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Central, Hong Kong: On Sundays, Filipino maids on their free day take over the publicness of the HSBC plaza. During the working week the plaza returns to its role as place of passage.

Heterotopias of Difference

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“Frustratingly incomplete, inconsistent, incoherent.” This is how Edward Soja (1996) characterizes Michel Foucault’s article on heterotopia. And yet he devotes a full chapter to it in his book. Indeed the short essay with which Foucault introduced the concept of heterotopia in social sciences is as famous as it is confusing. Perhaps in part the confusion, and frustration, is due to the character of the article, not a real essay, but notes for a lecture. In part, however, the confusion is unavoidable, as the term, from its very beginning addressed puzzling situations. In medicine, where the word was coined, it stands to indicate a condition of growth of normal tissue in unexpected ways and places. Already there the term’s penchant for ambiguity is present, questioning binary divisions between healthy/normal and sick/abnormal. In the introduction to *The Order of Things* Foucault pushes the term further, to indicate situations where “fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately” in one location and where the impossibility to give coherence and even to fully identify these possible orders makes it impossible

even to talk of them. In his 1968 lecture notes the same theme continues, but with a different focus: space, instead of “words and things.” The “possible orders” now refer to fragments of different possible spatial orders.

As heterotopias “desiccate speech” and “stop words in their tracks,” the attempt to clarify their spaces is probably futile. Yet, as Soja’s chapter shows, Foucault’s concept keeps being called upon, used, and discussed. In fact, it seems that interest in heterotopias keeps increasing. In this paper I’d like to propose that this renewed interest is due both to social changes that have occurred since Foucault’s article, and to changes in the character of heterotopias themselves. In particular, three areas of discussion help to identify the reasons for both changes. First of all, there are the studies that propose a shift from the mass society of Fordism to the flexible socio-economic organization of post-Fordism. This change has helped to introduce ‘difference’ as a new term in the equation normality//deviance on which Foucault based his heterotopias. As a consequence, heterotopias of deviation are no longer alone. Difference too has its other spaces. Secondly, there is the argument (that Foucault helped to establish) on the increasing importance of social space and its production. Following Henri Lefebvre’s characterization of space, I suggest that heterotopias are “spaces of representation” and vanish when the social relations that produced them end. Finally social differentiation has also enlarged the debate on the public sphere. The nineteen-sixties view of a universal and a-spatial public sphere is increasingly challenged by the notion of a multiplicity of public spheres that are public only for the social groups that produced them. Heterotopias are part of this group-specific publicness and make evident that public spheres are also public spaces.

Naturally, a Periodization

A periodization of heterotopia is already present in the first and second of the principles with which Foucault characterizes his ‘other spaces.’ Heterotopias, Foucault tells us, are common to all civilizations, but they change, taking different forms and purposes in different social contexts. New types of heterotopia appear while existing ones, “as [their] history unfolds, can ... function in a very different fashion.”

Admittedly, Foucault's periodization is rather limited: it is composed only by two phases. In "so-called primitive" societies heterotopias take the form of "heterotopias of crisis." They are places where individuals in-between recognized social roles retire from society and from which they emerge to re-enter society when they are ready for a new stable social position. The "crisis", in other words, consists of the temporary absence of a recognized social identity, a sort of 'anomic state', or to use Van Gennep's term, a "liminal" stage, such as the various moments of identity change and the associated "*rites de passage*" when, for example, the adolescent is no longer a boy and not yet a man; the menstruating woman is no longer a child and not yet able to bear children; the pregnant woman no longer fertile and not yet a mother (Van Gennep 1960). In Van Gennep's vein, we can perhaps call these heterotopias of crisis, "*espaces de passage*," fixed places with changing populations.

In the modern world Foucault identified "heterotopias of deviation" as the new "other spaces." In most of his examples the main characteristic is that these spaces are assigned to (or marked by the presence of) individuals and social groups who do not fit in the modern social order in a much more permanent way than in pre-modern heterotopias. The spaces of the prison, of the mental hospital, the retirement home, or the cemetery, are occupied by people who are not expected to return to productive and accepted roles of dominant society.¹ In short, modern heterotopias are for deviants, people who do not fit in the dominant social norm and, even if individually they may return to productive, normal, social roles, as a group they remain excluded from the working of society. These are spaces "in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the average or norm, are placed" (Foucault 1978: 139). For Foucault the presence of a social norm, and the adherence to it, is a key characteristic of modernity and, therefore, of modern heterotopias. With the development of capitalism "the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes" is in part regulated by disciplinary power expressed through the imposition of the law and, eventually, by force. Increasingly, however, in capitalism power and discipline are expressed also by "*regulatory controls*" constructed via the establishment of "*institutions of power.... created in the eighteen century as techniques of power present at every level of the social body and utilized by very diverse institutions*

(the family and the army, schools and the police, individual medicine and the administration of collective bodies)” (Foucault 1978: 140-141, italics in the text).

This process of normalization does not translate into the elimination of difference, but in its exaltation as deviance: “when one wishes to individualize the healthy, normal and law-abiding adult, it is always by asking him how much of a child he has in him, what secret madness lies within him, what fundamental crime he has dreamt of committing” (Foucault 1977: 193). A parallel can be drawn in the built environment between the normal, everyday, city and the spaces of deviance. Mental hospitals, retirement homes, prisons belong to the city, they relate to it, and underline its normality; yet, they stick out, claiming their extraneity to normal social life. This extraneity is present in their different social and temporal organization (“heterochronies”) as well as visually, in the formal and monumental character of their physical spaces. But power, in Foucault’s words, also “percolates upward” and thus the imposition of deviance (subjugation), with its rules, spaces and times, is countered by the making of self-identity (subjectification) by the ‘deviant’ groups who re-code these other spaces with their own informal and often invisible meanings, rules and times. Modern heterotopias, then, are “other spaces” on the one hand because they are made other by the top-down making of places of exclusion; on the other hand, they are made other by the deviant group that lives and appropriate those places. With their deviant populations and single purpose sites, heterotopias of deviance are fixed spaces with fixed populations.

Things change, though, and time may have come to extend Foucault’s periodization. Arguably, in relation to the production of “heterotopias of deviance”, a key change is that the social norms from which deviance emerges (that deviance mirrors) have become more flexible, and deviance a more transient concept. After all, power flows in all directions, and regulatory controls are not just produced by top-down interests. They also respond to movements from below. Thus in academia new arenas of discussion over multiculturalism, social identities, difference, lifestyles, reflect the calls for self-definition by groups emerging from deviance or invisibility. Similarly, in practice, struggles over the right to difference abound (such as the conflict over gay marriage).

In the economy too it's possible to identify recent changes that make capitalism more flexible and change its requirements for regulatory controls. At the time of Foucault's article what the Regulation School called the Fordist regime of accumulation was in full swing (cf. Aglietta 1979, Boyer 1990, Amin 1994). The economy was dominated (certainly in the United States and increasingly in Western Europe) by a system of mass production that required a mass market able to absorb the long and expanding runs of the homogeneous goods produced. Beginning with the New Deal in the US, various sets of regulatory mechanisms developed with the double effect of expanding the social market and giving it a direction coherent with the goods being mass produced. Most famously this occurred via a socialization of finance, starting with the establishment of the social security system, proceeding to bank loan reform and other interventions that created a credit system, and culminating with a string of programs that made home ownership available to large part of the population.

In the economy, these changes stabilized access to the mass market for a large part of the population and brought within reach goods that otherwise would have remained inaccessible. At the same time, they are also part of a process of definition and reinforcement of a *social norm of mass consumption* leading consumption in directions coherent with the sectors in which mass production was expanding. The banks' practice of redlining and the preferential financing for single-family housing collaborated in creating and directing homogeneity in the mass market via social expansion as well as exclusion. Other factors that worked in the construction of the regulatory controls of Fordism, such as the "dream of home ownership" or the social standardization of the family in its nuclear form, are less palpable than their economic counterparts. They are, nevertheless, part of the dynamics leading to the development and maintenance of mass society and to the homogenization of consumption in the public realm. As Foucault told us, though, a strong social norm also implies deviance and the development of the Fordist norm was no exception. From African-American and other minorities red-lined out of home ownership, to singles and same-sex couples not fitting in the family model, mass society was not for everybody.

Following still the Regulation School, the beginning of the new period can be marked around the mid-nineteen-seventies. Post-Fordism is characterized by the

progressive loss of dominance of mass production and by the (re)emergence of alternative organizations of production able, by virtue of their flexibility, to tap into markets that are either too fragmented or changing too rapidly for mass producers. In fact, these flexible production systems, since they do not enjoy the economies of scale of mass production, *require* small and changing markets to be economically viable. The multiplication of social identities and the fragmentation of consumer markets could be seen, in a relatively standard Marxist framework, as a consequence of the change from Fordist to flexible production. In alternative, the decline of mass production and success of the new industrial organization could be explained as a consequence of increasing social fragmentation and self-identification. Globalization can be added to the mixture as a cause or as a catalyzer of the process. Regardless of the cause-and-effect chain (if there is one), it is clear that a differentiated and changing population of consumers is an ideal match for an organization of production that need both constant change and inspiration for it. Thus the regulatory mechanisms that have supported Fordism are no longer necessary. In fact they would contradict the need for flexibility and change. This does not mean that norm and deviance disappear. It means, however, that they too have changed; that the boundaries for “the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes” have moved (and keep moving). Different lifestyles, social, cultural, or sexual identities in most cases emerge out of struggle for recognition, but at the same time, they are also inserted (or can be inserted) in the machinery of production and consumption, as niche markets, as pools of labor, as source for new commodifications.

In spatial terms this also means that heterotopias of deviation, with their prisons, hospitals, and rest homes, are still present and still house deviants – people who, even in post-Fordism, do not fit “into the machinery of production.” But another layer of other spaces can be added. Heterotopias of difference are still places in which irreconcilable spaces coexist, but what constitutes irreconcilability is constantly contested and changing. As these heterotopias fluctuate between contradiction and acceptance, their physical expression equally fluctuates between invisibility and recognition. No longer the monumental constructions of heterotopias of deviance, the “other spaces” of difference are part of everyday life, in part invisible (such as a coffee-shop or a bar where a

particular social group meets), in part in full sight (like when a park in Milan or a bridge between skyscrapers in Hong Kong is occupied by Philippino maids on their free day), and often in the in-between penumbra (like the parking lots in Los Angeles where daily laborers wait to be hired).

Different Spaces

Periodizations are dangerous, though. There is always the risk of using them to create meta-narratives, where time is the ordering device that allows one phase and its subject to erase and replace the precedent. Used carefully, however, they are constructive means both to identify change, difference, and to focus more clearly on the topic of interest and on the project at hand. In this spirit, Foucault's brief periodization of heterotopias – as well as the Regulation School's sequence Fordism-Post-Fordism – should be seen as identifying a subject matter that has become particularly relevant and deserves attention.

The same consideration is valid for the brief history of space with which Foucault opens his article. This periodization begins with the “space of localization” of the Middle Ages – hierarchical, fixed and immutable; it moves to the space of movement and extension (*espace étendue*) of the Renaissance; and it ends with modern space, which is “not a delineated entity, but one which constantly fragments and dissolves, reforming as other spaces.... A disembodied notion of space whose fixed nature and location is constantly disrupted by transience and ever-shifting relations between places.” Arguably, the “sacred spaces” of the Middle Ages and the “infinite and open space” of the Renaissance are still present, but the ability of space to change, vanish and re-form has assumed a new relevance, particularly in the attempt to understand heterotopias.

The connection with Henri Lefebvre's work on the production of space is obvious and unavoidable. Lefebvre does not propose a periodization of space. Rather, he sees spaces as composed of three “moments” that coexists, interact, and are produced in relation to each-other: *spatial practice*, which, in short, can be defined as the process of production of physical spaces (the built environment); *representation of space*, that is, a sort of ‘epistemological space’ – the organization of our knowledge of space, such as mental images and maps; and *spaces of representation*, the space that is directly lived,

occupied and transformed by inhabiting it. Even if, with some contortions, it would be possible to see affinities between each of Foucault's three phases and Lefebvre's three moments, it is his third aspect of space that has attracted most attention, created most discussion and that, by converging with Foucault's transient "space of relations" is particularly relevant for the production of heterotopias.

David Harvey exemplifies the spaces of representation as spaces of "popular spectacles, street demonstrations, riots" (Harvey 1987: 266). This brief statement already addresses two characteristics of the space of representation. First, it points out that what Lefebvre called the three "moments" of social space are not three kinds of space but three interdependent facets of the same unit and they cannot exist independently of each other. Thus, remaining close to Harvey's examples, the physical space of, say, a square does not change when it is occupied by a market, a political rally, or a carnival. Yet the social relations taking place in the different instances produce different "lived moments" – different spaces of representation. Thus, the same square becomes a space of economic exchange, or of political activism, etc.

At the same time, the characteristics of the physical space give shape and even impose limits on what kind of spaces of representation can be produced *there*. A market or a political rally have very different characteristics if taking place in a square or in an alley. In fact, the physical constraints of a narrow space, such an alley or of a cul-de-sac, are likely to stop some events (markets or political rallies) from taking place there, while it may be conducive to the production of other spaces of representation (for example the appropriation of the alley by drug dealers). Conversely, spaces of representation may leave traces in the built environment and change the physical space. The traces can be as light as a few pieces of paper or some placards on the ground, or increasingly permanent, like a traffic diversion at certain times, fixed stalls, or tags on walls, if the spatial appropriation becomes repetitive or permanent. Traces may become even stronger, if the social relationship is institutionalized, like in "organized spectacles" or in the "monumentality and constructed spaces of ritual" (Harvey 1987: 266).

Yet – and this is the second characteristic of spaces of representation I want to make – traces are just leftovers, even if powerful and loaded with symbolic value. They

are a modification of the physical space and, therefore, a spatial practice. They can also change our perception of space (a space as a fun or dangerous place), thus fitting also in Lefebvre's second 'moment'. But, the space of representation, in the meanwhile, has vanished as the social relations that produced it (the rally, the carnival, the drug dealing, etc.) have ended. Heterotopias, as spaces of representation, are produced by the presence of a set of specific social relations and their space. As soon as the social relation and the appropriation of physical space end, both space of representation and heterotopia disappear. This ephemerality of heterotopias is difficult to see in situations like the prison, where an apposite physical space has been built to contain a social group and its social relations. The building by itself, however, is just of trace of the lived space that it contained, still contains, and/or will contain (an a-priori trace). By contrast, spatial ephemerality becomes more evident in post-Fordism, where social identities multiply and shift from invisibility and exclusion to recognition and, at times, inclusion. Foucault's fifth principle of heterotopias begins to show up here: the "mechanisms of opening and closing," – of access and exclusion, entrance and exit – are also temporal systems, responding to the presence-absence of lived space.

Heterotopia, however, is not just another name for space of representation. The critical opening that Lefebvre offered by introducing the latter concept lies in the recognition that space is not an inert support of social action, but participates in the social action itself. Heterotopia goes a bit further, by making explicit how much fragmented, mobile, and changing the production of space is. This is particularly visible and significant at a time when social subjects keep multiplying and, with them, different spaces keep being produced. The ability of heterotopia of "juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces" at first sight can be seen as a re-statement of Lefebvre's three facets of space. But Foucault's statement continues, claiming that heterotopia is also characterized by the coexistence of "several sites that are in themselves incompatible." What makes heterotopias 'other' spaces is not just that they are 'other' from the fixity of physical space. Nor is it simply that, in different degrees and ever-changing extent, they are 'counterspaces' to the dominant ones. They are 'other' also in that they stem from an endless series of differences within the space of representation.

Paraphrasing Soja and Lefebvre, more than the space of representation per se, it is heterotopias that “are linked to clandestine or underground side of social life” and it is in them that there is a “partial unknowability,... mystery and secretiveness” (Soja 1996: 67). Even without following Genocchio (1995) to the conclusion that other spaces can never be known, since we cannot know the “other,” group-specific culture, codes, and interactions are, at least in part responsible for the “unknowability and secretiveness” of heterotopias. More importantly, to what extent heterotopias are visible and understandable depends also from their changing position between invisibility, marginalization, assertion of difference, and their cooptation into “the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and [in] the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes.”

Heterotopias as Public Spaces

Perhaps it would be excessive to talk (again) of periodization, but certainly the emergence of multiple social subjects and their related claims for the right to difference have provoked big changes in the conception of the public sphere. Particularly relevant for this paper, the proliferation of subjects has progressively brought space onto the stage as an important component of publicness. To be more precise, the increasingly visible presence of multiple social subjects has made heterotopias of difference more visible too.

Space was not a concern in 1962, when Jurgen Habermas’ *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* was published (English Translation: 1989). Habermas’ proposal was to continue – in fact, to put back on track – the development of the liberal public sphere that had began in the eighteen century, by eliminating the limits, exclusions of social groups and communicative distortions that are still present in it and by moving it towards an all-inclusive, democratic public arena. From the perspective of a universal publicness, space was not very important, since it remained, if not undifferentiated, limited to its physical aspect and to the identification of appropriate structures (from newspapers to city halls) where the public discourse could be carried out.

Even without an explicit reference, cracks in the a-spatiality of the public sphere began to show up in the critiques to Habermas’ conception put forward by feminist studies in the early nineteen-nineties (Landes 1988, Meehan 1995). These studies argued

that an all-inclusive public sphere was not only unrealistic, but it actually was ideological and anti-democratic, since it continued to keep invisible underprivileged groups who lacked access to it and had to produce their own semi-public spheres. For example, women-only voluntary associations, philanthropic societies, and even women's political activities in working-class protest where cases of publicness alternative and invisible to the official one. Nancy Fraser went a step further, by pointing out that the exclusion from the official public sphere was not limited to women. Workers, people of color, gay and lesbian, illegal immigrants are some of the different groups that constitute *subaltern counter-publics* who form "parallel discursive arenas where subordinate social groups invent and circulate ... oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs"(Fraser 1992:122-23).

In time, these identities, interests and needs (or some of them) may find official venues –fixed spaces such city halls and community centers, or known spaces of representation, such as those produced in political rallies. Initially however, like in the feminist case, new identities, interests and needs are not formed and articulated in pre-established venues. Rather, they begin in the perhaps 'weaker' but more pervasive practices of everyday life – "what remains when all specialized activities have been eliminated," as Lefebvre defined them – by appropriating the opportunities and spaces where a group-specific public discourse can be carried out. "The space that difference makes," to use Soja and Hooper's felicitous phrase (Soja and Hooper 1996), becomes evident here. It is the very difference of a social group (its marginality) that makes the appropriation of a physical space relevant and gives specificity to the space produced.

The recognition that, rather than a universal public, publicness is articulated around an ever-changing multiplicity of publics provokes a threefold shift. First, it suggests that publicness and identity formation are tightly related and are not limited to specialized practices, times, and places. Second, while in the conception of the liberal public sphere, space could remain in the background, as a secondary support to universal and largely a-spatial processes, the recognition of multiple publicnesses show that public spheres coincide with the production of public spaces. Finally, the spaces that the new identities, interests and needs produce, participate of the ephemerality of the space of representation. The same physical location can take on different spatial meanings

according to the social groups that occupy it – often at different times, sometimes simultaneously.

The layering of public spaces in the same physical location brings counter-publics in contact and confrontation with each other. Confrontation between different publics is an essential element of plurality since it is through disagreement and conflict that different social groups avoid to isolate themselves or to be pushed into isolation and it is there that “an additional *space* on which members of different, more limited publics talk across lines of cultural diversity” (Fraser 1992: 126) develops. This space of confrontation is a confrontation of heterotopias, a place where Lefebvre’s three moments of space also come visibly together and where Foucault’s “juxtaposition of incompatible spaces” occurs. Compared to the fixed spaces and changing population of heterotopias of crisis and to the fixed spaces and fixed population of heterotopias of deviance, heterotopias of difference are characterized by a multiplicity of changing spaces with changing populations.

All this does not mean that the unknowability and mysteriousness of heterotopias has disappeared. Indeed, the realization that more “fragments” of spatial orders coexist in the same physical space can make their “glitter” more blinding. Yet, being aware of the existence of fragments can help to prepare the ground – metaphorically and materially – to facilitate (or limit) the social production of heterotopias as opportunities for the confrontation, contestation, and negotiation between publics that forms the basis for cosmopolitanism.

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¹ I am leaving out other cases from Foucault’s list, such as the museum and the holyday village. They don’t fit Foucault’s own definition of heterotopia of deviation. The holyday village in particular, is more a kind a ‘part-time utopia’, or what Louis Marin called a “degenerate utopia” than a place for deviants.