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Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 36 (2012) 28 – 34

Procedia
Social and Behavioral Sciences

AcE-Bs 2011 Bandung

ASEAN Conference on Environment-Behaviour Studies, Savoy Homann Bidakara
Bandung Hotel, Bandung, Indonesia, 15-17 June 2011

Foucault, the Other Spaces, and Human Behaviour

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Abstract

Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was one of the major thinkers whose work offers a new approach to space and spatial thinking of our modern world. This article will explore his conceptualization of heterotopia and subsequent interpretations of it, with the ultimate purpose of examining its benefit and implication to the understandings of the complex nature of our contemporary urban spaces and their relations with human behavior.

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Keywords: Michel Foucault; the other space; heterotopia; urban space; urban behaviour

1. Of Other Space

The text entitled “Of Other Spaces” was the basis of a lecture given by Michel Foucault to a group of architectural students in 1967. Although it is not part of his official corpus of work, the manuscript was released into the public domain in 1984 for an exhibition in Berlin, shortly before his death. This text (Foucault, 1986: 22-27) has increasingly gained attention of scholars from different field related to spatial issues. With his concept of “heterotopia”, Foucault proposes ideas and new ways of thinking about space. Undoubtedly, Foucault’s theoretical oeuvre has to a certain extent impacted and informed the study of space in the contemporary world.

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Space, Foucault argues, has a history in Western culture, and it's always closely bound to our experience of time. The progression and evolution of this history has marched on to new venues in recent time. Reviewing the transforming concepts of space through history, he analyzes that the Middle Ages postulated "the space of emplacement", which consisted of "a hierarchic ensemble of places". In the seventeenth century Galileo dissolved the discrete and hierarchical spaces of the medieval era when he envisioned an infinitely open space, in which "a thing's place was no longer anything but a point in its movement". Thus, Galileo substituted the space of extension for that of localization. This set the stage for our present epoch, which Foucault argues is "one in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites", which is "defined by relations of proximity between points or elements".

Foucault posits the quality of contemporary space as divergent sites, a concept that replaces the medieval notion of the space of emplacement and the Galilean notion of the space of extension. He maintains that we now exist in "the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed", and argues that we experience the contemporary world less as "a long life developing through time", than as "a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein". He indicates that there has been a shift from a space of binary oppositions, of the open and closed, private and public, sacred and profane. Thus, the homogeneity of space, or at least the dialectical interrelation of spaces, has been eroded. In its place is a system which creates a heterogeneous landscape. Foucault's concept of the site has shifted the understanding of space from delineating its unique property to analyzing its positioning in a web of divergent spaces. Foucault argues that we are no longer living in a world of time that moves forward, but in networks of places opening onto one another, yet unable to be reduced to one another or superimposed upon each other.

2. Heterotopia

Foucault set up the concept of site to introduce a new spatial type: the Heterotopia. The term heterotopia comes from medicine, where it refers to the displacement of an organ or part of the body from its normal position. The heterotopia is etymologically linked to another more familiar term, "Utopia", which Foucault cites as a theoretical counterpart to the heterotopia. According to him, both utopias and heterotopias are external sites that "have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect". Whereas utopias are unreal, fantastic, and perfected spaces, heterotopias in Foucault's conception are real places that exist like "counter-sites", simultaneously representing, contesting, and inverting all other conventional sites. The heterotopia presents a juxtapositional, relational space, a site that represents incompatible spaces and reveals paradoxes.

Foucault uses the idea of a mirror as a metaphor for the duality and contradictions, the reality and the unreality of utopia and heterotopia. A mirror is metaphor for utopia because the image that you see in it does not exist, but it is also a heterotopia because the mirror is a real object that shapes the way we relate to our own image.

Foucault then posits six principles to establish his "*heterotopology*", a taxonomy of diverse spatial types of heterotopias, including their universality among world cultures, their transforming functions during different historical periods, their ability to juxtapose several incompatible sites in a single real place, their links to "*heterochronies*", which are "slices in time", and their system of "opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable". He systematically lists the six principles that govern the existence heterotopias as follows:

- All culture constitutes heterotopias, but there is no certain universal heterotopias norm. Foucault defines two types of heterotopias. First are the heterotopias of crisis. They are privileged or sacred or forbidden places, reserved for individuals who are, in relation to society, in a state of crisis. In

traditional societies their most widespread forms would be places for adolescents, menstruating or pregnant women, and the elderly. In modern societies a similar role would be played by honeymoon hotels, boarding schools and military service for young men, and old age homes. Foucault claims that these heterotopias of crisis are disappearing today, being rapidly replaced by the second category: the heterotopias of deviance, places like rest homes, clinics, psychiatric hospitals, and prisons. These new heterotopias represent sites for people whose actions deviate from the norms in some way (i.e. idleness), and hence need to be spatially isolated.

- Society can make heterotopias function in vastly different ways, refashioning their use over time, but their overarching functionality remains constant: heterotopias are always places where incompatible or contradictory kinds of space converge. Foucault takes cemeteries as an example.
- Heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in one real place several different spaces that are in themselves incompatible. The theater and the cinema, where a whole series of places alien to each other converge on the stage or the screen, represents a heterotopias of many spaces combined in one. Another example of these heterotopias is the oriental garden, the smallest parcel of the world that since antiquity has been designed to represent the terrestrial totality.
- Heterotopias are often linked to “slice in time”, which “for the sake of symmetry” Foucault calls *heterochronies*. This intersection and phasing of space and time allows the heterotopia “to function at full capacity” based on an ability to arrive at an “absolute break” with traditional experiences of time and temporality. In the modern world, many specialized sites exist to record these crossroads of space and time. “First of all, there are heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time”, such as museums and libraries, where “time never stops building up” in an attempt to establish a general archive, “a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages”. In opposition to these heterotopias are those more fleeting, transitory, precarious spaces of time. Noted are the festival sites, the fairgrounds, the vacations or leisure villages.
- Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing, that simultaneously makes them isolated and penetrable, different from that is usually conceived of as more freely accessible public space. These heterotopias are entered either by compulsory means, such as barracks and prisons, or their entry is based on ritual purification ceremonies or hygienic cleansing, like Moslems hammans and Scandinavian saunas.
- Finally, heterotopias have a function in relation to all spaces that remains outside them. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. The function of heterotopia of illusion is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, and the function of heterotopia of compensation is to create a real space – a space that is other. Thus, heterotopias enable us to both confront our illusions and to create new illusions of the utopias we cannot have. Foucault defines the gardens as heterotopias of illusion, and some 17th century puritan societies in America and the Jesuit villages of Paraguay as the most extreme example of heterotopias of compensation, a realized utopia, a very strict planned settlement that symbolizes the sign of Christianity and a mechanized order of communal life.

3. Heterotopic sites

Foucault’s “Of Other Spaces” does not provide a succinct and unproblematic definition of the term heterotopia. However, he did present us with various examples of heterotopic sites.

3.1. Ship

Foucault remarks that the ship is the “heterotopia *par excellence*”. The ship is ‘a piece of floating space, a placeless place’; it functions according to its own rules in the space between ports, between

cultures, between stable points. Since the sixteenth century the ship was simultaneously both the greatest instrument of economic development and the greatest reserve of imagination. Foucault observes that in “civilizations without boat, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates”.

3.2. Cemetery

Until the end of 18th century, Foucault notes, cemeteries were placed at the heart of the city in or next to the church, and were still deeply associated with sacred resurrection and the immortality of the soul. However, beginning with the early 1800s, cemeteries were banished to the outskirts in a “bourgeois appropriation” aimed at improved health, with the death becoming closely associated with illness. Moreover, as death is individualized, everyone needs his or her own space; thus the suburban cemetery becomes the city of the dead, both a space wherein everyone can eternally and individually lie and a kind of quarantine for death.

A cemetery is a heterotopia because the tombs form a sort of ideal town for the deceased, each placed and displayed according to his or her social rank. The cemetery gives the illusion to its visitor that their departed relatives still have an existence and status, symbolized by the stone of their tomb. It is a simulated utopia of life after death, but is also a representation of the real world, where blood affiliation, wealth and power play a central part.

3.3. Garden

Foucault identifies the garden as a heterotopic site, because it is real space meant to be a microcosm of different environments. Garden is the smallest parcel of the world and the same time is the idealized models of it. For examples, English garden mimics the irregularity of nature; the straight lines in French garden celebrate the mastery of man over nature; Japanese garden reflects the idea of balance in nature; Persian garden brings together disparate scenes and seasons from the sacred cosmology. Gardens are attempts to recreate an ideal, utopian nature. In doing so, they mirror the beliefs of their contemporaries. Foucault defines the gardens as heterotopias of illusion. “Their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory”.

Foucault compares the Persian garden with the carpet or rug: “the garden is a rug onto which the whole world comes to enact its symbolic perfection, and the rug is a sort of garden that can move across space”. Foucault saw the Persian rug as a “sort of mobile garden” that enabled the garden’s cosmic symbolism to be carried into rooms and houses.

3.4. Museum

Foucault mentions the museum as heterotopia of time. It brings together disparate objects from different times in a single space that attempts to enclose the totality of time – a totality that is protected from time’s erosion. The museum thus engages in a double paradox: it contains infinite time in a finite space, and it is both a space of time and a ‘timeless’ space seeking to freeze time in “period rooms” that slice time into “set pieces”. A museum is a palimpsest, a continual accumulation of time, a heterotopia “in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit”

Ethnographic museum is an example of both heterotopia of crisis and heterotopia of deviance in that they house collections of cultures and histories in an attempt to create a place outside time, and in that they attempt to describe the other – those deviating from the “western” norm.

3.5. Other Heterotopic Sites

Foucault also speaks of other heterotopias of illusion such as library that accumulates all times into one place that is outside time, holiday village that promises a temporary return to a lost ‘natural’ way of life, amusement park that offers concentration of intense experiences in a single locus, and Jesuit colony in Paraguay where the daily rhythm was strictly regulated and planned, in contrast to the chaos prevailing outside. The train is another example given, a place in which we can sit, a form which takes us between two distant points, an object which passes us as we remain stationary with one place.

Later on, Foucault (1977) chooses panopticon to symbolize the heterotopias of deviance. The panopticon was a design for a prison produced by Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century which grouped cells around a central viewing tower. The panopticon is a ubiquitous form of monitoring and disciplining human behavior, a kind of invisible fence that provides simultaneous surveillance and disciplinary power over certain groups of people, notably prisoners and students.

4. Heterotopia and the Urban Space

Foucault’s concept of heterotopia has been subjected to wide interpretation and application, and served as a touchstone for scholars from a wide range of disciplines. Scholars responded to Foucault’s text with different perspectives, including David Harvey (1989), Edward W. Soja (1996), David Grahame Shane (2005), and many others.

Foucault conceptualization of heterotopia presents a critical groundwork for developing interdisciplinary understandings of the complex nature of twenty-first century urban space. He interprets the city in such a way that we can see this fragmented realm as one of opportunities and freedoms, as one in which “otherness” becomes a real possibility. As suggested by Harvey (1989: 273), Foucault’s heterotopia offers multiple possibilities within which a spatialized “otherness” can flourish. Bart Lootsma (2008) also reads Foucault’s “Of Other Spaces” as an optimistic text. It was a liberating and perhaps a visionary text, as it suggests that a city always has room for pluriformity.

Foucault has convinced us that heterotopias exist without any doubt in a society and give way to otherness, and otherness subsequently opens a door to plurality and heterogeneity. His examples of heterotopia coalesce to produce the image of our contemporary city. Indeed, he calls for a city with many heterotopias, not only as a space with several places of/for the affirmation of difference, but also as a means of escape from authoritarianism and repression.

Now, more than forty years after Foucault’s text, city has expanded into a huge, sprawling patchwork of heterotopias. As observes by Lootsma (2008), today’s city has become a network of networks. It is not just a stable set of a limited amount of networks for traffic, infrastructures, inhabited by uniform and stable communities, but an almost unlimited set of interfering networks of many different kinds, giving birth to and inhabited by even more different lifestyles and subcultures. Each of these lifestyles and subcultures uses the urban public space in a different way and subsequently produce some modifications and alterations to the urban landscape.

David G. Shane (2005: 9, 14-15) uses theory of heterotopias to articulate how urban systems and fragments change in the contemporary cities as actors slice and recombine urban elements. He identifies Heterotopias as particular places in the cities where processes of change and hybridization are facilitated. Indeed, cities are necessarily built around a variety of patches or enclaves that are interconnected by a complex networks and crucially complicated by a wide variety of embedded heterotopias. Shane further distinguished three types of heterotopia as primary place of urban change that accommodates exceptional activities and persons in the contemporary urban settings.

The first type, the heterotopia of crisis, hides agents of change within the standard building types of the city, masking their catalytic activity. The second, heterotopia of deviance, comprises institutions that foster change in highly controlled environments. In these small pockets of highly discipline order, relationships between members of society are organizationally restructured to facilitate the emergence of a new order that may transform society. Examples include universities, clinics, hospitals, courthouses, prisons, barracks, boarding schools, colonial towns, and factories.

The third category of heterotopic change-fostering place compromised realms of apparent chaos and creative, imaginative freedom. In the heterotopia of illusion change is concentrated and accelerated. The rules governing the local system's organization can change quickly and arbitrarily. Such place includes formal and informal institutional markets, bazaars, shopping arcades, department stores, atria, malls, megamalls, stock exchanges, casinos, hotels, motels, cinemas, theaters, museums, fairgrounds, universal exhibitions, theme parks, spas, gyms, bordellos, and more. Here the primary values are pleasure and leisure, consumption and display, not work.

Shane (2005:231) cites that the form of the heterotopias itself is wildly diverse and constantly in flux. There is no single, stable appearance or guise under which heterotopias perform their complex functions.

5. Heterotopia and Human Behavior

What the human behavior studies can learn from Foucault's heterotopia? Foucault provides a crucial insight into the capacity for urban environment and architecture to influence human behavior and experience in the contemporary society, and helps us to understand the emergence of social, political, economic and cultural difference and identity in urban multicultural settings.

Despite our multicultural identity and historical diversity, our contemporary urban environment is still ordered consciously on the basis of sameness and homogeneity. Instead, we should consider our urban environment as the hybrid forms which reflects our cultural diversity, richness and identity. Perhaps, this kind of heterogeneity may find its inspirations in the excellent order of urban quarters where different ethnic groups give their own colors to their spatial arrangements (Velibeyoglu, 1999:10-11).

Urban and Architectural forms, according to Foucault, could produce "positive effects" only when the "liberating intentions of architect" coincide with "the real practice of people in the exercise of their freedom". (Foucault, 1984:246). The efficient layout of the architecture is fully dependent on the way people use urban spaces in everyday life, which is vastly different from one to another. Shane (2005:11) confirms that urban actors and designers now deal inevitably and everywhere with urban situations that are heterogonous and mixed, not simple and pure. They increasingly need new strategies and tactics to deal with these hybrid patchworks.

The complexity of the city's various autonomous systems, each with its own logic, meant that nobody could coordinate everything. The chief consequence of this revelation was that there was no longer a place for a master plan or a master planner. Given the absence of a single center of control, the old codes of single-function zoning will inevitably give place to a heterogeneous and flexible system that accommodates multiple actors more easily. There will be in the city strange juxtapositions of wealth and poverty, efficiency and waste, industry and commerce, residential life and work, pleasure and pain. Rather than suppressing the irrational in a collective unconscious as in the past, urban actors are articulating their desires without guilt, allowing the uncanny to appear in everyday urban situations and juxtapositions. Shane (2005:8) believes that designers will therefore have to work in an increasingly "irrational" situation and incorporate the irrational into their work.

Shane (2005: 305-6) further describes the contemporary city as a chaotic situation of competing systems, which has an emergent logic of its own, produced by different actors designing systems across vast territories without regard for each other's decisions, each adding their own system as a new layer to

existing topography, historic structures, and landscapes. This city of multiple actors is connected by a spaghetti tangle of relationships produces patches of only local order, without obvious mechanism of overall coordination.

6. Conclusion

Foucault's notion of heterotopia contests and alters the normative set of relations that define conventional sites. It provides an alternative and a different framework for thinking how to analyze the contemporary urban spaces and comprehend their complexity with the continuous emergence of variety, heterogeneity and equity of the urban daily life. The concept of Heterotopia represents a learning lesson of one side of an opposition – otherness. It depicts the urban landscape as a huge patchwork of heterotopias, and suggests how and where to find new example of heterotopias in contemporary and future urban landscape.

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