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## Heterotopia and structuralism

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Arun Saldanha

Department of Geography, 414 Social Sciences, 267–19th Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA; e-mail: [saldanha@umn.edu](mailto:saldanha@umn.edu)

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**Abstract.** The concept of heterotopia was introduced and immediately abandoned by Michel Foucault in 1966–67, but it quickly diffused across human geography, urban theory, and cultural studies during the 1990s. Notwithstanding the deserved impact of Foucault's overall work on these fields, there are some conceptual problems with the heterotopia concept. While the desire for a single term to probe spatial difference is understandable, the author takes issue with the *kind* of space envisioned in heterotopology. From a close reading of Foucault's notes, and with the help of Deleuze, Derrida, and Althusser, it is suggested that the spatiality of Foucault's heterotopology repeats certain flaws of the structuralism in vogue in 1960s France. In order for heterotopias to be 'absolutely different' from 'all the rest' of space, Foucault needs to posit a totality to society and to perform a 'slice of time'. The author ends by briefly examining how the structuralist tendency of heterotopology has pervaded some recent Anglophone adoptions of Foucault. As both geography and postcolonial theory have shown, slicing time often conceals particularist suppositions and is therefore inadequate to account for the multiplicity and unevenness of geographical change.

### Foucault and geography

In a 1976 interview with Michel Foucault in the geographical journal *Hérodote*, one of the editors told him: "You accord a *de facto* privilege to the factor of time, at the cost of nebulous or nomadic spatial demarcations whose uncertainty is in contrast with your care in marking off sections of time, periods and ages. ... This uncertainty of spatialisation [also] contrasts with your profuse use of spatial metaphors—position, displacement, site, field; sometimes geographical metaphors even—territory, domain, soil, horizon, archipelago, geopolitics, region, landscape" (Foucault, 1980, pages 67, 68). Foucault responded to the accusation by stressing that these spatial metaphors actually allowed him to think through what he became known for: the intersection of power and knowledge. Foucault's geography, as Chris Philo (1992) shows, was only 'nomadic' and 'uncertain' so that the inherently distributed nature of subjectivity and the spatiality of discursive practice could become apparent to the critical analyst: "Anyone envisaging the analysis of discourses solely in terms of temporal continuity would inevitably be led to approach and analyse it like the internal transformation of an individual consciousness" (Foucault, 1980, page 69). Geographers are fond of the final sentence of the interview: "Geography must indeed necessarily lie at the heart of my concerns" (page 77). Though it is true that Foucault could be vague in his topographical referencing, it can be argued that his thought was more 'geographical' than, say, Jacques Lacan's or Jacques Derrida's. As Edward Said suggests, Foucault's position in poststructuralist philosophy can be termed 'geopolitical':

"Whereas Derrida's theory of textuality brings criticism to bear upon a signifier freed from any obligation to a transcendental signified, Foucault's theories move criticism from a consideration of the signifier to a description of the signifier's *place*, a place rarely innocent, dimensionless, or without the affirmative authority of discursive discipline" (1978, page 701, original emphasis).

It is undoubtedly true that Foucault, as an event in thought and scholarly activism, has proven one of the 20th century's great thinkers of the spatiality of human being. The particular kind of spatiality Foucault has been so influential in imagining, forcefully integrates—precisely through its nomadism and fuzziness—the scales of the body, architecture, the city, and the nation-state through a singular understanding of power/knowledge as fundamental mechanism in modernity. Although critics such as Said have rightly pointed out Foucault's not-so-spatial conception of the colonial and postcolonial geographies of modernity itself, I am not interested here in undermining or defending Foucault's hugely productive encounter with geography. I want to take issue with just one minute moment in Foucault's conceptual career, because it is both disproportionately influential and springs out as not being faithful to his own nomadic thought.

In Anglophone theory the spatial dimension of difference is often captured with an initially obscure concept Foucault introduced four decades ago: *heterotopia*. While geography almost intrinsically argues for the multiplicity of (and within) places, the concept of heterotopia has allowed a wider range of analysts and critics to understand social differences as necessarily coexisting *because* they are fleshed out across space. Briefly, Foucault defined heterotopias as 'countersites', standing in an ambivalent, though mostly oppositional, relation to a society's mainstream. Unlike utopias, heterotopias are locatable in physical space–time; but like utopias, heterotopias also exist 'outside' society insofar as they work differently from the way that society is used to. Analysing space and place through 'heterotopology' is, therefore, finding out *where*, *how*, and for whom difference erupts and maintains itself.

The argument of this essay is that, despite the laudable effort of coining a term for spatial differentiation, heterotopia turns out to be an inadequate concept for analysing spatial difference. Not only was the concept barely used again by Foucault after he had introduced it, but its conceptual inadequacy does not, fortunately, reverberate through his earlier or later conceptualisations of space. However, the fact is that, in his concept of heterotopia at least, Foucault displayed some fallacies (of 'totality', of 'presence') that Derrida had identified in the dominant movement of the time—structuralism. Foucault wrote his heterotopology down while in Tunisia, during what has been called the 'year of structuralism'—1967. As he explained to a Tunisian newspaper, he had no intention of breaking with structuralism's philosophical and analytical premises (Foucault, 1994, volume 1, pages 581–585). So, while it is unsurprising that Foucault used much of the words and conceptual economy of structuralism, I will argue that his adherence to it in forming his heterotopology hinders a geography of mobility, unevenness, and differentials of power. As I will point out, with Deleuze, it is not 'structuralism' as such that is bad, but its tendency towards an insufficiently dynamic conception of space and time.

If Foucault seems to have been happy keeping his suggestions for a heterotopology inaccessible, it has been primarily Anglophone scholars who have diffused the concept of heterotopia since his death. Using it as a kind of metonymic notion to analyse what is seen as a general dialectic of sameness and difference in modernity at the scale of living spaces and art works, many have adopted the concept with a minimum of critical attention to its contexts and consequences. They have, therefore, inherited the unproblematic understanding of space lurking in structuralism. The differences between and within real places call for a more complex topology, with an analytical power which is largely lacking in structuralist analysis. The main difficulty with structuralism, from a 'poststructuralist' perspective, is that it posits a totality to 'society' from which all actual differences emanate. I will argue that spatial differentiation should not be reduced to the effects of such a quasi-transcendent totality,

but analysed in its mobile and nondialectal workings, as emergent, multiscalar, and contested.

### Heterotopia

In two short but captivating broadcasts for a French public radio series about utopia, on 7 and 21 December 1966, we find Foucault arguably at his most explicitly 'spatial'. The broadcasts have recently been issued on an audio CD entitled *Utopies et hétérotopies* (Foucault, 2004), which will undoubtedly rekindle interest in the concept of heterotopia. Foucault condensed his preparatory notes in March 1967 into "Des espaces autres", a presentation for a group of architects and planners. Foucault himself did not quite like "Des espaces autres", writes his partner Daniel Defert in the CD booklet (2004). The central term in the broadcasts, *hétérotopie*, though briefly appearing in the introduction to *The Order of Things* (1966) the year before, never appeared again in Foucault's writing. Only just before he died in 1984 did he allow the journal *Architecture – Mouvement – Continuité* to publish the lecture version, without his rereading it. English translations appeared two years later as "Of other spaces", in the literary criticism journal *diacritics* (Foucault, 1986 [1984]) and the architecture journal *Lotus International*. In other collections, such as Paul Rabinow's *Essential Works* (Foucault, 1998), it has been included as "Different spaces".

The urban theorist Edward Soja introduced the term heterotopia to the social sciences in his *Postmodern Geographies* (1989). Foucault's uneasiness with his 'heterotopology' contrasts sharply with the popularity it has since attained in the (British and American, some German, but not French) humanities. This contrast is important, though I will neither speculate exactly why Foucault himself was not fond of the lecture, nor how it could disseminate despite its flaws. However nuanced and deservedly influential the rest of Foucault's oeuvre, what I want to do here is deconstruct the spatiality underlying his short venture into heterotopology, not so as to eliminate it completely, but to forewarn geographers contemplating putting it to use.

So what did Foucault speak about? "Des espaces autres" tried to conceptualise those sites "that have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (1986, page 24). These sites could be called utopias, but Foucault wanted to talk about *real* spaces. For this he introduced the concept of heterotopia.

"There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" (Foucault, 1986, page 24).

At the outset, note that heterotopia is about the difference of one real place from *all* other places in a certain culture. It is this that makes a heterotopia not simply different from another space. We could compare here Henri Lefebvre's brief allusions to heterotopias as 'mutually repellent spaces' (1972, pages 207–208; cf 1991, page 366), or elsewhere, as historically contingent 'other' spaces in relation to the city: "Anomic groups construct heterotopic spaces, which are eventually reclaimed by the dominant praxis" (2003, page 129). However, we will see that, for Foucault, heterotopias are much *more other* than that.

What Foucault dubs 'heterotopology' seeks to describe (Foucault uses the fashionable word 'read') the full otherness of other-spaces. In the 1966 broadcasts, Foucault (2004)

even 'dreams' of a veritable 'science' of heterotopology. He proceeds to list six 'principles' of heterotopology, conjuring an enticing spectrum of examples: boarding school, cemetery, cinema, sauna, garden, library, festival, resort, guest room, motel, brothel, colony, boat. It is important that heterotopias are neither simply spaces of resistance, as Foucault also highlights prisons, nor liminal spaces in Victor Turner's (1966) sense. However, an important characteristic of Foucault's heterotopia seems to be that it requires some significant *travel*—some expulsion from 'mainstream' society and its habits. This might actually reinforce the stability of the society, as gardens and saunas tend to do. Foucault says clearly that heterotopias can function both to contain the 'deviant' (retirement homes) and to provide the illusion of power (brothels). The spatiality in heterotopology is thus certainly dynamic, and nowhere normative.

Even then it is true that, on the whole, Foucault seems to privilege heterotopias that are located on the wild edges of society, from where they unconsciously propel society forward. It is no surprise that he calls the ship the "heterotopia *par excellence*" (1986, page 27). In an essay on cosmopolitanism, David Harvey concludes from this that Foucault celebrates heterotopia for the sake of heterotopia—typical 'postmodernist' style: "the commercialised cruise ship is indeed a heterotopic site if ever there was one; and what is the critical, liberatory, and emancipatory point of that? Foucault's heterotopic excursion ends up being every bit as banal as Kant's *Geography* [which was replete with racist stereotypes]. I am not surprised that he left the essay unpublished" (2000, page 538).

Harvey is right that Foucault did not like the essay, but he is willfully hasty in questioning the concept's politics so that he can attack Foucault's influence. The concept is 'banal' (I would say 'flawed') for reasons other than Harvey supposes. In fact, the political ambivalence Harvey discloses is integral to the systematic nature of heterotopology. It is neither the political ambivalence nor the systematic-ness or Foucault's utopian scientificity that is the target of my deconstruction, however, but the conceptual delineation of the heterotopic site in the first place.

There are two distinct meanings of heterotopia that can be seen to emerge in "Of other spaces". First, heterotopia is *discordant space* or, according to Foucault's third principle, "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (1986, page 25). Thus any space in which the elements do not add up to a logical whole can be called heterotopic. There is a plethora of cases in the literature: Main St in Disneyland (Philips, 2002), Las Vegas architecture (Chaplin, 2000), El Paso's Border Control Museum (Barrera, 2003), a Buddhist monument in Kathmandu (Owens, 2002), ethnographic exhibits (Kahn, 1995), 19th century women's colleges (Tamboukou, 2000), Vancouver's public library (Lees, 1997), factories (Ahlbäck, 2001), alternative theatre (Cheng, 2001), Istanbul's Four Seasons Hotel (Kezer, 2004), Greek-American fiction (Kalogeras, 1998), cyberporn (Jacobs, 2004), coops (North, 1999), Kafka's oeuvre (Bogumil, 2001), Johannesburg's 'security parks' (Hook and Vrdoljak, 2002). Global capitalism (Wilke, 2003), media technology (Jones, 2004), landscapes (Guarassi, 2001), and postmodernity (Relph, 1991) are said to be in themselves heterotopic because they bring disparate elements together. One wonders where there is still space left for mainstream society.

Yet the second meaning of heterotopia is, I think, the one Foucault accords much more systematic attention to: heterotopia circumscribes subversive, visionary, or sacred space which *by virtue* of its special qualities, its 'absolute otherness', either keeps a social formation stable (garden), or, more often, forces it to evolve (ship). In other words, a place is heterotopic not simply because of internal heterogeneity, but because of its external difference from all the rest of a society's spaces. It is, precisely, a *counter-site*. The two meanings of heterotopia are, of course, related. For example, the theatre's

dreamlike incompatibility of imaginary and material spaces is exactly what gives it its power to provoke either complacency or revolution. This is the key problematic of Foucault's heterotology: under the second, most important meaning, heterotopia relates to the *totality* of one particular society, being "formed in the very founding of society" (Foucault, 1986, page 24). Whether this is through internal heterogeneity is not so important; cemeteries and prisons tend to be fairly orderly. The science of heterotology exposes the immediate relationship certain special places have with a virtual whole called 'society'. Whether these places should be admired or cultivated is a separate, political issue depending on one's normative view of the society's future.

When pressing the matter of spatial heterogeneity further, it is difficult to avoid arriving at the logical conclusion that no space is free of some internal discordance and conflict—certainly not carnival and boats and museums and churches, but also less special places, like the office or the home. To avoid this conclusion, it would seem that heterotology is not about analysing increasingly finer degrees of heterogeneity, but the *function* a 'different space', identified by the analyst, has within a societal whole. Indeed, according to the last principle of heterotology, heterotopias "have a *function* in relation to all the space that remains" (Foucault, 1986, page 27, my emphasis). Heterotology is a kind of geographical structuralism, or even functionalism, dealing with the work parts do in sustaining the whole.

Societies change, of course, and Foucault's heterotology would need to integrate his singular thinking on history. In the radio broadcasts he clearly states that heterotopias emerge and are later 'reabsorbed' in society. Heterotopia functions not only as a mirror, reflecting mainstream society's selfness through its otherness in a static way. From the examples listed, it also transpires that heterotopias guard or fuel society's *temporality*. This diachronic dimension, in fact, is crucial to the structure of heterotopia. Heterotopia's function is not only to reproduce society as a system in dynamic equilibrium (the sauna, the museum, the cemetery). It can also summon global change through the diffusion of a new way of organising space (Jeremy Bentham's panopticon, theme parks). Thus, according to the fourth principle of heterotology:

"Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time [*découpages du temps*]*—*which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break [*rupture absolue*] with their traditional time" (Foucault, 1986, page 26).

So heterotopias are at their most intense when they pull everything out into a new 'slice of time'. An 'absolute break' is achieved—a 'heterochrony'. Foucault goes on to qualify this break, explaining that heterotopias either 'accumulate time', or they are ephemeral—in his words, 'absolutely temporal'. He offers that there are complex configurations of heterotopia and heterochrony and possibly even a production of inertia. For instance, do nostalgic holiday villages preserve time, or point towards a future society made completely of hyperreal pasts? Foucault's innovative argument here is that the spatial particularity of heterotopia is given in its capacity to herald a *general* acceleration, temporal break, or memorisation of tradition. Maybe this is why heterotopia, though 'probably' present in all cultures, is for both Foucault and his interpreters a quintessential feature of European modernity, that ultimate generator of the 'break with traditional time'.

A recapitulation. Intrinsic to the original definition of heterotopia is that it stands in relation to *all* of society. Heterotopia slices time through signaling and generating change through all of society, or sometimes through serving literally as society's storehouse of memories. I will come back to the entwinement of heterotopia and modernity

shortly; first we have to consider what implications the ‘slice of time’ notion has for the heterotopological conception of space.

### Slice of time

In the same year in which Foucault delivered “Des espaces autres”, his friend Gilles Deleuze wrote a text: “How do we recognize structuralism?” (2004 [1967]). It is unlikely that the two events were directly linked, but it is not arbitrary that they both occurred in the same year. As Deleuze writes in the beginning of his article, “*We are in 1967*” (page 170, his emphasis). This strong historicisation of philosophy is important to my argument. Deleuze’s sympathetic but idiosyncratic interpretation of structuralism will help to start identifying what I see as the structuralist latencies of heterotopology.

I think Foucault’s concept of heterotopia is structuralist to a large extent because when he was prompted to speak explicitly about *space* (first about escapism, then to architects and planners), he had not taken a moment to shake off the pervasive way that space was thought in the hegemonic structuralist paradigm of the time in France. Indeed, Deleuze lists Foucault together with Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Roman Jakobson, and Claude Lévi-Strauss as a ‘structuralist’—at least, in 1967. The lasting usefulness of Foucault for understanding urban planning, architecture, land-use, and geopolitics has been convincingly demonstrated (Allen, 2003; Elden, 2001; Hannah, 2000; Ogborn, 1998; Philo, 1992). Lest my focus on heterotopia be forgotten, let me state forcefully that Foucault’s other work of the 1960s, a lot of which had very inspiring things to say about space and difference—for example, *Madness and Civilization* (1965 [1961]), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973), and perhaps especially *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel* (1987 [1963])—had already started overcoming structuralism even while using some of its vocabulary. James Bernauer (1992 [1990], pages 188–192) notes that Foucault himself rid *Naissance de la clinique* of some of its structuralist-sounding words for its 1972 edition. So again, I am analysing the structuralist spatial ontology not in all of Foucault’s oeuvre—but in the now-popular notion of heterotopia.

The first criterion of structuralism, Deleuze writes, is the introduction of a symbolic realm between the imaginary and the real which is irreducible to either. This is the definite merit of Ferdinand de Saussure, who had established the arbitrary nature of the sign at the beginning of the 20th century (1966, pages 65-70). Being arbitrarily related to real horses, the signifier *horse* attains meaning only *in relation to* other words (*cow, zebra, knight*). For Saussure these words exist at the same time, that is, synchronically, in a purely relational structure, a topological space Saussure called *langue*. Hence it is the place of a signifier within language’s system of differences that creates meaning, not the intention of a concrete speaker. Deleuze’s second criterion of structuralism is the ontological sense of this abstract, neither objective nor subjective positionality:

“It is not a matter of a location [*place*] in real spatial expanse, nor of sites [*lieux*] in imaginary extensions, but rather of places and sites in a properly structural space, that is, a topological space. What is structural is space, but an unextended, preextensive space, pure *spatium* constituted bit by bit as an order of proximity, in which the notion of proximity [*voisinage*] first of all has precisely an ordinal sense and not a signification in extension” (Deleuze, 2004, page 174, translation modified).

Structuralism’s most radical gesture in the history of philosophy is here acknowledged: its antihumanist centring of a transcendental space in which meaning is constructed through reciprocal relations, not through reference to any real things or individual consciousness. As Deleuze has it, structure is ‘virtual’.

It is crucial to understand that, in order for a structure to function, it needs to be a self-contained entity in which all elements equally and always obey the rules of the structure. This implies simultaneity: if one element were to transform faster than another, it would not obey the laws to the same degree. Structural laws hold everything in place, as one whole. Jean Piaget observes:

“That wholeness is a defining mark of structures almost goes without saying, since all structuralists—mathematicians, linguists, psychologists, or what have you—are at one in recognizing as fundamental the contrast between *structures* and *aggregates*, the former being wholes, the latter composites formed of elements that are independent of the complexes into which they enter. To insist on this distinction is not to deny that structures have elements, but the elements of a structure are subordinated to laws, and it is in terms of these laws that the structure *qua* whole or system is defined” (1970, pages 6–7, original emphasis).

Piaget grants that structuralism risks becoming both anti-historical and Platonic because of its privileging of synchrony and formalisation, and he presents some ways of overcoming this risk. The risk remains, however, and it might be intrinsic to structuralism’s conception of structure as internally consistent.

An important qualification of this wholeness of structure that is worth mentioning is the Althusserian. Though called a ‘structural’ Marxist, Louis Althusser explicitly distanced himself from prevailing concepts of structure. He arrived at a materialist theory of structure by reading the mature Marx as having gotten beyond Hegelianism (for a critique, see Schmidt, 1981). The traditional Hegelian–Marxist conception of history, Althusser argues, is linear and simplistic: society evolves as a whole and all parts necessarily evolve with it. Alexander Schubert has argued in a Derridean study (1985) that Hegel’s logic of negative presence can be interpreted as more complicated than that. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Hegelian dialectics requires some metaphysical notion of structural totality. This is what Althusser called an ‘essential section’ or slice (*coupe d’essence*), that is, “an intellectual operation in which a *vertical break* is made at any moment in historical time, a break in the present such that all the elements of the whole revealed by this section are in an immediate relationship with one another, a relationship that immediately expresses their internal essence” (1970, page 94, original emphasis). With Althusser, we can begin appreciating history as *multiple*, and not linear or unidirectional. Moving closer to Fernand Braudel, we could say there are temporalities particular to the various processes under consideration: human practices, the city, the economy, science, art, the seasons, even philosophy itself. All processes follow temporalities specific to their physical nature. It is true that Althusser could not help but concede to Marxism the determination of these spheres, in ‘the last instance’, by the economy. What is relevant here is that he questioned, from a materialist viewpoint, the notion of an underlying synchronic *totality* of society.

Inspired by Althusser, Doreen Massey has taken issue with the dichotomisation of synchrony and diachrony in both structuralism and much poststructuralism. In the ‘essential section’ view of history, there is not only a simplistic conception of time, but *space*—the coexistence of constitutive differences—is presented negatively as the realm of closure and stability. Even if this structuralist spatiality is virtual, as Deleuze claims, it remains by and large static, *opposed to* time, and grounded in transcendental laws which accord the totality just one timeline:

“[T]he conceptual synchronies of structuralism are relations imagined in a highly particular way. Above all, they are characterized by relations between their constituent elements such that they form a completely interlocked system. They are closed systems. It is this aspect of the conceptualisation—in combination with a-temporality—which does the most damage” (Massey, 2005, page 39).

Massey argues that it is logically impossible to think of history without space, since it is the heterogeneities and inequalities of/in space that propel change (an idea which can also be found in the works of Deleuze and Derrida). Spatial multiplicity contains its own potentials for temporalisation and, thus, politics, precisely by *not* making it possible to conceive history as a series of synchronic snapshots.

Althusser's intervention bears on our discussion of the structuralism in heterotology. Undoubtedly some spaces are especially discordant or peculiar. But why does this make them different from *all* of society? (And *which* society, anyway? I come back to this later.) Taking the Althusserian critique of Hegel to its logical conclusion, there is no totality of society which would be evenly expressed in all of its constituent elements. Foucault is well known, of course, for his resolutely nonteleological, non-objectivist, and nonessentialist conception of history. Furthermore, his interactions with Althusser's thought, as with structuralism and Braudel, defy opposing them on the issue of history. In Foucault's heterotology, however—and this might be why he left it undeveloped—he was explicitly dealing with slices of time operated from a privileged site/part, the heterotopia. This is where a simplification of space lurks. If there are connections between two or more sites, they are immanent to whatever networks those sites are part of, none of which add up to one delineated whole. This means that no site can be 'absolutely different'. A brothel relates differentially to the networks of law, morality, domesticity, business, sexuality, etc, but not to all of 'society'. All places are 'countersites' in varying degrees, and change relative to other places. Though they compete, none is completely opposed to another.

Like Deleuze, Foucault knew he 'was in 1967' when writing down his heterotopia lecture. It is somewhat of an irony that he started by situating his newly reinvigorated interest in space as a response to the current fashion of structuralism:

"Structuralism, or at least that which is grouped together under this slightly too general name, is the effort to establish, between elements that could have been connected on a temporal axis, an ensemble of relations that makes them appear as juxtaposed, set off against one another, implicated by each other—that makes them appear, in short, as a sort of configuration. Actually, structuralism does not entail a denial of time; it does involve a certain manner of dealing with what we call time and what we call history" (Foucault, 1986, page 22).

It is noteworthy that neither in the essay, nor the radio broadcasts, nor the interviews at the time (Foucault, 1994), did Foucault distance himself from structuralism's 'juxtapositional' and 'configurational' thinking, in fact advocating his programme of heterotology as complementary. It would seem that he had not yet entirely thought through structuralism's atemporal conception of space/structure and aspatial conception of history. He was, therefore, prone to repeat the fallacy of structuralism that Massey exposes, even if he would later be centrally instrumental in the humanities' overcoming of those very fallacies.

To summarise, this is Foucault's slippage in "Of other spaces": if heterotology identifies *absolute* breaks, in which change reverberates instantly through the totality of society, it performs Althusser's 'essential sections'. 'Society' is in this thinking a discrete and monochronous system within which some sites can be readily recognised as completely and inherently different. As in structural-symbolic analysis à la Lévi-Strauss or Turner, the topology of heterotology, however full of differentiation and transgression, seems fixed by an essence allocating relative value to various sites of 'a society'. This essence itself remains comfortably stable underneath all the strife and sudden breaks, to be unearthed by the heterotologist. Heterotology is structuralist not just because its notion of space is static and essential, but also because it

believes it has access to the underlying principle of differentiation. Derrida's work will help me to make this last point in the next section.

### Structure and wholeness

The problem with structuralism is not that it is scientific or multidisciplinary, or that it posits structure as 'virtual', or that structure is to some degree formalisable in diagrammes and mathematics. The problem lies with the supposed wholeness and simultaneity of structure. In order for something to be whole and legible as such, it needs to be held together by some centripetal force. Derrida's famous 1966 paper "Structure, sign, and play in the discourse of the human sciences" proclaimed that structuralism's notion of structure can only be upheld with the help of classical notions of a stable and originary core that remains outside the endless play of signs (Derrida, 1978, pages 278–293). The Saussurian and structuralist conception of structure ends up requiring some subject which grounds and limits the differentiations of the system so that it can be represented. Without a core, structure would be centreless, a nontotality abandoned to its own continuous transformations: exactly the way Derrida and Deleuze, often called 'poststructuralists', would have it.

Following Derrida, Benjamin Genocchio (1995) has also criticised Foucault's heterotology. "Des autres espaces" tends for Genocchio to reinforce a reified notion of space, as if anyone could divide space unproblematically into spaces of domination and spaces of transgression (cf Sharp et al, 2000):

"in any attempt to mobilize the category of an outside or absolutely differentiated space, it follows logically that the simple naming or theoretical recognition of that difference always to some degree flattens or precludes, by definition, the very possibility of its arrival as such" (Genocchio, 1995, page 39).

Foucault assumes that he can pinpoint 'other spaces'. One might ask, other to whom? Different from what? Different from *all* the rest of society. Like the structuralism which Derrida's paper attacks (chiefly Lévi-Strauss), Foucault seems to believe he has access to the hidden structures of society, which designate some spaces as *absolutely other*. This is not necessarily to deny that there might exist actual differences and virtual structures, differential topologies as Deleuze conjured them. It is to question the *way* in which these are conceived and studied: firstly, as self-contained totalities, and secondly, as transparently present to the analyst. As Pia Maria Ahlbäck writes:

"What can be absolute about heterotopias, these places of relative otherness, except the individual experiences of them? The experience of a heterotopia, of subversive strangeness, can make it *seem* absolutely other but, nevertheless, it necessarily remains relatively so" (2001, page 161).

Here I need to mention Derrida's 1963 lecture on Foucault "Cogito and the history of madness", which led to a never-resolved dispute between the two thinkers (Derrida, 1978, pages 31–63; see Boyd, 1990; D'Amico, 1984). Derrida starts typically from an apparently arcane passage of Foucault's *Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (1965 [1961]) wherein Descartes's 'I think therefore I am' is interpreted as excluding madness from thought. Foucault argues that the so-called Age of Reason could only emerge by virtue of this original split announced by the Cartesian *cogito*. The whole of Foucault's study, indeed his subsequent historical–philosophical project of understanding power and otherness, hinges on the idea that modernity can be analysed as an organisation of otherness. The details of Derrida's refutation of the claim about Descartes need not concern us here (neither does Foucault's bitter reprisal, 1979). What is more important is that Derrida is capable of charging Foucault with perpetuating the very discourse of

medical and psychiatric rationalism he is claiming to historicise, by forgetting the necessary historicity of his own writing. Naggingly, Derrida writes:

“In writing a history of madness, Foucault has attempted—and this is the greatest merit, but also the very infeasibility of his book—to write a history of madness *itself*. *Itself*. Of madness itself. That is, by letting madness speak for itself” (1978, page 33, original emphasis).

It is clear that, for Derrida, the fundamental methodological mistake lies in Foucault’s opting for a ‘structural’ approach:

“a method for which everything within the structural totality is interdependent and circular in such a way that the classical problems of causality themselves would appear to stem from a misunderstanding. Perhaps. But I wonder whether, when one is concerned with history (and Foucault wants to write a history), a strict structuralism is possible, and, especially, whether, if only for the sake of order and within the order of its own descriptions, such a study can avoid all etiological questions, all questions bearing, shall we say, on the center of gravity of the structure” (Derrida, 1978, pages 43–44).

If, as Genocchio posited, Foucault’s heterotology forecloses its own critical force by not questioning its complicity with what it criticises, I want to suggest that this is due to Foucault’s incapability, in the heterotopia talks, of breaking with structuralism’s totalist and ‘auto-causal’ conception of structure. Foucault would have protested. In the preface to the English edition of *The Order of Things*, he fumes:

“In France, certain half-witted ‘commentators’ persist in labeling me a ‘structuralist’. I have been unable to get it into their tiny minds that I have used none of the methods, concepts, or key terms that characterize structural analysis” (1970, page xiv).

I am not trying to argue that Foucault *was* a structuralist. Clearly, *The Order of Things*, and more so his later work, as Deleuze demonstrates in his book on Foucault (1988), is a grappling with the virtual constitution of social multiplicities that has to be distinguished from the efforts of Lévi-Strauss or early Barthes. But I do think that Derrida’s challenge to *Madness and Civilization* serves as a reminder that Foucault’s historical geographies of exclusion have a *tendency* towards structuralism—one tendency amongst others. This tendency comes out strongly, indeed explicitly, in “Of other spaces”.

Genocchio (1995) wants to rescue the term ‘heterotopia’ by recalling its brief appearance in *Les mots et les choses*:

“*Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy ‘syntax’ in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to ‘hold together’” (Foucault, 1970, page xviii).

Genocchio prefers this linguistic, epistemological, more metaphorical definition of heterotopia dating from before Foucault’s radio broadcasts, where it refers to the possibility of disjunction between knowledge (*including Foucault’s*) and the world:

“The heterotopia is thus more of an idea about space than any actual space. It is an idea that insists that the ordering of spatial systems is subjective and arbitrary in that we know nothing of the initial totality that it must presuppose. It is an idea which consequently produces/theorizes space as transient, contestory, plagued by lapses and ruptured sites” (Genocchio, 1995, page 43).

A few others picked up this discursive instead of geopolitical meaning (eg Barnes, 2004; Duncan, 1994; Fekete, 1995; Harkness, 1983; Reid-Pharr, 1994). Because heterotopia in the sense of *The Order of Things* is an epistemological concept and does not refer to

physical spaces, it is a strategic performance and not necessarily oppositional. This is also how Gianni Vattimo understands heterotopia, seemingly unaware of Foucault's use of the term (1992, pages 62–75; see Siebers, 1994). I think this more interventionist sense of heterotopia is less readily prone to the structuralist fallacy considered above. Somewhat surprisingly, and however much he disliked the term, Foucault seemed to have made up his mind that he preferred the geopolitical, more structuralist meaning in a 1982 interview with Paul Rabinow. Foucault abruptly recalled the term after stating famously, "Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power" (Foucault, 2001, page 361). To what extent *both* the metaphorical–critical and geopolitical–analytic definitions of heterotopia can be retained is an interesting question which, sadly, cannot be addressed here (though see Ahlbäck, 2001, pages 145ff; Bonazzi, 2002; Cheng, 2001). It is notable, however, that it is primarily the more naïvely descriptive and (as I hope to have shown) structuralist meaning of heterotopia that has survived in the literature. Turning to three of the most coherent elaborations of the concept of heterotopia, the next section will ask if Foucault's totalist slippage is reiterated.

### **Heterotopia and modernity**

Soja can be credited for spreading the heterotopia concept amongst cultural geography, urban theory, and cultural studies. He first referred to "Of other spaces" in *Postmodern Geographies* (1989, pages 16–17), a key text of the 'spatial turn' in the social sciences. A longer account of heterotopia appears in *Thirdspace* (Soja, 1996, pages 154–163), which builds on Foucault and Lefebvre to construct an ontology of urban postmodernity. Though he calls Foucault's lecture "frustratingly incomplete, inconsistent, incoherent" (1996, page 162), Soja also relishes these lacks, as the postmodern spaces he analyses purportedly exhibit the same lacks of fixed meanings: "Giving some specific definition to heterotopia will always be misleading. I was very pleased to find out from [Daniel Defert] that this was very close to Foucault's intention" (Soja, 2004, personal communication). As part of Foucault's 'toolbox' the concept of heterotopia has demonstrably travelled extensively, being put to work in a multitude of contexts.

A tool needs to be up to its task, however. As Deleuze understood well, concepts should be rigorous and consistent *through* their very fuzziness. Heterotopia, with its implicit privileging of totality and stasis, is an example of a concept which fails to sense what it aims to capture (spatial differentiation). This is because it was not properly constructed in "Of other spaces", a lot less fuzzy and postmodern than Soja supposes. In discussing an exhibition in Los Angeles commemorating two hundred years since the 1789 Revolution in Paris, for example, Soja unwittingly reinforces the very panoptical perspective on space he criticises. Without examining their real historical interrelationships, he presents the chronologies of the two cities on one neat time line—consecutive slices of time (Soja, 1996, pages 219–228)—and Derrida might ask according to whose logic these chronologies are arranged. Soja picks two famous sites in LA and Paris which, for him, stand in heterotopic relation to modern French and postmodern American society, respectively:

"The Bonaventure Hotel symbolizes and simulates the geographical experience of postmodernity just as the Bastille symbolizes and simulates the historical experience of the French Revolution. This is made most clear when the Bonaventure (or, for that matter, the Bastille) is seen as a contemporary heterotopia, as an evocative 'counter-site' in which all other (and absolutely different) real sites within the synchronous culture are 'simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.' Like most other heterotopias, it functions at full capacity within a specifically periodized slice of time and after a break with historical tradition" (1996, page 20).

The totality of the new French Republic was announced in the storming of the Bastille, just as the totality of postmodern consumerism and multiculturalism are announced by the Bonaventure Hotel. This is what makes them heterotopias. But how can one site claim responsibility for a general slice of time? Wasn't the Conciergerie of Paris perhaps not as important for the French Revolution, though in a different way? In fact, might we not ask whether the colonisation of California was related to the 1789 Revolution, even remotely?

Like most writing on postmodernity, Soja's is pressed to make the case for absolute change in Los Angeles (see also Soja, 2000). Foucault had already warned against this in his 1982 interview, saying about postmodernism:

"I think that there is a widespread and facile tendency, which one should combat, to designate that which has just occurred as the primary enemy, as if this were always the principal form of oppression from which one has to liberate" (Foucault, 2001, page 357).

As is often noted, postmodernism betrays a privileged Western sense of having arrived in a new phase of societal evolution. What is interesting about the Bastille in Paris and LA hotels that cannot also be found in Calcutta, Buenos Aires, or Shanghai? Though Soja is to be commended for building on critics of colonialism and racism such as Homi Bhabha and bell hooks, he discusses modernity and postmodernity as if they were only white Euro-American products. This sadly obfuscates the keen sense of geography he professes to develop.

Perhaps the most inspiring use of Foucault's heterotopology can be found in Kevin Hetherington's *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (1997). Reading "Of other spaces" through the lens of actor-network theory, then applying it to utopian discourses of Enlightenment France and England, Hetherington manages to create an analytical edge and theoretical purpose lacking in most usages of heterotopology. Heterotopias are defined as 'spaces of alternate social ordering', expressions of utopian visions of the future, which generate ambivalence at the heart of modern spatiality:

"Heterotopia are not quite spaces of transition—the chasm they represent can never be closed up—but they are spaces of deferral, spaces where ideas and practices that represent the good life can come into being, from nowhere, even if they never actually achieve what they set out to achieve—social order, or control and freedom.

Heterotopia, therefore, reveal the process of social ordering to be just that, a process rather than a thing" (Hetherington, 1997, page ix).

Hetherington's historical geography of the Enlightenment is refreshing because it moves decidedly away from the linear history of ideas. However, here too the residual structuralism of heterotopology and its Eurocentrism are inherited. To begin with, Hetherington's book is unapologetically centred on England and France. A more fundamental flaw is that the advent of modernity as a total condition of one society seems to be exclusively impregnated in the utopian sites Hetherington chooses to commemorate. The Derridean question remains: alternate to whom? Utopian from whose perspective? That the emergence of modernity consisted of utopianism, transgression, and subversion is undeniable. But simply picking out spaces and labeling them 'heterotopic' simplifies the heterogeneity of the power struggles and regional differences constituting modernisation. Many places were involved in the Revolution, including the French countryside and colonies, in varying degrees and ways. Even if he usefully grounds modernity in coffee houses, factories, freemasons, and prisons, in this Hetherington thus falls short of offering a properly materialist rejoinder to the critiques of bourgeois utopics by Adornian, feminist, and postcolonial theorists. Furthermore, while postcolonial theorists disclose precisely how their political

positionalities impinge upon analysis, Hetherington's deliberately elusive politics makes it difficult to see how his heterotopology differs from classical-liberal enthusiasm about the Age of Reason.

The final and most sophisticated elaboration of heterotopology I want to mention is a literary study by Cesare Casarino—*Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis* (2002). With both Derridean and Deleuzian flair, Casarino reads Herman Melville, Karl Marx, and Joseph Conrad as unconscious ontologists of modernity. The trope that drives them is the ship—already identified by Foucault as 'heterotopia par excellence'. Casarino opts for a strict and explicit adherence to Foucault's heterotopology. The deck and hold of the mercantilist ship announced, in terms of labour relations and multiracial homosociality, a general and dynamic geography of industrial capitalism:

"with the modernist sea narrative, in other words, the sea narrative questions not only its own foundation but also reaches beyond itself to question the foundation of a world that for several centuries had been run in all sorts of ways by ships—in questioning itself, it questions the whole world. By focusing on the modernist sea narrative, *Modernity at Sea* aims to capture the double event of that immanent interference by which an ancient form of representation came to confront in the nineteenth century at once its own unthought as well as the unthought of the world to which it belonged" (Casarino, 2002, page 13).

We can already see where a totalist view of space can seep in. Through its outsideness and difference, the ship questions and temporalises 'the whole world'. In fact, Casarino at many points admits that his intention is to construct a properly Hegelian heterotopology in which social change comes about through the interaction between ship and capitalism—a dialectical relationship of part to whole. For instance, after mentioning anticapitalist interpretations of Captain Ahab, he writes:

"Such interpretations of Ahab, however, are only partially accurate inasmuch as they are not dialectical enough in assessing what are highly dialectical dynamics. If Ahab has indeed wrested himself away from the logic of capital, in doing so, he also still functions completely within that logic ... : to reject and negate a dialectical process of constitution is merely to pave the way for a higher level of subsumption within such a process rather than to escape it" (2002, pages 87–88).

The question is not just to what extent Ahab consciously wishes to position himself heterotopically against American capitalism but, before that, whether we should be talking about maritime capitalism and mad sailors in dialectical terms at all. Ahab is positioned differentially in relation to his ship, his crew, Moby Dick, the sea, Nantucket, and American modernity in general. Can and should we not think the ambiguities and dynamics of all these differentials in nondialectical terms? While Casarino's dialectical analysis shows Ahab's embroilment, despite appearances, in capitalism, it misses the captain's genuine madness, which cares for nothing but killing the whale. In my mind, and still following Althusser and Deleuze, a Hegelian take on historical geography fails to take into account the messy webs of speeds that socio-spatial networks such as mercantile capitalism harbour. And yet again, as a correlate of treating societies as totalities, we have here the limitation of heterotopology to white modernity (even if Casarino does write about race). Did these ships moor only in American and European ports? Where the ships not equally 'other' to cities, trade routes, economic systems, political regimes, and women's bodies outside of Euro-American modernity? What is the site of a ship counter *to*?

In sum, there have been important elaborations of Foucault's heterotopology, but they tend to accede to a static, crypto-Hegelian dichotomisation of centre and margin. Soja, Hetherington, and Casarino each in their own way (and for good reasons) do not

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reflect on how the emergence of geographical variation within global modernities can follow from differentials that exceed the neat dichotomy of heterotopia-versus-mainstream. It would seem that heterotopology inherently contains a danger—though perhaps not an imperative—to simplify spatial difference.

### Conclusion

Insofar as it follows Foucault's original notes on spatial otherness, the concept of heterotopia needs to present 'society' as a totality in which some spaces relate to it in terms of inversion, novelty, and neutralisation. To do this, heterotopology has to think of the whole as suspended, quasi-transcendent, sensible only as a 'slice of time'. A slice or section of time can only be thought of as a bounded territory. Usually, from Hegel's philosophy of history to postmodernism, and most enthusiasts of heterotopology, this 'territory' is Western Europe. There is no space left here to develop the argument, but it will be plain to many readers that postcolonial critiques of the sort of Said's, as well as critical geographers such as Massey, have demonstrated that history never simply happens to bounded places or identities. History is made out of many encounters between different populations, multiple 'societies' with multiple sets of habits and norms, as exemplified, for example, in Paul Carter's 'spatial history' of Captain Cook's travels to Australia (1987). Cook's ship could conceivably be seen to signal an 'absolute break' by an English heterotopologist, but the indigenous peoples of the Australian coast might well remember earlier Dutch or Polynesian ships more vividly. Slicing time is logically absurd, because temporality exists only *through* geographical heterogeneities which are irreducible to any one perspective. Positing an underlying binary structure to change (this is heterotopic, this is not) misses what change (such as colonising) is all about: interaction, gradients, emergence.

This is not to deny that some people, technologies, and places are more productive than others. Change is necessarily uneven: Deleuze might say there are *local intensities*, spaces and practices where futurity is especially felt and produced. Ships, revolutionary protest, experimental music, or theme parks could well be 'read' as 'signs' of times to come insofar as they materialise, to a larger degree than do other spaces, certain more widespread tendencies of the social formations from which they stem. There are hidden 'structures' which they tell about. But it does not follow that any of these intense spaces, these structures, stand in relation to some whole. On the contrary, their intensity builds up because they operate *between* social formations and identities, in the interstices of what is currently possible.

I suppose some may still suggest using the term 'heterotopia' for such intense spaces, after it has been purged from structuralism and all of Foucault's writings on space are taken into account. The question is whether the totalist momentum which has implicitly slipped into the term can still be repaired. This paper has suggested it might not. In his oeuvre Foucault certainly foresaw that a sophisticated topological imagination is needed to analyse the political geographies of modernity. But insofar as it requires totality and synchrony, his concept of heterotopia did and still does not live up to this keen imagination. While of course not everyone using the concept now implies the structuralism it was originally conceived through, its precision in delineating spatial difference is actually lost if the structuralism is not followed. "Of other spaces" was meant to be totalist. Ultimately, if we want to remain open to the unpredictability of encounter that is forced upon us, the conceptualisation of difference in heterotopology warrants at least a wariness about its structuralist provenance.

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