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abstract

Public space research inspired by 'heterotopia': A tentative discussion

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Abstract

Heterotopia, as introduced by Foucault and developed by many scholars from different disciplines, describes sites that are other to, deviant or different from the normal and the mainstream. Characterised by its ambiguity as well as open-endedness and simultaneity, heterotopia could offer inspiration for rethinking contemporary public space and its publicness. More specifically, public space research has a strong tendency to be normative in nature, which, though useful, does not adequately address issues heightened by the increasing complexities of the contemporary city such as how to approach the contextual dynamics of public space and the relational quality of publicness. This paper offers an attempt to bridge heterotopia and public space. Instead of using heterotopia as a label to define any space as heterotopian or as a definite analytical framework, it draws on key developments of the concept of heterotopia following Foucault's original idea, namely heterotopia as space of alternative ordering and heterotopia in relation to normative city models, actors, and change. The paper calls attention to three aspects of public space and publicness, including actors and visions, normativity, and processes of ordering, in order to reflect on approaches to public space that could reflect and reveal the complexities inherent to public space.

Keywords:
Public space; heterotopia; actor; non-normative; ordering

Ricerche sullo spazio pubblico ispirate all'eterotopia: una proposta di discussione

L'eterotopia, introdotta da Foucault e sviluppata da molti studiosi di diverse discipline, descrive luoghi che sono diversi, devianti o al di fuori della norma e del mainstream. Caratterizzata dall'ambiguità, dall'apertura e dalla simultaneità, l'eterotopia potrebbe offrire spunti per ripensare lo spazio pubblico contemporaneo e la sua natura pubblica. Più specificamente, la ricerca sullo spazio pubblico ha una forte tendenza a essere di natura normativa che, sebbene utile, non affronta adeguatamente le questioni accentuate dalla crescente complessità della città contemporanea, come l'approccio alle dinamiche contestuali dello spazio pubblico e la qualità relazionale della pubblicità. Questo articolo offre un tentativo di collegare l'eterotopia e lo spazio pubblico. Invece di usare l'eterotopia come etichetta per definire qualsiasi spazio come eterotopico o come quadro analitico definito, attinge agli sviluppi chiave del concetto di eterotopia seguendo l'idea originale di Foucault, ovvero l'eterotopia come spazio di ordinamento alternativo e l'eterotopia in relazione ai modelli normativi di città, agli attori e al cambiamento. Il documento richiama l'attenzione su tre aspetti dello spazio pubblico e della pubblicità, inclusi gli attori e le visioni, la normatività e i processi di ordinamento, al fine di riflettere su approcci allo spazio pubblico che possano rispecchiare e rivelare le complessità inerenti allo spazio pubblico.

Parole Chiave:
Spazio pubblico; eterotopia; utente; non normativo; organizzazione

Public space research inspired by 'heterotopia': A tentative discussion

Jingyi Zhu

1. Introduction

As contemporary cities face all kinds of socioeconomic, cultural, and ecological challenges, public space is always at the forefront of debate, partially because the value of public space is widely, if not universally, acknowledged and cherished. Public spaces serve as venues for social interaction, self-expression, and civic engagement. Well-designed and managed public spaces are essential for fostering a sense of community and promoting inclusivity, diversity, and social equity, in addition to creating a wide range of economic and wellbeing values. There have been sustained academic, professional and community interests in complex questions around the way we design, develop, and use public spaces in different urban environments. However, there has been a strong tendency to focus on normative conceptualisations of public space such as how to make good public spaces or how to make public spaces more public, whereas ideas for 'good public space' and indeed 'public' still need further interrogation, as the design, development, use and management of public spaces are highly contextual and often messy processes subject to distinct local forces and mechanisms. Public space research undoubtedly needs to take into account the specific contexts, processes and actors involved, not least because the increasing complexity of the urban world and the intricacies of placemaking mean that the contemporary city 'displays a profound redrawing of the contours of public and private space, brining to the fore an equally treacherous and fertile ground of conditions that are not merely hybrid, but rather defy an easy description in these terms' (Dehaene and de Cauter, 2008, p. 3).

In view of such complexities, it makes sense that public space research draws inspiration from a wide range of academic discourses and practices. In this short paper, I am turning to the idea of heterotopia to rethink public space and its publicness. The concept of heterotopia confuses as well as fascinates generations of scholars in many different fields and disciplines. As will be discussed below, in many ways it is an underdeveloped idea, inevitably critiqued by some but simultaneously imaginatively re-interpreted by others. Whether as 'effectively enacted utopia' (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986, p. 24), 'spaces of alternate ordering' (Hetherington, 1997, p. viii) or 'an exceptional space, a miniature city or sub-city that forms an important part of the larger city' (Shane, 2005, p. 232), heterotopia does not seem to very obviously resonate with understandings of public space. In recent decades, however, more and more scholars have expanded the discussion of heterotopia to the extent that more forms of public spaces are being studied through the heterotopian lens. In addition, some theorists recognise the value of heterotopia in the study of public space as heterotopia is 'at a crossroads of the con-

ceptual flight lines that shape public space today' (Dehaene and de Cauter, 2008, p. 4), concerning the reinvention of the everyday, the privatisation of public space, the rise of the network society, and the postcivil society.

Therefore, in this article I want to follow such lines of discussions to discuss how heterotopia could provide inspirations for observing and researching the contemporary public space with all its complexities. In doing this I do not claim to be building new theories of either heterotopia or public space. Instead, I want to borrow heterotopia to help bring together some points, already emerging and developing in public space study, that I think are worth re-iterating. This paper is mainly theoretical, but it is built on the empirical research I have conducted on public space in different contexts over the past eight years. Some of these studies straightforwardly use heterotopia as an analytical framework (Zhu, 2020), while others more directly converse with the normativity in understanding public space and its publicness (Zhu, 2022, 2023), an issue very pertinent to the study of any heterotopia.

2. Heterotopia: A brief summary

Though never fully developed or articulated as a complete theory or a methodology, the idea of heterotopia as discussed by Foucault has fascinated and mesmerised generations of scholars. The concept, originally used in medical contexts, denotes the formation of tissue in an abnormal place, a phenomenon of displacement that does not influence the normal functional performance of the organism (Sohn, 2008). Foucault's discussion of heterotopia placed it in relation to utopia, both as sites that 'have the curious property of being in relation with all the other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralise, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror or reflect' (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986, p. 24). Whereas utopias are 'sites with no real place', heterotopias are 'effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted' (ibid.). A summary of Foucault's six principles of description of heterotopias (or heterotopology), though hardly requiring more rehearsal, is as follows (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986):

(1) Heterotopias are present in every culture. Taking varied forms throughout history, they could be classified into heterotopias of crisis, which are forbidden places reserved for individuals entering into a state of crisis from the point of the society in that they can no longer undertake their designated social roles but are not yet ready to assume new ones, and heterotopia of deviance, those that contain individuals whose behaviours are considered deviant from the social norms.

(2) Existing heterotopias can perform different functions throughout time as a given society evolves.

(3) In a single real space that is the heterotopia, several incompatible spaces could be juxtaposed.

(4) Heterotopias are linked to slices in time, whether that is 'indefinitely accumulating time' or 'time in its most fleeting, transitory, precarious aspect' (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986, p. 26).

(5) Heterotopias possess a system of opening and closing, enabling compulsory entry, permission subject to rites and purifications, or simple opening that hides exclusions.

(6) Heterotopias have a function to the rest of space that operates at two extreme conditions, either creating a space of illusion or a space of compensation. Whereas a space of illusion 'exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusionary', space of compensation is 'as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled' (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986, p. 27).

Since the publication of 'Of Other Spaces', many works have inherited, adapted, and developed Foucault's original idea to discuss various research contexts and subjects. Heterotopia as a conceptual frame has been variously called upon to discuss spaces and practices such as cemetery (Clements, 2017), waterfront spaces (Talamini et al., 2023), sidewalks (Roux, Guillard and Blanchet, 2017), 'studentified' neighbourhoods (Brookfield, 2019), experimental anti-capitalist neighbourhood (Chatzidakis, Maclaran and Bradshaw, 2012), social media practice (Lee and Wei, 2020), autonomous space (Siegrist and Thörn, 2020), urban common space (Santos Junior, 2014), night time cultural infrastructure (Gallan, 2015), public playground (Pitsikali and Parnell, 2019), makerspaces (Wu and Ma, 2023), art practices in participative urban renewal processes (Sacco et al., 2019), generation of relational codes for the design of an open urban fabric (Çalışkan, Cihanger Ribeiro and Tümtürk, 2020), and so on. While the list could go on, featuring prominently here is the association of heterotopias with marginality, resistance, empowerment, counter-hegemonic practices and alternative subjectivities (Allweil and Kallus, 2008; Sohn, 2008; Kong, 2012; Cangià, 2013; Qian, 2018; Siegrist and Thörn, 2020). As what Foucault gave as examples of heterotopias were 'very much spaces distinct and set apart from the everyday world most people inhabited, institutions that were worlds into themselves' (Kern, 2008, p. 105), heterotopias are often seen as where marginal and powerless social groups could have their voices and where practices deemed unconventional and even transgressive by the mainstream society can take place. These practices often create different forms of built environment and social events, creating new spaces that are separated from the ordinary space and existing form of power for these alternative social and spatial practices (Helten, 2015).

While many theorists adhere to heterotopias as 'synonymous with the marginal, interstitial, subliminal spaces that, by their eccentric position, defy the reigning logic of a dominant culture' (Dehaene and de Cauter, 2008, p. 6), there are others who choose to move beyond Foucault's structuralist discussion of normality versus deviance and focus more on the idea of difference (Chatzidakis, Maclaran and Bradshaw, 2012). For example, Cenzatti (2008) proposes heterotopia of difference as a new type of heterotopia as the social norm, which in Foucault's conceptualisation is where deviance emerges from, becomes more flexible, hence making deviance more transient. In other words,

while heterotopias of difference are still where irreconcilable spaces are juxtaposed as per Foucault's third principle of heterotopology, the production of such irreconcilability becomes more contested, making the resultant heterotopias 'fluctuate between contradiction and acceptance, their physical expression equally fluctuates between visibility and recognition' (Cenzatti, 2008, p. 79). Heterotopias in a way become more 'everyday' as they are interwoven in the urban fabric and integral to people's everyday experience (Pitsikali and Parnell, 2019). These heterotopias have more centrality and are more semi-public in nature (Dehaene and de Cauter, 2008), becoming 'places where differences meet' (Stavrides, 2007, p. 177) rather than enclaves of crisis and deviance.

3. Bridging heterotopia and public space research

3.1 Why could heterotopia be useful

Studies of heterotopias, both in Foucault's original conceptualisation and in later developments, are not without critiques. On the one hand, 'Of Other Spaces' is deemed 'as famous as it is confusing' (Cenzatti, 2008, p. 75), and Foucault's heterotopia is seen as a 'sketchy, open-ended and ambiguous concept' (Johnson, 2013, p. 790). Heterotopia has never been fully theorised, and there was inconsistency in the way Foucault himself used the concept in various occasions (Genocchio, 1995). Saldanha (2008, p. 2081) goes so far as to suggest that Foucault's discussion of heterotopia is 'both disproportionately influential and springs out as not being faithful to his own nomadic thought'. Because heterotopia as a theoretical lens has been underdeveloped and consequently ambiguous and open-ended, many later studies that adopt this perspective are criticised as 'simply calling up the heterotopia as some theoretical deus ex machina' (Genocchio, 1995, p. 36). Without critically examining the contexts and consequences of adopting the concept of heterotopia, such studies run the risk of inheriting the structuralist understanding of space (Saldanha, 2008).

On the other hand, heterotopia 'lacks definition and is perhaps too encompassing' (Dehaene and de Cauter, 2008, p. 4). The existing studies of heterotopia discussed earlier, while by no means comprehensive, already give the impression that heterotopia seems to be applicable to almost all spaces (Johnson, 2013). In a way, it is problematic that the answer to Genocchio's (1995, p. 39) question of 'what cannot be designated a heterotopia?' is that 'when putting on heterotopian spectacles, everything tends to take on heterotopian traits' (Dehaene and de Cauter, 2008, p. 6). This dilemma might again be attributed to the fact that heterotopia in its original sense is not adequately theorised, and Foucault did not address how heterotopias could be simultaneously 'outside' and 'within', different to all other spaces and yet still relate to them (Genocchio, 1995, p. 38). In the end, what makes heterotopias 'other' to the rest of space, apart from 'a somewhat general sense of being set-apart from what might contrastingly be thought of as the "normal" or the "everyday"' (Palladino and Miller, 2015, p. 1), is not always clear, and it is equally unclear as to how to measure the difference of heterotopias (Johnson, 2013).

With these critiques in mind, and acknowledging my use of heterotopia risks twisting Foucault's original ideas and failing to critically engage with the broader theoretical discussions, I believe heterotopia is a useful concept to introduce to public space research, not as a label or an operationalised analytical framework to discuss how and why particular public spaces are heterotopias or not. I use the concept of heterotopia quite liberally as an inspiration to echo with some ongoing discussions in the field of public space study and to consider the complexity of public spaces in contemporary cities. Indeed, Foucault, in the opening paragraph of 'Of Other Spaces', declared that 'we are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein' (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986, p. 22). While for him, the society was still governed by seemingly unchallenged oppositions, for example between the public and the private, that 'remain inviolable, that our institutions and practices have not yet dared to break down' (ibid., p. 23), decades after his writing it has been widely acknowledged that the physical and social fabrics of urban space are constantly being redefined as to create 'a permanent state of uncertainty' (Sacco et al., 2019, p. 200), and the once stable dichotomies such as public/private, control/controlled, central/marginal have been contested and disrupted. In such a context characterised by uncertainty and complexity, heterotopia becomes useful exactly thanks to its openness and 'undecidability' as 'a third term in situations where strict dichotomies…no longer provide viable frameworks for analysis' (Heynen, 2008, p. 312).

To further elaborate on how heterotopia could inspire rethinking our observation and analysis of public space, I want to first turn to two discussions of heterotopia in greater detail. The first perspective comes from Hetherington's (1997) discussion of heterotopia not as sites of resistance, transgression or marginality but spaces of an alternate ordering. The other comes from Shane's (2005) understanding of heterotopia in relation to normative city models, urban actors and change.

Many discussions of heterotopia have an expressed focus on the idea of otherness and its transformative potential to disrupt the established, the normality or the mainstream. In these studies, heterotopias are about resistance or other. For Hetherington, however, heterotopias are not about resistance or other but 'can be about both because both involve the establishment of alternative modes of ordering' (Hetherington, 1997, p. 51). For him otherness is relational, 'established through a relationship of difference with other sites, such that their presence either provides an unsettling of spatial and social relations or an alternative representation of spatial and social relations' (ibid., p. 8). For him heterotopias are associated with utopias as they are like laboratories where 'new ways of experimenting with ordering society are tried out' (ibid., p. 12), and where 'a new way of ordering emerges that stands in contrast to the taken-for-granted mundane idea of social order that exists within society' (ibid., p. 40). In a way Shane (2005) follows this idea of heterotopias as laboratories for alternative ordering and changes, but his discussions of heterotopia are more specifically positioned against the backdrop of the postmodern city as a 'qualitatively new urban condition' where urban situations are

'heterogeneous and mixed, not simple and pure' (ibid., p. 11). Shane sees heterotopia, together with enclave and armature, as the three basic components of any city, with heterotopias being where the other two elements are kept in balance and thus maintaining the stability of the city as a self-organising entity. Heterotopia thus serves as 'an apparatus where supposedly incompatible life forms could live together in a mutually beneficial relationship that was dynamic and changing' (Shane, 2021, p. 212). The premise of his discussions of heterotopia is that cities are in a perpetual state of disequilibrium, and heterotopias are 'specialised patches, acting as testbeds of change' (ibid., p. 9), where urban actors 'conduct concrete utopian experiments without endangering the established disequilibrium of the larger system' (ibid., p. 10) and potentially export the successful experiments as new norms.

3.2 Public space research from a heterotopian perspective

Now turning to public space, I want to highlight three interconnected issues that, though extensively discussed in various ways in different strands of public space research, deserve singling out as pertinent to rethinking public space under the inspiration of heterotopia. These three issues are actors and visions, normativity, and processes of ordering.

3.2.1 Actors and visions

Shane's discussions of heterotopia have a distinct focus on actor, which is closely related to one of his overarching arguments that in the postmodern city, the masterplan or a single centre of control is disappearing, with single-function zoning replaced by heterogeneous and flexible system (Shane, 2005). This is the condition for 'multiple actors connected by a spaghetti of relationships' (ibid., p. 305), each actors following their own logic of action without obvious overall coordination. While Shane mainly talks about those urban actors such as architects, urban designers or planners who 'work as catalyst in the city and depend on conceptual models to guide them' (ibid., p. 13), the network of actors we talk about in relation to public space can certainly be extended to include those who are not directly involved in creating the materiality of a particular place but nevertheless play a part in shaping and transforming space, actors such as policy makers, space managers and space users. No matter how actors engage with public space, whether through formal production or informal intervention, each actor enters the scene of public space with a particular set of preferences or visions of what the space should be like, what rules need to be in place, who could have access and who should be excluded. Oftentimes public space is discussed in relation to simple dichotomies such as public and private, government and citizen, dominant and marginal, top-down and bottom-up etc., but a more nuanced and contextualised reading of public space is needed to reveal how different actors, their visions and their practices are intricately intertwined.

3.2.2 Normativity and the challenge thereof

Closely following the discussion of actors and their visions is the issue of normativity. Otherness, whether viewed as resistance or alternative ordering, is necessarily defined against a normality. Many scholars have pointed out that the Otherness of heterotopias, or the existence of heterotopias, is relational rather than ontological in that heterotopias 'juxtapose a constitutive outside rather than inherently having the qualities that engender heterotopy'(Siegrist and Thörn, 2020, p. 1840). Because of its relational nature, heterotopia could be lost when the dynamic social contexts it is embedded in change its meanings (ibid.). Heterotopia questions the normativity of society at large, and at the same time its own normativity also needs to be questioned because, not necessarily always a haven for the marginal and the powerless, heterotopia could be deployed by those in power as a place for social control (Hetherington, 1997). Hence in relation to normativity, heterotopia is 'not ideologically speaking unambiguously good or bad' (Wesselman, Ferdinand and Souch, 2020, p. 8). As heterotopias have 'multiple and shifting meanings for agents depending on where they are located in its power effects' (Hetherington, 1997, p. 51), they always need to be defined with 'a certain amount of neutrality' (ibid., p. 52).

The discussion of normativity is important to public space research because public space is so highly valued that that any investigation into public space inevitably involves some underlying normative judgements of what (good) public space should be like. A large body of studies are devoted to operationalising and measuring the publicness of public space, seeking to reveal to what extent a given public space achieves such normative values as public ownership, accessibility, and inclusiveness (Benn and Gaus, 1983; Kohn, 2004; Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008; Varna and Tiesdell, 2010; Németh and Schmidt, 2011; Langstraat and van Melik, 2013; Mehta, 2014; Ekdi and Çıracı, 2015; Karaçor, 2016; Lopes, Santos Cruz and Pinho, 2020). In reality, public space hardly embodies all, if any at all, of these normative qualities. A short explanation for this is that public space, as both a spatial and social entity, is highly context-dependent, and the very idea of public could be interpreted variously as including, but not limited to, being 'an aggregation of real individuals', 'an aggregation of abstracted, disembodied subjects', or 'a normative vision without a necessary material or physical form' (Staeheli and Mitchell, 2008, p. 122). Therefore, the normativity of public space is not singular but complex and plural, being indeed a heterotopia comprising the (realised or not) utopian visions of a network of actors. Just as in understanding heterotopia it is always important to question to whom a heterotopia is other or alternative and from whose perspective the space is utopian or heterotopian, in approaching public space publicness cannot be treated as an unproblematic and unquestionable entity. It is essential to ask questions such as 'public to whom' and 'whose vision for public space'.

3.2.3 Processes of ordering

The discussion of otherness being relational and being more about ordering than order

could suggest that the quality of public space, publicness, could also be seen as relational and about a process of ordering, of space achieving a particular quality that under certain circumstances and for some urban actors could be considered public. Or as Tornaghi (2015, p. 25) puts it, publicness could be understood in a non-normative and process-oriented way as 'a (varying and relational) way of being "space"'. Many public space studies have been either behavioural or architectural, concerned with the patterns of use or the physical characteristics of the built environment (Low, 2000). These studies essentially study public space as an object, often with fixed boundaries and functions and fixed groups of users that can be neatly categories. While valuable in their own way, these studies may not adequately capture the complexity of contemporary public spaces with their changing internal dynamics and external relations with other places and processes. Therefore, the idea of 'ordering' provides a useful perspective to re-orient public space to a more process-based approach that reveals public space as something constantly in the making, shaped by the changing society and old and new actors and their negotiations.

When considering the ordering of space, it is also useful to consider the different dimensions of this ordering including but limited to the physical, the social, the discursive, and the affective. Low distinguishes the social production of space as the 'physical creation of the material setting' (Low, 2000, p. 127) and the social construction of space as 'the actual transformation through people's social changes, memories, images, and daily use of material setting into scenes and actions that convey meaning' (ibid., p. 128) as approaches to understanding place and space, which could be further enriched by affective, discursive, embodied and translocal approaches that answer, from different angles, the questions of how the physical space becomes part of the social world and how this sociality simultaneously becomes material (Low, 2017). The study of such complex dynamics would again help disturb the normative understanding of public space and the various seemingly unproblematic dichotomies it entails. In the end, at the centre is not necessarily the question of public versus private, or more public versus less public, but to what extent the production of the materiality of space and the construction of space meaning and sociality is centralised, imposed and collective, as opposed to emergent, spontaneous, and individualised.

3.2.4 A few examples

At this point, some discussion of empirical cases would be helpful for illustrating my points, though given the constraint of space many details will have to be omitted. These studies variously engaged with the discussion of heterotopia or the normativity of public space/publicness.

I started to draw on heterotopia as a perspective to study public space when researching the Sarpi Neighbourhood in Milan (Zhu, 2020). The area has a contested history around its alternative identity as the Chinatown in Milan, and much has been written about these social tensions from angles of ethnicity, migration, and diversity. Entering

this discussion as an architect and urban designer, I was more interested in understanding how the public spaces in the neighbourhood and the social changes mutually supported each other. Drawing on the heterotopia literature to build an illustrative assimilation-accommodation model, I discussed how different actors with their respective visions for the neighbourhood brought in corresponding spatial and regulatory interventions to mediate changes and conflicts, creating distinct public spaces and making the neighbourhood a layered and adaptive space within the wider urban system.

While the 'Milan Chinatown' can be easily read as an 'other', heterotopian space, some other public spaces that I have conducted extensive research on, namely the riverfront public spaces and community open spaces in Shanghai, are not conventionally interpreted as heterotopias characterised by marginality or otherness. In my study of how these public space developments mediate Shanghai's visionary development narratives and citizens' everyday use of space as part of the city's envisaged transformation into an 'Excellent Global City' (Zhu, 2022, 2023), even though I did not specifically refer to heterotopia as an interpretative framework, my analytical strategy, centred around understanding processes, actors, and their respective visions, was heavily influenced by my earlier research on heterotopia.

In the study of these different types of public spaces in Shanghai, I discussed how they were materially and discursively made (or in other words going through different ordering processes) to simultaneously open up previously closed and inaccessible spaces for citizens' daily enjoyment, materialise the people-oriented ideals through being design and governance experiments, and discursively and symbolically support the city's visionary narratives of building an 'Excellent Global City'. These empirical discussions in turn enabled me to develop a more nuanced understanding of publicness as a relational and multi-layered concept that challenges its conventional normativity. Through these studies I demonstrated a more contextual and complex picture of public space than the normative ideals tend to indicate, and emphasised the point that public space and space publicness are not fixed but are constantly negotiated and constructed by different actors in different contexts. In this sense, these public spaces, even though 'dominant' and 'mainstream' on the surface, have heterotopian and 'other' characters emerging from within that are relational to wider power dynamics and processes.

4. Concluding remarks

Acknowledging the risks in stretching the idea of heterotopia, I nevertheless believe it is useful to bridge it to the study of public space and publicness not only to question the degree of normativity inherent in public space research but also to question the normativity in using heterotopia as an interpretive framework. In borrowing heterotopia to understand public space, I have not attempted to label any space as a heterotopia, as heterotopia is most helpful 'more as an idea about space than any actual place', suggesting how space is 'transient, contestory, plagued by lapses and ruptured sites'

(Genocchio, 1995, p. 43). Or put it in another way, the point of resorting to heterotopia when approaching public space is not to use it as 'a label for any non-dominant space' or 'a theoretical "yardstick" to measure actual spaces against' but rather understand 'how parts, aspects, or qualities of space fit in and establish conventions, structures and orders' (Wesselman, 2013, p. 22). To discuss public space from a heterotopian point of view is to examine the variety of actors involved in the space and their respective visions and practices, to challenge the normative presumptions of what public space should be by looking into how publicness is contextually formed, and to untangle how different spatial and social layers of publicness play out as part of the ordering process. Without building a static and definite analytical framework, I hope to introduce heterotopia as a way of thinking about public space against all the complexities in the contemporary urban world.

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