A critical analysis of the Foucauldian heterotopias

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Abstract

The following study is intended to be the first part of what could be called a “triptych” dedicated to the Foucauldian heterotopias and it is designed to organically capture the following levels of the French thinker’s interpretation of the original concept: 1) an “internal” hermeneutics (a critical commentary) of the text where the concept is sketched; 2) an analysis of the existing comments on the subject; 3) a constructive “continuation” of Foucault’s ideas, by highlighting the possibility of applying the concept in question to the cases that are not discussed by the author or by other philosophers “faithful” to it. Of course, the manner in which we seek to approach this issue does not exclude all references – necessary, otherwise – to the minimal critical sources, but their role will be, for the moment, only to clarify, specify and complete our interpretative claims. In this first step, we will be particularly attentive to the manner Foucault’s structuralism “affects” his vision about space, to the consistency of what he called “the principles of the heterotopology” and also to some aspects of the extensional manner of defining the heterotopias.

Keywords: Foucault, Heterotopia, Heterotopology.

Foucault’s short text, entirely dedicated to the theme of heterotopias (Des espaces autres), had – from the point of view of publishing process – a special destiny: the author presented it in 1967 at a conference at Cercle d’études architecturales, and he accepted its publication only in the spring of 1984, shortly before his death (in fact, the conference was published in October 1984, in the Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité journal, after the author’s death, which occurred on June 25 of that year).

In addition, concerning its thematic content, it is a special text – very few of Foucault’s writings are “about space” (strictly speaking), which however did

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2 Romanian Academy, Iaşi Branch.
3 The author would like to thank Andreea Todd for helping him consistently to improve the quality of the translation.
4 According to Derek Gregory, we could speak about a “published unpublished” essay (Gregory 2012).
not prevent some commentators to consider Foucault to be a pioneer of the revival of the interest in space in the contemporary social thought. Edward W. Soja considers him to be, along with Henri Lefebvre, one of the prominent sources of a decisive process in the recent social thinking, for what he called the *spatial turn*. During an interview about this phenomenon, Soja pointed out: “I trace this recent ‘transdisciplinary’ interest in space back to the work in the late 1960s and early 1970s of Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, both writing at about the same time in the same place about a particular way of looking at space that was quite different from mainstream spatial thinking.” (Blake 2001: 140). Moreover, he further noticed – and, unfortunately, things have not changed too much since then – that “this remarkable ‘moment of origins’, if you will, has not yet been well studied”.

Stepping back to focus on Foucault’s text, we easily see that the way of approaching the subject, too “direct”, too “educational”, with many simple and short examples, not very detailed, is atypical to Foucault (the public context most likely caused such a discursive tactic). Foucault’s texts usually have a “subject” but are not “prisoners” of this topic, they are not subjected to the subject (to joke around a bit, even when the subject is the… prison system). The same Edward W. Soja, but in another work, spoke in this context of “Foucault’s uncharacteristically explicit and didactic discussion on the principles of heterotopology”, noting that he will ignore even his own theoretic approach (Soja 1996: 15), more dialectic and postmodern, we add.

We have already said that it is one of the few Foucauldian texts “dedicated to the space”. Of course, precisely relative to the previous remarks, we do not account here for texts in classic forms of presentations, reviews and analyzes: Foucault does not make such speeches (in which the space would have been presented as a category of reality – physical, social and so on – or through its significance in the knowledge – scientific, philosophical and so on). It is simply an assertion related to the presence of space in an oblique way through its “figures”, constructs, embodiments, or instantiations, but ones that receive a more consistent and a sort of self-description (we should note that *description* is just the term mainly used by Foucault in order to characterize his approach in *Des espaces autres*, trying to avoid – through his permanent terminological exploration or indecision – any classical form of presentation).

Finally, Foucault has never returned to this notion for “using” or “exploiting” it. *Heterotopia* previously appeared only in *Les mots et les choses*, published shortly before (1966) the conference analyzed by us, and only at the beginning of the work (we will return to this occurrence though), without being “recovered” in the text (methodologically, through examples and so on). Foucault’s text “about” heterotopias seems to resemble to – using a plastic expression at the end of this historical introduction – a firework announcing a big celebration of space which eventually has not been held.
The general framework outlined by Foucault in his discussion on heterotopias is, however, provided by what we might call an ideational urgency of the moment in which the article was written (paradoxically, it receives the subsequent “nonexistent” destiny of the term mentioned above). Foucault will add to this a historical outline designed to offer a clear meaning for the specificity of his approach, and also to fix some basic terminological elements later used during the conference.

First of all, the ideational urgency (which means, of course, also the “sufficient” reason to start the theoretical approach as such) could be condensed in the claim, situated at the beginning of the text, that “l’époque actuelle serait peut-être plutôt l’époque de l’espace” (1571) – is easy to see how a potential demanding character of the assertion is carefully mitigated by Foucault (instead of the verb “sera”, semantically expected in the tumultuous social horizon of that epoch, Foucault used attenuated and wise verb “serait peut-être”).

The historical “judgment” will be further clarified by identifying the elements that support it, both to the “theoretical” and “practical” level, i.e. at the level of the theoretical models and the everyday experience: “Nous sommes à l’époque du simultané, nous sommes à l’époque de la juxtaposition, à l’époque du proche et du lointain, du côté à côté, du dispersé” (1571). The history is claimed here by relating that “epoch” to the previous century (note: the nineteenth century, Foucault’s text being written in 1967), a “century of time” due to his obsession with history itself (and with all that it means: crisis, cycles, development, decay, revolution and so on).

We should notice in passing that Henri Lefebvre takes a similar contraposition in La production de l’espace. The heroes of this “primacy of time” are Hegel, Marx and his followers, at least for the nineteenth century. Referring to Georg Lukács, Lefebvre basically summarizes this trend in the history of thought when he asserts that “le temps retrouvé, dominé par la conscience de classe qui s’élève jusqu’au point sublime où elle saisit d’un coup d’œil les méandres de l’histoire, brise la primauté du spatial”. And he adds that “seul Nietzsche a maintenu le primat de l’espace et la problématique de la spatialité” (Lefebvre 2001: 30; in this regard, the entire section I, 10 of the book is instructive). This is a “common position” shared by Foucault and Lefebvre which can be used as a starting point for researching what Soja, as we saw, assessed as “[a] remarkable ‘moment of origins’” for what he called the spatial turn.

Otherwise, Lefebvre himself is very critical regarding Foucault’s conception of space, for example when he comments a passage taken from Archéologie du savoir: “«Un savoir, c’est aussi l’espace dans lequel le sujet peut prendre position pour parler des objets auxquels il a affaire dans son

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5 We will offer the pagination of Dits et écrits (2001 edition) in parentheses, without any indication, whenever we quote from “Des espaces autres”.
discours», déclare tranquillement M. Foucault (…) sans se demander de quel espace il parle, et comment il saute du théorique (épistémologique) au pratique, du mental au social, de l’espace des philosophes à celui des gens qui ont affaire à des objets” (Lefebvre 2001: 10).

Back to Foucault’s text, it is noteworthy to see that the structuralism itself generally responds to the ideational urgency mentioned above (indeed, a “nom un petit peu général” for Foucault), defined as “l’effort pour établir, entre des éléments qui peuvent avoir été répartis à travers le temps, un ensemble de relations qui les fait apparaître comme juxtaposés, opposés, impliqués l’un par l’autre, bref, qui les fait apparaître comme une sorte de configuration; et à vrai dire, il ne s’agit pas par là de nier le temps; c’est une certaine manière de traiter ce qu’on appelle le temps et ce qu’on appelle l’histoire.” (1571).6

We can say that the Foucauldian approach which follows this introduction is related and also not related to structuralism, like all the French thinker’s writings from this period. It is related because, for Foucault, the ideational determinant of the epoch was the network itself: “Nous sommes à un moment où le monde s’éprouve, je crois, moins comme une grande vie qui se développe à travers le temps que comme un réseau qui relie des points et qui entrecroise son écheveau. (our underlining)”. It is precisely this network, in its various modes, that will be involved in the way in which Foucault will configure the basic properties, the functioning of heterotopias.

It is not related, paradoxically, to that temporality (and not spatiality) – redesigned and recovered through efforts such as the “archaeological” or “genealogical” one – which remains a central category for the theoretical approach, to that history which, for Foucault, has to be “rewritten” – being suggested by the subtle distance from a “pure” structuralism marked in its presentation: the structuralism, we quote again, “c’est une certaine manière de traiter ce qu’on appelle le temps et ce qu’on appelle l’histoire (our underlining)” (1572). Of course, classifying Foucault’s (neo)structuralism in a “complicated” task, it can not be accomplished in a few words, but we should investigate it through an analysis of his generally relationship to space.

6 However, the same Henri Lefebvre presents structuralism as a theoretical extension of the pre-eminence of subjectivity or as a “falsification” of spatiality – the social space in the structuralism’s perspective actually reproduce a “mental space”, which does not capture the concreteness of the social reality, but reproducing in fact the main points previously criticized: “Dans cette école devenue de plus en plus dogmatique (…) se commet couramment ce sophisme fondamental: l’espace d’origine philosophico-épistémologique se fétichise et le mental enveloppe le social avec le physique” (Lefebvre 2001: 12).

7 See the “pivotal” text of Foucault in this respect, „Nietzsche, la généalogie, l’histoire”, from 1971.

8 But we can refer here to Manfred Frank’s fundamental work in this regard, Was ist Neostukturalismus?, 1983.
However, on the one hand, we can think that – this happens if we accept this (too) brief “classification” of Foucault as a neo-structuralist, at least until the texts of the last period of his life – all his texts are somehow automatic texts “about space”, and the interpreter’s effort should cover all of them. On the other hand, we can see that one of the “central themes” of Foucault’s thought, the power, developed especially after 1970, it does not involve the deciphering of some more or less abstract meanings (involving “the use of the words”, “the logic of power” and so on), but the analysis – meaning here a “concrete study” – of power relations that always occur in practice, i.e., “in space”. In this regard, the classic example is, of course, Surveiller et punir (1975). We should simply state: power is always “spatiophaging” itself. It “needs” space, both as “spatiophage” and “space builder”: it occupies spaces, it creates spaces, it “offers” (versatilely or imperatively) spaces. Perhaps a non-canonical Foucauldian definition would assume that power is “a dynamic in space, imposing constraints” – attention, not only in the passive sense, but also in the manner in which the subject is “constituted” (him or herself) as such.

But let us go back to the text we announced that will guide our approach. From a (very “simply” or “common”) historical point of view, which enables us to talk about a “history of space” (obviously, only outlined – “très grossièrement” is the expression used by Foucault), space is presented, since the Middle Ages, as having three distinct configurations (nothing about previous “figure” or “figures” of space).

A brief observation, a necessary one we believe. Foucault uses three terms to describe the evolution of the manner in which the things-bodies are thought – so theoretically speaking, it should be noted – to “behave” in a general spatial frame (or milieu): la localisation, l’étendue and l’emplacement, corresponding respectively to the Middle Ages, the Early Modern Era (the seventeenth century) and the Late Modernity (our epoch, nowadays)\(^9\). The first term will be translated by localization, and the last by emplacement\(^{10}\). Of course,

\(^9\) By using this periodization, what we have in mind is not to “trespass” a strictly Foucauldian terminology, but to efficiently provide to the reader some ordinary historical references.

\(^{10}\) Concerning the translation problems of the French “l’emplacement” we should only provide the reader with De Cauter and Dehaene’s full note in their translation of “Of other spaces”: “The term ‘emplacement’ in French refers to site and location (as in parking space) or the setting of a city, but also to a support (for instance, emplacement publicitaire: a billboard). In English, the meaning of the term is more specific. It is used in geology and more commonly as a military term to indicate the support/position of a semi-stationary weapon. In Foucault’s text, emplacement of the network as opposed to extension. The space of emplacement only exists as ‘discrete space’, an instance of one of the possible positions that exist within a set of positions. We believe that the term perhaps also foreshadows one of Foucault’s later key concepts, ‘dispositif’. On occasion, he uses the term in a non-technical sense to refer more generally to sites and places, but it is clear that he deliberately avoids the common words ‘place’, ‘lieu’, or ‘endroit’ and thereby produces an effect of both emphasis and estrangement. We have, hence, left the term ‘emplacement’ throughout the text to indicate its technical character and this sense of
we could avoid an “unnecessary” complication and we may naturally use “extension”\textsuperscript{11} for the French “étendue”, but it seems “non-homogeneous” with the other two, rendering a reality (in itself) rather than a reference to a “framework” (or to a “surrounding reality”). We choose therefore to use the term “positioning” for better rendering Foucault’s intention concerning the Early Modernity. Positioning involves thinking of something through its position, thinking of it as a point in a homogeneous space (extension), strictly geometrically understood. This option is not strictly speaking one of translation, but of interpretation of the Foucauldian text – or of its “comprehensive overview”.

A first remark, somehow trivial: heterotopias is related to the outer space (l’espace du dehors), a space defined by Foucault as being in opposition or at least complementary to the inner one (l’espace du dedans), in a classical scheme and through duality (questionable too). This is very briefly described, in a double dimension, phenomenologically and historically I dare say, as a heterogeneous space, a space that has not been leveled down, homogenized by the process of desacralization imposed by the thought of the seventeenth century (notably by Galileo and Descartes). Foucault gives a hint that this outer space has received no hermeneutic (broadly speaking) labors similar to those developed for the inner space by Bachelard and phenomenology, highlighting that this heterogeneity is his very general theme, the target of his own contribution. Of course, this fact transforms this text in an answer, modest if someone considers its size, to the ideational urgency previously mentioned and it also open a possible comparative “dialogue” with the way in which Lefebvre read the Foucault’s conception of space, mentioned above too.

What follows is a classification of heterotopias by creating a class or type of places of which they are parts, places that have therefore something in common. These other spaces (or “spaces of other kind”, if preferred) possess “la curieuse propriété d’être en rapport avec tous les autres emplacements, mais sur un mode tel qu’ils suspendent, neutralisent ou inversent l’ensemble des rapports qui se trouvent, par eux, désignés, reflétés ou réfléchis. Ces espaces, en quelque sorte, (…) sont en liaison avec tous les autres, (…) contredisent pourtant tous les autres emplacements” (1574).

We previously highlighted our relationship with the different social spaces, which gave them the characteristic of non-superposability: “Nous vivons à l’intérieur d’un ensemble de relations qui définissent des emplacements irréductibles les uns aux autres et absolument non superposables” (1574). Two things draw here our attention: our definition, as human beings, through the relationships we have with the “outside” (which actually involves our “non-substantialization” or

\textsuperscript{11} The same for Miskowiec (1986), Hurley (1998), and De Cauter and Dehaene’s translations (2008).
“non-subjectivization”), a new affirmation of a structuralist way of organizing human experience; and the determination of relationships “between people and places” as a constituent factor for the lack of interchangeability of places themselves and a decisive factor for pushing away the Galilean-Cartesian model of a homogeneous space from the horizon of the “human sciences”.

Moreover, we can discriminate this genre through the way its species relates to the real, in the ascending sense of its presence, which leads to the sequence utopia - mirror - heterotopia. Utopias are „emplacements with no real places“, “essentially are fundamentally unreal spaces” (“sont fondamentalement essentiellement irréels”) (Foucault 2008: 17), still they are not deprived of the existence of relations with the concrete social reality, being “les emplacements qui entretiennent avec l’espace réel de la société un rapport général d’analogie directe ou inversée. C’est la société elle-même perfectionnée ou c’est l’envers de la société” (1574).

The positioning of heterotopias in this new context, as opposed to utopias, is an occasion for resuming and deepening its previous definition:

“It y a également, et ceci probablement dans toute culture, dans toute civilisation, des lieux réels, des lieux effectifs, des lieux qui ont dessinés dans l’institution même de la société, et qui sont des sortes de contre-emplacements, sortes d’utopies effectivement réalisées dans lesquelles les emplacements réels, tous les autres emplacements réels que l’on peut trouver à l’intérieur de la culture sont à la fois représentés, contestés et inversés, des sortes de lieux qui sont hors de tous les lieux, bien que pourtant ils soient effectivement localisables.” (1574)

It is worthy to mention one particular aspect: heterotopias are different from utopia, they are opposite to them, only by their real, localized, concrete character – they are “sortes d’utopies effectivement réalisées”. Otherwise, they have in common with utopias the modulation or even the inversion of the relations with all other spatial realities, because in their case too “les emplacements réels, tous les autres emplacements réels que l’on peut trouver à l’intérieur de la culture sont à la fois représentés, contestés et inversés” (1574). Although “real”, they “loose” reality precisely because of the existence of this “privileged” relations with other emplacements. In fact, we might have said they have a “superabundance of reality”, that reality is overflowing inside them. They are, in this latter perspective, “des sortes de contre-emplacements” – visibles, tangibles, reals, they are just by their particular location somehow delocated, being thus des sortes de lieux qui sont hors de tous les lieux, bien que pourtant ils soient effectivement localisables” (1574-1575).

In a sense, heterotopias are “in the middle” between utopia and simple places-emplacements, possessing the “power” of the first (manifested through relationships with all other places) and the realtyor the effectiveness of the second. However, between utopias and heterotopias we can find the experience of
the mirror, “une sorte d’expérience mixte, mitoyenne”. Mirror simultaneously means an utopia, “un lieu sans lieu” (it creates in itself a “space” that is not of its own, a space that “steals” from the surrounding reality where it is located, and if I look in(to) it, I will see myself “out there” where I am not). In addition, “le miroir fonctionne comme une hétérotopie en ce sens qu’il rend cette place que j’occupe au moment où je me regarde dans la glace, à la fois absolument réelle, en liaison avec tout l’espace qui l’entoure, et absolument irréelle, puisqu’elle est obligée, pour être perçue, de passer par ce point virtuel qui est là-bas” (1575).

Furthermore, we add, the relationships of the mirror with the one who looks in the mirror are privileged for the mirror (understood as the water’s surface – as in the myth of Narcissus; the first mirrors were apparently even bowls of water) because it gives me the direct, natural experience of seeing my face, my image. It is the only that “creates” this “reality” – I can say that I have a face “resembling” to the other people’s faces which I can look at (otherwise, to “deduce”), but I do not “know” it visually in the absence of the mirror; I can touch my face, I can feel it, I can have a (rather vague) “idea” about how I look based on this experience, but we all feel that we lack a (maybe) decisive factor to speak about a face – even if I feel that I “have” a head “with” a face, I can touch only some parts of it, which do not give me the visual (not felt) significance of an assembled unity, as I made in the experience of looking at my own face “straight” in the mirror; or I can look in it at my whole body perceived in closed contours – naturally, I get it from a certain perspective: front, profile or semi-profile (a created semi-profile, we could say, because for looking at yourself in a mirror from one “side” you must rotate the head, so what I “straightly” see will be my head, my twisted neck, and the rest of the body “from one side” or “from profile”), with some possible coverage of my back (when I look in the mirror “over my shoulder”). Without mentioning that until the emergence of the contemporary devices of shooting and playback – which allow me to see corporeal projections of myself in the same time when I am filmed – mirror, in its various forms (made from polished stone, copper, bronze, alloys, glass etc.), was the only means by which we had access to these “realities”.

There is, we can observe, a latent tension (arising, perhaps, even from Foucault’s peculiar and structuralist positioning in this respect) about what is raised in relation to the presence of heterotopias in the contemporary reality. One aspect appear to belong to the history, it seems to require an explanation in the horizon of temporality – it is about understanding heterotopias as a kind of “residues” or “remainings” (our terms) related to a reality or epoch not yet disenchanted, which has not yet experienced the secularization:

“Or, malgré toutes les techniques qui l’investissent, malgré tout le réseau de savoir qui permet de le déterminer ou de le formaliser, l’espace contemporain n’est peut-être, pas encore entièrement désacralisé – à la différence sans doute du temps qui, lui, a été désacralisé au XIXe siècle. Certes, il y a bien eu une certaine désacralisation théorique
de l’espace (celle à laquelle l’œuvre de Galilée a donné le signal), mais nous n’avons peut-être pas encore accédé à une désacralisation pratique de l’espace. Et peut-être notre vie est-elle encore commandée par un certain nombre d’oppositions auxquelles on ne peut pas toucher, auxquelles l’institution et la pratique n’ont pas encore osé porter atteinte : des oppositions que nous admettons comme toutes données : par exemple, entre l’espace privé et l’espace public, entre l’espace de la famille et l’espace social, entre l’espace culturel et l’espace utile, entre l’espace de loisirs et l’espace de travail; toutes sont animées encore par une sourde sacralisation. (our underlining)” (1573)

We could easily note the admirable frequency of the expression “(pas) encore” for such a short paragraph, a sign if not necessarily for an “attitude”, at least for an explanation which is required for this strange “lack of tuning” of our current practice not only with all sort of “theoretisations”, but also with what might be called the “current” expectations of many of us.

In this eventuality, our next step would be a sort of “historical” explanation, which could provide the answer for the natural question: “What allowed these other spaces to ‘resist’ without being affected by secularization?” Moreover, the tone adopted here by Foucault suggests a kind of “care” or even “concern” about their destiny12, a certain joy offered by their present existence, which could open the possibility of “saving” them. Of course, what is thus opened is – we might say – only a “hope” and not what could be called a horizon of action: you cannot “write for (in favour of) heterotopias” nor “(concretely) fight for them”.

There is also, as we said, a “phenomenological” presentation, a presentation of heterotopias that does not involve at all the historical factor, based only, on one hand, on the description of the individuals’ relations (people’s relations) with the realities of the surrounding area, found in some relationships and pleading for their irreducible heterogeneity (from an explanatory point of view, this already situated us “out of time”) – from this perspective, the heterotopia would be an invariant of the spatial reality, one of its persistent qualities, and it would not depend on a particular historical instantiation, on the enchanted character of some epoch:

“L’espace dans lequel nous vivons, par lequel nous sommes attirés hors de nous mêmes, dans lequel se déroule précisément l’érosion de notre vie, de notre temps et de notre histoire, cet espace qui nous ronge et nous ravine est en lui-même aussi un espace hétérogène. Autrement dit, nous ne vivons pas dans une sorte de vide, à l’intérieur duquel on pourrait situer des individus et des choses. Nous ne vivons pas à l’intérieur d’un vide qui se colorerait de différents chatoiements, nous vivons à l’intérieur d’un ensemble de relations qui définissent des emplacements irréductibles les uns aux autres et absolument non superposables. (our underlining)” (1573-1574)

12 See the manner in which Manfred Frank identifies such “attitudes” in Foucault, in his work cited above.
Temporality itself seems to be an ideational subordinate to this heterogeneous space, our lives (our projects, our actions, etc.) being subjected to it. Temporality seems to loose its reality, being replaced by “whirls” (the term is ours) or other-spaces that “swallow” us. Like we said, as can be easily seen, what is at stake here is the relationship of the individual with the spatial realities, and not the relations between the latter ones (the relations between different emplacements).

On the other hand, the presentation of heterotopias contribute to the highlight of their transhistorical character – we only need to go back to the beginning of the text, when Foucault wanted to make us aware that “Il y a également, et ceci probablement dans toute culture, dans toute civilisation…”

This would mean that those passages using the term emplacement(s) refer, structurally speaking, not only to “nowadays”, with the remark that there are, of course, spatial realities defined only for our present time. Reviewing these emplacements with distinct relationships to the other sites, Foucault identifies en passant several categories of them: the emplacements of passage (the streets, trains), the emplacements of temporary halts (cafés, cinemas, beaches), the close or semi-closed emplacements of rest (the house, the room, the bed). It is clear now that apart trains and cinemas, the other “emplacements” have a considerable age, including those cafés existing since the beginning of modernity, from the XVIth century in the Ottoman Empire and from the XVIIth in the Western Europe. Obviously, we can discuss about a change, sometimes pronounced, of their function (let’s call it social), for some of them, like the case of beaches, whose true “social role” began to manifest only in the end of the nineteenth century, with – among others – the revolutionizing of how people start to look at their own nudity in public or to understand the concept of leisure or entertainment. But their special relationship with the rest of the spatial realities is not starting “nowadays”, and it is lasting so since a long time, at least for the ancient island communities.

According to Foucault, a heterotopology, i.e. the theoretical approach – „l’étude, l’analyse, la description, la «lecture»” (1575) – applied to heterotopias, is based on a total of six “principles”. Despite the “warning” that Soja mentioned above, we will discuss each one attentively (even “didactically”, it might be appreciated, but – we hope – not in the pejorative sense), trying to highlight both the contributions and the difficulties of Foucault’s conception.

The first principle: “il n’y a probablement pas une seule culture au monde qui ne constitue des hétérotopies. C’est là une constante de tout groupe humain. Mais les hétérotopies prennent évidemment des formes qui sont très variées, et peut-être ne trouverait-on pas une seule forme d’hétérotopie qui soit absolument universelle.” (1575) However, Foucault adds that they allow a classification in two categories: heterotopias of crisis and of deviation (de déviation).
The first is characteristic for the “primitive” societies – they are privileged places (sacred, forbidden) reserved for those individuals who are in a state of crisis: adolescents, menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly, etc. They are disappearing in our (Western) society of today, some remnants of them being still identifiable until recently: the nineteenth-century boarding school, military service (they allow the resolving of the crisis in the adolescent sexuality in “another space” than home) or the “honeymoon trip” (episodes performed in hotels, trains or boats, where the young girls’ deflowering is consumed); of course, we add, they can survive with some success in the traditionalist or pejoratively called “un(der)developed” societies of today.

The heterotopias of deviation concern an aspect often analyzed by Foucault, being those places dedicated to the behavior that deviates from the norm, to the abnormal: rest homes (les maisons de repos), psychiatric hospitals, prisons; retirement homes (les maisons de retraite) are somehow in the vicinity or at the intersection of both, because in our society, Foucault notes, the old age is regarded as expressing both a “crisis” and – because the retired persons’ “inactivity” – a “deviation” from the social normality (note: besides the English verb, we can observe, with this occasion, the same idea of being “out”, “retired”, “captured” in several languages, as in French by “être à la retraite” or in Romanian by “a ieşi la pensie” and so on – in other words, to leave a certain space, to pass a threshold, as they would have left in a sense our space, of course, a changeable “our”, from which we will be all evacuated some day.

The second principle states that “au cours de son histoire, une société peut faire fonctionner d’une façon très différente une hétérotopie qui existe et qui n’a pas cessé d’exister; (…) la même hétérotopie peut, selon la synchronie de la culture dans laquelle elle se trouve, avoir un fonctionnement ou un autre.” (1576)

We should answer a question before proceeding to comment on this principle: are heterotopias defined by reference to other spaces (by the functions they maintain in a social space with other “different-spaces”) or by the relationships that the individuals have with them? We have already noticed some aspects of this issue. Some passages in Foucault’s text seem to favor the first option, while others obviously support the second.

We saw – in the presentation of the first principle of heterotopology – that what matters is the way in which the individuals are constrained by the “society” to consume some crucial episodes of their lives (crises) in some places, specially “designed” for these purposes.

When he details the example offered to illustrate his the second principle of analysis (the cemetery), Foucault writes: “Le cimetière est certainement un lieu autre par rapport aux espaces culturels ordinaires, c’est un espace qui est pourtant en liaison avec l’ensemble de tous les emplacements de la cité ou de la société ou du village, puisque chaque individu, chaque famille se trouve avoir des parents au cimetière.” (1576)
We find here a clear trace of the reason that led us to raise the question above, because both possible answers are “merged” within the presentation of the social and symbolic functions of the cemetery (with all other emplacements of the society, city and village – with all individuals); moreover, the second option seems to explicatively support the first through the presence of the particle “puisque”. Obviously, any function that spaces and places have is relative to a practice (or to its absence: prohibitions, constraints, etc.) of some human beings. Even if those spaces are not built by man (for a certain, precise social, political, cultural, etc. practice), but they are, consequently, “natural”\(^{13}\), they are invested with such functions – from the most sacred places of various religions (*exempli gratia*, mountains: Mount Fuji, Olympus or Sinai; rivers: the Ganges; valleys: Urubamba Valley in the Andes of Peru etc.) to the most mundane elements of the tourism topology\(^{14}\). We can say that, since appearing on the tourist map, a place – even a white spot on a map, without a name; probably, *especially* for this reason – receives nowadays “the baptism of tourism”, becoming a potential and valuable target for the tourists’ curiosity. Not to mention that we can add here, as an increase of this phenomenon in the collective mentality, the “sacred” places for any tourism: Himalaya, the Everest, the Niagara Falls, etc., unavoidable points in any respectful tourist map).

Two things deserve to be noticed here: on one hand, there is no direct, immediate, *self-evident* explanation between the two levels (to call them, assuming the necessary imperfections: of the individual or of the society). Individuals may come from different places and can pass through different spaces (they may take different routes) to get to that “other space.” This observation is completed by a second one, which reminds us that, for Foucault, when theanalyze concerns the individual, the problem seeks all individuals who have relationships with that particular space – all people have someone buried in a cemetery or, at least, they *seem* to have such a dead loved person, whom memory is important and still present. By this, the cemetery becomes a kind of space of co-participation of the living and the dead, with its own mixed reality. Even if someone goes to the cemetery only to take care of his own future grave, we could concede that he accepted a peculiar “space” for himself (and for the others) after his own death and a future relationship between “him” (his grave) and his possible visitors, that he accepted to participate thus in a spatial

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\(^{13}\) We often forget that “natural” is a concept and not a pure and simple expression for what is “given” (independently of us) – in the social and cultural human experience there is no *datum* at all. Otherwise, we confuse the physical existence with the cultural meaning of the “things”.

\(^{14}\) Not to mention also, as an emphasis of this phenomenon in the collective mentality, the “sacred” natural places of tourism itself: Himalaya and the Everest, the Niagara Falls etc., unavoidable points for any respectable tourist’s map.
social convention, with its specific reality (i.e. the grave is not only a space, defined by its concrete dimensions, it is also a social space)\(^{15}\).

But what is here at stake is not only an “analytical” (logical or hypothetical) philosophical game and, for the accuracy of the “research”, we should introduce here also some concrete historical alternatives: the crematorium for example, with the possibility to deposit the urn in a columbarium, to take it home or to scatter the cremated ashes in the sea; the full body burial in the ocean, etc.\(^{16}\) The columbarium can be seen in the light of Foucault’s own analysis, something like a “continuation”, a palpable “transformation” of the cemetery in the strict sense. But the scattering of ashes – which is increasingly used today – that can be officially or privately done in many (other) places – does not practically relativize or “dilute” this heterotopia, apparently one of the easiest paradigmatic types.

We could also insert the constraint of a “total” individuals’ participation in the presentation of the examples used by Foucault in the case of the first principle. We should admit, from the beginning, that a major part of the population (we think, for example, of the children) who do not participate in any kind of relationships presented by these (almost all?) other spaces.\(^{17}\) It could be said that our remark belongs to a crude empiricism, like those made by Locke concerning Descartes’ doctrine of innate ideas. We accept this objection. But, we note further, the fact that the people situated in those “turning points” of their lives choose (we are not discuss how) other existential path which does not

\(^{15}\) We do not see the grave only as a condition facilitating (or permitting) the dead’s trespassing, but also as a continuation of his or her presence in our world. By this, it becomes a kind of extrapolation of the social function of the funerary monument, as Fahlander and Oestigaard stated concerning the Egyptian society: “The monuments are as much for the living as they are for the dead and the gods because they work and function in society. Through the monuments and ritual practices some humans attain divine legitimacy and become the gods themselves on earth.” (Fahlander and Oestigaard: 8).

\(^{16}\) An analytic philosopher, faithful to his method, may simply note here that we can imagine a man who has all his relatives, friends and acquaintances cremated and that their ashes were scattered in various places on the Earth, while that man could not be present – let’s say, for objective reasons - to none of the incineration. Also, imagine a man who is afraid of death and a man who, for this reason, never participated to a burial procession. What kind of relationship does he have with the cemetery or with the columbarium? Nothing at all, obviously, unless we do not choose to speak about a “mental relationship” that would move the discussion towards the imaginary and archetypal areas and so on this is not at all insignificant, but very important, because the constitutive factor of the discussion itself is what might be called an effective social practice.

In fact, for underlining this aspect in a social manner (spatially and indirectly), we could note, as Frederik Fahlander and Terje Oestigaard, that “the conceptions of death and the transformations of death into life and new social structures in society, together with beliefs of a life hereafter or realms where the ancestors are living or other transcendental states of being, are not merely spiritual or ideological, but they are materialised by the descendants and the living” (Fahlander and Oestigaard: 1).

\(^{17}\) And some people, probably, due to their premature death, will not even have the possibility to develop something like that, unfortunately.
imply the spaces mentioned above, is a significant problem of our present society, at least in the Christian area. Of course, the most ordinary interpretation and the solution to these difficulties would simply find a radical change in the relation between people and cemetery, more “liberal” today than aforetime and more absent, involving though some “danger” if the cemetery seen as heterotopia or as a “privileged place would be abandon.

At the end of the presentation of the cemetery as a heterotopia (the largest part of the entire conference) and after he detected the transformation of meaning and social practice recorded in the nineteenth century, Foucault summarizes: “Les cimetières constituent alors non plus le vent sacré et immortel de la cité, mais l’«autre ville», où chaque famille possède sa noire demeure. (our underlining)” (1577) We can see now that the cemetery is mainly presented by comparison with another social fully constituted space (the city), as a “new city”, a kind of replica of the “real” one, a city with its own “houses” (populated by different families), with its own “streets”, with its “squares”, moreover, reproducing the differences of the social and political classes from the “real society”, the quality and the location of the “eternal residences”, a space where visits are made, most often the “family visits”, etc. At this point, it would seem that what defines the cemetery as heterotopia is precisely its capacity to be “something else” in relation to a whole concrete reality: the cemetery is a heterotopia not only because it is (only) “a different kind of space”, but – mainly? – because it is “another city” (or, maybe, “the other city”), because it mimetically assumes the structure and the internal functions of another spatial reality.

Apparently, we are stuck in a dilemma: a) either we completely ignore the “all” of them, but then, we could say, Pandora’s box is still open, in the sense that we will have to virtually accept as heterotopias any social space (a “plausible” variant of this would be stated for the common sense only, having though many methodological difficulties, like to explicitly accept that here we imply the majority of people – or, for being even more imprecisely, many people – from a particular culture society); b) or we keep “all” of them (at least the “all” belongs of a certain society and not to the society in general) and then we do not see how we could respond to the previous complaints, unless by another definition of the heterotopias (which could avoid the extensional aspect).

Obviously, considering Foucault’s general philosophical position, we must accept a non-essentialist version – there are not heterotopias “by themselves”,

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18 We do not assume in the observation above that the city chronologically precedes the cemetery (that the cemetery is a replica of the city itself, being, consciously or unconsciously a kind of model), but that they are socially and spatially co-constituted, that they are co-originated.

19 In this sense, we explain the relative abundance of the texts on the heterotopias – at least in the terms of the spaces designated like that – which we see today: there are counted among heterotopias, often without making a minimal analysis of the notion itself, i.e. without asking about the legitimacy of its use in that particular case, probably all spaces of a society.
they appear and disappear, even the most “common” ones. It is important that, at any time and in any space, there are heterotopias. The problem is, and we insist upon it, that the “all” (synchronically and / or diachronically) reinterpreted by “many”, without a new appropriate definition, irreparably weakens the capacity of the heterotopia to be a real explanatory element, an effective cognitive instrument. In this respect, a “doctrine” of heterotopias would rather be a way to “give color” to different spaces of society, a more pretentious, philosophical manner to talk about spaces or places socially invested with certain qualities by the people, which could be otherwise the subject for sociological studies. Somehow, in the wake of the contemporary discourse that exalts “difference”, any space should “have the right” to be defined as heterotopia and to be studied like that. We may even suspect that these spaces, being generally and constantly accessible to people (at least in the democratic societies, where the most effective spatial conditionalities – and, by that, exclusions – seem to be “only” financial20), will be, maybe, in the future, politically correct to categorize all social, cultural and political spaces as heterotopias.

Therefore, we must abandon this “all” in order to see its occurrence (and the corresponding term for “every” – chaque) in Foucault’s text as an emphasis of the overwhelming social power of – at least – a certain heterotopias only, if not of a hyperbole. This means, in other words, to rethink “all” in the sense of “potential all”. And to do this not as a possible “materialization” for all (some day) the relationships with the heterotopia, but as the expression – with all its theoretical risks – that we are all “caught” in the social reality (i.e. concrete, effective, not just mental, archetypal, representational or ideational) of these spaces-places. Returning to the previous example, you may not have ever been to the cemetery and maybe you will not go in the future, but you’re socially “connected” to it in various ways. In other words, the cemetery is a social reality (a heterotopia) which can not be “bypassed” (nor denied, challenged, etc.) – at least in our days. Its social reality comes from the inescapable reality of the death itself, from our desire to make together something “against” it, to still give to the deads a form of “social life” on this Earth, just as the city (village, etc.) represents our common life trying somehow to avoid, maybe, the solitude and to remove the fear of dying alone.

Otherwise – and from this could come the “true” methodological dissolution of the heterotopias (and, therefore, the plausible explanation of their “disappearance” from Foucault’s later writings) – we might be forced to introduce an additional factor in the geography of the heterotopias, continuously spatialized by Foucault (and maybe for this reason “subversive” to any other social spatiality), namely the power. In other words, what indicates (discriminates) heterotopias is not only the social relations, their complexity and their “focal points”, but the spatial institutions

20 Which raise no problem for a neoliberal mentality.
(in a large sense) put into practice by different mechanisms of power. That would mean (however) to abandon many examples from Foucault’s own discussion of heterotopias and to limit ourselves to his “classical”, “socially blunt” examples, which constituted the favorite subjects of many of his further books and courses at Collège de France, to consider thus that the supplementary specification of heterotopias (without being an explicit thematisation), also equivalent to their own “disappearance”, occurs only by analyzing the concrete expression of power (as in *Surveiller et punir*). This would mean to abandon heterotopia as a central notion within a theory of social space, and to transform it in a spatial formulation of the prominent actions of power. Heterotopias would be, consequently, nothing than a name used only for the places where the power is manifesting itself.

What more could be done, however, in this case? No doubt we will have to indicate and analyze other examples, besides those “dear” to Foucault, and it would probably be interesting to move ourselves in the area of the seemingly insignificant everyday life, trying to decipher the meaning of the political (either communist or neoliberal) standardizations and spatial impositions – like the place where we live (the communist blocks of flats or the French HLMs), we learn (schools with standardized architecture) or we relax (resorts), and so on, without any present, “tough”, interference of a certain power, but where the latter sovereignly decided once.

Another trail, that might deserve careful consideration in this context, will determine whether the understanding of the heterotopias has anything to do with accepting the free individuals’ behavior. This does not happen in a social-cultural sense, of course – we are all “forced”, in one way or another, by the society, and, consequently, we attend certain social spaces, without being noticed – but from a social-political perspective: do the participations in the meetings of the communist parties or in the May 1 parades in the former communist countries define some “special” heterotopias? Is there, therefore, any “normal” and “natural” heterotopias (generally imposed by a society) or any “abnormal” ones (politically imposed)? Do “gray” heterotopias and “black” heterotopias really exist?

*The third principle* tells us that “l’hétérotopie a le pouvoir de juxtaposer en un seul lieu réel plusieurs espaces, plusieurs emplacements qui sont en eux-mêmes incompatibles.” (1577). Concerning this, Foucault’s examples involve the theater, the cinema and the garden. We should note some remarks about the first two, right from their presentation made by the author himself: „le théâtre fait succéder sur le rectangle de la scène toute une série de lieux qui sont étrangers les uns aux autres; c’est ainsi que le cinéma est une très curieuse salle rectangulaire, au fond de laquelle, sur un écran à deux dimensions, on voit se projeter un espace à trois dimensions.” (1577)

First, it is curious that Foucault rapidly changes the criterion proposed for “prooving” the heterotopical quality of the spaces in question: for the theater is
about the co-presence of various (incompatible, if desired) spaces on the scene, according to the text of the play or to the director’s intention, while the cinema requires the ability to give the sensation of the three-dimensionality starting from a two-dimensional surface. Obviously, the observation about the theater would be appropriate in the case of the cinema too, because they can be recreated and connected with the most diverse and “incompatible” spaces.

But perhaps, in both cases, Foucault actually wanted to show something else – that we are dealing with the juxtaposition of two or more spaces in the same room (not on the same stage or on the same screen, and from this perspective the presentation he makes to the cinema is closer to our suggestion): the space designed for the spectators (described by my own physicality and the one of those around me, viewers like me) and the stage or screen. Of course, it might be objected that you cannot be, at the same time, “participant” (mentally speaking) at two different locations. We could answer to that objection, even though this is not our target, our question being what could coexist in the same – unitary defined – space; two spaces, let’s say, two spatial realities “embracing” two different kinds of relationships, belonging to the actors and to the audience – although, as a summary remark, some theater performances include the spectator’s involvement in the actual substance of the theatrical act, his co-participation; or, in reality, our sensations are complex sensations, virtually containing more spaces that simultaneously coexist (this would mean that I simultaneously attend both the space of the audience and the space of the stage or screen).

We have to concede that the mere juxtaposition of the incompatible spaces or the creation of the illusion of a three-dimensionality (trompe l’œil) can easily be imagined in the case of painting too (you can even create the sensation of a moving object – see, for example, the famous paintings of David Hockney dedicated to the Grand Canyon; unfortunately, you really have to go and see the pictures for “checking” this). But, again, if our suggestion represents the theater and the cinema (better explanatory examples), it opens the door to all those means of expression that give to us, sometimes as well as those mentioned by Foucault, the illusion of being “in another place”, although we know perfectly well where we actually are: a book we are reading; the concert hall, when hearing a piece of music (on this occasion, it is worthy to notice that the “other spaces” are not just purely visual products, they do not depend only on the visual factors); a museum (of any type); a painting or an exhibited item, etc.. Why not, a natural landscape can take us in “another space” and/or in “another time” than the “present”. Thus, from this perspective, any space can be a kind of other space: people (in a private sense) have different and practically infinite places that can make them slipping into spatial reveries, which – again – would lead to a “heterotopic inflation.”

Additionally, the example of the garden opens some important discussions. Firstly, on the one hand, nothing that was initially situated in the
Persian garden was meant to be a microcosm, including the four parts reproducing the other four parts of the world, having the fountain as an “umbilical” center, and, on the other hand, the carpet was also a reproduction of a garden, Foucault completing thus his remarks: “Le jardin, c’est un tapis où le monde tout entier vient accomplir sa perfection symbolique, et le tapis, c’est une sorte de jardin mobile à travers l’espace. Le jardin, c’est la plus petite parcelle du monde et puis c’est la totalité du monde. Le jardin, c’est, depuis le fond de l’Antiquité, une sorte d’hétérotopie heureuse et universalisante (de là nos jardins zoologiques).” (1578)

So the carpet (at least in its “initial” intention, by its “original” meaning(s), if there is such a thing...) brings together several spatialities: it is an object of a certain size for household purposes (which occupies, with a specific function, a given area in a room21), it is a “garden” (in the house) and it is thereby a “world too.” All these spaces are put forward, called, presented in one and the same “thing”, the carpet itself. And it could be stated that, in an “enchanted” world, the “domestic” meaning of the carpet – today, that is for us its most natural function (and, probably, for many, the single one) – could have been once the least “actual” one – the carpet brought together, gathered the people of the house on its living surface, it determined them to have another smaller world in their sui generis world, which is the house itself; a more intimate, a more “vivid” world, remembering them the richness of the world itself, through its richness of colors and figurative elements; it could induce themselves the presence of a space (of the house) which seems today, for many people, a space of “closure” (physically speaking) extracting them, as direct participants, from the vitality of this world. Even if it is “mobile” – according to Foucault “c’est une sorte de jardin mobile à travers l’espace” – it also has the ability to “immobilize” or to “anchor” the whole world within itself, in the place where it is laid down.

Also, the heterotopias from the same “family” are meant to communicate with each other, being able to replace each other. If we accept that a carpet is a garden, that the latter was the “reason” for which the former was created (at least in a certain area and in a certain historical period), we will also accept – notes Foucault – that the garden is a carpet. Carpet and garden are not just “symbols” that can stand for each other, analogically, but they involve some concrete or “spatial” experiences – when we walk on a carpet, but also in a garden, we step somehow carefully (of course, some busy people would say that we only “use” them), we “tune” our steps according to their spatial reality, going to the place that “meets” us: we do not step be that as it may but we feel their special tissue, their special texture22.

21 For a more complex discussion, we could develop here the pattern of the vertical carpets or of the tapestries.

22 Today, some people still take their shoes off when they observe carpets in a house or in a room they enter; of course, there is much to talk on this subject, and it is also, in many cultures, a...
Without being linked to a strict topology as the Persian garden, the zoos and the contemporary botanical gardens (mentioned by Foucault himself in this context) have the same “universalizing” requirement, trying to show us (as much as possible) the world of animals or plants. In another sense, which brings some difficulties to the concept of heterotopia (we will see further why), the natural reservations and parks – configured precisely because their natural wealth – appear to be more than a “a part of nature”, constituting in fact what might be called a “world” itself. Naturally, each of these “worlds” is only one side of the World, it is a world because it has its finality and function in this greater world, with which it organically communicates. It is what scientists call today ecosystem or ecological system. Of course, and this is the difficulty which we have just talked about, these “worlds” are only symbolically characterized as being like that, they do not obviously reproduce or (re)present the whole world, but they only partially “instantiate” or “particularize” it, more or less, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

We can think, evidently, to other countless heterotopias of the same family: the herbarium, the insectarium, the greenhouse, the aquarium. Some imaginative metaphysicians found – avant la lettre – everywhere such relationships of “the reproduction of the world” (as we could call them), even as an endless possibility, their existence “resulting” beyond all possible perceptions, in conformity with the a priori foundations of that philosophy. In a famous fragment of his Monadology (section 67), Leibniz states that “chaque portion de la matière peut être conçue comme un jardin plein de plantes, et comme un étang plein de poissons. Mais chaque rameau de la plante, chaque membre de l’animal, chaque goutte de ses humeurs est encore un tel jardin, ou un tel étang.” (Leibniz 1909: 70-71). Let’s note here the internal, qualitative infinity of the matter and the impossibility of its undefined and abstract division.

We can ask then, for relating ourselves to the introductory general classification, which kind of heterotopia is this heterotopia called by Foucault “blissful” – it is one of crisis or one of deviation? It seems that the blissful heterotopias escape from this kind of “dark” alternative... It is obvious that some heterotopias are developed in the absence of the mechanisms of subjectivation, they do not appear as dispositifs of power (contrary to our hypothesis, previously announced). The “sociality” involved by some heterotopias seems to be “soft” when they are compared to the disciplinary intensity (often based on physical and verbal violence) of emplacements such as the prisons or the psychiatric hospitals.

form of expressing the respect for the masters of the house; additionally, many people take their shoes off nowadays to prevent the mess in the house – “I have dirt on shoes” or “I came with dirt from outside” we are told, especially if there are small children in that house.
Finally, let’s note before passing to the next principle that, despite the important “functional” issues related to the human practices (which include them) we might observe that what leads to the juxtaposition of the several spaces, in some of these cases, is something visual, belonging to the order of the representation or likeness, and not something developed or required by the individual practices: a carpet resembles to a garden (it is like a garden) and a garden resembles to a world (it is like a world). It is a structural, self-evident correspondence (strictly visual, perceptual), a correspondence that goes from big to small (or vice versa). This correspondence or visual likeness — and not a socio-cultural practice — “induces” the heterotopia (it creates its impression), while enforcing a static and aesthetic appearance to the overlapping spaces.

*The fourth principle* occasions the “link of the spatiality to the temporality” (our expression) and the introduction of the related concept of the *heterochrony*. Thus, “Les hétérotopies sont liées, le plus souvent, à des découpages du temps, c’est-à-dire qu’elles ouvrent sur ce qu’on pourrait appeler, par pure symétrie, des hétérochronies; l’hétérotopie se met à fonctionner à plein lorsque les hommes se trouvent dans une sorte de rupture absolue avec leur temps traditionnel.” (1578)

We find here that the heterotopias are really put into function (operating at full speed, we could reformulate) when the time itself, i.e. here the traditional time, is “suspended”. Naturally, it would be worthy to explore which or what time is this “traditional” time: the regular one, of our daily life? The cyclic one of the “traditional” (archaic) societies? The linear one of the modern man or the fragmented one (somehow “indifferent” to the order) of the postmodern man23? In some of them, this break of time is “natural”. This is the case of the cemetery, the first example given here by Foucault: any presence in this place is (even in a visit for some aesthetic reasons, such as a “walk” made by many tourists in the famous cemeteries Père-Lachaise, Montmartre or Montparnasse in Paris) a way to “plunge” into another time, to “link” thus two (or more) time levels.

There are, in light of this principle, two types of heterotopias: those which are meant to express “the accumulation of time” and those which “celebrate” life *hic et nunc*, life in its “immediacy” (which suspend the time, we could add, through an exacerbation of the lived moment: *carpe diem*). The first are called eddy “eternitary”, the others “chronic” (*chroniques* – from Chronos, of course). Let’s detail this, along with some comments.

Trying to present the first case, the one of the heterotopias related to the accumulation of time (“infinite”, it is added), Foucault produced a particularly vivid fragment:

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23 Insofar, it seems that this latter “really exists” and that it is not just a philosophical-literary construct, just an *idea* or a *desire* – not even a more or less “theoretical” *obsession* – of being different, so a desire that we think we could “objectify” and put into it practice.
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE FOUCAULDIAN HETEROTOPIAS

“l'idée de tout accumuler, l'idée de constituer une sorte d'archive générale, la volonté d'enfermer dans un lieu tous les temps, toutes les époques, toutes les formes, tous les goûts, l'idée de constituer un lieu de tous les temps qui soit lui-même hors du temps, et inaccessible à sa morsure, le projet d'organiser ainsi une sorte d'accumulation perpétuelle et indéfinie du temps dans un lieu qui ne bougerait pas, eh bien, tout cela appartient à notre modernité. Le musée et la bibliothèque sont des hétérotopies qui sont propres à la culture occidentale du XIXe siècle.” (1578)

Shortly, the museums and libraries as we know today (in their functions, not simply as “buildings”) are expressions of the modernity, they are proper heterotopias according to this epoch.

Foucault’s observation that precedes the above presentation is simple and it is based on the fact that until the end of the eighteenth century those realities existed in another form, without any relation to the time (to its accumulation), but rather in relation to the space, being the result of the personal choice of those who initiated such a project, being thus “personalized” – they rather expressed a “personal world” than a piece of a real geographical world. They were mainly a way to collect “precious” worldwide curiosities or specimens. There were, of course, also the libraries of the universities or monasteries, well organized, trying to give a kind of universal coverage (both spatial and temporal) of the knowledge, but their resources were intended to contribute to the spiritual education of those who had access to them. None of them had, strictly speaking, a public character: they were reserved for a relatively small circle of individuals: friends and acquaintances, or members of the congregation and the specific community.

There were also the great libraries of the Antiquity (but Foucault does not reach this issue either), whose “model” remains, of course, the Ancient Library of Alexandria. The intention of the latter was to keep all the wisdom of the world, to “accumulate time”, but it was also an expression of the Egyptian power and its usage. However, to integrate this observation in the Foucauldian discussion, we should note, on the one hand, that nothing prevents, in principle, a certain significance attached to a heterotopia to appear, to be “lost” and to reappear throughout history.

On the other hand, it should be noted that what distinguishes the contemporary museums and libraries from those of Antiquity is their institutional character (in the

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24 The Library of Alexandria is sometimes designated as a heterotopia. See in this sense Ryan MacLeod’s sketchy remark: “That project focused upon a community of people, objects and texts within the palace at the Brucheion, the Greek section of the city. For the next two thousand years – for linguists, archaeologists, historians, and scholars of religion, culture, and the book – that community became a place within a place, a constellation of identities, a heterotopia, in the language of Foucault, where text elides into subtext, and myth endures long after masonry disappears.” (MacLeod 2004: 2). See also Lawrence Liang, “Shadow Libraries”.
modern sense), of a systematic, generalized – social and cultural – practice\textsuperscript{25}, originally designed to preserve the national memory (thus giving it a certain “form”), to capture the national identity, and to keep it safe from the vicissitudes of the irreversible flow of time.

Not to mention that today’s museums and libraries are very efficient tools for the individuals’ cognitive discipline. The evolution of the museums (and, partially, of the libraries, keeping pace with the new conquests of the electronic technique, designed – isn’t it? – to facilitate research and to make more enjoyable and more comfortable our relationship with the written text, too inexpressive and too dusty as a printed work) in the direction of facile, spectacular or commercial show (under this “imminent”, to threat the public’s sensitivity might redirect itself to other spaces, more malleable, belonging to a “cultural relaxation”, and also, it could especially go after the ghost of the market economy) means, to a great extent, nothing than a neoliberal-style “change”, encouraging the decoupling of the paying public from the true culture because they offer instead a “cultural show”, profitable in two ways: it makes money and it “anesthetizes” the critical sense developed by an complex interrogative education\textsuperscript{26}. Anyway, we must keep the museums and the libraries in the horizon of the systematic institutional practices, with other, well “organized”, purposes (not declared, of course) this time.

A short postscript about the fact that we have “museums about anything.” The museum seems to be, from this perspective, the public and commercial analogon of today’s science, sociologically and sufficiently commercialized on its turn, for everyone’s benefit. In its annual course at the Collège de France, the one about The Psychiatric Power, in the meeting of January 23, 1974, Foucault noted that one of the characteristics of the modern science, which defines it, is to consider that no corner of the reality is trivial, so his duty is to “investigate everything.” Similarly, we can say that the mission of the today’s museums is to “present everything.” In fact, in a closer analysis, it appears that the common denominator of the two “research” directions is the curiosity (and, to be very direct, not the wonder), the peripheral, epidermal, “educated” excitation of human senses, the individual’s restless desire (researcher, visitor, tourist, etc.) to “learn” anything about everything, a personal curiosity, socially accompanied by the official recognition of himself – just – as a bold expression of a claimed and desired cognitive emancipation of the “man.”

\textsuperscript{25} We might add, even with an uncritical character: today, we take for granted that we must have museums, moreover, museums of any kind and for anything (of course, the museum policies have commercial-touristic reasons too).

\textsuperscript{26} A synthetic manner to render idea is to consider the current (neoliberal) state smart enough for not funding those activities that could lead to its own undermining; in the same way as they consume all sorts of products and services, the neoliberalized citizens could (and should) consume culture too, and the internet is probably the biggest possible cultural hypermarket.
The other heterotopias presented at this point, the “chronic” one, designates the escapes from the everyday temporality, from the routine, from the ordinary. Foucault’s examples are the fairs organized on the outskirts of the past cities (held once or twice a year) and the today’s holiday of the villages. They are both specially created spaces, precisely intended for this separation from everyday life. For the people of the past – we mean the vast majority of them – had no “holidays”, we can approximate the social effect of these fairs, i.e. offering them the spectacular, bringing another world close to those who could not go for that (having neither the financial means, nor the social curiosity for this); they were substantially the same as the today’s vacations or holidays, representing not only an encounter driven by curiosity with what is “different”, but also a “deserved reward”, psychologically felt as such, after the work of a whole year. Naturally, the forms of such escapes are today more varied and they should be presented beyond the (bourgeois) “cliché” of the holiday village, which appears in Foucault’s text, characterizing the French tourist space of the ’50s–’70s of the last century, promoted by the agencies such as the well-known Club Med.

The fifth principle shows us that the heterotopias “supposent toujours un système d’ouverture et de fermeture qui, à la fois, isole et les rend pénétrables” (1579). In its vague generality, this principle initially does not cause difficulties – any place (any space apart) implies a certain boundary that means both a closure (even for its identification) and an opening, so that the “toujours” in the text does not bring problems.

The continuation seems problematic though, since, on the one hand, Foucault returns to his familiar area, significantly restricting the meanings of these closings and openings, and, on the other hand, he mixes the heterotopias and the heterotopic emplacements, causing thus confusion. We present the whole fragment, followed by our comment:

“En général, on n’accède pas à un emplacement hétérotopique comme dans un moulin. Ou bien on y est contraint, c’est le cas de la caserne, le cas de la prison, ou bien il faut se soumettre à des rites et à des purifications. On ne peut y entrer qu’avec une certaine permission et une fois qu’on a accompli un certain nombre de gestes. Il y a même d’ailleurs des hétérotopies qui sont entièrement consacrées à ces activités de purification, purification mi-religieuse, mi-hygienique comme dans les hammams des musulmans, ou bien purification en apparence purement hygiénique comme dans les saunas scandinaves.” (1579)

First of all, we should note a brief remark, apparently minor, but which reveals at a closer look some significant difficulties. We start from a simple question: is the mill (moulin) or is it not a heterotopia? The mill – in the traditional sense (i.e. historically speaking, a “pre-emplacement” space) – represents a space

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27 At this point, our suggestion is this: even if they are “species” of the heterotopias, the emplacements mainly develop issues related to the disciplinary mechanisms of power in general, expressing the propagation, the configuration and the realization thereof.
apart, not only with a key role in the rural economy, but also with a wider significance, because all crops owners turn their corn into meal there – and that indicates a dependence of all people in the village on this space, transforming it in a sign of social intertwining. Naturally, a mill was not (specially) secured, it was only guided by special rules of accession, there was no password – the economical interest of those who arrived there to get the thing for which they came for was enough to enter in that place. We might add that you voluntarily came and entered to the mill.

But this also happens for several heterotopias – some amusement parks, some “modern” holidays fairs (the Christmas fair, for example) or some flea markets (which still exists); many of them have no entrance fee, therefore you do not have to ask for permission to enter inside nor to do certain “gestures” for accessing them.

The park, the simple park, could also be considered as a heterotopia: for most inhabitants of a city or of a region, it is another space, situated in the middle or in the outskirts of a city, creating the possibility to escape from the time and space of the everyday life (even of the park itself has its own urban “routine”, but this is something else). The restrictions for “admission” are minimal and they are applied for almost any public place: not to be aggressive, not to offer excessive bodily nudity28, etc.

We do not discuss here the disciplinary character (as much as it is, at least in a broad cultural sense) of such “restrictions” (the problem can be put, hermeneutically, in the wake of Foucault’s thought) – we just want to point out that if they define a way of accessing a place, so if they indicate a space apart, then all the public spaces get this status or character of heterotopia, thus the heterotopias sensibly loose again the capacity of being a methodological, efficient research tool30.

Concerning the saunas indicated by Foucault, we face other difficulties. The mentioning of the public baths only (such as Turkish hammam) could have ruled out such kind of difficulties and they would have related the discussion to

28 There are, paradoxically, “inverse” spaces, “special” spaces, where the nudity is “required” – the nudist beach, for example, where you will look different, becoming somehow “suspect”, even if you are not forbidden to stay dressed up. The general framework would impose some special spaces where the rituals and the constraints are indirect, “oblique”, tacit, imposed by the community (mostly) attends those spaces, by its behavior – by the community who practically creates the identity of those places. We precisely refer to the stadiums of many football teams, to the clubs frequented by sexual minorities, to the dens, etc.

29 This means, among other things, to have the capacity of qualitatively discriminate between the investigated entities.

30 Not to mention the private spaces, which would complicate the discussion, since they are in fact “typical” expressions of the existence of a procedure for accession, the simplest being, probably, the owner’s permission; apart from our further short discussion, we should extensively analyze somehow the importance of the public and private dichotomy of the heterotopia in general: and also, we should see if other concrete examples could contribute to the subject.
a social or religious practice (even venerable) which employed the existence of a space apart, specifically devoted to it (with different rituals of access, according to different cultures).

There is, indeed, a certain sacred character of sauna – there is an old saying in Finland, widespread even today, telling us that “saunassa ollaan kuin kirkossa” (you should be(have) in the sauna as you do in the church); however, we should remark, the sauna was also accompanied by what we could call a “spiritual dimension” (sometimes not in the expected sense of purification, but in the sense of being a space of divine pleasures).

But this (only this) does not transform the sauna into a heterotopia. Consequently, we think that is necessary to discuss what is related to the private character that the heterotopias might or might not have. If a certain practice is developed by one person or by few people only (those who have access to the family’s intimacy, for example), in a particular place (religious, cultural location etc.), might it be called a heterotopia?

There is no problem in the first instance and we could accept this: the small sanctuaries of worshipping from people’s houses (populated by icons, candles, votive lights, etc.) or the small spaces designed for private prayers may be an example – they are a variation in micro, a privatized and individualized place of worship and they receive (somehow by “contamination”) a heterotopic character

Everyone has (or rather had) such “spaces”, there is a widespread in the sense of cultural-religious practice, but could this belong to the “social space”? If so, then all cultural, religious, and especially secular developments of the majority of the population would lead to the creation of heterotopias: the (private) bathroom would be a heterotopia (people wash in the bathroom), the kitchen (people cook in the kitchen), the bedroom, the living room and so on, with all their variations and variants.

We return to this point, for the major problem is – differently formulated – that thereby it occurs again an “inflation” of heterotopias, that the very criteria used for their “attestation” may be changed depending on the case, that – again – any space is one of a particular coloring. It seems that we have no space to escape colorations: emotional, social, religious, political, cultural, etc. – there are no neutral spaces, there are no “non-places” spaces, all spaces are already places, the “space” occurs secondly, overlaps the place itself and it cannot “cancel”, “annihilate” it

Moreover, in a presentation of a juxtaposition of spaces, we find both the secular and the sacred space in the same domestic space which is a house. Simplifying the discussion, the family is, as for the Christians, a sui generis form of the Church – the family is “the little church” (or “the home church”, according to St. John Chrysostom), the church is a large family: for a Christian, church and family cannot exist without each other – and the house is the privileged place that expresses this relation.

A reference that works in this direction, not entirely identical to our previous suggestions, is the one belonging to Edward S. Casey in The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History.
We would also add that, in the era of “order” or “social disciplining” of the space where we already live since a while\textsuperscript{33}, any spatial “piece” receives \textit{a fortiori} a strong social coloratura and it introduces us to a world of social (but also political, cultural, etc.) relations.

Space, wherever it may be – in the deep jungle or at the North Pole, on the surface or in the depths of the Earth’s oceans – is (already) socially “organized”, there are ubiquitous and universal (legal) restrictions for space, any space is regulated. Moreover, these regulations exist far before our presence “there”, they already exist not only in treatises, but (which is more important) also in our behavior, when we “inform” about those places (even on the geographical and touristic level).

Nature or what is today called “nature” is \textit{organized}\textsuperscript{34} by itself, it is already full of restrictions (which are not the “natural” constraints of the physical obstacles – a river, a slope, etc.) – there is, for example, a typical tourist’s behavior (we are told, only “to defend nature”), a “normal” tourist’s behaviour, including what \textit{can} and what \textit{cannot} do a tourist, wherever he would be in this world.

Returning to the Foucault’s examples at this point, there is also another kind of heterotopias, some “qui ont l’air de pures et simples ouvertures, mais qui, en général, cachent de curieuses exclusions; tout le monde peut entrer dans ces emplacements hétérotopiques, mais, à vrai dire, ce n’est qu’une illusion: on croit pénétrer et on est, par le fait même qu’on entre, exclu” (1579). Here, the main example is the one of the farms in South America (Brazil in particular), which provided a special room for the unknown guests, isolated from the residence where the owners’ family ran their daily life. We might call them “openings that close”, and Foucault adds that, nowadays, their mentioned form is gone.

\textsuperscript{33} One of the aspects of this process is the translation of all our human relations in connections with some property, limited to the links between properties, so not between people, communities, etc. who own properties, but between “owners”; tout court, our way by excellence (if not, for many, unique) is to identify ourselves today, socially and anthropologically (not to speak juridically or politically), as individuals and social assemblies.

\textsuperscript{34} There is no more a “virgin” nature. The few left virgin areas must be defended and “organized” to remain so. You are in the presence of something special and you have to behave yourself specially, with care. You do not have to be “natural” in the “nature”. The natural is considered today – paradoxically – the expression of an exception: this conception belongs to the nature itself (now “corrupted” and damaged by the social for whom we fight for) and to you too, the “intruder” himself (in other words, the man recognizes that he is not – anymore – a part of nature). Not to mention the obsession to “maintain the ecological balance” in a desperate attempt to keep from the “(real) nature” whatever “exists”... or at least as much as possible. Like a posthumous recognition of an unpunished “social guilt of man”, of a “social sin” of himself (as a second Fall, this time not from Heaven, but from the Earth itself). In addition, the desire to recover a “pure”, a “virgin” or an “authentic” nature has to face a sharp criticism à la Baudrillard. And, to paraphrase him, the symbolic anticipation – and not only some “empirical reality” – compels us to say (is there any reason at all?) that “la nature n’existe plus”.

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There is something similar (“peut-être”, Foucault mentions) in the case of the motels (“américains”, is specified). Considering the presence of these two examples, we might state that what brings them together is the fact that you are somewhat tolerated inside them, you are temporarily allowed there (because you are not part of the family, or because – in the second case – of your moral behavior). You are accepted there for some time, then you will have to go. You find there a shelter, but you are somehow hidden: the rest of the space remains impenetrable to you, either because you do not have the permission to go there, or because it is mainly in your own interest not to be seen around that place, in the second case), so you are not present. You remain “unknown” to that place, that place remains “unknown” to you, you are clandestinely, incognito out there.

Finally, Foucault states quite vaguely that the heterotopias “ont, par rapport à l’espace restant, une fonction” (1580). This function covers the segment between two extremes, defined by the heterotopia of illusion (“d’illusion”) and the heterotopia of compensation (“de compensation”). The first “ont pour rôle de créer un espace d’illusion qui dénonce comme plus illusoire encore tout l’espace réel, tous les emplacements à l’intérieur desquels la vie humaine est cloisonnée” (1580), as example being offered “les maisons closes”, while heterotopias of compensation offer “un autre espace, un autre espace réel, aussi parfait, aussi méticuleux, aussi bien arrangé que le nôtre est désordonné, mal agencé et brouillon” (1580) – the colonies, for example (of the English Puritans in the North America or of the Jesuits in the South America).

The denunciation of the rest of the space – this is what we might call to “gather” together these heterotopias – as not satisfying our innermost desires, leads us to temporary “escape” from its limits or, respectively, to a total and “rigorous” reorganization of it, in another place, “forever” (at least, in intention).

And what brings us together, what juxtaposes at a second level, and not only these heterotopias, but also other countless spaces, going from harbor to harbor, is precisely the ship – the Foucauldian “hétérotopie par excellence”, from the sixteenth century to nowadays.

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35 We think that some examples offered by Foucault are the result of some general clichés: the “American” motel, where a boss flees with his mistress, both registering under fictitious names in exchange for a small tip, etc. – although this kind of space is present in all civilizations.

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