Foucault Studies

ARTICLE

Foucault, Borges, Heterotopia: Producing Knowledge in Other Spaces

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ABSTRACT: Arguably the most famous heterotopia that appears in Foucault's work is the Chinese encyclopedia, which originates in the fiction of Jorge Luis Borges. Drawing on this citation of Borges, this article examines Foucault's notion of the heterotopia as it relates to order and knowledge production. Frequently, heterotopias are understood as sites of resistance. This article argues that shifting the focus from resistance to order and knowledge production reveals how heterotopias make the spatiality of order legible. By juxtaposing and combining many spaces in one site, heterotopias problematize received knowledge by destabilizing the ground on which knowledge is built. Yet heterotopias always remain connected to the dominant order; thus as heterotopias clash with dominant orders, they simultaneously produce new ways of knowing. This article first explores the tensions between Foucault's two definitions of heterotopias before connecting these definitions to Foucault's distinctly spatial understanding of knowledge as emerging from a clash of forces. Finally, the paper ends by returning to the relationship between Foucault, Borges, and heterotopias.

Keywords: Foucault, Borges, heterotopia, order, knowledge production.

When the editors of *Hérodote*, a French journal of geography, interviewed Michel Foucault in 1976, they insisted on the centrality of geography to Foucault's project. Citing the proposal Foucault offers in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that statements must be grasped within a system of relations, the editors told Foucault that they "were surprised by your silence about geography."[1] Indeed, Foucault offers a number of geographical and spatial metaphors in his works: the system of relations, fields, domains, horizons, carceral archipelagos, and so on. Yet Foucault initially responded to the geographers skeptically, even condescendingly, "If I made a list of all the sciences, knowledges, and domains which I should mention and don't… the list would be practically endless… To me it doesn't seem a good method to take a particular science to work on just because it's interesting or important."[2] In other words, if one wonders why Foucault does not analyze geography, one might as well ask why he does not take up architecture, mathematics, or carpentry. Yet the *Hérodote* editors persisted in positing the cen-

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[1] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, edited by Colin Gordon, translated by Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 63.

[2] Ibid., 64.

trality of space to Foucault's project, and eventually Foucault shifted his tone. In the final words of the interview, Foucault asserted, "Geography must indeed necessarily lie at the heart of my concerns."[3]

This shift certainly seems surprising. Did the *Hérodote* editors simply manage to convince Foucault of the primacy of geography in his method? Did they unearth a concept Foucault had missed in his own work? The answer may lie in an observation Foucault makes in the interview. Latching onto a misleading distinction many have created between time and space, Foucault says, "Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic."[4] This focus on time alone is misleading precisely because it leaves no room for relationships. If we view history only in terms of progress and events only in terms of teleology, no room is left to examine the "*systems of dispersion*"; instead, we are left attempting to connect "small islands of coherence," filling gaps with linear progression. In short, analysis focused solely on time leaves no place for space.[5] Thus Foucault recognizes the importance of geography, and, more precisely, space to his own work and its rejection of origins, progressions, and linearity.

This spatiality can be usefully explored with recourse to Foucault's celebrated heterotopias, spaces that provide an alternate space of ordering while paradoxically remaining both separate from and connected to all other spaces. Foucault evokes heterotopias in "Of Other Spaces," which is based on a 1967 lecture but was not published until 1984. Foucault also describes heterotopias in his famous citation of Borges' heterotopic Chinese encyclopedia in the preface of *The Order of Things*. The conceptions of heterotopias that these texts provide do not reduce to one succinct, unproblematic definition of the term, making scholarly attention to the topic difficult. Traditionally, heterotopias are understood as sites of resistance.[6] There are certainly grounds for this. Yet, I suggest that such an understanding obscures their primary function: making order legible. Heterotopias are sites in which epistemes collide and overlap, creating an intensification of knowledge. Such intensification is certainly not at odds with the practice of resistance, but shifting our emphasis from one to the other promises new insights into the primary function of heterotopias.

Foucault rarely thematizes heterotopias, and as a result critical attention to heterotopias often overlooks their relationship to his other works. Indeed, Foucault relies heavily on space and spatial metaphors in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, "Truth and Juridical Forms," and "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History." These texts bridge the chronological gap between the publi-

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[3] Ibid., 77

[4] Ibid., 70

[5] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 37.

[6] See Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1997); Bruno Bosteels, "Nonplaces: An Anecdoted Topography of Contemporary French Theory," *Diacritics*, vol. 33, nos. 3-4 (Fall-Winter 2003), 117-39; and Benjamin Genocchio, "Discourse, Discontinuity, Difference: The Question of 'Other' Spaces," in Katherine Gibson & Sophie Watson (eds.), *Postmodern Cities and Spaces* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 35-47. For a revised look at the tensions among power, resistance, and heterotopias, see Peter Johnson, "Unravelling Foucault's 'different spaces,' *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 19, no.4 (November 2006), 75-90.

cation of *The Order of Things* and "Of Other Spaces." More importantly, these texts share a thematic concern with the production of knowledge. Building on an understanding of heterotopias as sites that make order legible, I argue that Foucault's heterotopology can be contextualized within the larger argument advanced in these texts that knowledge is produced by a clash of forces. Offering an alternative view to critics who see heterotopias as sites of resistance, I will argue that heterotopias are not primarily sites of resistance to power but instead sites of reordering. I shift the focus from resistance to knowledge intensification to examine how heterotopias make order legible. Here the metaphor of the operating table is useful: Objects become knowable because the space between objects on the operating table allows us to separate them into discrete entities. By juxtaposing and combining many spaces in one site, heterotopias problematize received knowledge by revealing and destabilizing the ground, or operating table, on which knowledge is built. To be sure, this destabilization can offer an avenue for resistance. Yet a shift in focus from resistance to knowledge production reveals how heterotopias make order legible by telescoping many spaces in one site.

Foucault's citation of Borges' Chinese encyclopedia is perhaps his best-known literary allusion. Given Borges' abiding concern with non-linear forms of memory and knowledge, it comes as no surprise that Foucault would turn to his fiction to explore knowledge production. I conclude with an example of another heterotopia from Borges. In "Funes the Memorious," Borges describes Funes, a man who, after falling from a horse, finds himself unable to forget. He remembers every moment in his life exactly as it happened. Forced to remember even the most minor details, Funes quickly loses patience with traditional ways of ordering knowledge. As the operating table of his memory becomes cluttered, he rejects language as too general and attempts to create a new language that closes the gaps between knowable objects. His heterotopic memory forces Funes to question the epistemes upon which he had always relied. This fictional heterotopia operates much like the real heterotopias Foucault describes: It is a space where the telescoping of many spaces in one site leads to the intensification of knowledge and the revelation of the governing principles of its order. For Foucault, heterotopias map the space of existing knowledge, making order legible.

a. Foucault's Heterotopias

The term heterotopia comes from medicine, where it refers to the displacement of an organ or part of the body from its normal position.[7] Foucault defines his conception of the term most fully in "Of Other Spaces," which outlines six principles of heterotopia. Although we must be careful in our usage of the essay because Foucault never intended it for publication, the six principles remain valuable.[8] The first principle of heterotopias is that they are universal: Every human culture has them, although the forms they take are heterogeneous. Foucault defines two types of heterotopias: heterotopias of crisis, which are sacred and forbidden places for people in a state of crisis (menstruating women, pregnant women, the elderly) and hetero-

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[7] Rosalind Fergusson & Anne Stibbs (eds.), *A Dictionary of Nursing*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[8] See Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," translated by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics,* vol. 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986), 22-27, for further description of these principles.

topias of deviance, which are, Foucault asserts, replacing heterotopias of crisis.[9] These new heterotopias represent sites for people whose actions deviate from the norms in some way; Foucault gives the examples of prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and rest homes, because even rest deviates from the norm of working. The second principle of heterotopias is that society can make them function in vastly different ways, refashioning their use over time. Here Foucault offers the example of the movement of cemeteries from the church in the heart of the city to the suburbs: where once propinquity to the city center marked one's status, now death is seen as a contagion, something that must be expelled. 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. The third principle is that heterotopias juxtapose many real, incompatible spaces in one space. The theater, where diverse worlds, norms, and customs converge on the stage, represents a heterotopia of many spaces combined in one. The fourth principle of heterotopias is that they are connected with time, both the accumulation of time, as in the case of a museum, and in the fleetingness of time, as in the festival; these two kinds of heterochrony, as Foucault calls them, come together in the example of exotic destination holidays that attempt to preserve a fleeting moment of bliss for the traveler: The resort preserves a bygone, simpler time for the traveler, who will only visit for a few weeks at most. The fifth principle is that heterotopias require a system of opening and closing that isolates them from other spaces while retaining their penetrability. This principle entails the sixth and final principle, which is that heterotopias have a function in relation to all other sites. These last two principles, in particular, separate heterotopias from utopias. Utopias are always imaginary, while heterotopias are always real. Thus heterotopias do not exist independently of our existence or our ways of knowing. I will focus in particular on principle three, which defines heterotopias as spaces that alter orders in some way by combining many spaces in one site; I will also explore principle six, which conceives of heterotopias as spaces that share a relationship with all other spaces, though they are isolated in some way.

As this brief summary shows, Foucault's definition of heterotopias is unwieldy; Foucault does not offer a succinct or unproblematic definition of heterotopias. In the preface of *The Order of Things*, Foucault writes perhaps his most concise descriptions of heterotopias:

> *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'.[10]

Here, it would seem, Foucault defines heterotopias in one sentence rather than in seven pages of text, as it takes him in "Of Other Spaces." This definition is not without problems; in fact, it is less a definition of heterotopias than a description of what they do. That is, in this case,

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[9] See Ibid., 24, where Foucault associates heterotopias of crisis with "so-called primitive societies."
[10] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xviii.

disturbing by undermining language. Yet Foucault does not seem certain even about this disturbance: They are disturbing *probably* because they undermine language, but that adverb leaves open the possibility that heterotopias do other disturbing things as well. Later in the same paragraph, Foucault asserts that "heterotopias (such as those to be found so often in Borges) desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its sources; they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences."[11] Heterotopias, in this conception, work to undermine text; they attack the space on which text is written. Clearly, a tension exists between *The Order of Things*, which seems to describe heterotopias as primarily textual, and "Of Other Spaces," where heterotopias are physical spaces. Yet attacking the space for writing or speaking also entails an attack on the principles according to which texts are written: grammar, syntax, and more generally, order. Thus the description from *The Order of Things* can clarify the desultory definition from "Of Other Spaces" and demonstrate the function heterotopias have in relation to all other spaces. This function is to problematize the order that undergirds knowledge production.

Still, *The Order of Things* alone does not resolve the problems of Foucault's desultory definition of heterotopias in "Of Other Spaces," making thorough critical attention to the topic difficult. It should come as no surprise, then, that many critics define heterotopias only in passing, and often with little recourse to Foucault, before applying the concept elsewhere. Edward W. Soja briefly outlines heterotopias as described in "Of Other Spaces" before using the concept to explore such Los Angeles spaces as the Bonaventure Hotel, Walt Disney Hall, and El Pueblo de Nuestra Senora la Reina de Los Angeles.[12] Sara Chaplin devotes more attention to Foucault's thinking on heterotopias in her essay "Heterotopia Deserta: Las Vegas and Other Spaces," but the focus remains largely on Las Vegas' spaces rather than on heterotopias.[13] In his essay in an anthology dedicated to the use of Foucault in geography, David Harvey mentions heterotopias to support his contention that "Foucault fails to develop a viable critical theory of what space and time might be about," but he spends little time discussing Foucault's description of heterotopias.[14] Benjamin Genocchio sets out to create a "more patient reading of Foucault's remarks on heterotopias" and he usefully explores the concept in "Of Other Spaces" and *The Order of Things*, but his argument does not attend to Foucault's discussion of space in other contexts.[15] Scholars, in short, tend to focus primarily on heterotopias as they are outlined in "Of Other Spaces," a text that lends itself to a reading of heterotopias as sites of resistance. Supplementing "Of Other Spaces" with *The Order of Things*, as some scholars have done, can extend our understanding of heterotopias. But just as

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[11] Ibid., xviii.

[12] Edward W. Soja, "Heterotopologies: A Remembrance of Other Spaces in the Citadel-LA," in Katherine Gibson & Sophie Watson (eds.), *Postmodern Cities and Spaces* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 13-35.

[13] Sarah Chaplin, "Heterotopia Deserta: Las Vegas and Other Spaces," in Alexander R. Cuthbert (ed.), *Designing Cities: Critical Readings in Urban Design* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 2003), 340-356.

[14] David Harvey, "The Kantian Roots of Foucault's Dilemmas," in Stuart Elden & Jeremy W. Crampton (eds.), *Space, Knowledge, and Power: Foucault and Geography* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 41-49. See in particular 44-45.

[15] Genocchio, 35-46.

heterotopias themselves must be understood in relation to other spaces, Foucault's work on heterotopias must be understood in relation to Foucault's work on space, order, and knowledge production. Instead of treating heterotopias in isolation, this contextualization reveals that heterotopias make legible the ordering that occurs in space.

The spatiality in Foucault's work has not gone unnoticed by critics. In his survey of French theory, Bruno Bosteels posits that because of Foucault's use of space, "the humanities are left literally without a ground to stand on."[16] Bosteels locates Foucault's critical leverage in his nonfoundational stance that provides him with a "standpoint from where to write a critique of modernity derived from an immanent yet disturbing relation to the here and now, a perspective for which Foucault coined the term 'heterotopia.'"[17] While this view values the often unnoticed spatiality in Foucault, it is problematic not only because Foucault did not coin the term heterotopia but because heterotopias, while they open into Foucault's ideas on knowledge production, classification, and ordering, do not necessarily provide the ground from which Foucault launches assaults on modernity, as Bosteels seems to imply.[18] While Foucault cites Borges' heterotopia to launch *The Order of Things*, he never claims to write from a heterotopic space. More accurately, heterotopias help Foucault complete what Michel de Certeau has called the "reproduced move of 'gridding' (*quadriller*) a visible space in such a way as to make its occupants available for observation and 'information.'"[19] In other words, Foucault uses heterotopias to map the space of existing knowledge. Yet Bosteels' association of heterotopia with resistance appears repeatedly in critical approaches to heterotopia. Writing from the perspective of a cultural geographer, Kevin Hetherington, in *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering*, sets out to theorize heterotopia and Foucault's writing on space; as Hetherington notes, Foucault "has had a significant impact on cultural geography."[20] Hetherington defines "heterotopia as spaces of alternate ordering. Heterotopia organize a bit of the social world in a way different to that which surrounds them."[21] Hetherington argues that heterotopias make possible new ways of ordering and can thus be seen as "counter-hegemonic spaces that exist apart from 'central' spaces that are seen to represent the social order."[22] This argument parallels Bosteels' in that Hetherington sees hete-rotopias as separate spaces that offer footholds for resistance. For Hetherington, the alternate ordering of heterotopias becomes a path for resistance to hegemony. Similarly, Genocchio posits that heterotopias act as "counter-sites, spaces in contestation of, or in contrast or oppo-sition to" other sites, thus revealing that "the ordering of spatial systems is subjective and

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[16] Bosteels, 118.

[17] Ibid., 120.

[18] *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Heterotopy." The first quotation, written in 1876, reads "Tumors are abnormal only because they occur in a locality in which their elements do not normally exist (Heterotopia)." Thus the term existed in medical discourse long before Foucault appropriated it for his purposes.

[19] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 46-47.

[20] Hetherington, 41.

[21] Ibid., viii.

[22] Ibid., 21.

arbitrary."[23] Peter Johnson argues that for Foucault, "heterotopia not only contrasts to but also disrupts utopia."[24] In this sense, heterotopias are an attempt to "think differently about, and uncouple the grip of, power relations," although this rethinking offers no promise of liberation from power.[25] Thus heterotopias can be understood as a temporary passage away from power.

Clearly, questions of order emerge repeatedly in scholarship on heterotopias. Frequently, scholars mine the tension between power and resistance to examine heterotopic order. Focusing instead on the relationship between knowledge production and order forces reengagement with the inextricable connection heterotopias have with the dominant order. Indeed, the paradox of heterotopias is that they are both separate from yet connected to all other spaces. This connectedness is precisely what builds contestation into heterotopias. Imaginary spaces such as utopias exist completely outside of order and therefore do not challenge it. Instead of remaining always separate, heterotopias hold up an alternate order to the dominant order, providing glimpses of the governing principles of order. These glimpses emerge through the connections heterotopias hold with all other spaces. As Foucault describes them in "Of Other Spaces," heterotopias do not exist independently of other sites, including sites of power: "They have a function in relation to all the space that remains."[26] In this lecture, Foucault ostensibly lends support to the idea that heterotopias are sites of resistance, describing them as "something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites than can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."[27] Critics who argue that heterotopias offer the possibility of resistance often refer to these spaces as counter-sites, and Foucault does describe a contestation enacted by heterotopias. This contestation makes visible the formations of received knowledge, and thus represents a confrontation with knowledge production that promises new formulations of knowledge. Yet these formulations will not shed the dominant order. To be sure, such a confrontation offers the possibility of irritating dominant forms of order, but any new knowledge formations will emerge with the imprints of both hegemonic and heterotopic space. Foucault's mirror example demonstrates this well: the mirror is a "sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself where I am absent."[28] The reflection in the mirror is isolated from all other spaces yet related to these spaces; the reflection in the "glass… is absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there."[29] The reflection reconstitutes our own visibility, presenting us an alternative view of who we are. Heterotopias reconstitute knowledge, presenting a view of its structural formation that might not otherwise be visible. Foucault explains that through

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[23] Genocchio, 38 and 43.

[24] Johnson, 87.

[25] Ibid., 87.

[26] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 27.

[27] Ibid., 24.

[28] Ibid., 24.

[29] Ibid., 24.

the mirror "I come back toward myself."[30] This movement offers a way of seeing that image in a new way from a new site; thus mirrors problematize our image of ourselves by putting that image in the paradoxically real and unreal space of the mirror. As Foucault shows in the preface to *The Order of Things*, heterotopias make legible the ground on which knowledge is built by complicating that ground.

b. The Chinese Encyclopedia

Foucault's reference to Borges' Chinese encyclopedia explores this problematization. The passage Foucault cites is from "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins," a story about John Wilkins, a man who proposed the formation of a "general language that would organize and contain all human thought."[31] Foucault quotes this bizarre classification:

> These ambiguities, redundancies, and deficiencies recall those attributed by Dr. Fran Kuhn to a certain Chinese encyclopedia entitled *Celestial Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*. On those remote pages it is written that animals are divided into (a) those that belong to the emperor, (b) embalmed ones, (c) those that are trained, (d) suckling pigs, (e) mermaids, (f) fabulous ones, (g) stray dogs, (h) those that are included in this classification, (i) those that tremble as if they were mad, (j) innumerable ones, (k) those drawn with a very fine camel's-hair brush, (l) others, (m) those that have just broken a flower vase, (n) those that resemble flies from a distance.[32]

While critics often cite Foucault's use of Borges, the reference rarely receives thorough attention. Alan Sheridan, in his study *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth*, opens his chapter on *The Order of Things* by quoting the entire Chinese encyclopedia, but he only devotes one paragraph to discussing it.[33] Hetherington, in his study devoted to heterotopias and Foucault, makes no mention of Borges, even though the Chinese encyclopedia is the only heterotopia Foucault discusses explicitly in any of his books. Yet this citation is significant in a work devoted in many respects to the contestation of the episteme. Foucault cites Borges' classification precisely because its method of classification seems inscrutable given received ways of knowing. Moreover, this classification complicates the normal circumstances that guide and form our knowledge. Foucault describes a monstrous quality in Borges' classification that derives not from the strange juxtapositions of the classification but from "the fact that the common ground on which such meetings are possible has itself been destroyed."[34] Thus Borges' classification does not contest classification systems by juxtaposing irreconcilably different objects of knowledge; it explodes the possibility of distinguishing between these objects by offering no space for the objects to meet.

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[30] Ibid., 24.

[31] Jorge Luis Borges, "The Analytical Language of John Wilkins," in Emir Rodriguez Monegal & Alastair Reed (eds.), *Borges: A Reader*, translated by Alastair Read (New York: E.P. Duttion, 1981), 141.

[32] Ibid., 142.

[33] Alan Sheridan, *Michel Foucault: The Will to Truth* (New York: Routledge, 1980), 49. Sheridan's paragraph is concise and useful, but the primacy Foucault gives to the Chinese encyclopedia by calling it the impetus of his book shows that there is room to develop a more thorough reading of the citation.

[34] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xvi.

Foucault presents *The Order of Things* in part as an attempt to rediscover in "what space of order knowledge was constituted."[35] Foucault posits that order requires a space for constitution; that humans need to place things on particular sites in order to make sense of them. To describe this space, Foucault borrows the metaphor of the operating table upon which "the umbrella encounters the sewing machine" and "enables thought to operate upon the entities of our world."[36] The operating table girds ordering by providing a foundational space for that ordering. Faced with the incongruous, we must resort to the operating table, the space that undergirds the classification of things and thus our ability to form knowledge. If, as Foucault argues, truth has a history, then it is upon this operating table that this history sits, waiting to be recovered. Thus Foucault asks, "On what 'table', according to what grid of identities, similitudes, analogies, have we become accustomed to sort out so many different and similar things?" In other words, in what space do we build our order? This question is troubling: if it is true that our knowledge rests on an operating table, if it is true that we can make sense of things only because of an underlying structural support, then removing this support or destabilizing it, as heterotopias do, would represent nothing less than an attack on our way of knowing, a direct assault upon our episteme.

Yet this attack does not destroy our way of knowing. Instead, it renders the laws that govern our knowledge problematic by revealing the ground that supports that order. The impossibility of Borges' classification is not that the animals he lists are absurd, as Foucault warns us. He writes that "the quality of monstrosity" in the classification comes not from the strange animals but because the classification "insinuated itself into the empty space, the interstitial blanks *separating* all these entities from one another."[37] The problem lies in the lack of space that would create separations between each animal and allow us to make logical links between each animal. As Foucault explains, "What transgresses the boundaries of all imagination, of all possible thought, is simply that alphabetical series (a, b, c, d) which links each of those categories to all the others."[38] In other words, the problem lies not in the links but in the lack of gaps between these links. Instead of presenting his classification on a firm space that would allow us to make sense of the separations between the animals, Borges "does away with the *site*, the mute ground upon which it is possible for entities to be juxtaposed."[39] It is this site that allows us to locate the gaps between objects of knowledge and thus order knowledge. In Borges' classification, "we shall never succeed in defining a stable relation of contained to container."[40] The monstrosity thus derives from the lack of stable relationships formed on solid ground.

Foucault cites Borges not merely because he satirizes classification or reveals it to be arbitrary but because it presents the impossible task of imagining a new order. Genocchio makes this point well: "What is impossible to imagine then is a coherent space which could

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[35] Ibid., xxii.

[36] Ibid., xvii.

[37] Ibid., xvi.

[38] Ibid., xvi.

[39] Ibid., xvii.

[40] Ibid., xvii.

ever contain such a classificatory scheme."[41] Yet Genocchio finds Foucault's use of heterotopia problematic because, in order to call existing orders into question, "Foucault's incommensurable structures must… remain outside (absolutely differentiated from) that order while at the same time relate to and be able to be defined within it."[42] As Steven Connor argues, this becomes problematic because once a heterotopia "has been cited and re-cited, it is no longer the conceptual monstrosity which it once was, for its incommensurability has been in some sense bound, controlled and predictively interpreted, given a centre and illustrative function."[43] Yet remaining connected to other spaces does not enervate the productive capabilities of heterotopias. Instead, the connection between heterotopias and other systems of ordering creates a productive clash of spaces as one system of order challenges another. In "Of Other Spaces," Foucault explains that "heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable."[44] Both isolated and penetrable, heterotopias are already bound by social orders. As Hetherington argues, heterotopias exist only "in this relationship between spaces."[45] Even if we could concretely locate heterotopias either inside or outside, we would not undermine their usefulness, for inside and outside are not stable. Foucault's mirror example shows that heterotopias can move us between inside and outside, demonstrating that inside and outside are fluid, interrelated concepts. As Gaston Bachelard writes, "inside and outside do not receive in the same way the qualifying epithets that are the measure of our adherence."[46] Heterotopias do not dissolve once located. Moreover, more important than their location is their relationship to other sites. In citing Borges' Chinese encyclopedia, Foucault does not insert solid ground behind the animals, rendering their propinquity less monstrous; the encyclopedia remains heterotopic precisely because its monstrousness exists in relation to other classifications, forcing a reckoning with order.

Borges' classification, then, does not so much resist order as it does reveal order. The Chinese encyclopedia, by foregrounding a different operating table, forces Foucault to question operating tables themselves. While Sheridan's claim that the "ordered list of nineteen subcategories of the category 'animal' acts as a total violation of any rational classification known to us" may be true, this violation in itself does not represent the significance of the classification for Foucault.[47] More specifically, Borges violates the space of classification, making the space of knowledge clear to Foucault. The classification becomes impossible only because Borges destroys the space between each element: the elements become indistinguishable because Borges provides no operating table that would allow us to sort out separation. If, as Foucault writes, "it is only in the blank spaces of this grid that order manifests itself in depth as though already there," then a classification such as Borges', with no

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[41] Genocchio, 40.

[42] Ibid., 41.

[43] Steven Connor, *Postmodern Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 8-9.

[44] Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 26.

[45] Hetherington, ix.

[46] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, translated by Maria Jolas (New York: The Orion Press, 1964), 215.

[47] Sheridan, 49.

clear separations, would have to be nothing less than monstrous.[48] Thus Borges' classification, by offering no blank spaces, represents an intensification of knowledge: because the objects of knowledge do not exist in a conceptual space, we cannot carve out differences between them. The objects, in other words, overload space, becoming unknowable.

c. Heterotopia, Knowledge, and Discourse

Knowledge, for Foucault, emerges in a clash of forces. The Chinese encyclopedia can produce new ways of knowing precisely because it clashes with Foucault's way of knowing. This clash takes place within the space of knowledge: "This book first arose out of a passage in Borges, out of the laughter that shattered, as I read the passage, all the familiar landmarks of my thought—*our* thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography" (xv). The shattering that Foucault describes takes place in space: we can find these geographical landmarks on the operating table, that space whereupon our familiar knowledge was formed. In these opening lines, Foucault places knowledge in space; he describes an unavoidably spatial way of knowing, a landscape dotted with landmarks of thought. Laughter appears as a destructive force, a force with the power to shatter our episteme. This destruction, paradoxically, produces knowledge: "This is because knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting."[49] In other words, knowledge formation entails a battle: we do not passively accept knowledge as a static entity; it must be carved out in a clash between forces.

Heterotopias, even as they contest received knowledge, participate in this battle, producing knowledge by problematizing order and space. In *The Order of Things*, as we have seen, Foucault attacks the familiar landmarks of his thought with laughter. Bosteels argues that "what is most hilarious about the list of animals in this text is not the addition of new fantastic or monstrous beings but rather the fact that nothing holds the arrangement of animals together except the arbitrary order of the alphabet."[50] This laughter, in turn, cuts Foucault's familiar ways of thinking, creating new knowledge. The classification is funny not merely because it is arbitrary but because it clashes with the very idea of classifications. As Friedrich Nietzsche has shown, laughter can play a productive role in knowledge formation. In "Aphorism 333" of *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche describes knowledge as a clash of three impulses: "What is this *intelligere* other than the way we become sensible of the other three? A result of the different and conflicting impulses to laugh, lament, and curse?"[51] Before knowledge is possible, according to Nietzsche, "each of these impulses must first have presented its one-sided view of the thing or event; then comes the fight between these one-sided views."[52] Here Nietzsche employs the language of combat, war, and attack. For Foucault and Nietzsche, knowledge does not exist except as a product of combat. This combat is real; it exists in space. By cutting and clashing with order, heterotopias force new forms of knowledge to emerge. It

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[48] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xx.

[49] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, translated by Donald F. Bouchard & Sherry Simon (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1997), 154.

[50] Bosteels, 121.

[51] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, edited by Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 185.

[52] Ibid., 185.

is in this sense that heterotopias participate in the formation of knowledge and power at least as much as they contest or resist those formations. In short, heterotopias reorder, and re-ordering is fundamental to both knowledge and power.

Foucault addresses the formation of knowledge explicitly in "Truth and Juridical Forms." In these lectures, Foucault offers a reading of Nietzsche in which he highlights the difference between *Erfindung*, or invention, and *Ursprung*, or origin: Nietzsche, Foucault argues, rejected the notion of metaphysical origins and instead focuses on inventions.[53] Offering a reading of "Aphorism 333," Foucault posits that knowledge emerges in the conflict of impulses: "Something is produced because the instincts meet, fight one another, and at the end of their battles finally reach a compromise. That something is knowledge."[54] Instead of metaphysical origins, Foucault describes productions. He describes this process in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" as well. This text continues the critique of origins, focusing on the concept of *Entstehung* or emergence, the moment when knowledge is invented.[55] And, just as the conflict between the impulse to laugh, lament, and curse produces knowledge, Foucault describes emergence in terms of struggle. As Foucault writes, "Emergence is thus the entry of forces; it is their eruption."[56] Knowledge, then, exists as a result of combat and struggle, and humanity attempts to order that knowledge: "humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination."[57] Here Foucault describes the violence of knowledge and humanity's attempts to give order to that violence in a system of rules. In *The Order of Things*, as we have seen, Foucault describes knowledge formation in explicitly spatial terms. He repeatedly uses the word space, foregrounding the production of knowledge as a spatial enterprise. While Foucault does not foreground this spatial thinking in "Truth and Juridical Forms," the importance of space is presupposed. Critiquing the notion of the fundamental nature of human knowledge, Foucault argues that knowledge "does indeed have instincts as its foundation, basis, and starting point, but its basis is the instincts in their configuration, of which knowledge is only the surface outcome."[58] Knowledge, in other words, represents the remnants of battle distributed in order on the surface of the operating table. Yet this ordering entails a distancing.

In his analysis of "Aphorism 333," Foucault warns us that the urges to laugh, lament, and curse do not offer the possibility of getting close to an object of knowledge "but, on the contrary, of keeping the object at a distance, differentiating oneself from it and marking one's separation from it."[59] This struggle of this particular knowledge, then, is also a struggle to separate oneself from the thing to be known, although the terms of this struggle are subject to change with the changing epistemes. In the entry of forces, the struggle between impulses, the battle for knowledge, it is not the object of knowledge itself that we ultimately know.

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[53] Michel Foucault, "Truth and Juridical Forms," in James D. Faubion (ed.), *Power: The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954-1984* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 7-8.

[54] Ibid., 8.

[55] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 148.

[56] Ibid., 149.

[57] Ibid., 151.

[58] Foucault, "Truth and Juridical Forms," 8.

[59] Ibid., 11.

Foucault, describing these forces, writes, "It is nothing but the space that divides them, the void through which they exchange their threatening gestures and speeches."[60] We know what objects of knowledge are by distancing ourselves from them and locating the gaps between each object of knowledge.

Heterotopias provide an avenue for this distance. Isolated yet accessible, heterotopias represent a space that can show us the landmarks of thought by distancing us from those landmarks. After reading the Chinese encyclopedia and recognizing its lack of space, Foucault laughed at the threatening gestures and speeches that created knowledge by creating space between objects. What we know, then, is not the thing itself but the space between the thing and something else; knowledge "always occurs in the interstice."[61] In other words, what we can measure on the operating table are not objects of knowledge but distances between objects. This is "the surface outcome" of knowledge, the space on which it appears: thus Nietzsche describes the battle that produces knowledge, and Foucault renders that battle in space. Heterotopias, with their intrinsic contestation of order, are spatial organs of knowledge production.

Foucault involves spatial analysis in much of his methodological framework in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Foucault focuses on disconnecting the "unquestioned continuities by which we organize, in advance, the discourse that we are to analyze."[62] Often, these continuities entail a linear temporality that is sustained by the insertion of an origin that becomes the impetus for all events. Foucault calls this the "secret origin" because it "can never be grasped in itself. Thus one is led inevitably, through the naivety of chronologies, toward an ever-receding point that is never itself present in history; this point is merely its own void."[63] In other words, the origin is a point that does not exist in space; by relying solely on chronology, one rejects space. For Foucault, knowledge emerges in the interstitial clash between objects. Origins have no interstices, thus they cannot form part of knowledge; they represent the false unity of an object formed without the violent clash that knowledge requires. Thus Foucault calls the theme of discourse based on origins "incorporeal discourse… a writing that is merely the hollow of its own mark."[64] This discourse is without a body; it exists in a void without space. The imposition of false unities attempts to fill in this space with linearity. Foucault compares this effort to planting "small islands of coherence in order to describe their internal structure."[65] Inserting origins behind discourse vitiates space; these islands of coherence represent the attempt to fill that space, to fill the interstices. Yet, as we have seen, knowledge emerges in the lacunae that linearity attempts to bridge. Thus Foucault's theory can be seen as a revaluation of the spatial: "In short, they [pre-existing forms of continuity] require a theory, and… this theory cannot be constructed unless the *field* of the facts of discourse on the basis of which those facts are built up appears in its non-synthetic purity."[66] This non-synthetic purity

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[60] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 150.

[61] Ibid., 150.

[62] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 25.

[63] Ibid., 25.

[64] Ibid., 25.

[65] Ibid,, 37.

[66] Ibid., 26.

can be seen as the space on which discourse emerges; it allows Foucault to examine the gaps between objects, to analyze the raw material of history without false unities, to replace these groupings "in a more general space which, while dissipating their apparent familiarity, makes it possible to construct a theory of them."[67] Thus, while spatiality is not the sole focus of Foucault's method in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, his method could not exist without it.

Indeed, Foucault insists on the primacy of spatiality throughout this work. Statements, for example, are distinguishable because they "cannot occupy the same place on the plane of discourse."[68] Statements become incomprehensible when, as in the Chinese encyclopedia, no gaps exist between the places that statements occupy. In analyzing a statement, Foucault writes, "what we try to examine is the incision that it makes."[69] Like knowledge, statements cut their way through space. To describe objects, Foucault proposes that "we must map the first *surfaces* of their *emergence*."[70] In other words, to appropriate a metaphor from *The Order of Things*, we must locate the objects on the operating table. Mapping the surfaces of emergence allows us to examine "the relations between the surfaces on which they appear, on which they can be delimited, on which they can be analysed and specified."[71] Again, Foucault directs us to the interstices. Thus any discursive unities Foucault uncovers rely "on the space in which various objects emerge and are continuously transformed."[72] Indeed, Foucault defines discourse at one point as "a space of exteriority in which a network of distinct sites is deployed."[73] As these brief samples show, spatial metaphors dot the landscape of *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Yet it would be a mistake to consider Foucault's use of spatial language as a rhetorical trope with no substantial connection to his method. Foucault's insistence on spatiality provides him with the critical leverage to deconstruct false unities, reveal the hollowness of origins, and free himself to describe the system of relations that represents nothing less than knowledge itself. In Foucault's words: "To reveal in all its purity the space in which discursive events are deployed is not to undertake to re-establish it in isolation that nothing could overcome; it is not to close it upon itself; it is to leave oneself free to describe the interplay of relations within it and outside it."[74]

Heterotopias, by juxtaposing many sites in one space, reveal the extent to which knowledge relies on spatiality. This is arguably Foucault's task in *The Order of Things*: by rendering visible the conceptual space upon which knowledge has been built, he treats discourse in its moment of irruption, locating it in its epistemological space. Origins make this task impossible because they hollow discourse out; they disembody discourse, treating it as the foundationless emission of an origin. Origins dissipate space. Heterotopias explode the myth of the origin. By shattering the ground below the Chinese encyclopedia's classification, Borges shatters the origin. The encyclopedia is hilarious because its lack of spatiality demon-

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[67] Ibid., 26.
[68] Ibid., 81.
[69] Ibid., 27.
[70] Ibid., 41.
[71] Ibid., 47.
[72] Ibid., 32.
[73] Ibid., 55.
[74] Ibid., 29.

strates the spatiality inherent in our way of knowing. By dissolving the gaps between (a) and (b), Borges shows the impossibility of making links in a void, which is precisely what relying on origins does. By problematizing knowledge, heterotopias disabuse us of the centrality of origins to thought; instead, they point us to emergence. Foucault advocates for just such a disturbance: "the tranquility with which they are accepted must be disturbed; we must show that they do not come out of themselves, but are always the result of a construction the rules of which must be known."[75] This disturbance reveals knowledge formations. By juxtaposing many spaces in one site and blurring the interstices between objects of knowledge, hetero-topias uncover the extent to which knowledge relies on a firm foundation. When many spaces converge in one site, the gaps separating objects become blurred; the rules of order become unintelligible. This does not mean, though, that the rules of order have somehow been destroyed or that power relations have been overcome. Instead, the absence of a solid concep-tual space, of a discernible operating table, demonstrates the need for that very space. Through the absence of order, heterotopias reveal the rules that construct knowledge.

d. Conclusion

Foucault offered frustratingly few descriptions and definitions of heterotopias, but he did tell us where to find more. Although he only quotes briefly from Borges in the preface to *The Order of Things*, he does write, "heterotopias (such as those to be found so often found in Borges)…dissolve our myths."[76] By way of conclusion, it seems worthwhile to follow Foucault's lead and to return to Borges. One such heterotopia can be found in Borges' "Funes el Memorioso," a short story whose title translates to "Funes, His Memory" or "Funes the Memorious"; the latter, while awkward in English, is nearer to the Spanish. Fittingly, the story is a memory told by an acquaintance of Funes Ireneo, a man whom the narrator introduces as an outsider, "I recall him—his taciturn face, its Indian features, its extraordinary *remoteness*."[77] Funes suffers a horse accident in his young adulthood that leaves him with a broken body. Although the narrator does not exactly detail his injuries, he tells us that while Funes no longer has the physical capacity he once had, his bodily injuries open something in his mind, and the accident leaves him with an excruciatingly exacting memory. As the narrator explains, Funes remembers every moment in full:

> A circle drawn on a blackboard, a right triangle, a rhombus—all these are forms we can fully intuit; Ireneo could do the same with the stormy mane of a young colt, a small herd of cattle on the mountainside, a flickering fire and its unaccountable ashes, and the many faces of a dead man at a wake.[78]

Funes' memory captures each and every moment; he remembers the interstices and the details. Borges' Chinese encyclopedia combines many sites in one, destroying the space that

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[75] Ibid., 25.

[76] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xviii.

[77] Jorge Luis Borges, "Funes, His Memory," in *Collected Fictions: Jorge Luis Borges*, translated by Andrew Hurley (New York: The Penguin Group, 1998), 131.

[78] Ibid., 135.

would allow for knowledge formation through overload: the objects of knowledge become too intense and dense to separate. Funes' memory works similarly; as Funes tells the narrator, "My memory, sir, is like a garbage heap."[79] This memory renders Funes unable to accept his old ways of knowing and thinking: "To think is to ignore (or forget) differences, to generalize, to abstract. In the teeming world of Ireneo Funes there was nothing but particulars—and they were virtually *immediate* particulars."[80] Funes captures things in their moment of irruption. He remembers so fully that he cannot create gaps between his memories; the landscape of his memory becomes incredibly dense, and this forces him to reject other systems of ordering as too general.

Funes attempts to create a new space for knowledge; thus he insists on developing a new system of numbering that requires an entirely new word for each number: "Instead of seven thousand thirteen (7013), he would say, for instance, 'Maximo Perez'; instead of seven thousand fourteen (7014), 'the railroad.'"[81] Funes' attempts to create more precise ordering systems do not stop with numbers; he tries to find a precise word for everything he sees: "It irritated him that the 'dog' of three-fourteen in the afternoon, seen in profile, should be indicated by the same noun as the dog of three-fifteen, seen frontally."[82] Funes' memory becomes a heterotopic space: driven by his exacting memory, he attempts to reorder language to fit the intensely full spaces of his memory. But he never liberates himself from alternate systems of ordering; he cannot spawn a new system of knowledge unbound by its relationship to all other sites; he cannot uncouple the grip of knowledge and power relations. Heterotopias, like Funes' memory, are isolated from and related to other spaces; by combining and juxtaposing many spaces in one site, they do create alternate systems of ordering. Thus Funes attempts new numbering systems and more precise words to describe each dog in each interstitial moment. Still, heterotopias remain part of the other spaces they combine and juxtapose by virtue of their relationship to those sites. The new spaces, though formed in part by all other spaces, offer an alternative view of the operating table but not a complete escape.

Funes eventually drops his massive reordering projects because of his "realization that it was pointless."[83] Funes' memory is a heterotopia, and it forces him to create an alternative view; but he cannot escape his old ways of knowing. This heterotopic alternative view can help us problematize knowledge, or shatter "all the familiar landmarks of… *our* thought."[84] Yet questioning knowledge does not only create resistance because this questioning still occurs within a system of relations. Perhaps Funes' insomnia demonstrates this best:

> It was hard for him to sleep. To sleep is to take one's mind from the world; Funes, lying on his back on his cot, in the dimness of his room, could picture every crack in the wall, every molding of the precise houses that surrounded him. (I repeat that the most trivial of his memories was more detailed, more vivid than our own perception of a physical pleasure or

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[79] Ibid., 135.

[80] Ibid., 137.

[81] Ibid., 136.

[82] Ibid., 136

[83] Ibid., 136.

[84] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xv.

a physical torment.) Off toward the east, in an area that had not yet been cut up into city blocks, there were new houses, unfamiliar to Ireneo. He pictured them to himself as black, compact, made of homogenous shadow; he would turn his head in that direction to sleep.[85]

Funes escapes his heterotopic mind by moving to a space that holds no memories; he manages to find an outside. For Foucault, however, "there is no outside."[86] Thus heterotopias do not offer us the same escape Funes finds. Heterotopias, real and accessible, combine and juxtapose many spaces in one site, creating an intensification of knowledge that can help us re-see the foundations of our own knowledge; but they cannot take us outside of this knowledge or free us from power relations.

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[85] Ibid., 137.

[86] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 2nd ed., translated by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 301. Although Foucault is discussing the carceral network here (another spatial system of ordering), the notion that we cannot escape the effects of power permeates many other contexts in his works.