

Bernd Belina

Raum Überwachung Kontrolle. Vom staatlichen Zugriff auf städtische Bevölkerung

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Critical spatial theory must not ask abstractly, 'What is space?', but instead look at social

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processes and ask how ‘space’ is used for specific purposes. According to Bernd Belina the production, control and appropriation of space, ‘are and can be relevant always only in relation to specific research questions’ (p. 25, all translations by Marit Rosol). Thus, the starting point for research in social sciences should not be space as such or a specific spatial scale, but must always be society and social practices.

The social praxis in focus of Belina’s now published dissertation is a politically charged topic: that of crime and urban policing in the USA, Germany and other countries. His intention is to explain—based on a historic-materialist perspective—how and why spatial and scalar strategies are used by the state as methods for ‘governing through crime’. This is possible by legitimizing state measures and discourses on ideological concepts like the ‘broken window’ thesis, as well as material practices like video surveillance. Regarding the aim of these strategies, Belina comments that they make possible ‘adequate control and management of the sector of the population made economically superfluous’ (p. 270). Their purpose is thus the policing of the poor and ‘undesirables’.

Belina’s analysis of criminal law at the beginning of the book—including both discourses and law enforcement—contradicts the ‘prevalent idea that state politics of crime are a reaction on behaviour which a majority would regard as condemnable’ (p. 18). Following Foucauldian and Marxist approaches, he understands them as ‘a method of governing, which allow for direct and indirect grips on populations with the purpose of the reproduction of social relations and which in its core secures the capitalist mode of production’ (p. 12).

Chapter 3 comprises the theoretical and conceptual framework of Belina’s work.

He criticises ‘spatial and scalar fetishism’ and the abstract proclamation of a ‘spatial turn’ and affirms his conviction that space and scale are purpose-oriented *means* in spatial and scalar strategies for pursuing economic, political or social aims. Strategy means that the own aim should be asserted *against* the aims of others. This is necessarily related to the disposition of instruments of power. Thus, studying space and scale is only interesting ‘if they are relevant for the explanation of social processes’ (p. 79). If ‘space matters’, he argues, it must always be analysed in specific empirical research. Belina underpins his rationale with a detailed critical review of existing literature on ‘spatial theories’. For his own theoretical perspective he draws on Marx, Harvey and Lefebvre, and on radical geography more generally.

The following two chapters comprise the deployment of these theoretical concepts on the specific research object: politics of crime. Belina first analyses *spatial strategies*. This includes the critique of ideological concepts such as ‘Broken Windows’, rhetorics of ‘Zero Tolerance’, ‘New York’ and ‘Public Space’, as well as material practices such as camera surveillance, entering bans, evictions and other forms of ‘keeping out’ the undesirables (for example, beggars, drug addicts and prostitutes). He sees the central achievement of ‘Broken Windows’ as the construction of an apparently evident connection between space and crime. This is used to legitimate police actions against deviations from ‘public order’. More complex is the question of ‘Public Space’, because this term seems to be traditionally based on justice and equality. But—and this is a most valuable critique by Belina—neoconservatives and neoliberals achieved reinterpreting the ideal of ‘public access for all’ in order to justify expulsions of ‘the undesirables’ from urban spaces.

The purpose of all of these spatial strategies is the criminalization of marginal deviation and increased social selectivity of state action. Belina considers this as governing crime through space, 'because the indirect criminalization of the socially excluded is achieved by reference to their spatial concentration' (p. 194).

The second part is dedicated to *scalar strategies* of US politics of crime. Belina portrays the centralization of crime politics from the 1960s until the 1980s and the following re-municipalization which is based on 'Community Policing' and the risen importance of the local scale. Purpose of this kind of policing according to the standards of order of a neighbourhood instead of the central state's interpretation of the constitution are 'new contents and competences for the police' (p. 261).

In analysing in a critical manner the social construction of space and scale on the basis of a specific and politically very relevant object (politics of crime), Bernd Belina makes an insightful and comprehensive contribution to 'spatial' and political theory building. The only critical remarks refer to the form. As the book is the author's dissertation, it is written for academic readers familiar with both political and spatial theory. However, the topic itself would be very interesting for a wider audience from citizens aware of civic rights to radical political (reclaim the streets) activists. Unfortunately it has not been rewritten in order to include them. At times, the author also includes unnecessary detail to make his point. Some more editing, shortening and subdivision of chapters would have been most useful for the interested reader, both academic and non-academic.

Nonetheless, Belina's work is very convincing. He not only presents existing research on 'spatial theories' in a profound and reflective

manner, but also goes beyond just theoretical considerations by showing in a concise analytical manner, with profound detail, the ways in which spatial and scalar strategies are used in politics of crime for the purpose of expanding control. Belina enriches current geographical and political debates in general, as well as debates on the politics of crime in particular. Thus, *Raum Überwachung Kontrolle* is relevant both for critical geographical theory as for political action. In order to make it available to a non-German-speaking audience, an English translation is therefore highly recommended.

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