French materializations? Does the historical double of the Panopticon give us another pole from which to view the birth of the prison? It would be tempting to position the penal colony as an “anti-Panopticon,” and certainly there is evidence to begin such an interpretation. Following Bentham, the Panopticon and penal colony become polar extremes, for where the former would perfect the architecture of internalization, the latter represents an extreme

of externalization. One effects change within the individual through intensive surveillance, where the other alters the individual through geographical dislocation and a radical transformation of the environment. But in placing the penal colony in such a role against the Panopticon, we would not arrive at opposition in the sense of a single reversal, such as that found in a mirror, but rather a set of plural oppositions, some distinct, some overlapping. To illustrate the point let us consider three significant attributes of the penal colony: its spatial logic, the plural politics of visibility deployed within it, and its persistent ambiguity.

Like the Panopticon, the penal colony contains the kernel of a simple idea, likewise invested in spatial reconfiguration. In order to reorient the soul of the offender, why not reposition the body? Rather than the constant implied presence of the inspection house, here we have a spatial solution to crime that emphasizes removal and distance. Britain moved convicts from the rotting hulks of ships in the harbor to a new colony in the Antipodes, while France shifted them from port prisons to settlements within an existing colony in the tropics. In either case this removal incorporated a geographic geometry of empire beyond architecture. Where Bentham's device depended on precise alignments, once passed from Samuel to Jeremy it needed no particular ground. A prison in Pennsylvania, an asylum in Provence, either could be produced from a similar set of plans.<sup>25</sup> The concept of the penal colony, on the other hand, while discursively mobile, encountered translation problems in practice. The *bagne* moved more awkwardly overseas, and never quite succeeded in reproducing Botany Bay. For unlike the penitentiary, the penal colony requires location. Specificity of the site matters, since here it is the very place that is to enact the punishment and the reform, while simultaneously undergoing transformation. Thus French Guiana itself – soil, climate, flora, fauna, and myth – became unavoidable, since it would have to be domesticated for the redemptive logic to work.

The penal colony also involved principles of visibility and invisibility in its operation, if along less focused lines than Bentham's project. Rather than making the subjects of punishment internally visible in the name of moralization, the penal colony involved a more overt, if shadowy, display. By introducing a factor of distance into the equation of power, transportation displaced the spectacle of punishment before several audiences, while contributing to an ongoing imperial imagination of comparative place. Removed from their homeland, convicts remained actively on display to each other and to a colonial audience. For those in metropolitan France, the penal colony served as a hidden punishment, a distant if graphic terror, retaining elements of torture out of public view. For those in metropolitan nations outside France, the effect was equally distanced, while further removed; the punishment was not only hidden but also the product of another's justice. For those sent to French Guiana, however, the penal colony served directly as a public display, a constant reminder of the operations of justice. The convicts were not merely confined, but forced to labor on public works – hidden from France but not from its immediate colonial subjects. Official executions were performed by that once humane instrument, the guillotine, but before



an audience of convicts, and by a fellow convict, far beyond the gates of Paris. Meanwhile the slow execution of the "dry guillotine" reminded the convicts that this punishment could only happen *here*, and not within metropolitan boundaries. And for those already living in French Guiana, the penal colony also served as a public spectacle, if one not aimed directly at them or of their making. Not only did the proximity of prison life to their own lives parade the power of justice before them in an immediate fashion, but the constant importation of prisoners for this apparatus of punishment emphasized the particularly colonial nature of this power. When all was said and done, French Guiana remained the destination of those deemed unworthy of France.

Most crucially of all, however, the penal colony appears to be a mixed form, and hence difficult to fix in a typology or simple opposition. As noted above, colonial transportation was simultaneously an innovation and the reconfiguration of an earlier system of punishment. Over time the project loses its claims to reform, and yet it never simply embraces repression. In some respects the penal colony appears like a partial anachronism, a reverse eddy in the flow of modern punishment. Transportation certainly had close ancestors in chain gangs, convict labor on public works, and the isolation of lepers, all practices that Foucault places in his earlier category of punishment. The prisoners were beaten and their fate was to some degree public. But the penal colony also displays traits of disciplinary control similar to the penitentiary. Every convict received a registration number and the administration maintained a dossier on each case. The prisoners were distanced and confined, effectively hidden from metropolitan France. Disciplinary infractions were primarily punished with isolation. The colony featured a variety of architectural forms in different settings, not only communal enclosures in prison camps on the mainland but also individual cells for special cases of insanity or incorrigibility on offshore islands. Different classes of prisoners were kept at different locations within the penal territories, and held under different conditions; as well as racial divisions, we find classifications by type of crime. Moreover, common convicts were sentenced to hard labor, while political prisoners were not required to work. On at least some level, the *bagne* was expected to rehabilitate its *bagnards*, and they to rehabilitate themselves. And yet they were also deported, and expected to spend their lives in a colony.

In short, the *bagne* was many things at once, always at a remove. Punishment, yes, but also colonial, and modern, in a shadowy and suspect way. Unlike the Panopticon, the penal colony never achieved the clarity of abstraction, remaining mired in the fantasies of empire and encumbered by the particularities of place. In this sense, we can see why it would not fit easily into the sharp contrasts of *Discipline and Punish*, or the chronological order of that text. Where Foucault focuses on a rupture within the history of Western responses to crime, the penal colony extends practices of the *ancien régime* into the greater carceral archipelago. Both elements of the dramatic opening of *Discipline and Punish*—executions and timetables—appear in the *bagne*. They are not separated by time, but rather conjoined awkwardly in a heterogeneous space and administered from a distance

with local effects. Alongside the birth of the prison, we have the emergence of a colonial alternative, undeniably modern, and yet never purely modern. While the *bagne* shares some broad similarities to the agricultural settlement of Mettray, it lacked a settled agrarian landscape around it and was never devoted to the training of youth. Unlike the Mettray of Foucault's description, the penal colony was no model of training in education, religion, or hygiene, and produced no "penitentiary saint" who might regret a premature departure (Foucault 1979: 293). The dream of reform appeared there, but it mixed with other dreams and anxieties of empire. While not outside the carceral network, the *bagne* seems to at least mark a point on its frontier, a zone of confusion in which some could, and did, glimpse a form of hell for a different sort of modern soul. As the most famously incorrigible convict of the era told a journalist in the early 1920s: "I can no longer endure myself. The *bagne* has entered in me. I no longer am a man; I am a *bagne*. . . . A convict cannot have been a small child" (Londres 1975: 94).<sup>26</sup>

### Displacement and Imperfect Technologies

Thus far in this essay I have followed the penal colony as a historical object, responding to Foucault's suggestive, offhand dismissal of the French *bagne* as a "rigorous and distant form of imprisonment," and suggesting instead that it represented an ambiguous colonial alternative to the Panopticon. The task now before us is to move this observation onto a more theoretical plane, and examine the possible significance of the existence of such a colonial alternative to the greater story of *Discipline and Punish*. What might be the effects of a space of ambiguity opposite Bentham's great architectural eye? What might the penal colony imply about the geography of modern power, or even the labor of anthropology? For assistance in this enterprise, I will first introduce elements of work by others who address aspects of Foucault's legacy in colonial contexts directly relevant to our topic.

In an article entitled "Panopticon in Poona: An Essay on Foucault and Colonialism," Martha Kaplan examines the decision of an early nineteenth-century British administrator named Elphinstone to build a prison modeled on the Panopticon in western India (Kaplan 1995). She sets herself two goals for this piece: first to situate the administrator's story relative to Foucault's reading of Bentham, and second to use the colonial context to query the historical frame of *Discipline and Punish*. "Thinking about Elphinstone and Foucault," she writes, "what might we learn about narratives of difference and historical trajectory?" (Kaplan 1995: 85). Kaplan's answer is that while we may indeed recognize panopticism within colonial rule in India, our real task is to recognize claims about temporal and civilizational difference as a powerful discourse of imagination, "a colonial project insistent on the creation of difference to establish power" (Kaplan 1995: 90). She notes that prior to British ascendancy and

Elphinstone's arrival, the Peshwa rulers in the region had developed detailed land and tax records, suggesting that panopticism may not have been a uniquely European innovation. Likewise she questions the modernity of Elphinstone's own vision, pointing out that the British themselves were prone to inefficiencies and addicted to spectacle. Finally, she finds evidence of the limits of power/knowledge in Mahatma Gandhi's successful manipulation of the British Raj.<sup>27</sup> On the basis of these points, she advocates recognizing panopticism – and more generally modernity – as a plural possibility. Rather than Foucault's temporal orientation that defines the present against the past, we could define any system of rule against alternatives present in other cultural settings. The key mode of comparison would revolve around cultural difference, not time, and any history of the present could never claim singularity.<sup>28</sup>

While Kaplan's discussion ranges well away from prisons per se to a more general understanding of the possibilities of Benthamite visibility, it returns us to the question of the Panopticon itself relative to colonial contexts, and recognizes the stakes involved. If the birth of the prison described by *Discipline and Punish* indeed represents some sort of "history of the present" as Foucault famously intimated, then what to do with human difference? Are not present and past both heterogeneous domains? Would not any narrative built around a singular claim to modernity then ultimately prove a colonial project, reorienting other histories around a master metropole? In keeping with disciplinary tradition and anticolonial politics, Kaplan demands plurality along with particularity. This call to recognize difference and the dangers of temporal framing is an important caution, as discussions grounded in European history – particularly when undertaken by European intellectuals – slide easily into the universal mode.

But Kaplan's return to culture as both the source of human difference and the analytic frame within which to position it also opens other dangers. As we have seen, the original Panopticon was not simply an English (or even British) artifact, and the "Europe" it might represent only appears in transit.<sup>29</sup> Kaplan is surely correct in noting the significance of self-representation to imperial rule, but we should not ignore the *effects* of such representation, or simply dismiss its content. I suggest that it matters if European panopticians "envision and characterize their era of rule as an age of progress, science, and enlightenment" when other rulers have not (Kaplan 1995: 94). Actively embracing change within an extant system does not necessarily imply a particular "cultural" value or a universal human attribute; rather we might follow Foucault (1984: 39) in considering it a temporal ethos, a modernizing *attitude*. And actively seeking to expand a system into universal principles and institutions (whether successfully or not) implies a particular understanding of political possibility.

In arguing on behalf of cultural and historical particularity, Kaplan minimizes a key element of Bentham's particular inspection house: its insistent claims to a *mobile* form of instrumentality. Here the genealogy of the Panopticon itself proves useful, for it is the shift of vision between the Bentham brothers, glossed as Samuel's Russia and Jeremy's abstraction, that matters most. Once

relocated to Britain the Panopticon became not only a doomed proposal but also the "simple idea" that justified it. In the name of this idea, Bentham would struggle against the rival project of Botany Bay, condemning its inefficiencies and ambiguous rationale. Yet this idea was also a principle of design, one associated with a specific, but very portable, set of plans.<sup>30</sup> The Panopticon not only suggested a different possibility for ordering life, it also provided a potential means to achieve it in a vast permutation of locations. We should not forget that Foucault (like many commentators on Bentham's project) refers to it repeatedly as a mechanism or machine. He insisted that we should not think of it as a dream building, but rather as "the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form." For once properly abstracted "it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use" (Foucault 1979: 205). In repositioning the inspection house in a plural historical field, then, we will want to remember its instrumental ambition, and its ancestry in engineering along with philosophy. Whether placed in London or Poona, the design laid claim to both, and announced another possibility of their connection.

Here the work of David Scott provides another reference point with which to relocate Foucault in a colonial context. In chapter 1 of this volume, "Colonial Governmentality," Scott asks the question of what conceptual level to assign to Europe beyond geography as "an apparatus of dominant power-effects."<sup>31</sup> When dethroning that continent from its inherited status as the universal subject of history, he wants to avoid both the simple inversion of forgetting it and the generalization of positing a singular colonial condition, a danger he identifies with much postcolonial writing, including that of Chatterjee (1993). Instead he proposes to focus on what he calls the "*political rationalities* of colonial power," providing a closer accounting of the points of application of colonial rule and its constructed zone of functionality. Rather than ignoring Europe, such a project would transform it into a problem, and critically interrogate its varied extension through specific practices, modalities, and projects. Scott simultaneously seeks to recognize colonialism itself as a plural endeavor, and to retain the possibility of identifying a significant pattern within it: the emergence of a "modern" colonial state. Following Talal Asad (1992), he locates this modernity not in capitalism or the discourse of liberalism per se, but rather a shifting point of application of power to the body, and "the *conditions* in which that body is to live and define its life." Scott is particularly interested in what Foucault later called "governmentality," the art of rule that extends further than the maintenance of territory.<sup>32</sup> Beyond the immediate microscale of disciplinary techniques, government acts on a field of conditions, affecting the body indirectly. Its goal is to achieve an arrangement so that, as Scott alludes to Bentham's version of the concept, people following their own self-interest will "do as they ought." In a colonial context this translates into: "*the systematic redefinition and transformation of the terrain on which the life of the colonized was lived.*"

Scott goes on to analyze the particular case of British rule in Sri Lanka, and the emergence of an effort to alter the social world of the colonized in that setting in



order to produce governable subjects. Here I want to focus on his suggestive use of the terms "terrain" and "conditions" in relation to an understanding of governmentality that explicitly acknowledges colonialism. Extending Foucault's sketch of the art of rule into the domain of empire, Scott's language implies the significance of *context* for the political rationality of what he calls the modern colonial state. This echoes points made earlier by Paul Rabinow (1989) about the significance of shifting concepts of milieu for urban planning in the French empire, where the question of the status of local particularities distinguishes different strains of modern plans. Setting, the alignment of things, a proper environment – these are essential concerns for a project of reaching and quietly administering bodies, and hence a crucial feature of any modernizing project. Just as reconfigurations were necessary in Europe for such a political rationality to take hold, so too were reconfigurations in the colonies; neither end of empire could be described as stable or a simple point of historical origin.

If we translate Scott's wording more literally into the enterprise of colonial settlement, away from the vast agrarian complexes of India and to the sparsely settled forest of the Guiana *bagne*, context incorporates obvious elements of nature amid the social order. Thus peering through the management perspective of governmentality, we can glimpse an ecological dimension of biopower, Foucault's general analysis of the incorporation of life into politics. For the population of a colony (particularly a settler colony) to survive as an appendage of a governing metropole, the landscape it occupies must, by definition, be habitable. Furthermore, to be governable (without significant alteration of a political rationality), this landscape must be recognizable as a territory, containing features appropriate for the application of power and the evaluation of its function. If bodies make up the target of power, they must be properly positioned and the conditions for reaching them established. Getting a Panopticon to work in any setting, in other words, involves a configuration of space more extensive than a simple application of architectural plans. It assumes a landscape of social and natural domestication.

Thinking of biopower in these ecological terms, we can now return to the penal colony to expand and complicate the point. Where would such a form stand relative to a political rationality of "colonial governmentality?" Let us again recall a few general facts of the French case. Initially, the removal of the *bagne* overseas claims some status as a reform policy. The administration demonstrates concern for the convict population, seeking to establish settlements conducive to survival. For a period European convicts are diverted to the Pacific, in the name of a racial understanding of health. For a different period women are also sent to the penal colony, and efforts made to encourage convict marriages in the hope of both domestication and reproduction. Clearly life is at issue in the *bagne*, and subject to a measure of governance; clearly bodies are targets within the exercise of power it employs. And yet these policies end in failure or reversal. Europeans are directed again to French Guiana, precisely in the name of its punitive death rates; the introduction of women does not produce stable families or a self-sustaining

population. Death rates remain high and standards of health low, despite a more general domestication of the tropics (Curtin 1989; Anderson 1996). The *bagne*, and along with it French Guiana, acquires a new layer of sinister reputation. Rather than becoming a site where people "do as they ought" by virtue of following self-interest amid favorable conditions, the penal colony exemplifies a domain where people are not only controlled and punished through a variety of techniques, but also placed in conditions unfavorable to survival, let alone reform. Life is present but so too is death, in the shape of both the literal guillotine and its "dry," figurative cousin. The *bagne* lingers on, after an early period of experiments, after multiple calls for reform, after it is clear to all involved in its operation that the gap between the stated goals of behavior for its denizens and the conditions they inhabit is large.<sup>33</sup> Rather than governmentality we have something like its negative impression: a deployment of the possibility of government without its fulfillment. In this sense the French penal colony serves as an example of an alternative modernity constructed around *institutionalized failure*, a place where governmental norms are suggested but not applied.<sup>34</sup>

Reference to other exceptional biopolitical spaces amplifies this point about failure while clarifying a colonial dimension of the *bagne*. Writing about the politics of life and death within the Western tradition of sovereignty, Giorgio Agamben (1998: 168–171; 2000: 36–44) casts the concentration camp as the pure space where exception has become the rule. The penal colony shares some qualities with the concentration camp. Those in and outside it both identified it as an exceptional space, where norms did not apply. Further, it was not simply a killing machine devoted to execution, but rather a less coherent system whose byproduct was death. The key formula here was "to make survive" (Agamben 1999: 155), amid conditions which rendered survival a significant problem. The *bagne* also shares qualities of a contemporary Brazilian squatter settlement, described by João Biehl (2001: 131, 139) as a "zone of social abandonment" for those incapable of living with biopolitical norms yet included through their "waiting with death." Under a provision known as *doublage*, those convicts who survived their sentence of confinement faced a second sentence as a *libéré*, officially free yet forbidden to leave French Guiana and provided with no means of support. The fate of the *libéré* was certainly one of abandonment: an effectively empty return to citizenship under circumstances that continued to favor death. Yet the penal colony is also a historical artifact of European empire, one constructed around a colonial rather than national scale of difference. In such a context, I suggest, the effects of institutionalized failure play out differently, in that they adhere more closely to the particularities of milieu, and reflect the inherent impurity of always signifying a connection to another place.

Having earlier suggested that the penal colony is an ambiguous form as well as a historical alternative to Bentham's inspection house, I am now suggesting that this ambiguous form represents an *imperfect* mechanism, one built directly upon effects of displacement. By the term "imperfect," I mean not simply the everyday failings of any materialization to achieve the clarity of a

diagram or rationale, but rather a deeper failing – the impossibility of maintaining an illusion of self-referential presence, of avoiding references to elsewhere. The penal colony depended on a marginal location and could never present itself – even in an abstracted form – as a universal center, only as an element of empire. In its French, tropical version it also produced an exceptional space, a site of colonial inversion and milieu of death within a wider field of rationality built on the management of life. The offset, destabilizing anti-Panopticon can also be cast as an offset, destabilizing domain of antigovernmentality. Here again the opposition is incomplete and the negative misleading. The administration of the *bagne* did not oppose itself in absolute terms to the possibility of governing any more than disciplining. Its rationale was full of bodies and allusions to their condition filled its documents. But these bodies were understood as repositioned entities, and their decline ascribed to the place they had come to occupy.

Recognizing a potential negative form of governmentality along with its limitations complicates our technical imagery of power, reintroducing variation in time and space. Such a move resonates with aspects of both Kaplan's and Scott's projects. On the one hand it disrupts the singular narrative of modernity implied in *Discipline and Punish* (if not in the culturally plural sense that Kaplan favors), on the other it disrupts the singular narrative of colonial difference and Europe (if in a slightly different direction than Scott suggests). The French penal colony, with its racial inversions and mixed disciplinary forms, does not suggest one history of the present emanating from Europe, nor only one colonial experience. But interpreting this extreme case in these terms also does one other thing of potential significance to a broader present: it emphasizes the possibility of *failure* within the given parameters of any project, and the potential for that failure to be reinscribed as a form of status identified with place. Management bears with it the possibility of mismanagement, large or small; a political rationality of modern power contains the possibility of inefficiency, breakdown, and endemic despair. While the penal colony was ultimately a secondary, lesser apparatus, and the French version produced nothing resembling a tropical Australia, it exemplifies a possible position within a greater array of modernizing projects: an environment of bad conditions, a space where norms are simultaneously asserted and violated. As analysis of international development inspired by Foucault suggests, such a position may be one produced in many modernization projects, conducted and maintained with a more singular sense of purpose than the penal colony (Ferguson 1990; Escobar 1995). Failure can also be internalized in the formation of subjects as well as international orders (Gupta 1998; Hansen and Stepputat 2001).<sup>35</sup> The very ambiguity of the *bagne*, then, may lead us back again to one of the starker insights of Foucault's analysis of the prison: power is rarely limited to stated function. The insight, however, is broadened and complicated. As well as considering political rationalities and their effects in a single temporal and geographic dimension, we would do well to consider their displacements, imperfections, and failures in multiple directions.

## Foucault and Bentham, or the Problem of Theory

Through much of this essay I have drawn an implicit parallel between Foucault and Bentham, positioning both in relation to the Panopticon and their shared fascination with the clarity of the principle involved and the range of life it could affect. Yet a crucial distinction between their understandings of the inspection house remains. Where Bentham embraced the principle as a foundation for the dissemination of one kind of rational order, Foucault approached it with an attitude of perpetual suspicion. *Discipline and Punish* offers generalized observations, but not quite a general theory. It draws near enclosure and a claim to intellectual dominion, but stops just short, side-stepping and swerving. Consider again that elusive point in *Discipline and Punish* where Foucault provides the rationale for his project, describing it as a "history of the present." Attentive readers will notice that Foucault then ends the passage with a footnote, one restricting his project on the prison to the French case (Foucault 1979: 31, 309; 1975: 40).<sup>36</sup> No sooner is the sweeping rationale given than it is limited, and qualified with the most mundane of scholarly conventions appealing to evidence. Perhaps the challenge of that claim, then, lies not only in the particular framing of its problematic, but also the form of its announcement. Between a pronouncement and a footnote, different symptoms of the assertion of significance and the fragility of certainty, lies the possibility of an approach that both makes a problem broadly visible, insists strenuously on its importance, and yet refuses in the last instance to subsume the world into it. A space remains for response, the elaboration of other questions.

Where *Discipline and Punish* limits its geographic scope, narrows its methodological frame, and restricts its genealogy, it excludes even as it reveals. Thus Foucault's Panopticon mirrors Bentham's when it serves as a clarifying center of an epochal shift, while the more ambiguous penal colony drops away. Thus we might find ourselves caught, whether vaguely or precisely, in an eternal return to Europe. But as Gyan Prakash notes, "colonial modernity was never simply a 'tropicalization' of the Western form but its fundamental displacement, its essential violation" (Prakash 2000: 190). Following Foucault's footnote to the limits of his French case, we find the ambiguous form of the penal colony and a vision of modernity that includes not only the greater apparatus of normalization but also the shadow of its partial exceptions. There the theme of productive failure leads beyond direct critique of that apparatus to recognition of variations in the relative success of its application. Such variations, I suggest, together with the distance they create between sites of efficiency and sites of breakdown, might lead us to consider if modernity's most damaging other might not lie in its own possibilities of failure.<sup>37</sup>

For anthropology in particular, part of Foucault's crucial legacy must surely be the manner in which his work reopened modernity as a problem, refusing to

accept its incessant official narration at face value, while at the same time refusing to reduce it to a cultural mirage or simply an epiphenomenon of capitalism. Yet no possible response to modern life could eliminate the deep tension of universalization implied within it. In an insightful recent essay, Timothy Mitchell (2000) returns to the problem of modernity and its colonial frame, arguing that the critical task remains one of disrupting the fundamental oppositions generated in the "performance" of the modern: oppositions between West and non-West and between representation and reality. "At issue, then," Mitchell writes, "is whether one can find a way to theorize the question of modernity that relocates it within a global context and, at the same time, enables that context to complicate, rather than simply reverse the narrative logic of modernization" (Mitchell 2000: 7). Our theoretical task, however, may lie even deeper within that awkward verb "theorize," including an effort to complicate knowledge at the point when it suggests imperial totality, and the rhetorical possibility of transcendence. Perhaps Foucault's more enduring provocation lies in an *attitude* toward theory, rather than in any particular position or statement. We should not forget that Foucault's repeated challenge to readers as well as himself was to use his work to dislodge self-certainty (Stoler 1995: 196; Foucault 1997c: 144; Rabinow 1997: xxxix). The stated goal was a continuing, critical project of self-interrogation, "the opposite of the attitude of conversion" (Foucault 1996: 461). In such a project, faith and continuity would be displayed not through ritual litany, but rather through questions and departures, the perpetual disorientation of serious engagement. For ours is a traveling present, its histories larger now, and growing ever more porous.

## Notes

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- 1 The comment is from a 1975 interview with *Le Monde*, given just after the appearance of the French original of *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1994a: 720). Also quoted in Eribon (1991: 237), but here I am adopting John Johnston's more literal translation (Foucault 1996: 149). See also Macey (1993: xx) citing François Ewald on Foucault's attachment to the toolkit metaphor.
- 2 Foucault (1997b: 321) from a 1980 anonymous interview with *Le Monde*. "Le nom est une facilité" (Foucault 1994b: 104).
- 3 Surely there is no longer much doubt that Foucault can be cast as a "founder of discursivity" (his term for an author in the human sciences who establishes a productive orientation beyond specific claims), fulfilling the wager Paul Rabinow made decades

ago (Rabinow 1984: 26). However unwilling Foucault might have been to be defined – even by his own authorial categories – and however many qualifications we might have to bring to bear, the work of many readers and writers has turned that possibility into a social fact. While Foucault's positions have hardly met with universal approval, or even accurate paraphrase, his name appears regularly in bibliographies, syllabi, and the daylight of acknowledged thought. Indeed, part of his authorial presence in anthropology likely stems from the reception and contestation of his writing in colonial and postcolonial studies, not only as an effect of circulation, but also as a result of its unavoidable encounter with questions of difference within projects of modernity. Foucault now echoes through references to *Orientalism* (Said 1979), as well as other wide circuits of interdisciplinary scholarship addressing problematics of power and knowledge, of sexuality and governmentality. For a small sampling of work on colonial issues positioned in and around anthropology see the collections by Cooper and Stoler (1997) and Dirks (1992). Amid an earlier generation Cohn (1996) displays interesting resonance with Foucault's analytic.

- 4 Since my focus will be on an evolving reading through a particular text, I begin with this testimonial to stress from the outset that readings unfold within society, history, and the other abstractions of our analysis, and that any bookshelf displays traces of generation in addition to personality. The Foucault imagined here is indeed a transatlantic figure, altered through multiple translations of place and time between languages and institutions, but no less significant or authentic an entity because of it. Given a theme of colonialism and its historical inertia, I wish to start with a reminder that tensions of origin and descent also run through the academy, and to suggest that claims to knowledge should recognize transit and reinvention as well as source. For an interesting examination of the politics of theory translated over ground see Boyer (2001), whose title resonates with mine. Here, however, I am less concerned with questions of the political effects of academic theory and more concerned with colonial history in a more literal, rather warmer version of "the bush."
- 5 For discussion and clarification of the Panopticon's rhetorical role see Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983: 188–197).
- 6 Krichev was in the southern Mogilev province of White Russia, until 1772 a part of Poland and presently in Belarus (Christie 1993: 125, 130; Werrett 1999: 2). Mitchell (1991: 35, 185) follows Anderson (1956: 165–166) in recognizing the link from Jeremy to Samuel, but loosely assigns the Panopticon's origin to a general encounter between Europe and the Ottoman Empire, subsuming it to Russia's larger trajectory of modernization. As Kaplan (1995) confirms, however, he is quite correct in noting that India was a primary site of the construction of prisons following Bentham's general principles of design.
- 7 Bentham's interest in penal reform fits within a larger wave of British reformers, especially John Howard. Lest the complexity of genealogies be lost, it should be noted that Howard's views owed much to Dutch prisons, and other British reformers were aware of earlier experiments in France and elsewhere (Ignatieff 1978: 47–79).
- 8 In a provocative recent contribution to the *Journal of Bentham Studies*, Simon Werrett suggests that Samuel Bentham's problems stemmed less from problems of discipline among the peasants than among their unruly English supervisors (1999: 2–3). He also argues that Samuel's design reflects Russian absolutism based

- on Byzantine theology and architecture (as opposed to Western Christianity), and thus the Bentham brothers' Panopticon represents not a new form of power but the decontextualization of an old one (1999: 8). While I do not find the latter point convincing as a refutation of Foucault's thesis (the decontextualized mobility of the Panopticon is surely "new" relative to the earlier formations of power he is describing, particularly when the guards are well trained), nonetheless his historical inquiry helpfully complicates Foucault's genealogy.
- 9 For more on issues related to shipbuilding on Potemkin's estate at Krichiev see Werrett (1999) and Christie (1993, esp. 122–144 and 166–184). Given the theme of failure, we should also not forget that Samuel Bentham's scheme was never enacted, that Potemkin fell from power, and that Russia's southern expansion remained limited.
  - 10 For a sampling of some of the debates about prisons in French historical circles see Perrot (1980), Petit (1984), and Petit et al. (1991). Garland (1990) offers an overview of punishment relative to social theory, Ignatieff (1978) an interesting, overlapping analysis of prisons, and Johnson (2000) a recent survey of prison architecture. Asad (1997) counters some misreadings and examines shifting understandings of pain within a larger historical frame.
  - 11 Cited in Jackson (1987: 12). This is a draft passage apparently intended for his Finance Committee report; here I have altered his spelling of "defense" and "expenses" to conform with the conventions of my text. For further detail on Bentham's Panopticon scheme and his opposition to Australian transportation see Hume (1973, 1974) and Jackson (1987, 1988), in addition to Bentham (1962, 1977).
  - 12 For some recent work on transportation in general see the electronic archive at the International Centre for Convict Studies (ICCS), [iccs.arts.utas.edu.au/](http://iccs.arts.utas.edu.au/). For general orientation on Botany Bay in particular see Hughes (1986) and Shaw (1966).
  - 13 "La seule alternative réellement envisagée a été la déportation que l'Angleterre avait abandonnée dès le début du XIX siècle et que la France reprit sous le second Empire, mais plutôt comme une forme à la fois rigoureuse et lointaine d'emprisonnement" (Foucault 1975: 317). See also discussions in published interviews (Foucault 1980: 63–77, 146–165) and course outlines (Foucault 1997a: 17–37). Perrot (1980) includes studies of the Metropolitan (precolonial) *bagnes* in a collection of historical work responding to Foucault. In a discussion for a psychoanalysis journal, Foucault suggests that French relegation laws establishing the deportation of recidivist criminals to French Guiana and New Caledonia played a role in transforming Siberia from a site of simple exile to a site of labor camps. "In France we don't have a gulag, but we have ideas" (Foucault 1980: 224–225). The Siberian case presents an interesting parallel in a contrasting climate unfortunately beyond the scope of this essay; the circulation of penal ideas and practices (whether or not Foucault's off-the-cuff genealogy would withstand scrutiny), however, is one of my major concerns. Reading these texts with an eye toward the *bagne*, one gets the sense that Foucault was not particularly interested in French colonies beyond Algeria; French Guiana in particular comes across as *lointaine* [remote]. For more on the topic of comparison and circulation in definitions of colonial topics see Stoler (2001).
  - 14 For more general background on the French Guiana *bagne* see Clair et al. (1990), Devèze (1965), and Pierre (1982), and for a discussion of its closure Donet-Vincent (1992). Among English sources Miles (1988) provides a compact and vivid summary, Price (1998) an insightful biography of an unusual *bagnard*, and Wright (1983) a general history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century French penal practices. For more detailed historical exposition along the similar analytic lines as presented here see Redfield (2000). For background on French Guiana itself during this time period see Mam Lam Fouck (1987).
  - 15 André Zysberg (1980: 165) opens his discussion of the Metropolitan *bagne* with a suggestive pairing between it and "anti-Panopticism." As we shall see, the later, colonial form of the *bagne* complicates the negative opposition further.
  - 16 The selection of French Guiana as a site for this experiment was the product of considerable discussion. French Guiana emerged, as it had done repeatedly in earlier studies, as the most viable option as it was the right distance from Europe, relatively uninhabited, and – most crucially – under French control. The abolition of slavery removed a primary objection, rendering the small plantation economy of the existing colony obsolete. However, New Caledonia was of great interest to the committee in charge of the decision, and would eventually become the second French penal colony. See Redfield (2000: 56–66) and Forster (1996) for further background, also Bullard (2000) on the New Caledonian experience and the deportation of the remnants of the Paris Commune to that location.
  - 17 Official death rates for the *bagne* in French Guiana fluctuated between 4.5 percent and 26 percent (Pierre 1982: 311–312). Overall, 10 percent can be taken as a rough average for the time period involved (Redfield 2000: 200).
  - 18 For more on Dreyfus see Bredin (1986) for background and Menier (1977) for a specific discussion of his confinement on Devil's Island itself.
  - 19 Pierre (1982: 311) reports official figures suggesting that out of the 48,537 who had arrived in French Guiana by 1921, 25,747 had expired, one way or another, while 7,636 had escaped or "disappeared," 5,194 had been paroled into the civilian population of the colony as *libérés*, and 3,896 had achieved repatriation to their land of origin.
  - 20 E.g., as the Minister of the Navy and the Colonies responded to French Guiana's governor in December, 1854, "le chiffre de 26 décès pendant le mois de novembre est avec raison signalé par vous comme un grand progrès comparativement à la situation de l'année dernière, mais non comme constituant encore une proportion satisfaisante. Le nombre des malades donne lieu plus encore, à cette observation [the figure of 26 dead for the month of November is quite rightly pointed out by you as a significant improvement relative to the situation last year, but not yet constituting a satisfactory proportion. The number of sick lends still further support to this observation], Letter 743, December 21, 1854. CAOM H bagne 14. As Prakash (2000: 219) notes in the Indian context, the use of statistics in such colonial documents is too widespread to easily single out.
  - 21 "Vous allez descendre, travailler, préparer le terrain, élever des cases. Pendant ce temps-là, je parcourrai la colonie. Je choisirai, dans les sites les plus charmants, les cantons les plus fertiles; puis ces terres cultivées en commun seront partagées entre les plus méritants." The same governor sought to promote marriage between the convicts and prostitutes from Martinique; however his plans met with little success, and he was subsequently removed from office (Devèze 1965: 129; also Clair et al. 1990: 19). High turnover of officials was a factor in the administration of both the penal colony and French Guiana as a whole.

- 22 About 900 women arrived in French Guiana between 1858 and 1904. Another 1,000 or so would be sent to New Caledonia; the majority in each case sentenced under the recidivist laws of 1885 (Clair et al. 1990: 39). Mortality among them was remarkably high: 23–54 percent in New Caledonia, 44–69 percent in French Guiana. For a statistical breakdown see Krakovitch (1990: 283–295), Clair et al. (1990: 36–39), and Devèze (1965: 136), as well as the exhaustive early studies of Orgeas (1885).
- 23 “La caste blanche tient singulièrement à la noblesse de l’épiderme” (Ginouvier 1826). The same passage refers to a “bad joke” in circulation that suggested that convicts should be dyed black before embarkation.
- 24 The convict population usually ranged between 3,000 and 7,000, hovering around 20 percent of the total population of French Guiana. Despite the shipment of some 700 new arrivals per year, deaths and escapes kept the number of prisoners relatively constant. The average prisoner was metropolitan, French, nominally Catholic, partly educated, between 20 and 50 years of age, single, and from the lower end of the urban social order. However, this profile masks considerable variation, and the colonies were also well represented, with *bagnards* arriving from Algeria to Vietnam. Michel Pierre provides the breakdown of 63 percent European, 25 percent Arab, 7 percent black, and 5 percent Asian, but without specifying total figures (Pierre 1982: 41). A sample from 1907 shows 2,605 Europeans to 998 Arabs, 361 Africans, and 130 Indochinese (Le Clère 1973: 61). For further statistics see also Devèze (1965: 165–168), Krakovitch (1990: 260–261), and Pierre (1982: 307–315). The convicts were controlled by trustees and several hundred prison guards of mixed origin, including Corsicans, North Africans, and some Guyanais, as well as about six hundred troops, including a detachment of Senegalese. Herménégilde Tell, a Guyanais Créole, became director of the penal administration in 1919. For a sense of sensationalist accounts about Devil’s Island, including Hollywood films, see Miles (1988). For a general discussion of race as a medical problem in imperial settings see Anderson (1996). For accounts of the penal colony by physicians with direct experience of it see Orgeas (1885) and Rousseau (1930).
- 25 To further complicate the opposition given here, it is worth noting that Bentham not only railed against the Australian penal colony, but also sought to have a Panopticon constructed in New South Wales (Hughes 1986: 123).
- 26 “Je ne puis plus me souffrir moi-même. Le bagné est entré en moi. Je ne suis plus un homme, je suis un bagné. . . . Un bagnard ne peut pas avoir été un petit enfant.” The speaker is Roussenq, a figure legendary for defying the penal administration and spending an extraordinary amount of time in solitary punishment. He would eventually go on to write his own memoir called *L’Enfer du bagné* [*The Hell of the Penal Colony*] (Roussenq 1957). He was far from alone in this allusion: the titles of many accounts of the *bagné*, particularly in the twentieth century, conjure up images of damnation, while evincing colonial anxieties about the tropics and race. For examples and discussion see Redfield (2000: 76–108).
- 27 Kaplan maintains a rather restrictive interpretation of Foucault’s understandings of power. Rather than proving an exception to power/knowledge, Gandhi’s successful manipulation of visibility in anticolonial struggles would seem to confirm the point that power is attached to resistance as well as knowledge and that anyone could potentially occupy the Panopticon’s central tower. See Faubion (2000).
- 28 Kaplan (1995: 94–95) recognizes this move as a return to a Boasian project of cultural comparison as an alternative to Foucault’s temporal analytic. In Boas we find the old hope of detaching human difference from the inherent hierarchy of any evolutionary order, or, in Kaplan’s context, of depriving the British Empire (and with it the West) of any monopoly on the present. In short, we have a central legacy of American anthropology.
- 29 For more on the historical imagination of geographic difference see Lewis and Wigen (1997).
- 30 As a diagram the Panopticon could be cast as an “immutable mobile” in the Latourian sense when passing from Samuel’s first descriptions to Jeremy’s elaborated calculations (Latour and Woolgar 1986). However, mutability in mobility is precisely what would seem most at issue in a colonial context. Here I simply want to insist on the significance of a transportable form; for an interesting discussion of mutability with a very different object see de Laet and Mol (2000).
- 31 An earlier version of the essay was published in the journal *Social Text*. See David Scott (1995).
- 32 Unlike sovereignty, government disposes of law tactically rather than directly, and deploys things as well as people (Foucault 1991: 93). The term “governmentality” has spawned a large body of writing; here I am less interested in it as a symptom of the liberal state and more interested in the way it permits a consideration of nonhumans and environments within human politics.
- 33 As alluded to above, the *bagné* produced a remarkable and long-lasting genre of exposé writing, both in the form of journalistic accounts and sensational memoirs (most famously Londres 1975 and Charrière 1970; see Miles 1988 and Redfield 2000 for additional examples). Here I am interested in emphasizing not only a difference between original intention and outcome, but also a shift in intentionality through time, one that readjusted the balance between action and inaction even as knowledge about the situation and the environment increased. While the later penal colony retained institutional elements of a concern for health (an infirmary, for example), many of the medical conditions reported could easily have been treated through better nutrition, sanitation, and medications available to French doctors elsewhere at the time. In addition to consistent descriptions of corruption and active abuse, we have the institutional preservation of what are – by public health standards of early twentieth-century tropical medicine – outdated norms. Like with the prison (Foucault 1979: 272), here we have the proclamation of failure together with maintenance, but particularized in place.
- 34 For more on alternative modernities see the *Public Culture* volume by that title (Gaonkar 2001). In his contribution, Charles Taylor opposes cultural and acultural variants of modernity, suggesting the image of a wave for the latter (2001: 182–183). Here I wish to leave cultural difference to one side, and simply highlight the complexity of fluid mechanics in the spread of institutional forms: backflows, swirls, eddies, and – in particular locations – stagnation. As Mitchell points out, such a representation itself depends on and hence reinforces the rhetorical frame of modernity; he rejects the coherence suggested by the term “alternative modernities,” preferring to emphasize the “impossible unity” of both modernity and capitalism (Mitchell 2000: 24). Here I am less invested in contesting modernity as a term than in disrupting the implied functionality of theoretical language in general, and expanding the possibility of

- "alternatives" into the central frame of modernity itself, including its technical dimensions. The multiple failings of colonial and postcolonial states could be another avenue for exploring what I am terming "imperfection" in comparing the materialized form of the French penal colony with Bentham's Panopticon. For a helpful review of recent literature on the topic see Hansen and Stepputat (2001).
- 35 This point acknowledges the significance of machines to projects of empire (e.g., Adas 1989 and Headrick 1981), but complicates the linear sense of function central to their presentation.
  - 36 The note reads: "I shall study the birth of the prison only in the French penal system. Differences in historical developments and institutions would make a detailed comparative examination too burdensome and any attempt to describe the phenomenon as a whole too schematic" (Foucault 1979: 309). Foucault's writing varies considerably in its recognition of difference, occasionally cautioning about the limits of the analysis, often implying general relevance and usually floating in between. A more rigorous inventory and analysis of his geographic claims lies outside the scope of this essay. But in an interview with the French geography publication *Hérodote*, Foucault comments on the spatial framing of *Discipline and Punish*, acknowledging the ambiguity of his frame of reference between France and Europe (Foucault 1980: 67-68). He concludes: "There is indeed a task to be done of making the space in question precise, saying where a certain process stops, what are the limits beyond which something different happens - though this would have to be a collective undertaking" (1980: 68). As Ann Stoler notes in commenting on Foucault's response, this collective project has turned in a somewhat different direction than Foucault himself might have imagined, and yet resonates with his conception of critique as the art of "reflective insolence" (Stoler 1995: 208-209).
  - 37 In deploying the term "failure" I do not mean to imply an essential state of being, but rather a particularly potent regime of valuation that figures into the *conditions* of action. Whether or not any of us have ever *been* modern (Latour 1993), some people (like Bentham) have certainly tried their best, with lasting effects.

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