EXPLORING JOYCE CAROL OATES’S WORK BY USING FOUCALUT’S HETEROTOPIA

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ABSTRACT
Joyce Carol Oates has been recognized as a postmodernist writer. In her literary texts, there is a
great deal of difference and heterogeneous space in postmodern writing techniques. This paper
explores Oates’ relevant texts through Foucault’s theory of Heterotopia by examining the main
forms and representational meanings of her heterotopia writing to understand Oates’ social
critique of established space and power more deeply. In this paper, the concept of Heterotopia
and its characteristics are introduced and applied to an analysis of Oates’s work. It argues that
Oates’ literary works contain numerous postmodern writing techniques in the space of difference
and heterogeneity. Oates’s ideas and works traverse the real and the imaginary, the moderate and
the edgy, in a manner that intersects time and space, history and the future. Almost every
significant scene in Oates’s work conforms to the six characteristics of Heterotopia. In Oates’s
writing, American society is a heterotopia of power; it is a heterotopia of special operation; it is
a juxtaposition space of functional superposition; it has multiple non-immediate connections
with time, producing a heterotemporal space; it is inclusive and exclusive; it is a heterotopia of
illusion and compensation. It concludes that Oates’ Heterotopias reflect religious repression,
racial discrimination, and sexual violence. By analyzing the construction of Heterotopia, this
paper provides a glimpse of Oates’ plot of power and violence, her innovative and pioneering
writing, and her expectation of female struggle for survival space and pursuit of self-worth.

Keywords: Heterotopia, Space, Oates, Foucault, Power

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past half-century, American scholars have gained traction and made significant breakthroughs in their study of Joyce Carol Oates. Researchers have expanded the scope of their studies of Joyce Carol Oates’s life and the context of her creative writing, analyzed the entire spectrum of American society, history, and culture in Oates’s life, and introduced critical approaches and new ideas.

Spatial analysis of the positioning of Joyce Carol Oates’s works has drawn criticism. Many different writers influence the context of her works: the setting of her early works in upstate New York is often compared to Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County (Greg Johnson, 1994, p. 16); descriptions of city life are often compared to Dreiser (Bender, 1987, p. 42), and her proximity to the spirit of place because of the spiritual landscape has been compared to D.H. Lawrence (G. F. Waller, 1979, p. 29). In her writing, forces such as sexuality, masculinity, religious hierarchies, and racial discrimination rule different spaces, transforming them into Heterotopias where power is overwhelmingly dominant. Oates’ spaces are immersed with “the latent terror, violence, obsessive sexuality, and religious strife Oates perceives lying close to the surface of contemporary life.” (G. Waller, 1974, p. 482) Deborah Jeanne Zak uses spatial theory to interpret Maureen in them, arguing that the urban space she inhabits is connected to her identity and that she is destroyed by the urban space she occupies and fails to realize herself. (Zak, 2002) Susana Araújo describes the violence and madness under the experience of space in Oates’ novel, revealing that Oates’ private and public spaces create phantasmagoric landscapes of anxiety about the social and economic factors and fears and desires formed by class. (Araújo, 2006, p. 411) And for the use of the concept of Heterotopia under space, Shreya Rastogi and Srirupa Chatterjee employ Heterotopia to analyze the mixed homes of various female identities in We Were the Mulvaneys by Oates, revealing the challenges and counterattacks on the patriarchal family. (Rastogi & Chatterjee, 2020) In Oates’ fictional universe, the universality of power is the essence of power. Since the beginning of her works, Oates has depicted America as a vast space where violent forces clash, a space of violence. Heterotopias are “the sites of limited experiences, connected to madness, sexual desire, and death, in which humans test the limits of their existence and confront its sublime terror.” (Filimon, 2014, p. 30) To further understand Heterotopia in the works of Oates, it is necessary to recognize Michel Foucault’s theory of Heterotopia.

Michel Foucault is one of the most prominent contemporary French philosophers, social theorists, and literary critics. Most of us are familiar with his theories about the relationship between power and knowledge and how social institutions transform them into a form of social control. What we may not know, however, is that all the living spaces inhabited by marginalized people in Foucault’s texts refer to his concept of Heterotopia. This is a concept that Foucault rarely mentions, and different critics may hold different opinions about it. Despite the differences, the concept of the heterotopia is largely associated with forms of resistance and criticism of our modernity.

Compared to Foucault’s other terms, the concept of Heterotopia is less known and more provocative, as Foucault refers to it indirectly on three rare occasions. It first appeared in certain textual spaces in the preface to Foucault’s 1966 book Les Mots et Les choses, then was encapsulated in a broadcast on utopia and literature the same year. Finally, it was revealed in a 1967 lecture to an audience of architects. But it was not until a few years before Foucault’s death that a summative essay on Heterotopia, entitled Of Other Spaces, was made public. Foucault proposed the concept of “Heterotopia” as a counterpart to the ideal world utopia.
Whereas utopias may be perfect imaginations of extreme ideals, Heterotopias are real beings in society because they are not illusory but real places that exist in material life; they are the realization of utopia, the real location of a social system or ideal space. Simply put, Heterotopias are truly special spaces with perverse nature, structure, and rules, which are isolated from the universal space. They exist in different, heterogeneous, disruptive, and innovative forms of space, creating a strong visual impact that reflects the state of human life and the experience of existence. However, no systematic and exhaustive research utilizing Foucault’s Heterotopia to analyze and summarize Oates’ works has been published. It should be a new domain for Oates’s research and merits the interest of scholars. This paper attempts to take the characteristics of cultural construction, social relevance, structural juxtaposition, spatiotemporal synchronization, exclusiveness, and spatial transcendence, as the theoretical perspective to deeply investigate the forms of Heterotopia in Oates’s work and explore the power relationship behind space.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Heterotopia comes from the medical dictionary and refers to displacing an organ or part of the body from its normal position. (Wainwright, Fergusson, Martin, & Stibbs, 1990) In 1967, Foucault introduced the concept of *Heterotopia* in his speech *Of Other Spaces*. 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. (Topinka, 2010, p. 55)

Before addressing Foucault’s concept of *Heterotopia*, we must define *Utopia*. *Utopia* is a recurring theme throughout the history of literature. Plato’s *Utopia* depicts the utopian complex of the sages who yearn for a better life. People envisaged an ideal state due to their discontentment with reality and limited ability to alter it. *Utopia* is a kingdom of freedom, truth, goodness, and beauty. However, utopia is not a real world; it only exists in the human imagination. Foucault also clearly indicates the unreal nature of utopia: “Utopias are sites with no real place.” They are sites that have a direct or inverse analogy with the real space of society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case, these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces.” (Foucault, 1997, p. 3) As one of the variants of utopia in the postmodern context, Heterotopia has a completely different character than utopia. In contrast to utopia, Heterotopia is real and has a place in the social system. *Heterotopia* is a real space. It has some crossover experiences of utopian space. As an illustration, the mirror has the dual properties of utopia and Heterotopia because it creates a connection between the imaginary and real worlds and can simultaneously present elements of diversity and heterogeneity. The formation of *Heterotopia* is realized through the refraction of perspective. The perspective alternates between the real and the virtual, and Heterotopia may emerge on the backside of this perspective. Kevin Hetherington defines Heterotopia as a location of “Otherness, whose Otherness is 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” (Hetherington, 2002, p. 8).

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1 The term heterotopia comes from the ancient Greek word *heteros*, meaning “other,” and *topos* meaning “place”. Heterotopia was coined by analogy with utopia and dystopia, which means “a place of a different order”. It can be summarized as referring to a real place that is seen as different and exists outside the normative social and political space.
Foucault’s idea of Heterotopia provides a new scientific method for spatial theory, and his philosophy also reflects the openness and inclusiveness of postmodernism. The “Heterotopia” presents us with a unique perspective - a philosophy of difference as opposed to a philosophy of truth and homogeneity. This Heterotopia analysis aims to investigate the easily neglected elements of space and establish a metaphorical epistemology and a new theory of micropower. Foucault abandoned the establishment of a general form of spatial theory because his research has been characterized not by a macroscopic analysis of dominant consciousness but by a particular focus on applying the microscopic perspective. Numerous disciplines have used it as a theoretical foundation for the explanation, which has led to a broader interpretation.

Characteristics of Heterotopia
In 1967, Foucault outlined six characteristics of Heterotopia in various spatial texts and contexts. This statement is not only a description of Heterotopia’s characteristics but also a new way for Foucault to think about space. Heterotopia is a space where multiple cultural models are juxtaposed. First, this non-monocultural mode encompasses both dominant and non-dominant cultural forms. All Heterotopias exist in real space. Foucault divides Heterotopias formed by juxtaposing mainstream and deviant cultures into two major categories: Crisis Heterotopia and Heterotopia of Deviation. They exist in the familiar everyday space, but “Heterotopias of deviation” encapsulate individuals whose behavior deviates from the required mean or norm. (Foucault, 1997, p. 5) Joan Gordon argues that crisis Heterotopia and deviant Heterotopia are the same space, viewed from different vantage points: “As people are cast off from society, they form a counter-society, a counter site of their own. To the society that casts its deviants aside, these institutions are deviation Heterotopias. The social isolation of the residents of rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, and prisons connects them to others like themselves. “No longer deviant in this countersuit, they undergo the transformative experience of the crisis” (Gordon, 2003, p. 466).

Second, the description of Heterotopias persisting in society has varied styles due to cultural differences in historical evolution. Foucault uses Cemetery as an example to illustrate this argument. The shift in the location of the cemetery reflects the difference in Foucault’s idea of Heterotopia. From the ancient cult of death to the modern personalization of death, the cemetery’s status as a heterogeneous space has shifted, from symbolizing “the existence of a complete hierarchy” to becoming “another city” in the dark. Each family rests in an “exotic” cemetery that is no longer associated with the sanctity and immortality of the city center. Thus, the cemetery is a cultural space but not a part of the mainstream cultural space; it is a “foreign” cultural space.

Third, Heterotopia can juxtapose several contradictory places in the real space. It is inclusive, allowing spaces with different characteristics to coexist in the same physical location and map each other, thus subtly expressing new values and meanings. The third characteristic of Heterotopia is the one that writers analyze the most. Miriam Kahn describes the “heterotopic dissonance” caused by the “displacement” of objects and myths in anthropological museums (Kahn, 1995). Edward Soja elaborates on the context of heterogeneity in contemporary Los Angeles space in his writings on heterotopologies. (Soja, 1996) According to Edward Relph, “postmodernity” is the generalization of Heterotopia or the pluralistic cohabitation of components that one would ordinarily regard or locate as distinct. (Relph, 1991) A Persian garden constructed thousands of years ago is the earliest example of a Heterotopia. The garden is rectangular, with the four sides representing the four directions of the world and a fountain.
pool in the center representing the center of the world. This pool is the sole source of irrigation for the garden’s plants. Foucault considers this garden to be the epitome of a “Heterotopia.” At this point, the garden is a “Heterotopia” in which seemingly “incomparable” spaces are “rationally” connected for a specific function or purpose.

Fourth, Heterotopias can accommodate a variety of spaces, temporal or historical fragments. It is a radical departure from traditional temporality, allowing space and time to be reconstructed and presented in a relatively complex context. It is embodied in the infinite accumulation of time and history in locations such as libraries and museums. In these locations, countless documents and historical artifacts from various eras continue accumulating indefinitely and reaching their zenith. Meanwhile, the cemetery mentioned heretofore is a typical heterogeneous space. Here, the boundaries between life and death are distinct and somehow related; here, time is suspended forever. In contrast, another type of Heterotopia does not pursue eternity but rather transience and fluidity. Modern society’s popular resorts and sites of folklore experiences are of this type. Here, time can be traced back to any period, and external time is static, as is overlapping and hybrid time. Each layer represents a new time and rests in the space where they coexist.

Fifth, Heterotopia has its own open and closed systems, separating them from other spaces and rendering them permeable. Usually, Heterotopia areas are not freely accessible. To enter, you must obtain official permission or perform the required rituals. For instance, in a high-security prison or the military compound, or when participating in rituals such as a Muslim bath or church service, you must adhere to a strict set of procedures. There is also the typical American motel, where couples can check in and engage in sexual activity. Another type of Heterotopia appears completely open but conceals an invisible exclusivity. Like a resort, we can experience the local culture for a time, but we can never truly enter it. Anyone passing through is a transient, as opposed to a true local.

Sixth, Heterotopia can produce a spatial system overflowing with illusions and compensations. The former resembles a brothel, while the latter resembles colonies. In other words, a Heterotopia can construct an illusory space to reveal the corresponding real space. This illusory space can be compared to our real space, or even surpass it, to compensate for the lack of real space. In addition, cars and boats are mobile and floating spaces; Foucault perceives them as “extreme types of Heterotopia” (Foucault, 1997, p. 9) that can connect multifaceted spaces, including brothels and colonies. Their inhabitants are artificially segregated or gathered, and their lives tend to be ordered but also full of anomalies in which people are disciplined and reshaped.

**DISCUSSION**

**The Construction of Heterotopia Cultural Space**

Foucault believes that utopia does not exist in real places and locations, whereas in all cultures and civilizations, there are real and effective center-emplacements. Therefore, these correspond to the Utopia imagination or Heterotopia, which may be real or imagined and experienced because the space itself is “the perceived, the conceived, and the directly experienced.” (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 246) The diversity of American culture in Oates’s works is akin to the absence of a single culture in a Heterotopia. Oates explores a variety of contemporary American physical spaces, including cities, schools, cars, homes, and apartments. Whether private or public, domestic or social, recreational or occupational, cultural or pragmatic, they all embody
power relations. Therefore, these spaces have diverged from their original functions and evolved into power Heterotopias. They are either real existences, such as Detroit in Them (1969) or Las Vegas in Starr Bright Will Be With You Soon (1999). Or they are fictitious, such as Eden County in Oates’s early novels.

These distortions or abuses of power in particular spaces frequently relate to religion, familial ties, and race. First Love: A Gothic Tale (1996) is set in an old house built in 1893 called Burkhardt. Although it is a conventional residence, it is a unique space isolated from contemporary society. In such a house, you will have recurring nightmares and wake up unsure of your whereabouts. Even smaller spaces can be frightening. In You Must Remember This (1987), boxing represents a potential means by which Felix can gain autonomy from his oppressive environment and express his potency to seize and reshape his destiny according to his inner desires. The boxing ring is thus the forgotten space that restricts daily life. In the boxing ring, life becomes so simplified that “to defend oneself at all times” becomes the main rule of the ring, the brain becomes the target, and the knockout is the ultimate goal (Oates, 2017, p. 202). The magical boxing ring allows its devotees to escape the mundane and the obscurity into which his life and circumstances have plunged him. Instead, Felix enters a transcendent “surreal” space where he can realize a purified and augmented male self. There, he establishes an absolute experience that is “a public accounting of the utmost limits of his being; he will know, a few of us can know of ourselves, what physical and psychic power he possesses—how much or how little he is capable of.” (Oates, 1987, p. 8)

The supernatural presences return to the real panoramic surveillance. “Panopticism emerges as a new modality of control throughout society.” (Cohen, 1978, p. 567). For Foucault, the panopticon symbolizes “the modern world in which we, its citizens, are the bearers of our own figurative, mental imprisonment” (Bertens, 2012, p. 117). Foucault, in examining the mode of panoramic surveillance of the 18th-century perfect camp, uncovers that “all power would be exercised solely through exact observation; each gaze would form a part of the overall functioning of power.” (Foucault, 1995, p. 171) In I Lock My Door Upon Myself (1990), a poor white woman named Calla falls in love with Tyrell, a black man, defying the racial prejudices entrenched in the 1920s white American community. Deeply prejudiced, her white relatives would observe their every move from within their home. The two spaces, inside and outside the house, become a confluence of individual states of existence and patterns of social discipline through the surveillance of power. Calla and Tyrell, who seek freedom of love, appear to be able to move freely outside the house. Still, the stern gaze and omnipresent slander form an invisible net that makes them feel like they are in an invisible prison, with no way to escape, until they finally commit suicide. In Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang (1993), Legs Sardovsky invites high levels of control with her most violent form of resistance when she is sent by the police to the Red Bank, a juvenile correctional facility for young girls, to serve her sentence for car theft and speeding after a joyride. Longshanks lives in a space that is a metaphor for the mechanisms of power in modern society, the Red Bank, where she lives in a closed, isolated, and small space, where her every word and action is strictly monitored and where her cell is linked to the manager by the watchful gaze, just as in the round prison. What Legs encounters in the Red Bank is a concentrated manifestation of the control and oppression each experience within the spatial power structure of contemporary society.

**Performance of the Social Correlation in Heterotopias**
Foucault argues that Heterotopias are socially relevant in terms of their operation and that each type of society, in their respective phases and heterogeneous histories, “has a precise and determined function.” (Foucault, 1997, p. 5) Every relatively constant social stage or cultural formation in the same or different national societies at varying times is a Heterotopia. Oates’s American society is a Heterotopia of national cultures and historical developments full of differences. It is a restless and volatile wonderland, full of “colliding social and economic forces, its philosophical contradictions, its wayward, often violent energies.” (Greg. Johnson, 1987, p. 8) Small Heterotopia with special and precise functioning can be found everywhere in the great American Heterotopia. For instance, the motorcycle racing track in With Shuddering Fall (1964), the home in Angel of Light (1981), the school in Marya: A Life (1986), the hospital in The Rise of Life on Earth (1991), the Stonehouse in The Gravedigger’s Daughter (2007), and the mud puddle in Mudwoman (2012). These spaces vary in size and intent, but one thing remains constant: they are all spaces of violence and thus spaces where power operates. Spider Monkey is sodomized after being wrongfully imprisoned in The Triumph of the Spider Monkey (1976); Marya is bullied by boys at school and then by her male superiors when she becomes a teacher in Marya: A Life; Bright is beaten and sexually abused by men in a hotel room in Starr Bright Will Be With You Soon; Rebecca, who lives near a cemetery, is cruelly controlled by her father in The Gravedigger’s Daughter. The male subordination of women in space exemplifies Foucault’s belief that the “noncorporeal soul is not a substance; it is the element in which are articulated the effects of a certain type of power and the reference of a certain type of knowledge, the machinery by which the power relations give rise to a possible corpus of knowledge, and knowledge extends and reinforces the effects of this power.” (Foucault, 1995, p. 29) The Heterotopia in the episode of Owen’s assassination in Angel of Light is the home where he lives with his mother. Owen’s perception of the truth is illusory, and his actions are based on false ideological constructs, creating a mixture of reality and illusion in his family, which is intertwined with power and has been planned in multiple ways. His hatred grows under the domination of his illusory thoughts and eventually grows into an unquenchable hatred. He is desperate to vent this emotion, and Isabel becomes a victim of the intertwined power. In Mudwoman, M.R.’s spatially alienated life struggle is written in a spatial patchwork of clockwise and counter-temporal, interspersed with news and memories, as she struggles with violent memories and mental distress because her mother, who was mentally abnormal after the devastation of the war, threw her into a nearby mud puddle. She was regularly bullied and abused by other children after her adoption. Adopted and regularly bullied, she had to play the role of a “substitute” for their deceased infant daughter. Mudwoman is also a metaphor for a madwoman, suggesting the anxiety and plight of the female psyche.

**Juxtaposition of Heterotopia in Spatial Structures**

From the structural perspective, Heterotopia also exhibits the structural feature of heterogeneous juxtaposition. Not only can a Heterotopia be markedly distinguishable from other Heterotopias, but it can also juxtapose several mutually incompatible spaces within a single Heterotopia without destroying the integrity of the original space. Such spatial juxtaposition emphasizes breaking the temporal flow of the text, requiring the juxtaposition of large or small units of meaning, i.e., the juxtaposition of several temporal clues into the spatial form so that the text’s unity exists in the relationship of the work’s space. In these Oates’s works, the fusion of several seemingly unrelated sites in space becomes a kind of functional superposition. In Zombie (1995), Quentin P.’s room is not only his daily residence but also the slaughterhouse
where he commits many murders and the operating room where he creates zombie slaves. *American Appetites* (1989) focuses on the negative effects of power in a multifunctional Heterotopia. A courtroom is comparable to a theater and a garden. It is a three-dimensional space that divides distinct locations into specific functional spaces. The crowded auditorium and press gallery make the courtroom a place for voyeurs. Everyone can observe and discuss Ian’s disgraced identity and hear what cannot and must be said in private. For the defendant, this open space is simultaneously closed, as he cannot escape the network of voyeurism and trial consisting of the jury, the press, and the audience. Space evokes infinite imagination, and the power of the trial expands infinitely. Before the innocent Ian is sentenced, he has already become a criminal in newspaper headlines and street talk. In this case, the courtroom represents both justice and threat. Although Ian regained his freedom, he lost his marriage, job, friendships, reputation, and hope for the future. *Carthage* (2014) continues Oates’ tradition of Heterotopia and a sense of responsibility concealed within a society of power. The novel recounts the disappearance of a young girl in the city of Carthage through two interwoven threads: light and dark. The bright line is the sudden disappearance of a 19-year-old girl, Cressida, on the night of July 9, 2005, which is the unraveling of a mystery case; the dark line is the confession of the suspect, Kincaid, at the trial and his imprisonment, interspersed with what he saw and experienced during his military service in Iraq. The fragmentation of language and the interlacing of time and space in this war novel embedded within a suspense novel make us feel the trauma of war for any individual or family. The trial and confession that opens the sixth section of Part I, *The Corporal in the Land of the Dead*, allow the reader to enter a Heterotopia of fractures, dislocations, and changes (Oates, 2014, p. 130). Here, Kincaid’s narrative presents two stories: their memories and their interrogation about what he did to her. Then she points to two distinct characters: the Iraqi civilian girl who witnessed the violent sexual assault and murder of her comrades in Iraq by Kincaid and Cressida in the case of the disappearance. This section contains a constant intertwining of trial and memory, present and past, Iraq and Carthage. However, the trial of the Carthage disappearances makes no progress; these two vignettes reveal more of Kincaid’s confused recollections of his Iraqi experiences. At this point, Oates successfully draws the reader into her preconceived war story by borrowing from the mystery genre. Still, Kincaid’s fragmented language and spatially confused memories enable the reader to superimpose and synthesize them: What precisely did Kincaid experience in Iraq? How do these experiences relate to the disappearances? As in a mystery novel, the reader still has to search for, and piece together clues to unearth his Iraq war experiences.

**Heterotopia of Spatiotemporal Synchronization**

In terms of space and time, Heterotopias “are not oriented toward the eternal, they are rather temporal Chroniques.” (Foucault, 1997, p. 7) If the location is constantly populated, it has formed a time break outside of normal time; its time and space constitute a Heterotopia. Oates uses montage, flashbacks, switches, and fragments to produce the fourth characteristic of Heterotopia, “Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time? which is to say that they open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies.” (Foucault, 1997, p. 6). *We were the Mulvaneys* (1996) is a saga of four ancient houses, each with historical baggage, where time is held aloft. The social and patriarchal forces that dominate these ancient dwellings are gradually dismantled as they are recreated through their present-day use. (Rastogi & Chatterjee, 2020) The castle is a family history museum in Oates’s Gothic novel Bellefleur (1980). Inside, the Turquoise Room is haunted by ghosts, and the dust-coated drum hanging on
the wall is made of Raphael’s skin, thus carrying the power of God. Whenever hearing it, “the family shivered and stared off into space. That, they could not help but think, even those Bellefleurs who scorned superstitions, is old Raphael, living still.” (Oates, 2010, p. 560). The castle thus becomes a supernatural space. In such a Heterotopia, the past and present are indistinguishable, and time loses its significance, becoming what Foucault refers to as an invisible but imaginable Heterotopia. This imaginary space is particularly prominent in the Turquoise Room. This living space becomes a surreal space, and the illusions stem from the white people’s discrimination and fear of black people. The Turquoise Room is also known as the “Room of Contamination” (Oates, 2010, p. 233), referring to the fact that overnight the white man’s beautiful room is no longer free of the traces of black inferiority and that even in a white family that helps black slaves escape, the shadow of racial discrimination still lingers.

Exclusive Spatial Structure of Each Other

Time breaks form a spatiotemporal synchronous Heterotopia, which also has internal exclusivity, the spatial structure between two Heterotopias that separate and permeate each other. The various Heterotopias are open and closed systems, a connected but non-integrated exotic area. In Foxfire: Confessions of a Girl Gang, Heterotopia’s openness and exclusivity are manifest. A group of teenage girls spontaneously form the Foxfire Gang with the motto “confidence, strength, and revenge,” and any teenage girl with similar intentions can join. However, certain rituals must be followed to join the gang, including the wearing of a cross, a speech by the leader, a blood oath by the members, “their brightly colored scarves, their homemade tattoos— historically the sign of collective allegiance among groups designated as outsiders— and as the composite elements of the shifting coalitions they form as they walk around their campus, down the streets, and through their town” (Oates, 1993b, p. 126), and only after this series of processes can one become an official member of the organization, which again reflects its exclusionary nature. The establishment of the girl gang not only creates an independent female space within the male space but also offers women a voice outside their common role as victims in Oates’ world. In this sense, the work employs the Heterotopia structure of the mutual other to reveal the heterogeneous exclusivity of the gendered mutual other. In I’ll Take You There (2002), the Kappa Gamma PI dormitory is depicted in multiple locations. By presenting the isolation of “my” space as a border everywhere, the novel presents the reader with an open but closed Heterotopia system, and the dormitory in the Kappa building reveals Oates’ class space. The same space is mutually exclusive. Many wealthy and powerful girls reside in the enviable Kappa dormitory but are not as decent as they appear. “My room” is on the third floor, but I don’t want to go to my room. The room was smoky and cluttered with clothing, cosmetics, food, and trash because all the girls were smoking and doing nothing without adult supervision. The girls in the other rooms could come and go as they pleased, stretching out on “my” bed and smoking among themselves without permission. “I” didn’t have money to buy cigarettes or smoke. “I” just wanted to work, study, and have normal relationships with girls. Kappa Gamma PI is a national sorority. The girls in it are one in a million rich women, but they are girls who lack self-esteem, self-reliance, self-love, compassion, and self-motivation. They only wish to marry into a wealthy family by their well-groomed appearance and refined demeanor. As a result, “I” cannot find a sense of personality, dignity, and identity in a space full of the smell of money, and “I” am always excluded and become a poor substitute.

Transcendence of the Preexisting Order Space
Space compensation and transcendence are Oates’s astute writing techniques. Functionally, Heterotopia can transcend the existing space to create a new form of fantasy and real compensatory space. The automobile is a specific Heterotopia that recurrently appears in Oates’s novels. Like the ship, it connects various spaces and places by its mobility. The automobile is a relatively enclosed space. It is connected to infinite space through mobility. For instance, in Them (1969), Jules drives around Detroit to make a delivery, and the car connects the slums to the places where he lives with the wealthy neighborhoods, where his lover lives, and the various other areas of the city, exhibiting the vitality and chaos of the American city in the 1960s. In Blackwater (1992), the automobile is a space of power, as are the spaces mentioned above. The only background of the story is a Toyota car. The driver controls the car’s direction and determines the destination, while passengers only participate in the journey passively. The two identities are so dissimilar that the car, ostensibly a mode of transportation, becomes an unequal space. “Kelly listened. She would have liked to turn the frantic air conditioner down a notch but hesitated, for this was the senator’s car after all, and she his passenger.” (Oates, 1993a, p. 30). Although the senator is renting the vehicle, the main character Kelly believes he is the owner. In this way, the relationship between the driver and the passenger has a high and low points, as Kelly enters a state of aphasia, does not dare to reduce the noise of the air conditioning, and does not dare to point out that he went the wrong way, and even dares not touch the dashboard, and before dying, does not dare to call the senator by name. The senator finally escapes by stepping on Kelly’s corpse. It implies that patriarchy and male power’s dual oppression of women have reached its epitome. The theme of the destruction of the American dream and the relationship between the sexes has a more realistic interpretation. In You Must Remember This, the symbiotic relationship between Felix and the car represents a “transcendence” of the self. The car is a living echo of the nest, the house, the shell, and the dynamic interplay between Felix and the car enhances a pervasive sense of power that is difficult to articulate but present, a power that seems to encompass notions of independence, freedom, and control, a power that seems to glorify the self - for better or worse. For Felix, “he could lose himself in speed, as he had once lost himself in violent physical exertion” (Oates, 2017, p. 399). This extreme anticipation becomes addictive and circular from the ring to the car. His car is a refuge beyond himself. In a sense, Felix traverses both time and space. More precisely, Felix traverses time or space distortion. He liberates himself from all problems, past, present, and future.

CONCLUSION

The works of Oates are replete with postmodernist intercultural expressions. She uses the spatial perspective of Heterotopia as a special form to reveal the complex psychological states of the characters in her works from another perspective so that the social criticism of the themes of her works can be deeply reflected. Her thoughts and works traverse the real and the imaginary, the center, and the periphery, in a kind of intersection of time and space, history and future. By comparing Oates’s work to Foucault’s Heterotopia, we not only witness the cruelty of Heterotopia to the heroes and heroines, but we also explore the power relationship behind space. Through Oates’s work, we see the Heterotopia of American society and the hidden social power oppression, gender, racial discrimination, and violence behind it. Therefore, Oates’s greatest contribution to the spatial writing of Heterotopia is that it deconstructs and dismantles the
habitual order of concealed space, highlighting the strength and insight of postmodernist intellectual reflection.

REFERENCES


