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Unravelling Foucault's 'different spaces'

PETER JOHNSON

ABSTRACT

Although it is widely acknowledged that Foucault's accounts of the concept of heterotopia remain briefly sketched and somewhat confusing, the notion has provoked many interpretations and applications across a range of disciplines. In particular, it has been coupled with different stages or processes of modernity and persistently linked to forms of resistance. This article re-examines Foucault's concept through a close textual analysis. It contrasts heterotopia with Lefebvre's conceptualization of heterotopy and wider formulations of utopia. Drawing on Foucault's study of the spaces of literature of Borges, and particularly Blanchot, the article argues that heterotopia refers to varied spatial and temporal disruptions that imaginatively interrogate and undermine certain formulations of utopia. It concludes by outlining how heterotopia contests the space in which we live.

Key words Michel Foucault, heterotopia, Henri Lefebvre, space, utopia

Foucault outlines the notion of heterotopia on three occasions: first, in his preface to *Les Mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things*) published in 1966 (1966a); second, in the same year, within a radio broadcast as part of a series on the theme of utopia and literature; and finally, in a lecture presented to a group of architects in 1967. The first refers to textual spaces, while the other two, with close similarities, concern an analysis of particular social spaces. Although drawing upon each of these presentations of the concept, the main

focus of this article will be on Foucault's lecture. According to a detailed account by Defert, the lecture's context was one of some bewildered amusement. In a letter Foucault wrote:

Do you remember the telegram that gave us such a laugh, where an architect said he glimpsed a new conception of urbanism? But it wasn't in the book; it was in a talk on the radio about utopia. They want me to give it again. (Defert, 1997: 274)

The architect's invitation refers to a radio talk in which Foucault reflected on the possibility of studying systematically a range of 'different spaces' that somehow challenges or contests the space we live in: 'not a science of utopias but of heterotopias, a science of absolutely other spaces' (Foucault, 1966b). The brief 12-minute broadcast is fascinating as it follows the same shape as the later better-known lecture but with some distinctive features both in content and style. In particular, his opening illustrations of the concept refer to various children's imaginative games, mentioning tents and dens in gardens as well as all the games played on or under the covers of the parents' bed. The children's inventive play produces a different space that at the same time mirrors what is around them. The space reflects and contests simultaneously. Foucault outlines a number of these 'counter-spaces' that are in different ways outside the ordinary, including cemeteries, brothels, prisons, asylums and holiday villages. Foucault goes on to explain that such sites can be found in all cultures. For example, in 'primitive culture' there are different spaces set apart for some form of rites of passage, or initiation, while in the 19th century, amongst privileged classes, this setting-apart can be seen in boarding or military schools. Modern heterotopian sites relate more to separating out some form of deviation rather than marking a stage in life. Foucault gives the rest home as an example, a place for the non-productive, for doing absolutely nothing. Interestingly, in the light of his later lecture, he mentions brothels as spaces that adapt and mutate throughout history, describing how in recent times the telephone network has complemented these houses of pleasure.

Following on from this broadcast, Foucault accepted the invitation from the group of architects and gave his lecture in Paris in March 1967. Foucault was said to be reluctant to publish the lecture at the time but shortly before his death agreed to its publication to coincide with an exhibition held in Berlin in 1984. The published lecture, 'Des Espaces Autres', has been translated into English as 'Of Other Spaces' and 'Different Spaces' (Foucault, 1986, 1998a). As indicated by these two distinct titles, the lecture presents some specific challenges for the translator. As is often remarked, there are complex and subtle relational differences in English and French between space [*espace*] and place [*lieu*]. Augé provides a helpful and succinct distinction. 'Space' is much more abstract than 'place'. The former term can refer

to an area, a distance and, significantly in relation to Foucault's concept of heterotopia, a temporal period (the space of two days). The latter, more tangible term, refers to an event or a history, whether mythical or real (Augé, 1995: 81–4). Foucault uses 'place' when there is a sense of intimacy or subjectivity, as in his description of the mirror, but it is also noticeable that he can use both words generally within the same sentence, as well as exchanging 'difference' and 'other' quite freely as in 'these different spaces, these other places' [*de ces espaces différents, ces autres lieux*]. However, he favours the word '*emplacement*', which is repeated over 20 times in the introductory paragraphs. Unfortunately, the significance of this term is completely lost in the first translation by Miskowiec that appeared in *Diacritics*. It is converted to 'site' and confusingly the English '*emplacement*' is used to translate '*la localisation*'. This leads to such misleading translations as: 'today the site [*l'emplacement*] has been substituted for extension which itself had replaced *emplacement* [*la localisation*]''. In the more recent translation by Hurley, this difficulty is overcome by simply retaining the word '*emplacement*' in English.¹ This is critically important, I think, as Foucault's favoured term has the sense of *placing* in a certain location. Usually referring to archaeological sites, the term makes explicit the action of marking out a position. For Foucault, it is above all a relational term 'defined by the relations of proximity between points or elements' (1998a: 176). It contains a sense of both space and place that is not conveyed by the word 'site'. Foucault is focusing on the formal, spatial qualities of certain places, which are 'both mythical and real', and specific historical mutations – all of which are encapsulated in the term '*emplacement*'. To conclude this brief textual analysis, 'heterotopia', derived from the Greek *heteros*, 'another', and *topos*, 'place', is used within a broad typology to distinguish these *emplacements* from 'utopia'. This distinction will be explored later, but it is worth noting that heterotopia is originally a medical term referring to a particular tissue that develops at a place other than is usual. The tissue is not diseased or particularly dangerous but merely placed elsewhere, a dislocation.²

TOWARDS A PLACELESS PLACE

The lecture starts with some sweeping observations, asserting that whereas the 19th century seemed to be preoccupied with history and time, the present is more concerned with structure and space. Foucault then takes a glance at what he calls the history of spatiality and, although some have made much of these brief comments, the general outline merely mirrors Alexandre Koyré's *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (1957). Simply put, medieval space refers to a hierarchy, a binary set of places; for instance, the sacred and profane. With Galileo, from the 17th century, these sets of

enclosed places are replaced by extension, the infinitely open. However, in the present, according to Foucault, this concept is being replaced by one of 'emplacement'. The question today is about finite space – for example, demography – and whether we have enough space for humanity, but it is also about the relations between different sites and our place within them. We do not live in a void but in a range of diverse emplacements. For Foucault, unlike time, these spaces may not yet be fully 'desacralized'; they may contain persistent if unacknowledged sacralized oppositions as private/public, family/social, work/leisure, cultural/useful. Bachelard's poetics of space is then briefly discussed but in contrast to these explorations by phenomenologists, Foucault turns to his central interest: the space of the outside [*du dehors*]. Tellingly, this space in which we live is a set of relations cut through with time. It is the space in which we are 'drawn outside ourselves' and 'the erosion of our life' takes place and

... among all these emplacements are certain ones that have the curious property of being connected to all other emplacements, but in such a way that they suspend, neutralize, or reverse the set of relations that are designated, reflected or represented [*reflechis*] by them ... (Foucault, 1998a: 178)

Foucault is now in the territory that he began to explore in his earlier radio broadcast. He asserts again that these emplacements are 'probably in every culture, in every civilization'. Like utopias, these sites relate to other sites by both representing and at the same time inverting them; unlike utopias, however, they are localized and real. In some ways they are like utopias that are practised or enacted. The bunch of verbs that Foucault uses to describe these different spaces is dazzling and somewhat confusing. They mirror, reflect, represent, designate, speak about all other sites but at the same time suspend, neutralize, invert, contest and contradict those sites. Here, however, he supports his argument by providing, rather didactically, a list of principles and, rather teasingly perhaps, a diverse range of illustrations. Each heterotopia involves all the principles to some extent, forming a diverse group of family resemblances, but it is suggested that some are more 'fully functioning' or 'highly heterotopic' (1998a: 182).

Reference to children's games disappears, but other illustrations tend to follow and expand those found in the radio broadcast. The examples are extremely diverse, and difficult to summarize, but they all refer in some way or another to a relational disruption in time and space. They are, to use Defert's term, 'spatio-temporal units' (1997: 275). With regard to time, he refers again to places set aside for certain rites of passage and also the marked time in a prison, asylum, or old people's home. Other examples include holidays that split conventional work time, or festivals that spring into life at certain points of the year. These latter spaces are classified rather

awkwardly as specific 'heterochronias' that embrace 'temporal discontinuities' [*decoupages du temps*] and are found in fairs, those utterly transitory or fleeting constructions: 'marvellous empty emplacements on the outskirts of cities that fill up once or twice a year with booths, stalls, unusual objects, wrestlers, snake ladies, fortune tellers' (Foucault, 1998a: 182). In contrast to these breaks or gaps in time, other spaces such as modern museums endeavour to accumulate and protect all time in one space. While another set of spaces integrates both types of heterochronias, as with those holidays that attempt to replicate the life of a primitive culture for all time in one short intense period. But for Foucault, it is the cemetery that provides the most powerful example of this temporal disruption, as here we are faced with the absolute rupture of familiar time and, as Ariès suggests, a space that formulates a break in time that becomes strangely permanent:

The city of the dead is the obverse of the society of the living, or rather than the obverse, it is its image, its intemporal image. For the dead have gone through the moment of change, and their monuments are the visible sign of the permanence of their city. (Ariès, 1976: 74)

The cemetery is also used to illustrate how these spaces change their function at different stages in history and reflect wider attitudes in society. In many respects, Foucault is rehearsing work by Ariès here. The medieval cemetery was traditionally in the centre of the city, with a close and untroubled promiscuity between the living and the dead. With enlightened concerns about hygiene, coupled with a growing disbelief in immortality, cemeteries at the end of the 19th century were gradually placed outside the city where those who could afford it found an individual place of rest or 'dark dwelling' in perpetuity.³

In other heterotopias, the displacement of time is matched by the disruption of space. Emplacements for rites of passage or initiations take place out of sight or 'elsewhere'. Other heterotopias provide an utter contrast with the rest of space creating, for instance, a meticulously arranged enclosure that exposes the jumbled mess that we tend to live in. Prisons would fit here but Foucault refers to other utopian communities such as Jesuit colonies in South America where all aspects of life were regulated in minute detail. In contrast, some emplacements involve an enclosure of several spaces that clash or produce strange juxtapositions. He mentions the cinema and the theatre and also what he considers may be the oldest form of heterotopia, the garden, especially those symbolic designs found in antiquity with their startling ability to represent both the smallest part of the world and its totality. A further disruptive feature of these spaces may concern accessibility, as entry is never straightforward. A person may be compelled and constrained within the space as with prisons or asylums, or certain rituals may have to be undertaken in order to gain entry. Secret gardens spring to mind, but Foucault

refers to the purification ceremonies associated with traditional Muslim baths. The traditional French brothel, or the 'house of illusion', is also a clear illustration of this aspect, revealing openings and enclosures, hidden pleasures with a range of rituals of purification and exclusion. But if the cemetery offers the sharpest example of the disruption of time, perhaps Foucault's reference to the mirror illustrates the disruption of space most explicitly. Although the mirror is like a utopia, a 'placeless place', it is also an actual site that completely disrupts our spatial position. The space occupied is at the same time completely real and unreal, forming an utter dislocation of place (Foucault, 1998a: 179).

Foucault decides to end his lecture, not with the splendid image of the magic carpet as in his earlier radio broadcast, but with the intense heterotopian features of a ship. Here we have a space that seems to incorporate all the essential disruptive ingredients of heterotopia both within itself and in relation to other spaces. It is a richly ambivalent vessel with disruptive features that are described in exactly the same way as the dislocating effect of the mirror: 'a placeless place'. Above all, it is an emplacement that is enclosed and yet open to the outside, a 'boundless expanse of the ocean' (1998a: 185). For Foucault, the heterotopian site *par excellence* provides a passage to and through other heterotopias: brothels, colonies, gardens and so on. Foucault seems to be suggesting a relational aspect of these spaces; they form relationships both within the site and between sites. The ship not only visits different spaces, it reflects and incorporates them. It is also worth noting that there are some striking similarities between this description of the heterotopia *par excellence* and his earlier description of the 'ship of fools' in the opening pages of his *History of Madness* (2006). The ship of fools, which contains the 'passenger *par excellence*', is part of the literary landscape of the Renaissance, but it is also a description of boats that did exist, conveying madmen from harbour to harbour. Foucault examines the possible reasons for this strange means of dispersing the insane and concludes that it is not simply for security or social utility. He identifies ritual as well as its practical aspects of removing them from cities. The madmen's voyage is deeply ambiguous, both 'rigorous division and absolute Passage', both 'real and imaginary'. The space is a prison and an entrance, a play of interior and exterior: 'a prisoner in the midst of the ultimate freedom, on the most open road of all, chained solidly to the infinite crossroads' (2006: 11). It provides a rich and intense metaphor, mapping out the relational, liminal position of madness at a particular point in history, a space where madness has a certain freedom, a pervasive and ambiguous reach. The play of spatial ambiguities (confined and delivered, prisoner and most open, bound fast and at infinite crossroads) captures madness within a space where modern boundaries and binary thinking are held in ambivalent but productive suspension. But it also represents an unsettling site where we are drawn away from, or out of,

customary landmarks. The passenger is positioned on 'the inside of the outside, or vice versa', within a placeless place. This disruption provides a rich imaginary space: a provocation. Such an intense example can be found in all cultures and throughout history, here marking the ambivalent position of the mad in medieval society. Significantly, as shall be explored later, the passenger and the heterotopia *par excellence* also produce a disruption that forms a 'reservoir of imagination' (1998a: 185).

DISRUPTING UTOPIA

Foucault's account of heterotopia, however playfully presented, remains briefly sketched, provisional and at times confusing. Soja describes Foucault's analysis as 'frustratingly incomplete, inconsistent, incoherent' (1996: 162). It is also significant that although he does refer back to it briefly on two occasions, Foucault never returned to this spatial framework in any explicit or sustained manner.⁴ This open-ended and ambiguous analysis has in turn provoked many conflicting interpretations and applications across a range of disciplines, particularly sociology, human geography and architecture. A dazzling variety of spaces have been explored as illustrations of heterotopia, including the Palais Royal, masonic lodges and early factories, landscapes, environmental installations, postmodern cities and buildings, internet sites and dozens more.⁵ As Ritter and Knaller-Vlay comment, the various uses are 'not only contradictory and opposed to each other but also in some cases completely incomparable' (1998: 14). However, among all the attempts to apply and make sense of the concept, there is a persistent association with spaces of resistance and transgression. Yet, curiously, this link is often asserted with little substantiation. The common assumption can be found sprinkled through many academic discourses. Here is a typical example taken from Werbner's introduction to *Debating Cultural Hybridity*:

Modernist hybridity theory looked to sites of resistance and exclusion, as in Foucault's analysis of heterotopic spaces. Similarly, Barthes, Bourdieu and Bakhtin analysed popular mass culture and carnival as subversive and revitalising inversions of official discourses, high-cultural aesthetic forms or the exclusive lifestyles of dominant elites. (Werbner, 1997: 2)

The supposition here is that Foucault's 'different spaces' are sites for resistance to the dominant culture. This may be one interpretation, but it is actually difficult to find anyone who explicitly makes a sustained case for it. Hetherington asserts that the term has been used to identify 'sites of marginality that act as postmodern spaces for resistance and transgression – treating them in many ways as liminal spaces' but the references he provides are not

substantive (1997: 41). Genocchio makes the same assumption by stating that many of the new theorists of space have applied the term heterotopia to expose 'counter-sites embodying a form of resistance to our increasingly surveyed, segregated and simulated socio-spatial order'. This time, although he goes on to critique such a position, no references to those who might hold it are given at all (1995: 38).

Yet is there any justification for this common conjecture about the meaning of heterotopia? How in particular does it relate, if at all, to questions of power? I think one way of starting to clarify the concept generally, and its ambivalent position in relation to power specifically, is to take a step back and contrast it with the elusive notion of 'utopia', particularly as rendered by Bakhtin and Lefebvre. Such an analysis reveals that heterotopia not only contrasts with utopia, but actually undermines or unsettles it. In particular, heterotopia contests utopian forms of resistance and transgression based on a space of liberation. First of all, however, it has to be admitted that Foucault's conception of utopia is often very limited and predominantly centred on the encapsulation of unreal spaces, reflecting either a perfectly ordered society or the opposite of society (1998a: 178). It does not include any recognition of the complex range of interpretations and adaptations of the concept (Levitas, 2003: 1–8). Levitas provides an analytical and inclusive approach to utopia that is able to trace various interrelated features rather than trying to pin the concept down to firm categories of thought or representation. Aspects such as form, content and function are analysed in the way each changes and develops historically and also in relation to each other (1990: 123). Form includes literary models, but also filmic, religious, political and spatial descriptions of alternative societies. Content refers to normative notions of the good society, for example, various projects based on scarcity, distribution, class, gender or ethnicity. The functions of utopia are various and include compensation in the form of daydreams and fantasies, critiques of existing conditions and the capacity to provoke the desire for transformation. Following the inclusive thoughts of Bloch, Levitas argues that utopia is expressive and broadly about the desire for a better way of life. For Levitas a core aspect of utopia is the space to think and feel outside existing normative and conceptual frameworks, or to desire differently.

Some have connected Bakhtin's utopian conception of the 'carnavalesque' to heterotopia. This is worth outlining briefly as Defert feels that although there was no direct influence, there may be a 'Bakhtinian note' in Foucault's formulation (1997: 275). In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin explores the writer's description of medieval festivals (1984: 218). He reveals the carnivalesque as a way in which laughter and the mocking of authority inverted civil and ecclesiastical traditions through the celebration of idleness, dissipation and debauchery. During these festivities, there is a momentary disruption of hierarchical distinctions and barriers, norms and customs, official ordering

of time and space, and all forms of political coercion. For a short while established order is replaced by a space of freedom and the self dissolves into a collective spirit (Webb, 2005: 122). Bakhtin's reading of Rabelais has in turn inaugurated much research into popular cultural practices that are said to reveal transgressive, liberatory and utopian features. What ensues seems to be a competition to find the authentic utopian spirit that is destroyed, sidelined, dissipated or hidden by dominant and coercive socioeconomic and political forces.⁶ For example, Shields argues that the pleasure beach, and similar sites, can become 'an open field of social innovation', displaying rituals of resistance and providing a social space that 'liberates' subjects from disciplinary 'micro-powers' while acknowledging that such displays are compromised or tempered through various political and socio-economic controls (1991: 94–6). In this light, it is also worth noting Stallybrass and White's critique of Bakhtin's interpretation of the carnivalesque. They find Bakhtin's reading is too simplistic and nostalgic, resting upon unchallenging binary oppositions between high and low, classical and other, top and bottom. They object to viewing the carnival as something that is always opposed to official order and ideology. Instead, they argue that it was a heterogeneous gathering that mixed up opposites in complex ways, although they do accept that the notion has some usefulness as a 'modelling' of something that is both utopian and critical: a space that is different and pleasurable, as well as representing a communal ideal (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 18).

In contrast to Bakhtin, it is also worth tracing Lefebvre's distinct use of the related terms 'heterotopy' and 'utopia'. In *The Urban Revolution*, Lefebvre depicts heterotopy in two specific ways.⁷ Historically, it is formulated as the 'place of the other' in terms of marginality. An example he provides is the ambiguous spaces of exchange and trade found outside the city in the 16th century. Such activities are both excluded from and interwoven within the city. These heterotopic parts of the city are populated by an underclass of semi-nomads who are viewed with suspicion: traders, cart drivers and mercenaries as well as 'caravansaries and fairgrounds' (2003: 9). They are inhabited by 'dangerous' people who are easily sacrificed at times of war. Apart from this historical formulation, heterotopy is also defined formally within a conceptual grid, as distinct from 'isotopy' and 'utopia', within Lefebvre's favoured dialectic (2003: 38). Crucially, heterotopy and isotopy provide an explanation for how the utopian urban dimension emerges dialectically by 'uniting difference'. Unlike Foucault, Lefebvre concentrates on this utopian dimension produced by the clash of heterotopy. However, at first sight, Lefebvre's description of utopic spaces may also seem to resemble Foucault's notion of heterotopia. The utopic is a non-place and a real place, 'half-fictional and half-real', closed and open, concentrated and dispersed, near and far, present and absent. It is a paradoxical, contradictory

space, opposite the everyday. The former is essentially anticipatory, promising simultaneously the possible and the impossible.⁸ Utopia is the central conception of urban space that cuts through capitalist spatializations, resisting homogenization and rationality. Lefebvre conceives urban space as a generative unification of differences. Something is always happening through assembly and reassembly and creative encounters: 'contrasts, opposition, superpositions and juxtapositions replace separation, spatio-temporal distances' (2003: 125). It is a space where centres are continually created and destroyed. For Lefebvre, this creative potential of urban society can be seen most clearly in some vast exhibition spaces. He mentions such an emplacement in Montreal, where 'an ephemeral city rose up from a transformed site, a magnificent city, where everydayness was absorbed in festival' (2003: 131). His critique of urbanism – a politics of space that imposes homogeneity through a process of rigorous planning, suppressing 'symbols, information and play' – highlights these utopian spaces that break up this order: holidays, festivals and celebrations. In other words, he is deeply optimistic about the revolutionary and illuminating 'virtuality' within the urban (2003: 97–107).

I want to argue that Bakhtin and Lefebvre's notions of the utopic, and similar forms of utopianism, are everything that Foucault's concept of heterotopia avoids. Moreover, heterotopia not only contrasts to but also disrupts utopia. Although Foucault describes heterotopia as 'actually existing utopia', the conception is not tied to a space that promotes any promise, any hope or any primary form of resistance or liberation. As outlined above, heterotopias are fundamentally disturbing places. Children's games, holidays, festivals, brothels, prisons, asylums, cemeteries and ships alter to different degrees what might be described as everyday existence. However, in describing generally the space in which we live, as opposed to Bachelard's inner space, Foucault refers to that which 'draws us out of ourselves'. This is crucial. Heterotopias draw us out of ourselves in peculiar ways; they display and inaugurate a difference and challenge the space in which we may feel at home. These emplacements exist out of step and meddle with our sense of interiority. There is no pure form of heterotopia, but different combinations, each reverberating with all the others. In a sense, they do not fully function except in relation to each other. But their relationships clash and create further disturbing spatio-temporal units. Lefebvre's brief formulation of heterotopy captures this but with Foucault there is no inevitable relationship with spaces of hope. It is about conceiving space outside, or against, any utopian framework or impulse.

A specific way of conceiving this distinction is to note the difference between the utopian Panopticon and real prisons. In this respect it is interesting that most commentaries and analyses of the concept of heterotopia avoid the inclusion of prisons and asylums, as examples. These coercive places do not seem to fit into most interpretations and are forgotten or

sidelined. This is partly due to the fact that there is a tendency to reduce Foucault's analytic of power to an endless debate about a Panopticon society. It then becomes difficult to equate the prison and heterotopia. But unlike Bentham's Panopticon, prisons exist. Once it is enacted it becomes a heterotopia. The prison and asylum are open-ended, ambivalent and contradictory places, enclosures for both punishing and generating criminals, for both liberating and morally imprisoning the mad. They are ideals full of fantasy, mirroring and at the same time inverting what is outside. Despite the moral intentions, the prison and the asylum become a source of fascination, a forbidden place of secret pleasures, an imaginary landscape reflected most intensely within Sade's images of 'the Fortress, the Dungeon, the Cellar, the Convent' (Foucault, 2006: 362). Heterotopias unstitch, undermine and transform utopias. This can also be seen in their relational aspect. In describing heterotopias of 'compensation', in contrast to brothels that are places of 'illusion', Foucault refers to the Jesuit colonies in Paraguay. Here in an enclosure where all features of life are regulated, we find reverberations of the prison and all its precursors: barracks, monasteries, schools and so on. All these actually existing utopias reflect, incorporate and yet contest each other.

I think the manner in which heterotopia contests utopia is made more explicit by contrasting Foucault's lecture with his earlier account of heterotopia as disturbing textual spaces in his preface to *The Order of Things* and also his wider analysis of the 'space of literature', particularly in Blanchot's work. Both the similarities and differences between Foucault's lecture and his earlier account are worth tracing. In the preface, he explains the utterly disruptive effect of a passage in Borges, in which he describes a 'certain Chinese Encyclopaedia'. The text provides a completely baffling classification of animals that shook 'all the familiar landmarks of my thought – *our* thought'. The classification that includes the wonderful 'having just broken the water pitcher' and 'that from a long way off look like flies' exposes the customary way in which we tame and control the wild abundance of things (1970: xv–xx). These heterotopias, as he goes on to label them, are not formations of unusual juxtapositions; they produce an impossible or 'unthinkable' space that could only take place in language. We are here in the imaginary realm completely rather than the half-real and half-imaginary world of the ship of fools. The disorder provokes a space in which 'fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately'. Foucault's overall concern in *The Order of Things* is to establish the ground from which we produce classifications and order, the foundational 'codes of a culture'. Textual heterotopias help to expose this ground. They are distinct from his later account, but there are connections. Here, they are unthinkable spaces that reveal the limits of our language, but, to different degrees, both accounts splinter the familiar.⁹

It is worth recalling that Foucault was profoundly influenced by his reading of the spatial dynamics of literature, especially in Blanchot and Roussel. For Foucault it is 'necessary to think *through* fiction' (emphasis added). One reason for this can be seen if we look at the meaning of the word 'space' [espace] as it appears in Blanchot's *The Space of Literature*. As the English translator of this work explains thoroughly, although the meaning of this word has the sense of a domain or realm, it also 'implies the withdrawal of what is ordinarily meant by "place"; it suggests the site of this withdrawal'. Literature's space is deeply ambiguous: nowhere and here. It is most often described as the outside [*le dehors*] that is both unreachable and unavoidable. Literature presents a void or interval 'in place of the place it takes' (Blanchot, 1982: 10–11). It is cut through with a different time and is never quite itself. As Foucault explains in an essay on Blanchot, this space of literature is important because it holds the possibility of excluding any sense of elementary depth, or origin, or interiorization. Blanchot's fiction lights up an 'irredeemable incompatibility' between language as it appears and notions of consciousness or subjectivity. Moreover, Blanchot's discourse critically refuses any use of 'reflexive language' that always tries to move toward some inner certainty; it holds no secret but merely dances across a 'neutral space': a dispersion without any foundation. Blanchot's thought loosens the grip of Hegel's 'interiorization of the law of history', exposing a site for language without foundations. It 'does not use negation dialectically'; there is no return to the interiority of the mind (1998a: 152). Crucially in Blanchot's work, there is an anteriority of language, an existence beyond customary subjectivity. It does not reveal anything except itself with no 'conclusion and no image, with no truth and no theatre, with no proof, no mask, no affirmation, free of any centre, unfettered to any native soil'. Both types of heterotopia therefore form enclosures that are a passage to the outside, detaching us from ourselves.¹⁰ But they are a form of escape without the comfort of a home. Significantly, echoing the phrase used to describe both the ship and the mirror, Blanchot's narratives produce 'placeless places' (1998b: 153).

It is in this way that they ultimately lead to questions of power, not as the expression but as the problemization of resistance and transgression. Heterotopia reflects to some extent Foucault's wider questioning of the complexity of resisting power relations. For Foucault, 'power's condition of possibility' must not be conceived as having a central or primary focus, but is local, unbalanced, tense, heterogeneous and unstable. Above all, 'one must understand the strictly relational character of power relationships' (1981: 95). In some ways, heterotopias provide an escape route from power. Perhaps they open up what Deleuze calls a line of subjectivity and fracture that becomes more explicit in Foucault's final studies (Deleuze, 1988: 94–5). For Deleuze this line is closely linked to Foucault's reading of Blanchot. Interestingly, it is one of the key themes in Blanchot's novel *The Most High* [*Le Très Haut*],

the question of finding a way to avoid 'reinforcing what you think you're knocking down' (1996: 43). It is an attempt to think differently about, and uncouple the grip of, power relations: to overcome the dilemma of every form of resistance becoming entangled with or sustaining power. Heterotopias in this way light up an imaginary spatial field, a set of relations that are not separate from dominant structures and ideology, but go against the grain and offer lines of flight or, echoing remarks about Roussel, a 'passage which is an enclosure' (Foucault, 1987: 76). There is no consistent pattern or path to follow but their existences indicate 'ruptures in ordinary life, imaginary realms, polyphonic representations' (Defert, 1997: 275). As with Lefebvre's notion of heterotopy, there is here a teasing play of differences, but without the logic of contradiction, or negative dialectic, or any consequent utopic formulation. They offer no resolution or consolation, but disrupt and test our customary notions of ourselves. These different spaces, which contest forms of anticipatory utopianism, hold no promise or space of liberation. With different degrees of relational intensity, heterotopias glitter and clash in their incongruous variety, illuminating a passage for our imagination.

NOTES

- 1 Both translations have their strengths. The version that appears in *Diacritics* retains the vigour of a lecture (1986). The later version in Foucault's *Essential Works* is more measured and tidy (1998a). Unless referring to the original French, I use the latter.
- 2 See Lax for a wider explanation of the medical term 'heterotopia' (1998).
- 3 See Ariès (1976, 1981).
- 4 Foucault recalls his lecture in two interviews. The first was originally published in 1977 in a book on Bentham's Panopticon and republished in *Foucault Live* (1989) and the second appeared in *Skyline* in 1982 and was republished in the *Essential Works* (2000).
- 5 See Defert (1997) and Ritter and Knaller-Vlay (1998) for comprehensive accounts of the reception and various uses of the concept of heterotopia. See Hetherington for an argument linking the notion to modernity (1997). In contrast, see Soja for links with postmodernity and wider applications (1989, 1995, 1996). Of the dozens of other interpretations, see in particular Teyssot (1977), Genocchio (1995), Guarrasi (2001) and Jacobs (2004).
- 6 See Webb (2005).
- 7 Lefebvre's *La Révolution urbaine* first appeared in 1970, but it has only been available in English [*The Urban Revolution*] since 2003. His *La production de l'espace* [*The Production of Space*] is better known as it was translated in 1991. The former provides a clearer account of the distinction between 'heterotopy' and utopia. The latter mentions 'heterotopias' fleetingly (1991: 162, 294).
- 8 Lefebvre's anticipatory conception of utopia has some intriguing resemblance to

Marin's notion of the utopic. Marin encapsulates an essential feature of utopia as the possibility–impossibility that everything that is actually possible masks (1984: 197 and 1993: 394–420). Jameson – drawing on Adorno, Bloch, Lefebvre and Marin – has recently reworked the idea by presenting a negative dialectic, a 'zero-degree' utopianism, which voices a total systemic change: something that disrupts the foundations of what we presently do, think and feel. It faces us with the 'terror of obliteration' of what we hold on to within our class and ideological positions. For example, it may totally undermine the process of commodification and our present addiction to consumption. For Jameson, this is an essential prerequisite for any notion of transformative politics. Confrontation with the impossibility of imagining utopia gives us the necessary courage for revolutionary change (2004: 35–54).

- 9 Contrary to Hetherington, I think this form of disruption is completely different from Marin's notion of the 'neutral'. Marin focuses on the semiological spatial play of the text as the resolution of fictional and historical contradictions. There is no sense of contradiction or resolution in Borges or any of Foucault's accounts of heterotopia. Indeed, an important part of Foucault's work is the struggle to escape the pull of the logic of contradiction.
- 10 Drawing on Foucault's studies of Roussel and Blanchot, this theme of the 'outside' is explored thoroughly by Deleuze. He finds that Foucault's work is haunted by 'an inside which is merely the fold of the outside' or the theme of the 'double' which is 'an interiorization of the outside' (1988: 94–9).

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