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Heterotopia as Choreography: Foucault's Sailing Vessel

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In 'Of Other Spaces' (1986) Michel Foucault outlines his concept of heterotopia.^{[note]1} Introduced as a corollary to the idea of utopia, the concept is construed by Foucault via its peculiar relationship to space and time. Whereas a utopia (literally 'no place') must exist outside of dimensional reality, being only a dream of sorts, a heterotopia is definitively spatio-temporal, taking place in the here and now. Heterotopia, in other words, is a concept that brings utopia down to earth; it shows how the promise of social alterity contained in the no place of utopia might be practised, 'placefully', in the present (Harvey 2000: 183). Given the synthesis of space and time inherent in Foucault's heterotopia--its binding of space to time in the here and now--this article suggests that the concept operates through a certain kind of dialectics. Running against notions of absolute time and space, this dialectics grasps a situation in which space is temporal and time is spatial or in which movement is the only constant. My concern here is to test the following idea: in making movement its constant, the concept of heterotopia offers a mode of thinking that is fundamentally choreographic.

It is of no surprise that in working with such a concept Foucault nominates a moving environment--the sailing vessel--as 'the heterotopia par excellence' (1986: 27). As a place characterized by displacement, the sailing vessel becomes for Foucault a kind of mobile here and now that others itself to the world as it is. The figure of the ship is central to the arguments set out in this investigation of heterotopia as choreography because, as a displaced place, the ship captures the idea of space and time bound together, that is, of the spatio-temporal. Choreography, though, provides us with a starting point. It is from here that we may begin to examine the spacetime co-mingling by which utopias are made present as heterotopias and with which Foucault conceptualizes these situations both in and through a state of movement.

A heterotopia, to borrow Kevin Hetherington's formulation, is 'a process rather than a thing' (1997: ix). What does it mean to describe a place as a process? The practice of choreography grants a set of answers to such a question. Choreography consists in the

production of time and space through the organization of movement.^{[note]2} The important part of this idea, given our topic, is the sense in which choreography wraps up both time and space in its creations. Indeed, movement cannot but involve time and space together; both duration and environment are needed for the refusal of stillness. Choreography, then, in organizing movement organizes something that works negatively. Movement denies stasis. Such an idea may be refined in turn by thinking through a special kind of dialectic--one articulated by Fredric Jameson, when he discusses the politics of utopia, as 'a negative dialectic in which each term persists in its negation of the other' (2004: 50). In the case of choreography, a practice that makes movement its medium, stasis is denied through a negative dialectic of time and space. When choreography occurs time is arrested in momentary formations of space and space is dissolved in its modulations through time.

Think of a choreography. This might be performed by human beings on a theatre stage, a set of graphics flashing across a screen, schooling fish just under the water's surface, or whatever you like that moves. The organization of movement in this scenario consists at once in the arrival at and elimination of spatial formations. When space takes shape choreographically in whatever form, time-as-duration is negated because it ceases in momentary closures of formation. Likewise, as soon as a formation is reached choreographically, it disappears because the necessary persistence of movement in time leads to the (de)shaping of space. As far as movement is concerned, space and time exist in a perpetual game of mutual negation. Choreography makes a place a process, then, because it creates a situation where time is materialized in space while space is dematerialized in time.

The foregoing sketch of a spacetime dialectics sets up a terrain in which ideas of heterotopia and of choreography can be brought into dialogue and this is a terrain into which this article proceeds. The following discussion does not deal with particular instances of choreography as an artistic practice. In this sense, I join Laura Cull in wanting to move 'beyond application' when bringing philosophical problems into dialogue with ideas generated by performance, wanting in particular to move beyond the utilization of philosophy simply as a lens through which to view art (Cull 2012: 23). Instead I invoke an idea already germane to the performance arts--an idea of 'the choreographic'--in order to illuminate the spacetime dialectics that invest certain strands of utopian thought. My discussion unfolds around two such strands. It works with Foucault's figure of the sailing vessel and takes up David Harvey's processing of utopia

through dialectical materialism. A particular idea of the choreographic pertains to both of these theories of utopia. Defined incipiently in the foregoing discussion as a place in process, the choreographic is understood for the purposes of this article as the making of a situation in which space and time negate one another. The following pages present a three-part enquiry through which this idea of the choreographic is used to assess propositions about utopia come-to-earth.

The first part of the discussion excavates the choreographic properties of Harvey's model for utopian thought and practice (2000). Harvey's purposefully dialectical constructions form a basis from which to assess Foucault's ideas about heterotopia, ideas that Harvey has characterized as being resoundingly undialectical (Harvey 2009: 162). The second part extends that excavation to questions about the spatio-temporal nature of Foucault's sailing vessel (1986). Does the ship figure a heterotopia that might in fact bring to life Harvey's spacetime dialectics, bringing also the utopian propositions of Foucault and Harvey into alignment? Finally, I use the discussion of spacetime oscillation at sea to evaluate the utopian character of a lived example: the Middle Passage slave ship. Here the materialist underpinnings of Harvey's argument are used to extend Foucault's ideas to (or locate them in) the context of a ship that carries utopia and dystopia entwined. A dialectics of negation invoked previously as being innate in choreography is uncovered in the concept of utopia itself. Ultimately, I propose that dialectical thought can be grasped as a kind of choreographic thinking (that is, as a thinking that moves) and ask whether a spacetime dialectics can ever model the possibility of a utopia enacted in the here and now.

Dialectical Utopianism

The problem with utopias is that they do not exist. They are neither here nor now and as such hover outside of our reach. Harvey, though, does not give up on the idea. In the speculative Appendix to his Spaces of Hope he paints his own vision of an improved future, one catalyzed by a global revolutionary movement breaking fundamentally with the advanced capitalist societies about which his book is written (2000: 257--81). Harvey's central proposition is that such a future (or indeed any other in which alternatives to the status quo are imagined) cannot take shape according to the blueprints of existing models of utopia. In this he refers exclusively to Anglo-American and continental European philosophies as well as to his own Marxist geographical analysis of

the spaces of neoliberalism. He identifies the problems with these philosophical and economic blueprints for utopia as being rooted in the ways they operate with respect to time and space. Harvey seeks a new way of conceptualizing (and eventually practising) utopia; one that works choreographically in that it proceeds from a dialectical treatment of space and time.

According to Harvey, the utopias that have been imagined, theorized and attempted in action fall into one of two categories. There are utopias of spatial form and then there are utopias of social process. Neither is satisfactory to the aim of his book, which is to think optimistically of ways to 'produce a better future', because both sever space and time from one another (17). The former category is emblemized in the world depicted by Thomas More in his Utopia (1965 [1516]). Described at length as a social paradise and contained on an island named Utopia, this world is an example of spatial-form utopia because it operates as a closed physical structure impermeable to the passing of time. Harvey describes More's Utopia as:

an artificially created island which functions as a ... closed-space economy.... The internal spatial ordering of the island strictly regulates a stabilized and unchanging social process. Put crudely, spatial form controls temporality, an imagined geography controls the possibility of social change.

(2000: 159)

Here the island Utopia falls short as a model for an improved future because its very material fixity necessitates a strict regulation of social process. The problem with this state of fixity--the maintenance of paradise--is that it is marked by 'the problematics of closure' and of regulation and, as such, is at risk of becoming authoritarian, even totalitarian (196).

The problematics of closure that plague spatial-form utopias--Harvey points also to Charles Fourier's and Le Corbusier's respective 'ideal cities' among other conceptions--are not, however, to be resolved by a simple reversal of space and time (Harvey 2000: plates 8.20 and 8.23). We learn this when Harvey turns to social-process utopias--those models of social organization that privilege progress above all else. His central example is free-market capitalism, which he characterizes as utopian because of its commitment to the unchecked behaviour of financial markets as the guarantor of a perfected socio-economic harmony. Harvey locates the utopian seeds of this project in the writings of

Adam Smith and describes its contemporary reliance upon ideas about process in the following way:

capital builds a geographical landscape in its own image at a certain point in time only to have to destroy it later in order to accommodate its own dynamic of endless capital accumulation, strong technological change, and fierce forms of class struggle.

(177)

In order to specify such a process, one has only to think of the construction and demolition cycle characterizing the endlessly changing skylines of urban financial districts, or the type of site with which those districts are economically co-dependent: the impermanent and precarious settlements of those ‘rural migrants, “floating populations” and slum dwellers’ of the global South whom Neferti X. M. Tadiar describes as making up the ‘surplus populations’ produced by and necessary to the financial processes of neoliberalism (Tadiar 2013: 30). The utopianism of social process, then, carries with it two kinds of danger. First, it runs the risk of descending into an ‘agonistic romanticism’ that leads nowhere for no one (Harvey 2000: 196). That is, it runs the risk of not ever materializing beyond its conceptualization as endless change. Second, and more urgently, social-process utopianism is dangerous because it has always to destroy that which it has created in order to remain in process, as is shown in the ruinous material effects of free-market capitalism.

Having rejected both of these blueprints for utopia, on the grounds that each abstracts either space from time (as in a closed-space economy) or time from space (as with an enterprise of ceaseless accumulation), Harvey makes his central proposal. What is needed for utopia to be enacted in the here and now--without risking either a closed authoritarianism or the unchecked freedom of the forces that drive progress--is a dialectics of spatial form and social process. Harvey puts it this way:

The task is then to define an alternative, not in terms of some static spatial form or even of some perfected emancipatory process. The task is to pull together a spatiotemporal utopianism--a dialectical utopianism--that is rooted in our present possibilities at the same time as it points towards different trajectories for human uneven geographical developments.

(ibid.)

Harvey imagines here a utopianism that acknowledges and treats carefully the material conditions of the present in order to open new possibilities of social arrangement into the future. He proposes a utopianism, in other words, that extends out of space possible trajectories in time. In such a proposition space becomes temporal: spatial orderings imply futures in which they might be configured differently. Likewise, time is made contingent upon space: ways into those futures are figured that take account and take care of present materials and populations. Harvey, then, confronts the problems presented in utopias both unrealizable and undesirable by offering a resolution that is definitively dialectical. The task as he sees it is to move towards a concept of utopia in which it is impossible to think of time and space as separate, let alone of one dimension as taking primacy over the other. It is precisely in this reorientation of utopia through a concept of spacetime that Harvey practises a kind of choreographic thinking.

Neither space nor time, for Harvey, can be permitted to be absolute, and utopia must instead be realized through the mutual disaffirmation of these dimensions. It is here fruitful to think of space and time as they are produced in choreographic acts. Space, first of all, is treated in choreography not as a frozen environment but as something more like spacing. This idea refers in general to physical configurations but denotes specifically those configurations that carry in themselves the promise of what comes next. To clarify this point we might borrow a phrase from Foucault's discussion of space as it has been conceptualized in the wake of Galileo's unsettling of geocentric astronomy (the latter in which the earth is seen as the fixed orbital centre of the cosmos). Astronomically speaking after Galileo but also choreographically speaking in general, 'a thing's place [is] no longer anything but a point in its movement, just as the stability of a thing [is] only its movement indefinitely slowed down' (Foucault 1986: 23). A position reached in the context of a dance is nothing more than a moment of reaching, which is undone again in a condition of ongoing movement. Choreographic space, in other words, is explicitly temporal in quality. It extends out of itself potential trajectories in time.

Time, likewise, is treated in acts of choreography only in and through space. Time is something that passes, certainly, but its choreographic passing takes place in material environments. Indeed the organization of time (rhythm, pace, duration) in a dance is contingent upon the condition of the spatial formations that are being modulated. Speed, for instance, is conveyed differently in the case of a vast stage being crossed by a solo dancer along a diagonal pathway than in the case of that same stage

when filled to the brim with sedentary bodies. The nature of time depends on the nature of the spacings in and through which it passes. Just as choreographic space is prevented from being absolutely spatial (it is not ever fixed, closed, permanent) so choreographic time is prevented from being absolutely temporal (it is never unbuckled from materiality).

A dialectics of negation borne out in choreographic spacetime characterizes the way in which Harvey models utopia. In his concept space cannot be absolute because it must remain open to processes of (social) change, and time cannot be absolute because it must depend on the (social) conditions of the present. Harvey's proposal for a better world, then, is one that leaves itself attuned to different futures while remaining attentive to extant settings. Such a proposal works choreographically because it enshrines a kind of dialectics in which space and time disaffirm one another in their synthesis as movement. Harvey's choreographic concept of utopia, then, extends itself in a particular way towards Foucault's theory of heterotopia, for both imply that utopia is bound with action. For Harvey it is the bringing of space into creation with time that allows for the act of utopia and not just the dream of it and that also prevents the closed spaces of totalitarianism or the exploitative temporality of neoliberalism. For Foucault, too, that double-headed concept of spacetime is fundamental in the case of heterotopia, and comes exemplified not in proposals for a global revolutionary geography but in the more modest and poetic form of his displaced place: the sailing vessel.

Heterotopia Par Excellence

In a critique of Foucault's heterotopia, Harvey accuses his forebear of being undialectical in his conceptualization of utopian space. 'Foucault assumes' writes Harvey, 'that heterotopic spaces are somehow outside the dominant social order or that their positioning within that order can be severed, attenuated or, as in the prison, inverted on the inside. They are construed as absolute spaces' (2009: 160). Foucault here is made guilty of a kind of spatial-form utopianism. According to Harvey, Foucault conceives of a social alternative in the here and now (a heterotopia) as a situation that is enclosed and somehow autonomous from the social world that goes on around it. Inside a theatre (one of Foucault's heterotopias) for instance, different worlds may be dreamt up and enacted, making a place that is entirely otherly and protected from its normative social outside. In line with Harvey's critique, we might problematize this idea of theatre-as-heterotopia by arguing that no theatre is protected from the material or ideological realities of the

outside world and indeed that there can be no hard line drawn between inside and outside in this respect. That which is dreamt up within the walls of a theatre building is always part of that which is ongoing in a broader social field.[{note}]³ Harvey underlines this critique when he laments: ‘worse still, the absoluteness of the space confines, pointing to segregation and stasis rather than progressive motion’ (161). He implies, in other words, that the autonomous nature of Foucault’s heterotopia freezes space in time, so that the concept behaves as a kind of spatial-form utopianism. This critique is fragile, though. If we turn to Foucault’s ultimate conceptualization of heterotopia we find at its heart a seemingly dialectical idea, indeed a choreographic one, in which space and time bind into an environment that moves.

In the closing paragraph of his essay, having given at least twenty examples of heterotopia, Foucault states the following:

if we think, after all, that the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea ... you will understand why the boat has not only been for our civilization, from the sixteenth century until the present, the great instrument of economic development (I have not been speaking of that today), but has been simultaneously the greatest reserve of the imagination. The ship is the heterotopia par excellence. In civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates.

(1986: 27)

Here there are two respects in which Foucault joins Harvey in thinking about utopia. Both theorize utopia not only from the point of view of discourses of ‘the West’ but also as a spatio-temporal experience. Sailing vessels are spaces that are fundamentally temporal. They are, like More’s Utopia, closed environments. But unlike More’s island they also travel from place to place and so are mobile in time. Foucault’s ultimate heterotopia, in other words, operates through a spacetime dialectics. ‘Given over to the infinity of the sea’, ships are places that move always towards their futures.

‘What is a ship?’ asks Bernhard Siegert. His basic answer, invoking the physics of Archimedes, is that a ‘ship is a body that floats in water because it displaces its weight in fluid’ (2015: 68). In this simple classification are embedded the mechanics of the choreographic and so too a clue about Foucault’s concept as a dialectical utopianism of

sorts. The ship is a body--a spatial entity--that is distinctive for the way it displaces itself in fluid. A spacetime negation is again at play. Because of its basic design as an environment that moves through water, the ship creates space and time in a way similar to that described just now in relation to Harvey's choreographic thinking. Recall that choreographic space is explicitly temporal in quality, extending out of itself potential trajectories in time. The ship does just that. It is a space that undoes its own placing. Indeed, in water the ship is both a material location--housing crew and cargo--and a trajectory through time, displacing itself along its navigational course. It is of no surprise, then, that Siegert goes on to characterize the ship as a cultural technology that has got something to do with the verb choreo. He explains, with the help of Christina Vagt's reading of Heidegger, that choreo 'means "to make place" or "give room" ... but also translates as "passing through, penetrating, traversing successfully"' (70). In this way of thinking through the root of the word choreography, and like any good heterotopia, the sailing vessel is figured as a place in process; the verbs 'make', 'give', 'pass', 'penetrate' and 'traverse' all point to the processual. Being at once a space and a displacement, the ship activates a spacetime negation and in this way too it resists Harvey's critique of heterotopia.

Harvey warns that 'to materialize a space is to engage with closure (however temporary) which is an authoritarian act' (Harvey 2000: 183). The ship might escape such a fate because it is a materialized space on the move, which means it leaves itself open to changing conditions, positionings, locations. The social importance of such contexts to a discussion of utopia will be picked up in a moment. However, being that the ship is also a trajectory through time, we should acknowledge that it always holds the promise of the future within it. A sailing vessel is a structure designed not so much to be somewhere as to take us elsewhere. Foucault's heterotopia par excellence, then, may in part satisfy Harvey's call for a dialectical utopianism. The ship, in and through its peculiar figuration of space with time, can be thought of as a choreographic situation and so as a social environment in which form and process entwine. Indeed, it would seem to operate as a space that is basically temporal and in which dreams of a better future can be moved towards.

When placed under closer scrutiny, though, Foucault's sailing vessel, as the place that most keenly holds the promise for a utopia come-to-earth, falls foul not of being too absolutely spatial but perhaps of being too absolutely temporal. Fiona Wilkie offers an apposite critique of the ship as a figure for a better future. She writes:

Part of the aesthetic appeal of boats might be their apparent disconnection from social realities on land ... but this masks the ways in which they are, of course, intricately caught up in networks of carefully controlled shipping routes and timetables, as well as the connections they forge between points of departure and arrival.

(2015: 124)

Wilkie here points towards the ways in which the ship-as-heterotopia can be all too easily severed from the geopolitical terrains towards which sailing vessels sail and from which they embark. She also underlines the carefully controlled temporalities of maritime navigation. Working from Wilkie's observations, I want to suggest how certain kinds of maritime ship mitigate their potentially utopian character by departing from what has been referred to throughout this article as the choreographic. This departure is represented in a making-absolute of time and is enacted by the enlisting of a ship's crew and cargo in a social teleology.

During his discussion of the ship, Foucault acknowledges the economic dimensions of that vessel, mentioning its journey from port to port. However, he goes swiftly on to state that these dimensions are not the concern of his short lecture. In the light of Wilkie's critique and of Harvey's dialectical utopianism, both of which demand that attention be paid to the economic, social and political realities bundled up in utopian thought and practice, the final part of this article will turn to the ship's participation in the social world. This world is always a specific one, and so specific focus will be placed on the presence, or absence, of the choreographic in one instance of ship-as-heterotopia: the Middle Passage slave ship.

Dystopia

In Black Reconstruction (1935) W. E. B. du Bois describes the transatlantic slave trade in the following way:

The most magnificent drama in the last thousand years of human history [... consisted in] the transportation of ten million human beings out of the dark beauty

of their mother continent into the new-found Eldorado of the West. They descended into Hell.

(1935: 727)

Here Du Bois exposes utopia as a place that can be a hell-on-earth as much as it can be a terrestrial paradise. Working from Du Bois' shrewd underscore of the double-headed nature of utopia, I continue my discussion of the ship and the choreographic with the recognition that no assessment of the ship as a technology of utopia is complete without a consideration of the dystopian reality of the slave ship.

The reality in question is narrated in the accounts of those who crossed the Atlantic in slave ships, as well as in the weaving of those accounts by writers who reckon with the immensity of what Du Bois calls that 'magnificent drama'. As the means by which this drama was made possible, indeed as the stage for part of its enactment, the slave ship has received considerable attention by historians, perhaps most thoroughly in Marcus Rediker's The Slave Ship: A Human History (2007). The specific entry of this kind of ship into the present article on utopia and dialectics, though, is made through a consideration of the slave ship's choreographic qualities. Choreographies unfolded on board Middle Passage slave ships. These were choreographies of crew and of captured human beings who had been made, in this environment, into cargo. A number of studies of slave ships do take account of the dances performed regularly on their decks (Stanley Niaah 2010; Thompson 2014). However, in the light of my discussion of choreography as heterotopia, I place my focus not on the dances that were performed by enslaved peoples on board these ships but instead on the way in which the slave ship itself stages a certain choreography of time without space. Through a cleaving of space from time the slave ship departs from the choreographic as it has been discussed so far. By propagating a form of utopia that is instead distinctively undialectical the slave ship collapses the emancipatory promise of Foucault's heterotopia par excellence.

Borrowing from Ben Robinson's study (2014) of the slave ship in Herman Melville's novella Benito Cereno (1855), I want to suggest that the choreography of space on board the Middle Passage ship can be described as one of disassemblage. We will begin by thinking with Robinson of the famous illustration, produced and circulated by British abolitionists in 1788, of the slave ship Brookes, which maps the way in which the ship's human cargo was to be stowed under deck. In this diagram, rows of captive bodies, coloured black and coloured the same, are shown to occupy supine positions extending

across the floor space of the lower decks. The bodies are crammed so linearly and so neatly together as if parts on a factory production line. About this choreography of space Robinson writes:

[there] is the packing and compacting of bodies together but in a manner so disarticulate, disconcerted and constrained as to occlude any sort of political gathering. The slave ship brings together in order to dis-assemble: systematically cutting or disabling former bonds--familial, linguistic, ethnic, amicable--while impeding the constitution of new ones. The slave ship, as 'ideal type', generates a state of disassembly, the regulation of a crowded but apolitical site by techniques of corporal violence and terror.

(2014: 137--8)

In this statement Robinson observes something important about the choreographic design of the slave ship. This design was resisted by those who were forced to live within it and sought to erase the conditions for that resistance through a kind of choreographic atomization of communal space. [note]4

The spatial organization of bodies on board is designed to produce a social space in which pre-existing and future communality is pulled to pieces. While crammed side-by-side, their bodies always touching, these people are imagined as atomized units. Individuals are dis-assembled from the human associations that might give them their humanity not only at the level of the social bonds that have been broken with the people and land left behind them but also at the point of spatial connection with their fellow captives. The people in the diagram do not look at one another. The touch of their skin is a product not of kinship but of a terrible lack of space. What is shown on the lower decks of the 'ideal type' Brookes is not a group of human beings communing in a shared space but a set of isolated bodies together making up a consignment and that might each raise profit in their future sale as commodity. Indeed, this very spatial arrangement choreographs Rediker's assessment of the slave ship as a 'factory' in which was created 'a labor power that animated a growing world economy' (2007: 9).

In the slave ship's choreography of disassembled space, a distinctively non-choreographic estrangement of space from time is also conveyed. The type of disassemblage depicted on the Brookes, and elaborated by Robinson, which is also an assemblage of valuable products to be sold on the New World slave market, is placed

ultimately in service of a form of absolute time. A number of social spaces ('familial, linguistic, ethnic, amicable') are dismantled. They are dismantled in order to produce a utopian future--the Eldorado of the West--for which the captives of the ships had been wrested from their homes and enslaved in order to build. Time, then, emerges as the dominant dimension in the slave ship economy and presents itself as an absolute commitment to a particular telos at the expense of the populations and spaces through which that telos would be met. On board the slave ship, time becomes teleology. Negation runs in one direction (time persists in the negation of space but not the other way around) and so undoes the choreographic play of space and time underpinning the utopian promise of Foucault's sailing vessel.

Because of its projection towards a future time the sailing vessel had previously been framed in this article as a place that might resist Harvey's idea of closure. The sailing vessel avoids a charge of spatial-form utopianism, I had argued, by being a structure designed not so much to be somewhere as to take us elsewhere. However, in the case of the slave ship the elsewhere to which the ship's captive inhabitants were taken was a nightmare and so in this 'portable prison' we find not so much a spatial closure as a temporal one (Rediker 2007: 45). Indeed, it is the emphasis on time as teleology that leads to the kind of closure Harvey cautions against. The destiny of slave ships' kidnapped populations is absolute: their future is predetermined and so in a way is closed to them. Indeed, life on board the ship is designed to enact that closure, constructing a factory for the production of future slaves and masters, and so too, as Rediker crucially argues, of race (2007: 10). The temporal closure of the Middle Passage slave ship undoes the choreographic synthesis of space and time by which Foucault's sailing vessel is heterotopic and by which Harvey's utopianism is dialectical. Indeed, the absolute temporality of what Paul Gilroy calls this 'micro-political system in motion' is deeply implicated in Harvey's idea of social-process utopianism (Gilroy 1993: 4). The capitalist drive towards a future of ceaseless accumulation depends on the exact kind of disassembled social spaces--reassembled here as racialized labour power--produced by the slave ship as prison and as factory.

Conclusion

The case of the slave ship serves as a caution to the question posed at the end of this article's introduction. We should be cautious of invoking 'the choreographic' as a

property that might guarantee the bringing of utopia to earth. Certainly the ship is a place in process: a heterotopia par excellence for Foucault. It is a mobilization of space through time and so approximates the conditions of dialectical utopianism prescribed by Harvey. However, what we might call the ship's choreographic nature in general does not in itself prevent the entrenchment in specific cases of such regimes that, in utopian imaginings, we purport to leave behind. As Du Bois and those who have spoken from and of the Middle Passage have showed us, Eldorado was pursued across the Atlantic at the expense of those who found hell on the slave ships as well as in those places to which the ships delivered them. Indeed, through the lens of Rediker's insight that the slave ship functioned as nothing less than a factory for the production of race, it is clear to see that the colonial European vision of the New World figured a utopia that was always also dystopic.

The ship, that 'floating piece of space', cannot hatch an improved world just because it is a figuratively choreographic situation. The ship is a place in process but one that still works through and for the ideological positions of those who operate it. It is here that Harvey's materialism may be helpful in rooting Foucault's sketches of heterotopia to those concrete instances of oppression that utopias are dreamt up in order to escape. It is not enough to think poetically of the spatio-temporal properties of sailing if one is to discover a way of countering the degrading social practices of a given historical present. Even so, the mutual negation of space and time proposed as an ideal in Harvey's dialectical utopianism, and which makes the figure of the ship seem especially choreographic and so especially ripe for the actualization of utopia, is explicitly subsumed in the case of the slave ship. Here we find a different kind of dialectic to the one theorized by Harvey. In this case it is not so much that time and space mutually negate one another; indeed the social spaces of the kidnapped populations who were made into slave ship cargo were dismantled and reconstituted in order to preserve the absolute temporality of the Middle Passage project. Rather, in this kind of ship we find an environment where the paradise of the New World persists only in the hell of those on whose backs that paradise would be built. What is exposed in the case of the Middle Passage sailing vessel, then, is the dialectical nature of utopia itself. The danger inherent in dreamt-up worlds is that they become nightmares once lived by those who did not dream them.

Notes

1 The concept had been introduced by Foucault ‘in relation to discourse and language’ in The Order of Things (1966) and was developed into a matter of space in his lecture for the Architectural Studies Circle in 1967 (Harvey 2000: 183). The 1967 lecture was elaborated and published in essay form in the October 1984 issue of Architecture, Mouvement, Continuité, and Jay Miskowiec’s 1986 translation of that essay for Diacritics is the version to which I refer in this article.

2 While it is beyond the scope of this article to investigate the genealogy of the term ‘choreography’, or to map out the contestations surrounding its meaning, a conviction is maintained that it is a practice that has to do (at root) with the production of time and space through the organization of movement. A definition allowing for the expanded sense in which the term is used here can be borrowed from Susan Leigh Foster, who states that ‘choreography has come to refer to a plan or orchestration of bodies in motion’ (2011: 5). For fifty other definitions of choreography, gathered from artists, scholars, curators and critics, see the survey published in Corpus, the Austrian online dance and performance magazine (‘What is Choreography?’ n.d.).

3 I am indebted here to Fiona Wilkie’s discussion of the relationship between Foucault’s concept of heterotopia, ships and the dreaming that goes on inside theatres (2015: 121--2).

4 The people abducted to slave ships did stage complex and various acts of resistance (Rediker 2007: 8). Paul Gilroy explains that ships crossing the Middle Passage in general ‘need to be thought of as cultural and political units rather than abstract embodiments of the triangular trade. They were something more--a means to conduct political dissent and possibly a distinct mode of cultural production’ (1993: 16--17).

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