

Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias

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As is well known, the great and obsessive dread of the nineteenth century was history, with its themes of development and stagnation, crisis and cycle, the accumulation of the past, the surplus of the dead and the world threatened by cooling. The nineteenth century found the quintessence of its mythological resources in the second law of thermodynamics. Our own era, on the other hand, seems to be that of space. We are in the age of the simultaneous, of juxtaposition, the near and the far, the side by side and the scattered. A period in which, in my view, the world is putting itself to the test, not so much as a great way of life destined to grow in time but as a net that links points together and creates its own muddle. It might be said that certain ideological conflicts which underlie the controversies of our day take place between pious descendants of time and tenacious inhabitants of space. Structuralism-or at least what is lumped together under this rather too vague label-is the attempt to establish between elements that may have been split over the course of time, a set of relationships that juxtapose them, set them in opposition or link them together, so as to create a sort of shape. Actually it is not so much a question of denying time as of a certain way of dealing with what we call time and which goes by the name of history.

For one thing the space which now looms on the horizon of our preoccupations, our theories and our systems, is not an innovation in Western history, having a history of its own. Nor is it possible to deny its fatal entanglement with time. To provide a very rough outline of its history, it could be said that there was a hierarchical system of places in the Middle Ages: places that were sacred and profane, protected and, on the contrary, open and undefended, urban places and rural places (for the real life of men anyhow). In cosmological theory, supercelestial places existed, in contrast to the celestial place, opposed in its turn to the terrestrial place; there were places where things could be found because they had been shifted there by violence and there were other places where, on the contrary, things found their natural position and rest. This hierarchy, contrast, and mingling of places made up that which might, very approximately, be called medieval space. That is to say, the space of localization.

This space of localization was opened up by Galileo, for the real scandal caused by Galileo's work was not the discovery, or rediscovery, of the earth's movement around the sun, but the assertion of an infinite and infinitely open space, in which the space of the Middle Ages was to some extent dissolved. The location of a thing, in fact, was no longer anything more than a point in its movement, its rest nothing but its movement slowed down infinitely. In other words, from Galileo onward, ever since the seventeenth century, localization was replaced by extension.

Nowadays arrangement has taken over from extension, which had once replaced localization. It is defined by relationships of neighborhood between points and elements, which can be described formally as series, trees, and networks.

On the other hand, we know very well the importance of the problems of arrangements in contemporary technology: storage of information or of the partial results of a calculation in the memory of a machine; circulation of discrete elements to random outlets (automobiles, for instance, or even sounds transmitted over telephone lines); location of labeled or coded elements within a randomly divided set, or one that is classified according to univocal or multiple systems, etc.

In a still more concrete manner, the problem of position is posed for men in demographic terms. The question of the arrangement of the earth's inhabitants is not just one of knowing whether there will be enough room for all of them—a problem that is in any case of the greatest importance—but also one of knowing what are the relations of vicinity, what kind of storage, circulation, reference, and classification of human elements should take preference in this or that situation, according to the objective that is being sought. In our era, space presents itself to us in the form of patterns of ordering.

In any case, I feel that current anxiety is fundamentally concerned with space, much more than with time: the latter, probably, merely appears to us as one of the many possible patterns of distribution between elements that are scattered over space.

Now, it may be that contemporary space has not yet lost those sacred characteristics (which time certainly lost in the nineteenth century), in spite of all the techniques that assail it and the web of knowledge that allows it to be defined and formalized. Of course, a theoretical desanctification of space, for which Galileo's work gave the signal, has already occurred: it remains to be seen whether we have achieved its desanctification in practice. It may be, in fact, that our lives are still ruled by a certain number of unrelenting opposites, which institution and practice have not dared to erode. I refer here to opposites that we take for granted, such as the contrast between public and private space, family and social space, cultural and utilitarian space, the space of pleasure and the space of work—all opposites that are still actuated by a veiled sacredness.

The (immense) work of Bachelard and the descriptions of the phenomenologists have taught us that we do not live in a homogeneous and empty space, but in a space that is saturated with qualities, and that may even be pervaded by a spectral aura. The space of our primary perception, of our dreams and of our passions, holds within itself almost intrinsic qualities: it is light, ethereal, transparent, or dark, uneven, cluttered. Again, it is a space of height, of peaks, or on the contrary, of the depths of mud; space that flows, like spring water, or fixed space, like stone or crystal.

In any case, these analyses, however fundamental for contemporary thought, are primarily concerned with inner space. But it is about external space that I would like to speak now. The space in which we live, from which we are drawn out of ourselves, just where the erosion of our lives, our time, our history takes place, this space that wears us down and consumes us, is in itself heterogeneous. In other words, we do not live in a sort of a vacuum, within which individuals and things can be located, or that may take on so many different fleeting colors, but in a set of relationships that define positions which cannot be equated or in any way superimposed.

Certainly, one could undertake the description of these different arrangements, looking for the set of relationships that defines them. For instance, by describing the set of relationships that defines arrangements of transition, roads, trains (and, with regard to the latter, think of the extraordinary bundle of relations represented by something through which one passes, by means of which we pass from one point to another, and which, in its turn, has the power of passing). Through the sets of relationships that define them, one could describe arrangements where one makes a temporary halt: cafes, cinemas, beaches. It would be equally possible to define, through its network of relations, the arrangements of rest, closed or partly open, that make up the house, the bedroom, the bed, etc However I am only interested in a few of these arrangements: to be

precise, those which are endowed with the curious property of being in relation with all the others, but in such a way as to suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relationships designed, reflected, or mirrored by themselves. These spaces, which are in rapport in some way with all the others, and yet contradict them, are of two general types.

First of all, the utopias. These are arrangements which have no real space. Arrangements which have a general relationship of direct or inverse analogy with the real space of society. They represent society itself brought to perfection, or its reverse, and in any case utopias are spaces that are by their very essence fundamentally unreal.

There also exist, and this is probably true for all cultures and all civilizations, real and effective spaces which are outlined in the very institution of society, but which constitute a sort of counter arrangement, of effectively realized utopia, in which all the real arrangements, all the other real arrangements that can be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged, and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable. In contrast to the utopias, these places which are absolutely other with respect to all the arrangements that they reflect and of which they speak might be described as heterotopias. Between these two, I would then set that sort of mixed experience which partakes of the qualities of both types of location, the mirror. It is, after all, a utopia, in that it is a place without a place. In it, I see myself where I am not, in an unreal space that opens up potentially beyond its surface; there I am down there where I am not, a sort of shadow that makes my appearance visible to myself, allowing me to look at myself where I do not exist: utopia of the mirror. At the same time, we are dealing with a heterotopia. The mirror really exists and has a kind of comeback effect on the place that I occupy: starting from it, in fact, I find myself absent from the place where I am, in that I see myself in there.

Starting from that gaze which to some extent is brought to bear on me, from the depths of that virtual space which is on the other side of the mirror, I turn back on myself, beginning to turn my eyes on myself and reconstitute myself where I am in reality. Hence the mirror functions as a heterotopia, since it makes the place that I occupy, whenever I look at myself in the glass, both absolutely real-it is in fact linked to all the surrounding space-and absolutely unreal, for in order to be perceived it has of necessity to pass that virtual point that is situated down there.

As for the heterotopias in the proper sense of the word, how can we describe them? What meaning do they have? We might postulate, not a science, a now overworked word, but a sort of systematic description. Given a particular society, this would have as its object the study, analysis, description, and "reading," as it is the fashion to call it nowadays, of those different spaces, those other places, in a kind of both mythical and real contestation of the space in which we live. Such a description might be called heterotopology. Its first principle is that there is probably not a single culture in the world that is not made up of heterotopias. It is a constant feature of all human groups. It is evident, though, that heterotopias assume a wide variety of forms, to the extent that a single, absolutely universal form may not exist. In any case, it is possible to classify them into two main types. In so-called primitive societies, there is a certain kind of heterotopia which I would describe as that of crisis; it comprises privileged or sacred or forbidden places that are reserved for the individual who finds himself in a state of crisis with respect to the society or the environment in which he lives: adolescents, women during the menstrual period or in labor, the old, etc.

In our own society, these heterotopias of crisis are steadily disappearing, even though some vestiges of them are bound to survive. For instance, the boarding school in its nineteenth-century form or military service for young men has played a role of this kind, so that the first manifestations of male sexuality could occur "elsewhere," away from the family. For girls there was, up until the middle of this century, the tradition of the honeymoon, or "voyage de nocces" as it is called in French, an ancestral theme. The girl's defloration could not take place "anywhere" and at that time, the train or the honeymoon hotel represented that place which was not located anywhere, a heterotopia without geographical coordinates.

Yet these heterotopias of crisis are vanishing today, only to be replaced, I believe, by others which could be described as heterotopias of deviance, occupied by individuals whose behavior deviates from the current average or standard. They are the rest homes, psychiatric clinics, and, let us be clear, prisons, in a list which must undoubtedly be extended to cover old-people's homes, in a way on the border between the heterotopia of crisis and that of deviance. This is because in a society like our own, where pleasure is the rule, the inactivity of old age constitutes not only a crisis but a deviation.

The second element of my description: over the course of its history, a society may take an existing heterotopia, which has never vanished, and make it function in a very different way. Actually, each heterotopia has a precise and well-defined function within society and the same heterotopia can, in accordance with the synchronicity of the culture in which it is located, have a different function.

Let us take, for example, the curious heterotopia of the cemetery. This is certainly an "other" place with respect to ordinary cultural spaces, and yet it is connected with all the locations of the city, the society, the village, and so on, since every family has some relative there. In Western culture, one might say that it has always existed. And yet it has undergone important changes.

Up until the end of the eighteenth century, the cemetery was located in the very heart of the city, near the church.

Within it, there existed a hierarchy of every possible type of tomb. There was an ossuary where the corpses lost their last traces of individuality, there were some individual tombs, and there were the graves inside the church, which conformed to two models, either a simple slab of marble, or a mausoleum with statues, etc. The cemetery, situated in the sacred space of the church, has taken on quite another character in modern civilization. It is curious to note that in an age which has been very roughly defined as "atheist," Western culture has inaugurated the so-called cult of the dead.

After all, it was very natural that, as long as people actually believed in the resurrection of the body and the immortality of the soul, not a great deal of importance was given to the mortal remains. On the contrary, from the moment when people were no longer so certain of survival after death, it became logical to take much more care with the remains of the dead, the only trace, in the end, of our existence in the world and in words.

In any case, it is from the nineteenth century onward that each of us has had the right to his own little box for his little personal decomposition, but it is only from the nineteenth century on that the cemetery began to be shifted to the outskirts of the city. In parallel to this individualization of death and the bourgeois appropriation of the cemetery, an obsession with death as "sickness" has emerged. It is supposed that the dead transmit sickness to the living and

that their presence and proximity to the houses and church, almost in the middle of the street, spreads death. This great concern with the spread of sickness by contagion from cemeteries began to appear with insistence toward the end of the eighteenth century, but the cemeteries only moved out to the suburbs during the course of the nineteenth. From then on, they no longer constituted the sacred and immortal wind of the city, but the "other city," where each family possessed its gloomy dwelling.

Third principle. The heterotopia has the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other. Thus on the rectangle of its stage, the theater alternates as a series of places that are alien to each other; thus the cinema appears as a very curious rectangular hall, at the back of which a three-dimensional space is projected onto a two-dimensional screen. Perhaps the oldest example of these heterotopias in the form of contradictory locations is the garden. Let us not forget that this astounding and age-old creation had very profound meanings in the East, and that these seemed to be superimposed. The traditional garden of the Persians was a sacred space that was supposed to unite four separate parts within its rectangle, representing the four parts of the world, as well as one space still more sacred than the others, a space that was like the navel, the center of the world brought into the garden (it was here that the basin and jet of water were located). All the vegetation was concentrated in this zone, as if in a sort of microcosm. As for carpets, they originally set out to reproduce gardens, since the garden was a carpet where the world in its entirety achieved symbolic perfection, and the carpet a sort of movable garden in space. The garden is the smallest fragment of the world and, at the same time, represents its totality, forming right from the remotest times a sort of felicitous and universal heterotopia (from which are derived our own zoological gardens).

Fourth principle. Heterotopias are linked for the most part to bits and pieces of time, i.e., they open up through what we might define as a pure symmetry of heterochronisms. The heterotopia enters fully into function when men find themselves in a sort of total breach of their traditional time. Then it is easy to see how the cemetery is a highly heterotopian place, in that it begins with that strange heterochronism that is, for a human being, the loss of life and of that quasi-eternity in which, however, he does not cease to dissolve and be erased.

Generally speaking, in a society like ours, heterotopia and heterochronism are organized and arranged in a relatively complex fashion. In the first place there are the heterotopias of time which accumulate *ad infinitum*, such as museums and libraries. These are heterotopias in which time does not cease to accumulate, perching, so to speak, on its own summit. Yet up until the end of the seventeenth century, these had still been the expression of an individual choice. The idea of accumulating everything, on the contrary, of creating a sort of universal archive, the desire to enclose all times, all eras, forms, and styles within a single place, the concept of making all times into one place, and yet a place that is outside time, inaccessible to the wear and tear of the years, according to a plan of almost perpetual and unlimited accumulation within an irremovable place, all this belongs entirely to our modern outlook. Museums and libraries are heterotopias typical of nineteenth-century Western culture.

Along with this type, bound up with the accumulation of time, there are other heterotopias linked to time in its more futile, transitory and precarious aspects, a time viewed as celebration. These then are heterotopias without a bias toward the eternal. They are absolutely time-bound. To this class belong the fairs, those marvelous empty zones outside the city limits, that fill up twice a year with booths, showcases, miscellaneous objects, wrestlers, snake-women, optimistic

fortune-tellers, etc. Very recently, a new form of chronic heterotopia has been invented, that of the holiday village: a sort of Polynesian village which offers three short weeks of primitive and eternal nudity to city dwellers. It is easy to see, on the other hand, how the two types of heterotopia, that of the festival and that of the eternity of accumulating time, come together: the huts on the island of Jerba are relatives in a way of the libraries and museums. And in fact, by rediscovering Polynesian life, is not time abolished at the very moment in which it is found again? It is the whole story of humanity that dates right back to the origins, like a kind of great and immediate knowledge.

Fifth principle. Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that isolates them and makes them penetrable at one and the same time. Usually, one does not get into a heterotopian location by one's own will. Either one is forced, as in the case of the barracks or the prison, or one must submit to rites of purification. One can only enter by special permission and after one has completed a certain number of gestures. Heterotopias also exist that are entirely devoted to practices of purification that are half religious, half hygienic (the Muslim 'hammams'), or apparently solely hygienic (Scandinavian saunas).

Other heterotopias, on the contrary, have the appearance of pure and simple openings, although they usually conceal curious exclusions. Anyone can enter one of these heterotopian locations, but, in reality, they are nothing more than an illusion: one thinks one has entered and, by the sole fact of entering, one is excluded. I am reminded, for instance, of those famous rooms to be found on big farms in Brazil and throughout South America in general. The front door did not give onto the main part of the house, where the family lived, so that any person who happened to pass by, any traveler, had the right to push open that door, enter the room, and spend the night there. Now, the rooms were arranged in such a way that anyone who went in there could never reach to the heart of the family: more than ever a passing visitor, never a true guest. This type of heterotopia, which has now almost entirely vanished from our civilization, might perhaps be recognized in the American "motel" room, which one enters with one's own vehicle and lover and where illicit sex is totally protected and totally concealed at one and the same time, set apart and yet not under an open sky.

Finally, the last characteristic of heterotopias is that they have, in relation to the rest of space, a function that takes place between two opposite poles. On the one hand they perform the task of creating a space of illusion that reveals how all of real space is more illusory, all the locations within which life is fragmented. On the other, they have the function of forming another space, another real space, as perfect, meticulous, and well-arranged as ours is disordered, ill-conceived, and in a sketchy state. This heterotopia is not one of illusion but of compensation, and I wonder if it is not somewhat in this manner that certain colonies have functioned.

In a number of cases they have played, at the level of the general organization of terrestrial space, the genuine role of a heterotopia. An example of this, from the first wave of colonization in the seventeenth century, might be some of the Puritan colonies founded by the English in America, which were absolutely perfect places.

Or those extraordinary Jesuit colonies, set up in South America: wonderful, totally regulated colonies, in which human perfection was actually reached. The Jesuits of Paraguay had established settlements in which existence was regulated point by point. The village was laid out according to a strict pattern around a rectangular square at one end of which stood the church; on one side, the college, on the other the cemetery, while, facing the church, there was a street

which met another at a right angle. Each family's hut lay on one of these two axes, reproducing exactly the symbol of Christ. Thus Christianity made its fundamental mark on the space and geography of the American world.

The daily life of individuals was regulated not by the whistle, but by the bell: the same hour of awakening laid down for all, with meals at midday and five o'clock. Afterward people went to bed and, at midnight, came what was known as the conjugal awakening: at this sound of the monastery's bell, each of them did his and her duty.

Brothels and colonies, here are two extreme types of heterotopia. Think of the ship: it is a floating part of space, a placeless place, that lives by itself, closed in on itself and at the same time poised in the infinite ocean, and yet, from port to port, tack by tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies, looking for the most precious things hidden in their gardens. Then you will understand why it has been not only and obviously the main means of economic growth (which I do not intend to go into here), but at the same time the greatest reserve of imagination for our civilization from the sixteenth century down to the present day. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations where it is lacking, dreams dry up, adventure is replaced by espionage, and privateers by the police.