Space and Time as Cultural Artifacts: Blackpool as *Heterotopy* and *Heterochrony*

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Claiming for Blackpool the status of an archaeological site requires some justification, not for epistemological reasons – these should be obvious -- but in view of a socio-cultural context which, on the one hand, values more what is remote in time than what is relatively more recent; and on the other hand, gives precedence to "high culture" over the material and symbolic productions linked to the peasantry and the working class. The archaeologists of popular cultures are at a marked disadvantage. Their objects of inquiry were not considered particularly worthy of being chronicled, let alone preserved. Creating archives of popular culture productions is a very recent phenomenon.

At least, thanks to the magnificent scholarship of social historian John K. Walton (1983, 1998), the history of Blackpool since the late seventeenth century is now known in great detail. The successive constituencies of visitors are well documented, as are the kinds of entertainments that attracted them, and the problems which the city had to solve over more than two centuries of profound political, social and technological changes. The nature of the fascination that Blackpool exerted on successive generations of English North-Westerners and beyond certainly deserves some more attention. Spending time in Blackpool, even a single day, obviously was (and to a certain extent still is, albeit perhaps for different reasons) a very meaningful experience. This experience was generated in great part by a built environment designed to provide pleasures to working-class men and women who could enjoy a brief leisure time far from the daily chores at the factories. For this, they were prepared to spend a sizeable portion of their savings. Contrary to what happened in other places (e.g., Brighton, Coney Island), as well as more recently with the construction of Disneyland types of leisure parks, Blackpool was never conceived and built as a coordinated grand design but emerged piecemeal over time to meet, and at the same time stimulate the demand of an increasing number of vacationers. Exciting entertainments were provided in many forms which are rather well documented. However, the hypothesis that forms the core of this paper is that the particular experience provided by Blackpool was more than the mere contents of the entertainments. This leisure resort offered (and still does offer) an experience of space and time that was

created by its built environment, a place that can be characterized as heterotopic and heterochronic.

The term heterotopy (or heterotopia) is formed by two Greek words: *topos* (place, space) and *heteros* (other). Heterochrony joins together *heteros* and *chronos* (time) with the corresponding semantic effect. These words come from the technical vocabulary of medicine and biology where they designate respectively a deviation from the natural position of an organ, and an evolutionary change in the site at which a particular development occurs. Heterochrony is one kind of developmental explanation regarding the different appearance of two related organisms. Heterotopy was coined by German evolutionary zoologist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919). Stephen Jay Gould more recently popularized these terms referring to changes in spatial patterns of development (1977). These concepts were eventually borrowed from medicine and biology by social scientists and literary scholars to refer to spatial and temporal "otherness" in cultural productions, implying a systematic deviation from the topological norms prevailing in the built environment or, metaphorically, in the literary artifacts of a particular culture. These cultural notions have been first outlined in the works of Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), Henri Lefebvre (1991, 2003), and Michel Foucault (1986, 1998, 2000) in a variety of intellectual contexts and with different epistemological and ideological agenda. They are obviously relative since they presuppose a space and a time with respect to which they are experienced as being not only different but also alien in the sense that other rules apply and form a new conceptual universe to which one has to adapt. Heterotopies and heterochronies are not identical to utopias (the description of physical or social universes that do not exist). Indeed, heterotopy and heterochrony do not refer to space and time as the abstract dimensions of physics but rather to their concrete cultural constructions: space as the built environment that constrains our urban experience and time as it appears in the guise of calendars, time tables and clocks that regulate and synchronize our daily activities. In this sense time and space are cultural artifacts (Kern, 1983). Heterotopy and heterochrony apply to spatial and temporal configurations that are properties of equally concrete environments that are also artifacts embedded within a culture they subvert to some extent.

The culture of space and time that generated industrial cities while Blackpool took shape as a leisure resort is marked by constraining topographical rationalization and strict synchronization. The factory schedules, the industrial premises, the workers dwellings form a universe that is mostly square, repetitive, and uniform, and in which activities are regulated in a clockwork manner with the imperative sounds of sirens punctuating the day. The built environment of the industrial era is characterized by a high degree of redundancy that produces very predictable social behavior. Time being money, there cannot be wandering space or loose timetable. The ultimate goal is to achieve economic results in a most controlled way. Lawrence Stephen Lowry (1887-1976), an artist who painted scenes of the life in the industrial districts of Northern England, has documented these urban landscapes and the mechanization of their inhabitants reduced to a uniform population of stick people. This is the universe with respect to which Blackpool can be construed and experienced as a heterotopy through its different layout and architecture, and the relative temporal looseness this structure created. This is not to say that this leisure resort was not geared toward economic profit, but, like the commercial basis of fairgrounds, its means were markedly different. For the vacationers, experiencing its otherness had indeed a price. Nevertheless it provided a kind of gratification that sustained long periods of local prosperity.

Contrary to a fictional utopia, a heterotopy has a concrete existence. It is an actual place, a temporary or permanent built-environment. Seasonal fairgrounds are examples of temporary heterotopies; leisure resorts such as gambling cities, monumental public baths, or labyrinths are implementations of permanent ones. Circus offers a case in point: its essential nomadic mode of existence is experienced by its audience as the ephemeral staking out of a territory within an urban spatial fabric. It imposes its own topology based on the distinction between zones of admission and zones of exclusion, each one being structured into specialized spaces. The presence of a circus, or a traveling fairground in a city means the irruption of a counter-space that displaces usual activities and imposes a heterotopy, a particular spatial logic to which one has to submit. Time is a necessary component of any portion of structured space. It takes time to walk, or drive from one point to another, or to proceed within a constructed space. Only rarely can two points be joined by moving along a straight line. It remains, though, an imperative of industrial

space which must reduce distances as a parameter of profitability. This is indirectly exemplified by the classical problem of the traveling salesman. But some structures impose a circuitous itinerary. Circus space involves detours and compulsory meanderings within its confines, and imposes its own timing, rhythms, and timetables for the duration of its presence. The time of the labyrinths or the mirror galleries is typical in this respect: it is not the result of an economical ratio time/distance, and the time spent finding one's way is psychologically longer mainly when there is uncertainty as to whether or not the exit is close. The risk of getting lost in the maze is purely subjective because the commercial owners of these contraptions need to process through them as many customers as possible. All these features of circuses and fairgrounds create a contrived universe defined by curves and convolutions, dead ends and entrapments, whose logic is not obvious to the occasional users whose time slows down or accelerates depending on where they find themselves in such seemingly chaotic environments.

Blackpool itself has emerged as a haphazard accumulation of small concerns along the seafront and the adjoining areas. The prominent fixtures of English towns (churches, court houses, town halls) are conspicuously absent from the immediate experience of the urban landscape. They can be found, of course, but they are overshadowed by entertainment and pleasure centres with grand names such as Palace or Gardens, which are not sheltering aristocratic lives but comedians who occasionally mock them. The monumental Blackpool piers do not service cargo boats. Viewed from the promenade, at a distance, sometimes wrapped in mist, they are like light bridges which do not bridge any space, in fact they are bridges to nowhere, except to more palaces of fun that appear all the more attractive as they are remote, suspended above the sea, perhaps immune to the moral order that rules on land. They also provide a paradoxical road that exists only for loafing, perambulating at a slow pace, meeting strangers. Loitering is not prohibited, it is compulsory. They generate the open ended time of the wanderer.

The Blackpool Tower (1894) was a relatively late addition but it is equally at odds with the purposeful industrial buildings that saturate the cities of North Western England. It is ostentatious, like the Eiffel Tower in Paris, a gratuitous technological display, as well as a money-making tool (selling a bird's eye view of the city and its surroundings, plus a number of displays within its shell). But, contrary to the Eiffel Tower, it is not made for

being contemplated from a distance, at the end of a spacious perspective. According to the logic of the fairground, space is money. Perspective is intimidating. The tower emerges from a huge undistinguished building like an oversized beacon on top of it. The whole concern is packed with rooms of various magnitudes, some of them appearing from inside even bigger than the premises that contain them. The entrances are so close to the sidewalks that there is no threshold to cross. The threshold is indeed the bane of the showman who needs to devise strategies to overcome the customers' reluctance to make the first step in front of the crowd's gaze. Here, the crowd flows along the building on a sidewalk that is not oversized. The two wickets where admission tickets are sold are so close to the street that a dozen persons queuing there are contiguous to the sidewalk traffic. Once inside a disproportionate and majestic flight of stairs leads to the upper floors, then to a buffer waiting room where even a small crowd seems to saturate the available space. Today, visitors who have purchased circus tickets are kept there for a while, contemplating the large pictures of famous circus acts which have been featured here. Their panoramic representations of the acts in the whole physical context of the circus space open wide vistas of the past on the wall, seeming all the larger as the visitors can see them only at close range. When people are let in to be directed to their assigned seats, they enter the circus from the upper level and have to walk down to the rows of seats. By that time, they have lost all sense of orientation. This huge inner space, still dimly lit, all decorated in red with gilded cast iron cannot be logically related to the outside appearance of the building. When at the end of the high intensity performance, the dazzled audience is let out of the premisses, it is through the maze of a dark aquarium with full walls of bluish water where huge fishes are slowly moving. When one reaches an exit, it is hard to predict on which side of the building one will find oneself in the outside world because of the convoluted paths that lead out.

Reflecting upon this experience, it appears that several expectations regarding the "normal" use and meaning of space have been frustrated. Let us try and make them explicit in order to articulate the contents of these topological frustrations which construe this experience of space as *heterotopic*. It is possible to identify at least five main properties of the constructed environment of the Blackpool Tower, including the circus, that define its otherness.

First, congruency between the outside appearance of a building and its inner structure is generally expected both in quantitative and qualitative terms. It is usually possible to mentally project from the external architecture a virtual map of the interior, which sustain the anticipation of its inner space. It may be quantitatively based such that the size of the windows gives a hint of the number of rooms, their height and footage, and their disposition along the façade, or the number of floors. It is also common to infer the function of a building from its outside style and decoration. Such a spontaneous mapping from outside in is misleading in the case of the Blackpool Tower building for the first time visitor. [the commensurability principle]

Secondly, in the everyday use of the built environment, once the threshold is crossed, the organization of this inner space is relatively predictable. Large premises, administrative ones or apartment buildings, mostly conform to a cultural model. Moreover, they usually provide visitors with a list of numbered units or even a map from which orientation is made relatively easy. [the predictability principle]

Thirdly, the various parts of this inner space are functionally related according to the general commonsense logic that prevails in the urban culture of the users. [the functionality principle]

Fourthly, while any new experience of a building usually requires some adjustments to its particular spatial implementation, it is relatively easy to remember the spatial pattern of the first itinerary, to find one's way out, and eventually to direct others if they need guidance. [the re-traceability principle]

Finally, the linguistic and semantic resources of English provide the means of referring with precision to such mapping of directions on a virtual map, and to say for instance "take the first stairs on your right and go two floors up. The office you look for is the second on the left." But the clarity of such a statement implies the existence of a common tacit cultural knowledge of the structuring of space that is implied in the language used. Not all cultures have the same representation of space. Consequently, a language that is adapted to refer to a standard spatial structure may be inadequate to describe the experience of a spatial layout that is generated by a "deviant" algorithm. [the representability principle]

The latter feature may be the less obvious but it has been amply documented in comparative psycholinguistics and cultural anthropology (e.g., Levinson 1996, 2003). It

involves propositional representations in which geometrical representations interface with language, mental models based on cognitive maps, dead reckoning systems that rely on the multimodal experience of space and blend haptic, acoustic and visual landmarks with geometric specifications, two-dimensional projections of three-dimensional spaces, and a stock of all-purpose descriptive strategies (Levinson 2003: 286). All these assume a culture-specific conceptualization of space that has been molded by the built environment in which one has psychologically developed. These tacit assumptions are so deeply rooted in the language itself that they are taken for granted. It is only when one wants, or is required to provide a description of a place or object (e.g., a clown's prop, a surrealist sculpture) whose spatial logic is at odds with usual expectations that the inadequacies of the natural language become obvious. Then, one may turn to a graphic representation. However such a representation will necessarily be based on spatial memory. Once again a limitation is encountered because most of the time spatial memories are linguistically mediated. The main criterion of a heterotopy is its indescribability by using the standard words and phrases available in the natural language one speaks. In the absence of a blueprint of the building, a description of the experience of the inner space of the Blackpool Tower could only be an accumulation of local impressions devoid of any overall spatial logic.

A built environment that produces heterotopic effects can do so by design, as in the case of a fairground mirrors gallery, or be the result of independent constraints from which such a spatial otherness emerged. There are indeed some degree of overlap between the topological logic of the fairground construction of space and the way in which the spatial organization of the entertainment district of Blackpool has taken shape. For many years the two actually were contiguous since fairground joints used to fill the space between the shore and the seafront buildings with their numerous alveoles and protuberances (Walton 1998). But there are also independent constraints as far as the inner space of the Tower building is concerned. Like the Eiffel Tower, this steel structure stands on four legs joined by four arches, but unlike the Paris building this supporting structure is not designed to be contemplated from the outside at a distance. It forms the shell of the circus arena and its surrounding circular rows of seats, the last ones (and least expensive ones) being located just under the arches. Lavatories are accessed by steep and

narrow stairways. The general radial symmetry of the inner space makes it difficult to orient oneself within the circus space even by using some landmarks like the main food outlet or the position of the circus band. The rectangular building within which the basis of the tower is embedded provides room for the artists and animal quarters, the machinery that can transform the ring into a water filled tank with fountains, and the entrances and exits corridors which meander through and between other entertainment spaces such as an oversized ballroom, an aquarium, a museum, several restaurant and shopping areas, and the elevators which lead to the upper levels of the tower, which included until recently a zoo, and various exhibit and play concerns, to finally reach the observatory platform at the top. By necessity, the economy of space constrained the logic of the layout and created a unique entanglement of controlled itineraries linking the specialized spaces to each other, and these spaces to the exterior and to their service areas.

Most of the remarks that have been made with respect to the kind of space produced by the Tower building, also apply to the whole interface between Blackpool and its successive waves of visitors since this seaside resort started attracting holiday makers. Many of the fundamental oppositions that defined the usual urban environment from which these visitors came from (and to which they returned) were subverted by the spatial organization of Blackpool's particular layout, at least on the band of land that runs along the seaside with a variable depth. Schematically, this space can be represented as a line that is not straight but repetitively curving in to form alveoles or curving out to create protuberances. Both are designed to capture the attention of the passerby, to slow down the flow of the crowd and to entice individuals within that particular dead-end space, let it be a fortuneteller exiguous "salon" or a prawn selling stand that protrudes on the sidewalk. The same opportunities for deviating from a straight path will repeat itself after a few steps. The density of information at each nook and cranny is such that it is not possible to mentally represent the structure of this space as a functionally organized whole like the global pattern of a regular city. Time goes faster when an overload of information saturates the attention while it is perceived as being slow when there is a lack or low level of information. Some of the alveoles, like the piers for instance, are literally "time guzzlers". After an exhausting day and evening of making the most of it, the

visitors yearn for a good rest; they do not go home but usually to their temporary dwelling, a room at a bed and breakfast where they are spared the domestic chores.

The experience of space is not purely visual and kinesic. It involves other sensorial modalities: haptic (touch), acoustic and olfactory. The lack of industrial activities and its immediate proximity to the sea conferred to Blackpool a distinctive smell compared to the coal burning smog that blanketed the big cities. The many food outlets added various olfactory accents to the experience of perambulating along the sidewalks. Crowded spaces reduced personal distances with strangers and induced social and physical promiscuity. Between the sea and the hawkers, the various musical tunes both leaking from the buildings and produced in open air, contrasted with the noisy factories and the repetitive patterns of sound that produced the sirens and the machineries. These sensorial experiences, and the layers of memories they usually evoke, are quantifiable qualities of the built environment. Space as artifact has smells, sounds, and touch that may indeed define it as a heterotopy as much as its visual impressions and the negotiations of its inner paths. So does the experience of time when the straight line is no longer an imperative, let alone a possibility.

A built environment which is the result of multiple, uncoordinated enterprises claiming a portion of space as a money making territory whose resources are purely semiotic or symbolic, is as interesting for the archaeologists of human cultures as a grandly designed layout. Historically, Blackpool "entertaining" seaside band has emerged as a mostly chaotic pattern created by autonomous agents with variable, but generally minimal interferences from the City Council. John Walton (1998) has retraced this dynamic over the last two centuries, and has explained this particular feature of Blackpool by the fact that the seafront area was not in the hands of a single landowner, as was the case for other seaside resorts, but was fragmented into small farms and fishermen's dwellings. Those who, like the Clifton family, thought of developing Blackpool on a grand scale were detracted from their project when it became obvious that the railway would increase the inflow of working class holiday makers. Archaeologists can make the inventory of what is left from this pattern of development and the specific cityscape and urban layout it generated, and try to preserve the traces of this unique

dynamic which seems to be still at work on the Golden Mile, with its blending of premises and fairground constructions.

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