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## Reflected Spaces: “Heterotopia” and the Creation of Space in William Gibson’s Neuromancer

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# Reflected Spaces: “Heterotopia” and the Creation of Space in William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*

Wesley Dalton

Michel Foucault’s concept of “heterotopia” is finding a welcome place among twenty-first century theoreticians who are concentrating increasingly on *space* in relation to social, cultural, and political arrangements. The widespread use of Foucault’s “heterotopia” in literary and cultural theory stems from the popularity of a lecture titled “*Des Espace Autres*,”<sup>1</sup> given in 1967 but not published until 1984, only a few months after his death and the same year, coincidentally, as the publication of science fiction writer William Gibson’s novel *Neuromancer*. This essay will argue for a renewed look at “heterotopia,” both in and outside of Foucault’s writing, as a contextually and theoretically situated concept, using Gibson’s *Neuromancer* as a literary backdrop for the theoretical *mise-en-scène*.<sup>2</sup> As a potent theoretical tool (Foucault sometimes referred to his texts as providing “toolkits”), “heterotopia” can be deployed more productively by resituating it into Foucault’s broader and continually evolving theories on space (especially in relation to social technologies/regimes of knowledge). Such a resituation is important for critical discourse today—not only in literature, but also in conversations ranging from political philosophy to digital humanities—because the theoretical investigation of space has re-entered the dialogue in force. That such theorization is receiving renewed importance can be seen in contemporary analyses of a wide array of spaces (from all eras)—for example, the city, the prison camp, the brothel, the sex club, the restaurant, the department store, the resort, etc.—as well as in concerns over the new digital or virtual “spaces”

constantly emerging and bringing with them political, social, and legal questions. Many of these spaces (both of the past and present, real and virtual) may too easily be construed as special, deviant, and free, and be idealized under what I will argue is the ossified version of heterotopia as any “other” or heterogeneous “disconnected” space. Yet the “heterotopia” designated in Foucault’s work is not simply an other, deviant space, but, as a real or virtual instantiation of a utopian ideal, heterotopic space carries the potential for abuse, for the violent rounding of real corners that refuse to conform to the ideal, or merely for ignoring the parts of the instantiation that do not fit. More importantly, these spaces, and the violence that accompanies them, function to maintain the network of places that constitute “normal” space.

*Neuromancer* is an excellent vehicle for elaborating the complexity of Foucault’s “heterotopology,” as well as the difficulties that can emerge from attempts to deploy it theoretically. Not only was it composed and published in the same theoretical milieu (i.e. with similar concerns about space and life in a late capitalist world) in which “Different Spaces” came to prominence, but it also reflects many of the spatial arrangements that Foucault posits. Both the text itself and the critical writing around the text can serve as examples for describing Foucault’s theories and the ways in which critics deploy such theories by applying them to relevant or popular cultural productions. The body of literature surrounding cyberpunk and *Neuromancer* in particular<sup>3</sup> offers a unique example of repetition and fashion in theoretical terminology. As the bulk of this criticism dates from the late eighties and early nineties, the conversation often comes back to the idea of networked space, global connectivity, and the dominance of so-called “postmodern” themes in science fiction.<sup>4</sup>

Literature, in this case *Neuromancer*, serves as an object-anchor, something that can be returned to, speculated upon, something that gives shape to the theory at hand. It is, strictly speaking, unnecessary in the theoretical domain to bring such an object to the fore. However, for my purposes here, it is beneficial to have an objective counterpoint to the abstraction of theorizing spaces-in-relation. It is not a matter of reading heterotopias *into* Gibson, but of deploying a cultural product that expresses the relations of space that Foucault is positing. *Neuromancer*—because of its neurotic emphasis on space (collapsing time into nanoseconds and movement into the speed of light), and because of the corpus of (critical and literary-theoretical) writing that has followed it through the years—offers a particularly conductive wire with which to connect the theoretical and meta-critical analyses. *Neuromancer* stands at a critical point in the development of theories of space: it comes at a moment (in the mid-eighties) when old anxieties about spatial ordering are being manifested and producing a new set of anxieties (around globalization and capitalism, cyborg-being, etc.). In other words, it is positioned between Foucault’s network of relations (“Different Spaces” 178), on the one hand, and theorization of the global or total network, as seen in the work of Fredric Jameson, on the other. Gibson presents the reader with a world in which the object of these anxieties is intensified, multiplied, and comes to structure the reality of his characters. Whether *Neuromancer* is taken as a reflexive example of such relations (i.e. spatial relations

influence cultural production such that the novel reveals, beyond the author's intent, a given spatial paradigm), or if it is merely a "good" example of these relations in a literary form, it offers the contemporary reader a window through which to view the transformation of anxieties over "real" space into those of ("hyperreal") cyberspace. My interest is not in generating another critical essay on a (nearly) thirty-year-old novel (though I do think that reappropriating such works as retro-neo-futurisms would be interesting and productive), but rather in adding to the contemporary conversations about space and producing a critique of the current discourse around "heterotopia" by using, as an object of this inquiry, a work that has been submitted to this very discourse.

*Neuromancer* also stands at the beginning of and heavily influences what will become a central issue for contemporary scholars: the *digital* landscape. The speed at which digital spaces appear and disappear makes it difficult to maintain a sustained analysis and offer examples of how technology can create politically and socially ambiguous effects. One might think of the lionization of Twitter during the Arab Spring uprisings, the trumpeting by Silicon Valley of "online classrooms" as replacements for "unsustainable," real classroom space, or the Western mythos of underground internet communities in China, based on a real-world web of internet cafés and secret servers, this latter being a mythos that itself comes almost directly out of Gibson's imagined near-future. Perhaps most interestingly of all, reading Gibson's most recent work shows how the author himself is now coming back to and cannibalizing the (especially Asian-centered, internet-based) mythos that he himself helped to create. Finally, on this last point, it seems we are seeing a case of science fiction prophecy in current scares over Chinese cyber-terrorism/war, in which a group of government-backed hackers has been (purportedly) traced back to "Housing Unit 61398 of the People's Liberation Army" in Shanghai. Such a news story seems to be pulled straight from the pages of *Neuromancer*, yet it also generates a number of questions about the digital mapping of space, of highly contested virtual terrain. Like previous communication technologies, the internet is lauded as a means to end war, yet through its effects on space, by its compressing, mapping, doubling, etc., it actually "renders war far easier to wage" (Foucault, *Power* 353).

Fredric Jameson has described Gibson's work, specifically in *Neuromancer* and more generally in cyberpunk as a genre, as the first literary form to truly come to grips with the cultural ramifications of the explosion of communication technology (*Postmodernism* 38). Gibson uncannily recognizes the cyborg nature of contemporary society. There is no authorial fear of the omnipresent communication networks, the surveillance systems, the transgressive movements of sexuality, fashion, and posthumanism. The clustered webs of fiber-optic cables, the billions of discrete data packages roaring through walls and bodies, surgical, chemical, and cybernetic modification: these things constitute the worlds created by Gibson. Further, Jameson has linked this propensity for representing the contemporary world in terms of networks, whether social, technological, or both, with the rise of the conspiratorial narrative. Such narratives, he believes, correspond to an attempt to "think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system" (*Postmodernism*

38). That is, the sheer complexity of the networks and systems that surround us forces the author to hide them under the narrative skin, while at the same time hinting occasionally at their presence. Indeed, there are traces in *Neuromancer* of that paranoia characteristic of the broader landscape of postmodern literature, in which the surface of reality is permeated with the subtle ripples of something seething underneath. The physical infrastructure of communication networks traces the streets and buildings of Gibson's urban landscape, providing a constant reminder of the unseen eyes that may be following our protagonist's every move.<sup>5</sup> What should be noted here is the doubling effect that technology has on the physical environment. It is this effect that links the work of Foucault, Gibson, and Jameson. The spatially compounding effect of technology is more important today than ever, when one is able to see the concrete repercussions of digital surveillance in, for instance, targeted drone strikes. The daily life of an individual is reproduced in data and displayed in real-time on a screen thousands of miles away, giving the operator the ability to judge silent patterns and movements as potentially criminal, correlate various patterns within an intelligence "matrix," and to summarily execute the offensive datum. It is indeed difficult to come to terms with the reality of a situation that so closely expresses the fears of science fiction. Attempts to narrativize these global-technological situations seem, necessarily, conspiratorial.

### Spatial Divides

*Neuromancer* is at the same time an iteration of this paranoid theme and a mutation of it. The noir aesthetic of the novel immediately imbues the narrative with a kind of suspicion, giving the reader the impression that there is always someone or something to be discovered around the corner, manipulating the protagonist toward some yet unforeseen end. However, Case is a hacker by trade, someone who is already from the beginning able to "bug the buggers" or to pull the invisible strings (Jameson, *Geopolitical Aesthetic* 15). The networks of the controllers (in this case, transnational corporations) are his natural habitat. He moves through the walls of cyberspace as a ghost might, haunting the data-cores and surgically extracting what is hidden there. His problems, as it were, originate in his own flesh and in the prohibitive weaknesses of physical existence. We learn early on that his nervous system has been sabotaged as part of a deal gone awry, leaving him unable to "jack in" to the matrix: "For Case, who'd lived for the bodiless exultation of cyberspace, it was the Fall. In the bars he'd frequented as a cowboy hotshot, the elite stance involved a certain relaxed contempt for the flesh. The body was meat. Case fell into the prison of his own flesh" (Gibson 6). His initial impetus for participating in the book's criminal conspiracy is a promise to reverse the damage, allowing him to swim free once more in the ocean of cyberspace and returning him to that "relaxed contempt" for flesh. When he sees a sign for the orbital paradise called Freeside, his disdain for physical being becomes apparent:

He walked through the crowd and stood beneath it, studying the thing. WHY WAIT? pulsed the sign. A blunt white spindle,

flanged and studded with grids and radiators, docks, domes. He'd seen the ad, or others like it, thousands of times. It had never appealed to him. With his deck he could reach the Freeside banks as easily as he could reach Atlanta. *Travel was a meat thing.* (Gibson 77, emphasis added)

This stance places Case in opposition to the quasi-antagonists, the Tessier-Ashpool clan, the creators of Freeside, who are concerned primarily with the perpetuation of their flesh through physical isolation, cryogenics, and repetitive cloning. Unlike Case, the Tessier-Ashpools see technology as a mere toy, while a physical withdrawal from humanity represents their path to liberation.

Much of the spatial focus of Gibson's first novel (and that of the analyses surrounding it) centers on "the matrix" or "cyberspace." After coining the term in 1981, Gibson's description of "cyberspace," a virtual datascape accessible via the ubiquitous personal computers in his near-future world, influenced the very innovators of the networks that we today, without hesitation, call cyberspace, and thus became a lightning rod for critics reading his work. The virtual freedom of the unbounded space of the networked computer, this bright movement of light, is counterpoised by the countless physical, social, and economic barriers that Gibson's characters encounter. Each physical space is mirrored in and by an "unreal" or virtual data-space, and vice-versa, allowing characters to inhabit the same concrete space, or even each other's perceptions, and lending a kind of breakneck speed to the narrative movement as the reader is transported from city to city and, simultaneously, from the global "matrix" to singular "simstim."<sup>6</sup> The mutually reinforcing effects of these elements form a play of spaces, a fugue-like repetition of theme that slowly re-forms both real and virtual emplacements.

The physical spaces of *Neuromancer* are characterized by a particularly saturated kind of urban space, typified by the extended cityscape called BAMA, or the Boston-Atlanta Metro Area, an area Gibson's characters refer to as "the Sprawl." This urban environment presents a series of juxtapositions: self-sufficient, corporate spires and street-level criminal speakeasies; photocopied luxury hotels and ad hoc slum villages. The side-by-side positioning of disparate social entities can be seen as a mark of the postmodern aesthetic. In fact, we see the same high-culture/low-culture dynamic at work even as the narrative moves into outer space. Gibson juxtaposes a hodge-podge cluster of orbital detritus housing religious refugees and a perfected ellipsoid space station containing a bucolic land of lakes and pleasure clubs. There is a constant shifting or oscillation between spaces of luxury, security, and access, and spaces of deterioration, decay, and violence.

Gibson's protagonist, Case, is imbued with a Manichean disdain for the body as mere meat. He is chained to the urban landscape while his mind is free to fly through the glittering, neon hallucination of cyberspace.<sup>7</sup> This duality is again projected onto the urban spaces and demographics of the novel, in which the *hoi polloi* of the streets are trapped in self-destructive patterns of hedonistic excess and razor's edge dealing, while the elite fly from city to city and even into orbit, becoming virtually immortal as they attempt to keep pace with techno-medical

progress. Jameson points out that there is an obsession with this latter life-form (the late-capitalist elite) in cyberpunk, an obsession that is manifested in the narrative action of the protagonist who is extracted from his natural, street-level habitat and thrown into a world of jets and limousines (*Postmodernism* 321). Freedom of physical movement is afforded by social status, which is in turn indistinguishable from the characters' bank accounts. No longer does the rebel move into and out of enemy territory through his own cunning; instead, he buys his way into each successive territory.

Again, the novel's physical spaces are doubled in their visual representation as data in the matrix. In fact, Gibson's first description of the Sprawl, a physical space, is visualized as data:

Program a map to display frequency of data exchange, every thousand megabytes a single pixel on a very large screen. Manhattan and Atlanta burn solid white. Then they start to pulse, the rate of traffic threatening to overload your simulation. Your map is about to go nova. Cool it down. Up your scale. Each pixel a million megabytes. At a hundred million megabytes per second, you begin to make out certain blocks in midtown Manhattan, outlines of hundred-year-old industrial parks ringing the old core of Atlanta ... (43, ellipsis in original)

This passage reminds the reader that Gibson's cyberspace is not only a self-enclosed "other" space, but also stands as a graphical representation of the "real" world (or of urban space). That is, it emphasizes the fact that data travels physically between points on a grid, that the city itself is organized in a way as to maximize the flow of data (whether it be digital or corporeal), thus underscoring Foucault's analysis of the current mode of conceptualizing space: the paradigm of "emplacement," which will be discussed in more detail below. The data-scape of the matrix is shaped by, as well as shapes, the cityscape of the Sprawl. The two are superimposed onto one another.

### Reading "Different Spaces"

The infinitely networked spaces, both virtual and real, of Gibson's near-future world offer a literary example of what Foucault calls the spatial paradigm of "emplacement." In many ways, emplacement is the structuring concept of "Different Spaces," almost a condition of possibility for the existence of heterotopia; but, in order to reach that concept, we must first understand Foucault's terse narrativization of the paradigm shifts in (Western) spatial history. Space in the Middle Ages, he says, was conceived of as a "hierarchized ensemble of places":

sacred places and profane places, protected places and ... places that were open and defenseless, urban places and country places... It was this whole hierarchy, this opposition, this inter-

connection of places that constituted what might be called, very roughly, medieval space—a space of localization. (“Different Spaces” 176)

With the Renaissance, and particularly with Galileo, there is an opening out of localized space. The place of a body becomes conceptualized as a point in the arc of its motion—and, more importantly, a point that exists in *infinite space*. With this unfolding, Foucault says, the spatial paradigm of extension supplants that of localization. Today, however, *emplacement* is the dominant spatial paradigm: “Emplacement is defined by the relations of proximity between points or elements. In formal terms these can be described as series, trees, lattices” (“Different Spaces” 176). In other words, emplacement (as a paradigm) refers to the organization of *networked* spatial relationships in an infinitely extended space. It relies on the set of relations between discreet elements in space. It is diagrammatic in nature, mapping the non-spatial relationships (of power) between points in spatial terms; hence Foucault’s description of “series, trees, lattices.” Further, it is driven by (both physical and social) technology: it is a time in which once-disparate points are suddenly brought face to face (think here of the effects of the railroad, of electricity, telephones, and eventually of the internet); positioned in a grid (both physically, in terms of urban/technological ordering, and socially, in terms of various forms of segregation); and measured in distance, though only for the purpose of determining place—that is, space is measured in this way in order to ensure that discrete places are settled into their proper order. As Foucault writes,

We are in an era of the simultaneous, of juxtaposition, of the near and the far, of the side-by-side, of the scattered. ... More concretely still, for people the problem of place or emplacement is posed in terms of demography; ... the problem of knowing what relation of proximity, what type of storage, of circulation, of identification, of classification of human elements are to be preferentially retained in this or that situation to obtain this or that result. We are in an age when space is presented to us in the form of relations of emplacement. (“Different Spaces” 175-77)

Relating this back to what was said earlier, Gibson’s physical/virtual mirrorings are essentially forecasted by Foucault in this theoretization of networked space. Foucault likens the spatial arrangements and orderings that occur in “emplacement” to the necessity of efficient data storage in a computer.<sup>8</sup> Space in our era, Foucault contends, has become a matter of classification, order, and juxtaposition. Spaces are serialized in order to ease identification, inspection, regulation, and connection. How are differing groups classified and how can their corollary spaces be ordered in such a way as to perpetuate the functioning of “normal” space (in this case, the global space of late-capitalism)? In *Neuromancer*, the constant side-by-side comparisons, quick cuts from “real” to “virtual” space, offer the reader a structural example in narrative form of the constant lateral movement between



corollary spaces that Foucault is here speaking of. Within the matrix, the data associated with physical spaces are sequentially arranged and immediately accessible. In surveying them one would see the regimented lines of rank and file related by Foucault to military order. With simple gestures Case is able to move in and through these clusters of data, and with the flip of a switch, he moves instantaneously from the unencumbered space of the matrix to the claustrophobia of inhabiting the Molly's subject-position; again, from Molly to the "reality" of his own body in a hotel room hundreds of miles away. One could argue that Foucault's analogy, that space today is arranged like data in a computer, has crossed a boundary—that the analogical relationship has become a real one, that space is data in a computer.

Of all the emplacements that one may move through (the home, the train station, etc.), Foucault expresses particular interest in a peculiar kind of emplacement or group of emplacements which have the property of being "connected to all the other emplacements, but in such a way that they suspend, neutralize, or reverse the set of relations that are designated, reflected, or represented by them" ("Different Spaces" 178). Here he names two types of these spaces: utopia and heterotopia. The former are *unreal* spaces, through which a society may see itself, like a mirror that perfects the viewer's image or one which reverses the set of real relations that constitute it. The latter, however, are not only real, but are culturally ubiquitous. They are "sorts of actually realized utopias in which the real emplacements, all the other real emplacements that can be found within the culture are, at the same time, represented, contested, and reversed, sorts of places that are outside all places, although they are actually localizable" ("Different Spaces" 178).

Foucault enigmatically describes heterotopias as kinds of actually realized utopias that reflect all the other "real" emplacements while standing outside of them. How is something as fundamentally unreal as utopia connected to all other emplacements (including heterotopias)? Foucault uses the metaphor of the mirror to explain: the mirror is a site of mixed or "intermediate experience" between the utopia and the heterotopia. It is a "placeless place" in which "I see myself where I am not, in an unreal space that opens up virtually behind the surface"; "a kind of shadow that gives me my own visibility, that enables me to look at myself there where I am absent—a mirror utopia." He continues:

The mirror functions as a heterotopia in the sense that it makes this place I occupy at the moment I look at myself in the glass both utterly real, connected with the entire space surrounding it, and utterly unreal—since, to be perceived, it is obliged to go by way of that virtual point which is over there. ("Different Spaces" 179)

In such a way, heterotopias function as mirrors to our emplacements, reflecting the set of real relations that constitute those emplacements, though first reversing the image and forcing us to look "beyond the glass" as it were. We are forced to look beyond the actual heterotopia, to the virtual point, the utopia, in which the image

forms and has its being. To look at the heterotopia is to look through it at the utopian image that structures it.

This virtual/real pairing, the relation between utopia and heterotopia, is expressed in Gibson's portrayal of the Tessier-Ashpool clan and their orbital dwelling: The Villa Straylight. The Villa Straylight is a sealed and distorted simulation of an old European mansion, without the prohibitive effects of gravity. Doreen Hartmann, echoing Foucault, has called it "the heterotopia par excellence" (287). Indeed, it seems to express every one of the so-called "principles" listed in "Different Spaces": it is a deviant space, the Tessier-Ashpools being something other or just beyond the human norm; it is a timeless space, replete with curios and artifacts, existing as a living museum and a kind of cemetery for Western Europe. It is a space of the juxtaposition of several "real" emplacements: that is, it attempts a kind of perfection by representing and re-organizing emplacements that exist separately elsewhere. It is a space that aspires to be outside of time, containing the means through cryogenics and cloning for the clan's progenitors to extend their lives indefinitely; it is a space that "presuppose[s] a system of opening and closing [which] isolates [it] and makes [it] penetrable at the same time" (Foucault, "Different Spaces" 183).

The final "principle" Foucault sets out for heterotopias frames them as either spaces of illusion or of compensation. The Villa Straylight seems to exist at both poles of this axis. It is illusory in its pretension to disconnected space, i.e. in its denial of the outside world; however, it is also compensatory in its aspiration to perfection.<sup>9</sup> Yet, I would argue that this treatment, even while it uses the principles listed in the original lecture, admits to a kind of theoretical instrumentality that actually obscures the intricacy of Foucault's thought.

### Reading Around "Heterotopia"

The primary way "heterotopia" is used in the critical literature surrounding *Neuromancer*, as well as its general usage in spatial analysis, is to designate a space of deviance and sometimes liberatory, intentional and, thus, empowering difference. Yet, this usage seems to clash with Foucault's broader project of analyzing spaces in terms of the relations of power and social technologies that constitute them. It would be beneficial to revisit the lecture and Foucault's writing around it, in order to gain a better understanding of how these terms (heterotopia/utopia) function within his broader theory.

First, let us take an earlier example of Foucault's use of the terms. *The Order of Things* (originally published in 1966) was written before the famous lecture on heterotopia (1967) and already one may see the terms utopia and heterotopia not only connected, but also designating fundamentally opposing movements.

*Utopias* afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical. *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably

because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy “syntax” in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to “hold together.” This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*; heterotopias (such as those to be found so often in Borges) desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences. (xviii)

Here Foucault is deliberately intertwining space and language. Once again, he speaks of utopia in terms of a fundamental undergirding: “utopias afford consolation,” they allow us to group together disparate things under untroubled words (in essence, languages themselves are utopian, they move and develop unrestrictedly in a space that is unreal). Further, they exist as a “fundamental dimension of the *fabula*,” that is, they are imbricated in *narrative* formations. Heterotopias are “disturbing” precisely because they display utopian formations in real space and, therefore, demonstrate the paucity, the incoherence, the discontinuity of *language brought down to earth*. They “undermine language” by demonstrating how ineffective it is when placed up against bodies and a life, that is, when made immanent. If utopia is a non-place because of its impossibility, the heterotopia designates the faltering of the utopian diagram when placed next to that which it supposedly represents.

From here, Foucault is able to analyze certain techniques of forcing the utopian story onto bodies in space. The language of the original lecture, specifically of the description of emplacement as a spatial paradigm, is brought back and used to help explain the function of spatial and temporal distributions effected by the *disciplinary* regime or technology. In Part Three, Section One of *Discipline and Punish*, one can begin to see the ways in which “emplacement” was re-incorporated by Foucault to serve as scaffolding for his new understanding of modern space. The principles of heterotopia set forth in “Different Spaces” become “techniques” employed to achieve a specific “distribution of individuals in space”:

1. Discipline sometimes requires *enclosure*, the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself. ...
2. But the principle of “enclosure” is neither constant, nor indispensable, nor sufficient in disciplinary machinery. This machinery works space in a much more flexible and detailed way. It does this first of all on the principle of elementary location or *partitioning*. ... Its aim was to establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to

supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits. ... *Discipline organizes an analytical space.* ... 4. *In discipline, the elements are interchangeable, since each is defined by the place it occupies in a series, and by the gap that separates it from the others. The unit is, therefore, neither the territory (unit of domination), nor the place (unit of residence), but the rank: the place one occupies in a classification, the point at which a line and a column intersect, the interval in a series of intervals that one may traverse one after the other.* Discipline is an art of rank, a technique for the transformation of arrangements. *It individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations.* (141-146, third, fourth, and fifth emphases added)

From here, as if this were a detailed expansion of the original lecture, Foucault proceeds to describe how *time* is structured differently under this regime. “Heterochronia,” the concept of existing in a different time, is thus made real in the new structuring of movement and activity, an efficiency of gesture, and a channeling of communication that is effected by discipline. The possibilities that seemed to flow from the original lecture are foreclosed by Foucault’s description of *actual* spatial arrangement under modern disciplinary technology.<sup>10</sup> “Of Other Spaces,” in essence, is the form of this theory drained of disciplinary content or, rather, not yet invested with it: a “pure” contemplation on space construction (given, as it was, to a group of architects). Instead of a particular regime, we are given the empty category of utopia. If this lecture has been used repeatedly in theoretical discussions it is most definitely because of this deliberate openness, the unusual and extraordinary exemption by Foucault of particularity. By abstracting the lecture, by giving it a theoretical force that it was never meant to possess, literary and cultural theorists have, in essence, created a catchall term for describing any “deviant” or “other” space. But the reality of even these “free deviant” spaces, like the doubled reality of Gibson’s world, conceals the purpose working underneath them, which determines their position in the network of emplacements so as to ensure the proper functioning of each other emplacement.

If, as Foucault says, the ship is the heterotopia par excellence, it is because of its inhabitants—the passengers, the sailors, the captain—apart from which the ship hardly constitutes a space at all. In fact, the ship, standing as it does for lines of flight and constant movement, is a heterotopia only by virtue of an unfolding. The ship’s inhabitants are made to escape the orders of land; their utopia is always just past the horizon. Such a deferred vision, then, creates an unstable and amorphous image: like the messianic community, the shipmates are divested of particular content, rather than invested by it (as in the case of the prisoner, worker, etc.). The Villa Straylight is not the heterotopia par excellence because its utopic vision is forcefully instantiated upon its inhabitants and, thus, implodes under its own weight. Foucault’s shipmates never

find their harbor; the utopian narrative is never done being told, extending the possibility of its manifestation indefinitely.

This leads me to the meta-theoretical push of this paper: how and why should we use the concept of heterotopia to theorize space and spatial relations? Is it sufficient or productive to simply deem something a heterotopia? Why has the broader usage of the term (in many cases, outside of academic criticism) taken on a positive tone, and does that not contradict Foucault's entire theoretical trajectory? There are three commonly held characteristics of heterotopias that I would like to challenge: 1) they are *necessarily* deviant spaces; 2) they are inherently liberatory or offer a space free of societal norms; 3) they are disconnected from the established network of emplacements, i.e. they do not operate as a functional node in the network, but stand outside of it.

Heterotopias are created when forces act upon bodies, distributing them spatially in a way that mirrors the utopian foundation, i.e. the structuring fantasy that precipitates such a distribution. There can be no heterotopia *as such* (at least in the Foucauldian sense). It can only exist as the face of a coin whose reverse is the content found therein, just as prisoners exist only within prisons and with all of the correlative networks of power and mechanisms of normalization undergirding the penal system (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 306). The parochial nature of Foucault's lecture on heterotopic space is an exercise in applying the art of one's theory to an object, in this case spatial construction *qua* architecture. That is to say, "Different Spaces" focuses on *the creation of space as such*. Yet to understand what heterotopia might be in the larger context of Foucault's thought, it must be recontextualized, and not simply used as a flat descriptive term. Divorced from the more extensive movement of Foucault's body of work, "heterotopia" names only just that—"other space," which can be claimed to describe almost any space. However, viewed as a part of the broader analysis of, say, disciplinary society, the heterotopic construction can be seen in relation to the multiplicities it acts upon (the workshop with its workers; the asylum with its patients; the school with its students; etc.). In this sense, a given "heterotopic" space is analyzable in terms of action and movement. For example, the prison cell stands as the culmination of the process that creates prisoners. Society must build prisons in order to house prisoners. The simplicity of this statement is deceptive, but it should be clear that the concept of the prisoner (what Foucault analyzed as the criminal) as a person or body that must be kept separate from the rest, an imposed heterogeneity, forms the condition of possibility for the "heterotopic space" called a prison. Likewise, the body of the psychiatric patient is placed into a definite relation with "normal" space, forming the conditions of possibility for the psychiatric ward. In a different way, the student and the worker generate heterotopic space by enacting the bifurcation of domestic and "public" spaces and the relations of power that exist therein. The liberatory connotations of "heterotopia" are thus meaningless without an analysis of practice, because certain practices may generate *oppressive* heterotopias.

Heterotopia, precisely because it denotes a "place" or definite space that is heterogeneous with respect to continuous, homogenous—and for this very reason—*normal* space, will always *connote* "deviance." Perhaps this can be better under-

stood by shifting the frame of inquiry slightly towards the psychological or psychoanalytical mode. Heterogeneous spaces, because of their discontinuity, their often closed or occluded dimensions, and their relation to human activity, will be associated immediately with deviance, especially *sexual* deviance. Foucault's own early examples—gardens, movie theaters, ships—all carry certain undertones, hints of infidelity, arousal, and homosexuality. In essence, it is the hiddenness of these spaces, the very effect of their being separate, that evokes a double action of fantasy and transference. First, fantasy by providing a blank screen upon which to project desire and, second, in transference “abnormal” or “deviant” desires are shifted into these hidden spaces and imputed onto those who inhabit them. Returning to Foucault, it is not important that these spaces be considered “deviant,” per se, but that we ask why and how such spaces are constituted in the first place. That is, why is force applied to bodies in order to form a new distribution of places?

By designating a given population one may begin to see its correlative “heterotopia.” For example, the Tessier-Ashpool clan, Gibson's apotheosis of transnational corporate elite, forms a couplet with the space created by and for them: the Villa Straylight. The Villa Straylight is heterotopic in the sense that it forms the visible sign of the clan's “articulable” utopic vision:

“The Villa Straylight,” said a jeweled thing on the pedestal, in a voice like music, “is a body grown in upon itself, a Gothic folly. Each space in Straylight is in some way secret, this endless series of chambers linked by passages, by stairwells vaulted like intestines, where the eye is trapped in narrow curves, carried past ornate screens, empty alcoves. ... By the standards of the archipelago,” the head continued, “ours is an old family, the convolutions of our home reflecting that age. *But reflecting something else as well. The semiotics of the Villa bespeak a turning in, a denial of the bright void beyond the hull.* Tessier and Ashpool climbed the well of gravity to discover that they loathed space. ... *We have sealed ourselves away behind our money, growing inward, generating a seamless universe of self.*” (Gibson 172-73, emphases added)

Lady 3Jane is here expressing the logic of human overcoming (a fairly common SF trope), touted in the real world by “transhumanists,” that characterizes the becoming-nature of humanity's next evolutionary stage.<sup>11</sup> The particularly cyberpunk iteration of this trope sees the potential for such an overcoming in the power afforded to the wealthy. The obsession with the over-class of corporate elites comes into focus with the image of the inseparable combination Villa Straylight/Tessier-Ashpool: by forcing a virtual discontinuity with normal space (building an orbital mansion) and by binding themselves to their architectural creation, human evolution becomes a spatial-economic operation. By denying the real space of the outside, the space that slowly deteriorates our bodies, and by fusing with the inward-facing construction of the dwelling, the clan attempts to create a utopia of extended self. Yet, it is precisely

the *semiotics* of the dwelling that “bespeak a turning in ... generating a seamless universe of the self”; in other words, it is the *language* of the Villa Straylight that would make of it a utopia, echoing Foucault’s description of the “fabular” nature of utopia, the consolatory nature of utopian language. It is the narrative behind such a structure as the Villa Straylight that points towards its utopian foundation. However, the actually existing arrangement (which proves to be far from seamless) is intensely unsettling because it demonstrates the corruption of bodies that occurs when a utopic image is forcibly laid down in space.

The heterotopia exists at/as this intersection of forces, bodies, and spatial arrangements. Spaces (or emplacements) exist as a network of relations, which precludes any one space from being an island of liberation in a sea of control. Simply designating a site as “heterotopic” is meaningless without the corresponding analyses that make the term possible in the first place. David Harvey demonstrates the failings of such a generalized theory of heterotopia by taking Foucault’s characterization of the ship (as “heterotopia par excellence”) and applying it to the cruise ship:

Ultimately, the whole essay on heterotopia reduces itself to the theme of escape. “The ship is the heterotopia par excellence,” wrote Foucault. “In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure and police take the place of pirates.” I keep expecting these words to appear on commercials for a Caribbean cruise. But here the banality of the idea of heterotopia becomes all too plain because the commercialised cruise ship is indeed a heterotopic site if ever there was one; and what is the critical, liberatory and emancipatory point of that? (538)

This passage points to the theoretical deficiency of the original lecture, both for later thinkers and *even for Foucault himself*. Relating this point back to Gibson, it would be easy, given the frame of the lecture, to designate “the spindle,” Freeside, the orbital gaming/sex resort to which the clan’s Villa is attached, as a “heterotopia.” Yet, just as Harvey points out, if it is sheer escape that characterizes the heterotopic space, what is the liberatory point? Foucault gestures to this problem in an interview with Paul Rabinow for the architectural magazine *Skyline*: “I do not think that it is possible to say that one thing is of the order of ‘liberation’ and another is of the order of ‘oppression.’ ... I do not think that there is anything that is functionally—by its very nature—absolutely liberating. Liberty is a *practice*” (*Power* 354).<sup>12</sup> If Freeside is to be designated as a heterotopia, then one must attempt to describe its utopic aspiration, the composition of its population, the shape it presses upon them, and the “diagram,” in Foucauldian/Deleuzian terms (Deleuze, *Foucault* 34-35), that lays down the conditions of possibility to create such a space. Heterotopia, as a concept, is innately tied to objects, things, bodies—in short, populations—and the actions upon them that attempt to bring them into the utopian arrangements designated by language and mapped in the diagram.

By terming certain spaces “heterotopias” (full stop), literary critics, along with many others, miss the larger point: heterotopias exist only as a function of the larger network of emplacements. “Heterotopia” as a concept has much more analytical depth and rhetorical force when understood with reference to Foucault’s broader methodology. It functions in naming a space only when that space is implicated in the wider theoretical context (including, for instance, a historiographical account of formation, a sociopolitical account of power relations, a cultural account of production, etc.), which in Foucault’s short excursus takes the form of an analysis of utopian space. There is no heterotopic space that does not have a corresponding utopic vision and, far from being merely “imaginary,” utopias give form to the content of heterotopias. They are the effective “shape” of a given space. This misuse is significant because it overlooks a fundamental characteristic of heterotopias: they are always incomplete; narratively incoherent; sites of linguistic, classificatory, and even physical violence. The real question of heterotopia is how to conceive of the bodies contained within it, the utopic narrative or vision that marks them, and the network of emplacements of which they are a function.

### **Total Space**

Jameson’s concept of “total space” is theoretically parallel to that of heterotopia and could possibly help in rectifying some of the misuses of Foucault’s term. It describes spaces that attempt to escape the imposed order of society and close themselves off from the decomposition inherent to life in real (heterogeneous) space. Like Foucault and Gibson, Jameson grounds his theory of disconnected space (particularly in architecture) in the desire for escape and, ultimately, in utopia. The above pairing of *Freeside/Villa Straylight* works well to describe Jameson’s “total space,” as the pairing is an attempt to possess within it and to reform all of the relations of space and bodies necessary for a new (utopian) society. Unlike previous forms, the total space’s utopian project is completely singular, stemming from its self-imposed discontinuity with connected or networked space. The ultimate goal of the Tessier-Ashpool clan is to break away from humanity, to shape themselves in isolation into a posthuman organism that can function indefinitely, siphoning off the material wealth (the life-blood of Gibson’s ultra-neoliberal world) of vacationers, gamblers, and investors.

Lady 3Jane’s essay on the *Villa Straylight* describes the orbital resort “town” of *Freeside* as having to “conceal the fact that the interior of the spindle is arranged with the banal precision of furniture in a hotel room” (Gibson 172). Gibson again produces a spatially binary relationship, this time between the inward-spiraling, “intestinal” catacombs of *Straylight* and the meticulously arranged and shiny-new hotel-space of *Freeside*. An organism attached to a mechanism. No longer required to be connected to the network of emplacements that once sustained them, they are able to live parasitically on the energy created by the global movements below. By burrowing deeper and deeper into their self-imposed exile, they hope once and for all to break ties with the imperfection of the real world. In doing so, they manage to create their own unsettling, flawed, and disastrous heterotopia.<sup>13</sup>



In sketching “an analysis of a full-blown postmodern building,” Jameson consciously passes over the works of self-proclaimed proponents of “post-modern architecture” such as Michael Graves or Robert Venturi, self-identified semioticians<sup>14</sup> of the dwelling (*Postmodernism* 38). Instead, he turns his critical gaze toward the hotels of John Portman, and specifically the Westin Bonaventure in Los Angeles. The Bonaventure hotel “aspires to being a total space, a complete world, a kind of miniature city” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 40). Like Freeside, which contains its own world of hotels, brothels, casinos, restaurants, recreational zones, and even a false ecosystem, the Bonaventure juxtaposes a virtual world of emplacements: shops, restaurants, gyms and recreational facilities. The Bonaventure could easily fit into the sequence of nearly indistinguishable hotels that the protagonists of *Neuromancer*, as well as of Gibson’s other novels, inhabit as they soar around the world. Freeside only seems to extend this sequence, which itself admits to Jameson’s analysis of cyberpunk as a genre that possesses a perverse affinity for expressing the postmodern fascination with the limitless lives of the corporate elite. Freeside’s existence in the vacuum of space, as well as Straylight’s lack of discernible entranceway, resonates with Jameson’s description of the late-capitalist hotel, as he argues that “ideally the minicity of Portman’s Bonaventure ought not to have entrances at all, since the entryway is always the seam that links the building to the rest of the city that surrounds it: for it does not wish to be a part of the city but rather its equivalent and replacement or substitute” (*Postmodernism* 40). Unlike the great modern projects of Corbusier and the International Style’s universal pretensions, the Bonaventure has no aspiration to transform the city around it; rather, it is “content to ‘let the fallen city fabric continue to be in its being’ (to parody Heidegger)” (Jameson, *Postmodernism* 41). Jameson continues, “This diagnosis is confirmed by the great reflective glass skin of the Bonaventure ... [T]he glass skin achieves a peculiar and placeless dissociation of the Bonaventure from its neighborhood: it is not even an exterior, inasmuch as when you seek to look at the hotel’s outer walls you cannot see the hotel itself but only the distorted images of everything that surrounds it” (42). Given this conceit, we may add that the hotel, insofar as it embodies aspirations of total space, attempts to reject the diagram of forces that would shape its population by creating a “disconnected network” of its own. It attempts, in other words, to cut all connections with the city fabric while establishing *within itself* a new and better form of all of these same connections. Those inside the entryless structure are able to look out, while those attempting to look in would only see the vague and deformed reflections of their own existences.

This image of the spatial mirror draws our attention back to Foucault’s account of the mirror as metaphor for the relationship between utopia and heterotopia, and finally his rejection of the possibility of any such disconnected or “total” spaces:

The space in which we are living, by which we are drawn outside ourselves, in which, as a matter of fact, the erosion of our life, our time, and our history takes place, this space that eats and scrapes away at us, is also *heterogeneous space in itself*. In other words, we do not live in a kind of void, within which individuals and

things might be located. We do not live in a void that would be tinged with shimmering colors, we live inside an ensemble of relations that define emplacements that are irreducible to each other and absolutely nonsuperposable. (“Different Spaces” 177-78, emphasis added)

Aspirations to total or disconnected utopic space are ultimately attempts to escape the inescapable. Portman’s *Bonaventure* succeeds only in reproducing, in a spatially intensive way, the diagram of the culture that produces it and thus fails to achieve anything like utopia, forming instead a *heterotopia*. Similarly, Case and his reverse image, the Tessier-Ashpools, both have utopian agendas that are destined to falter and can only be reflected in heterotopic space. For Case, his desire to escape flesh is manifest in his retreat to cyberspace, which is an image of the void “tinged with shimmering colors,” an essentially *unreal* image of homogeneous space, through which one moves unabated and without obstacle. For the Tessier-Ashpools, the creation of the Villa Straylight, with its cryogenic sleep chambers, its cloning facilities, its complete break from the order of emplacement that is defined by this ensemble of relations through its existence in a real void (outer space)—this is all an attempt to escape the “erosion of life” and history. However, Case’s desire to “fix” his body so that he might float freely once more in cyberspace, coupled with the T-A clan’s desire to become immortal through repetitive cloning, belies a desire to escape heterogeneous space altogether (the “space that eats and scrapes away at us”) and create a space that is free of this degeneration and limitation. The utopian vision (of just such a space) can only serve to reflect the flawed and decomposing fabric of *real* space.

The creation of new heterotopic spaces is happening all the time: from online universities to rehabilitation centers, ever increasing prison populations to mega-churches, massively multiplayer video games to video game work-camps. To theorize these arrangements in purely spatial terms is to reduce the subjectivizing narratives imposed on bodies to a function of their environs, instead of a function of power relations. The interesting thing about heterotopias is not their “freedoms,” some idealized form of deviance, but the way in which they actually perpetuate “normal” space by distracting us from its constant deterioration. Literature like *Neuromancer* is important in our theorizing because it reminds us that new spaces, both real and virtual, are created through narrative, and that such narration is a *practice*. How can we avoid reductive analyses of space as subjective experience (the types of analyses that Foucault avoided under the heading “phenomenology”) and, instead, emphasize the subject-forming function of spaces? Finally, how can we begin to theorize liberatory *practices* in a productive way even as critical discourse turns more and more toward space as its theoretical polestar?

### Wesley Dalton

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This lecture has been given various titles: “Of Other Spaces,” “Heterotopias,” “Different Spaces,” etc. I am here working with the Robert Hurley translation, which uses the latter of these titles: “Different Spaces.”

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent (and more recent) bibliography regarding previous debates among critics of *Neuromancer*, see Benjamin Fair.

<sup>3</sup> This short-lived, yet explosive subgenre lasted less than a decade. Some critics even place its relevant lifespan at as short as four years (from the publication of *Neuromancer* in 1984 to the publication of *Mona Lisa Overdrive* in 1988). See, for example Neil Easterbrook, 378, and for a later assessment of cyberpunk’s decline, Ross Farnell, 459-60.

<sup>4</sup> For an interesting introduction to the conversation surrounding “postmodern science fiction,” see John R. R. Christie.

<sup>5</sup> Jameson has pointed to such a trend in works such as *Three Days of the Condor* (*Geopolitical Aesthetic* 9-15) or, more recently, in *The Matrix*, in which the real world of the protagonist is doubled in the networks of communication that physically trace the environments through which he moves. The conspiracy thriller is an invitation to peek under the noisy surface of the world at the serene sanctum of the *real* controllers of society (*Signatures* 300-303).

<sup>6</sup> Simstim, short for “simulated stimulation,” is a fictional technology that serves as a dominant medium in Gibson’s future world. It allows the wearer to enter the sensorium of whoever has or is presently recording, thus virtually inhabiting that person’s body.

<sup>7</sup> Istvan Csicsery-Ronay relates this position to a kind of romanticism inherent in Gibson’s work.

<sup>8</sup> Foucault’s prescience is here demonstrated in linking the data traveling through a computer to “discrete elements” (in this case cars) traveling through physical channels: “Further, we are aware of the importance of problems of emplacement in contemporary engineering: the storage of information or of the partial results of a calculation in the memory of a machine, the circulation of discrete elements, with a random output (such as, quite simply, automobiles or in fact the tones on a telephone line), the identification of tagged or coded elements in an ensemble that is either distributed haphazardly or sorted in a univocal classification, or sorted according to a plurivocal classification, and so on” (“Different Spaces” 176). This was an especially important issue in 1967; when data was stored on magnetic reels it was of the utmost importance to store it in a way that best lent itself to efficient retrieval.

<sup>9</sup> Along with Hartmann, Ross Farnell and Christopher Palmer also pick up on this thread. For a similar use in legal studies, see Julie E. Cohen.

<sup>10</sup> David Harvey also notes this shift in passing: “The presumption is that power/knowledge is or can be dispersed into spaces of difference. This idea is

tacitly reneged upon in *Discipline and Punish* and given an entirely different reading in his 1978 interview on “Space, Knowledge, and Power” (538).

<sup>11</sup> This connection is brought into especially sharp contrast when read through Case’s foreshadowing memory of the wasps’ nest and its destruction (Gibson 126-27). The Villa Straylight *is* this wasps’ nest: an organic unity of will, flesh, and concrete. It is beyond human.

<sup>12</sup> The extension of this quotation is significant to the conversation: “So there may, in fact, always be a certain number of projects whose aim is to modify some constraints, to loosen, or even break them, but none of these projects can, simply by its nature, assure that people will have liberty automatically, that it will be established by the project itself” (Foucault, *Power* 354). This short interview also has a revealing aside by Foucault that points to the theoretical insignificance of the lecture in question: “Yes. Space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power. To make a parenthetical remark, I recall having been invited, in 1966, by a group of architects to do a study of space, of something that I called at that time ‘heterotopias,’ those singular spaces whose functions are different or even the opposite of others. The architects worked on this, and at the end of the study someone spoke up—a Sartrean psychologist—who fire-bombed me, saying that space is reactionary and capitalist, but history and becoming are revolutionary. This absurd discourse was not at all unusual at the time. Today, everyone would be convulsed with laughter at such a pronouncement, but not then” (361).

<sup>13</sup> The Tessier-Ashpools’ movement inward is contrasted by Case’s gradual expansion outward into cyberspace and in his hallucinatory “run” (his final move to hack the T-A data cores), in which he sees himself finally dissolved, if only for an instant, in the infinite digital space of the matrix. Yet, his utopian escape (the freedom of the matrix) is constantly withheld in a much more banal way: the physical needs of his body remind him of the “virtuality” of his life in cyberspace.

<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting here that Lady 3Jane’s essay describing the architecture of Straylight is written for a “semiotics course,” instantly bringing to mind the blunt application of theoretical high-fashion to architecture that has been pointed to, for instance, in the writing of Robert Venturi (see, for instance, Venturi’s seminal work in *Learning from Las Vegas*).

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