

Ogborn, Miles (1998) *Spaces of Modernity. London's Geographies 1680-1780*. New York, The Guilford Press, 340 p. (ISBN 1-57230-365-4)

Peter G. Goheen

Volume 43, Number 119, 1999

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/022825ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/022825ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Département de géographie de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0007-9766 (print)

1708-8968 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

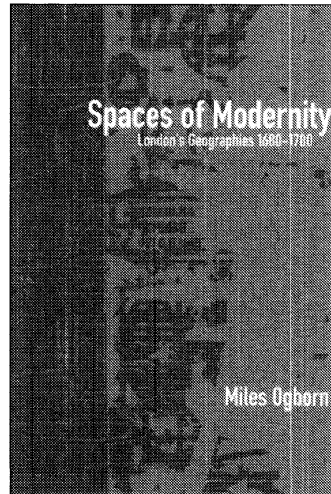
Cite this review

Goheen, P. G. (1999). Review of [Ogborn, Miles (1998) *Spaces of Modernity. London's Geographies 1680-1780*. New York, The Guilford Press, 340 p. (ISBN 1-57230-365-4)]. *Cahiers de géographie du Québec*, 43(119), 336–338. <https://doi.org/10.7202/022825ar>

Généralement écrit dans un anglais compréhensible, mais pas toujours (Bonavero et Conti), ce recueil de texte d'actualité saura intéresser les nombreuses personnes qui considèrent que l'analyse et la compréhension des effets de la mondialisation sur la répartition spatiale des activités économiques est un enjeu fondamental. Les spécialistes des relations internationales et d'économie politique internationale, souvent très préoccupés par les relations entre États et par les politiques des gouvernements centraux, auraient intérêt à tenir compte de la place des villes dans les processus d'intégration. Ce livre illustre bien l'importance de ce rôle et invite les chercheurs, même s'ils ne sont pas spécialistes en science régionale, à profiter des progrès réalisés dans le traitement comparatif des données urbaines.

Martin Turcotte
INRS-Urbanisation

OGBORN, Miles (1998) *Spaces of Modernity. London's Geographies 1680-1780*. New York, The Guilford Press, 340 p. (ISBN 1-57230-365-4)



Miles Ogborn's aim is to persuade us that modernity is more than grand claims for a "world in which rational beings are caught in an iron cage of their own making, and one where all that is solid melts into the air of dramatic and disruptive transformation" (p. 2). He wishes to present modernity in different terms, as a series of specific initiatives undertaken at a particular place and time. His place is London, England, and the period is 1680 to 1780. His geographies are the variety of scales at which initiatives conveying social, political and economic changes identified with modernity manifest themselves. He offers Rocque's map of London in the 1740s as a talisman of modernity's influence in the metropolis. This map becomes a vehicle of modernity by virtue of its novelty in presenting the city as a whole, of highlighting its heterogeneity, of emphasizing the connections of commerce and industry within the city, and of utilizing new technologies of printing. Its limitations, including its unwieldiness and impracticality, convey the imperfect design and implementation of an overly ambitious project. Like Rocque's map, modernity is a multi-faceted undertaking whose realization may be partial and flawed.

Five chapters convey the highly specific experiments in modernity which are the focus of Ogborn's meticulous reasoning and research. He begins with attention to an impulse to reform the behaviour of problem women. The Magdalen Hospital, opened in 1758, was designed to make penitents out of prostitutes by offering them a structured environment of surveillance safe from the threats and temptations

of the streets. Next, he addresses a problem of the public sphere, proposals to improve the filthy and unregulated streets of Westminster. Subsequently the reader is set down in Vauxhall, a new private pleasure garden where Ogborn, closely analyzing the manners of contemporaries, explores the linked meanings of masculinity, illusion, commodification and commercialization. By investigating the Universal Register Office, Ogborn explores the process by which the collection, collation and merchandising of commercially valuable information was instituted. The office was a place for the consumption of information which was to become part of a process for organizing and controlling time and space in an environment where access to information was increasingly important. Excise taxation and the mathematics of the barrel bring Ogborn directly to consideration of the role of government as a modernizing institution. Here, in contrast to the other chapters, the scale is national as well as local. The process involved the standardization of measure, the implementation of strict procedures of inspection, and the creation of an effective geography of administration. It was a system "that could only operate in and through a set of carefully calibrated spaces that ranged in scale from the barrel to the nation-state, and that sought to guarantee the production of accuracy, political legitimacy and taxation revenues necessary to wage war" (p. 184).

Ogborn associates modernity with both the radically particular and the general. The modernity of the penitentiary as a design for reformed living arises from the general ideas inspiring its creation as much as from such particulars as inmate dress and deportment. Integral to his presentation of the developing realization of modernity are the philosophies which he discusses. He approaches proposals for street improvements through discussions of the thinking of Shaftesbury, Mandeville and Hume. To understand Vauxhall Gardens he engages the reader in an exploration of the idea of the Macaroni that is as serious as his account of the amenities provided and the behaviour of the clients who used them. The geography of the excise involves an extensive tour of Charles Davenant's political arithmetic before Ogborn allows us to travel with him as he implements his system.

Ogborn offers his readers a richly varied view of modernity. I find his claim that the geography of modernity is more than a patchwork of spaces and processes but less than a singular, linear transformation of space convincing and useful. The variety of contexts and institutions included in the compass of his book nicely illustrates an alternative to the totalizing and rationalizing view of modernity which he rejects.

Modernity is achieved gradually. By looking back to the eighteenth century, Ogborn highlights the temporal depth of the process. In contrast, his chapters present snapshots that offer the reader tantalizingly foreshortened accounts of the consequences of the innovations which interest him. The reader who does not doubt that the Magdalen Hospital qualifies for inclusion as a modern idea is entitled to ask what impact it had, and whether its ideology facilitated the desired reform? Neither in this chapter nor in the others, with the possible exception of that on the excise, does Ogborn seriously address the implications for the people of their experience of these institutions. What difference did they make? This research strategy explains in part, I believe, why an intellectually exciting book becomes, even for a devoted reader, a challenge to comprehend. It can be a struggle to marry

the eighteenth-century material to present intellectual concerns despite the author's clear desire to see this as a contribution to the lively debate about modernity then and now.

Peter G. Goheen
Department of Geography
Queen's University

DE SOUZA, Maria Adélia (1998) *São Paulo. Ville mondiale et urbanisme français sous les tropiques*. Paris, L'Harmattan (Coll. « Géographies en liberté »), 163 p. (ISBN 2-7384-6410-6)

Cette étude sur l'influence de l'urbanisation française sur la ville de São Paulo dépasse son objectif initial et cherche à reconstruire l'enchaînement de plusieurs facteurs déterminants, à différentes époques de l'histoire de la ville de São Paulo, afin d'expliquer la réalité sociospatiale de cette métropole d'aujourd'hui. Pour l'auteur, Maria Adélia Aparecida de Souza, ces recherches ont pour but de construire une théorie du processus d'urbanisation brésilienne.

La notion espace/temps/réalité utilisée par l'auteur rompt avec la méthode dualiste traditionnelle de lecture de la réalité. L'étude a pour base la thèse suivant laquelle l'espace géographique, en tant qu'espace social, est un produit des relations sociales. Ces phénomènes se produisent et se reproduisent particulièrement en ville, où se maximisent les intérêts des agents qui commandent les relations de nature capitaliste. De plus, chaque lieu est, en même temps, objet d'une logique globale et d'une logique locale. Dans cette perspective, tâchant de mieux définir les particularités, les origines et le sens de l'espace urbain de la ville de São Paulo, elle utilise la méthode de reconstruction historique de l'espace, tout en essayant toujours de relier le local et le global. La richesse et l'exactitude des données historiques présentées par l'auteur impressionnent, surtout par la précision avec laquelle ces données sont ensuite utilisées pour donner un sens aux liens entre le local et le global.

La structure de l'œuvre est cohérente avec la conception théorique et méthodologique mise de l'avant. Dans la première partie, portant sur la métropole mondiale et le processus de globalisation, l'auteur présente la ville de São Paulo comme une métropole et aborde son contexte global, sa dimension géographique, l'histoire de son urbanisation, son identité de métropole, le processus de verticalisation, etc. C'est dans la deuxième partie que nous trouvons le cœur de l'œuvre. Intitulée « Territoire *paulistain* et rêve européen », elle présente une archéologie historique de l'urbanisation de la ville de São Paulo où apparaît une

