Introduction: Property and Heterotopia

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We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.

—Michel Foucault (1967) 1984

Aided by the critical wisdom of *Novel*'s editorial board, I selected the essays for this special issue from a pair of conferences sponsored by the journal. That was in truth the sole institutional connection between the two events. Challenged to organize a one-day symposium on any topic having to do with novel studies, a committee of PhD students at Duke designed such an event in response to the recently coined term *Anthropocene*, a coinage for the geologic period during which human activities have had global impact on earth's ecosystems. In its letter inviting its chosen speakers for this symposium, the planning committee asked speakers to address the following questions:

How has the novel contributed to the narrative genres and forms that we use to tell the story of the Anthropocene, and how—in turn—does the story of the Anthropocene ask us to reconsider these narrative genres and forms as reconceptualizing the human environment? How do we bring this concept to bear on novel studies as a product of contemporary discourse that calls for critique? In looking at the history and/or theory of the novel as a response to the history of the earth, do we discover new possibilities for imagining our relation to the real?

The essays by Tobias Boes and Matthew A. Taylor were first delivered as papers at that symposium, held at Duke in October 2013.

The following spring, Vince Pecora generously hosted the second biennial meeting of the Society for Novel Studies at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. As the editor of the SNS's official journal and one of the sponsors of this high-quality event, I was intrigued by the coincidence that, within the same year, two different planning committees for quite separate events independently decided on such closely related conference themes. Pecora's call for papers specified that the SNS conference would aim

at something like a reconstruction of the entire nexus of land and the novel from the ground up, including broader considerations of political theology and conflict, the cosmopolitan and the indigenous. The panel topics are intentionally diverse, ranging from specific historical-geographical moments (that is, using a somewhat different figuration of Bakhtin's chronotope*) to broader considerations of the lands in and of the novel.*

The coincidence seemed to call for this special issue. After soliciting the remarkably insightful SNS conference keynote addresses by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Ursula K. Heise, I selected papers by Antoine Traisnel, Leila Mansouri, Nasser Mufti, and Mario Ortiz-Robles from the rich diversity of those delivered. As his title suggests, Ngũgĩ's paper (which appears here in lecture form) offers a heterotopic perspective on contemporary society. To provide a sense of what sort of composite statement readers should expect from essays about the land that novels ask us to consider real, I shall develop Ngũgĩ's allusion to the brief but powerfully suggestive essay by Foucault quoted at the beginning of this introduction, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias."

In that essay, Foucault is characteristically less interested in the spaces that cultures designate as real, for, as he says, "we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not super-imposable on one another" (3). He also chooses not to focus on "fundamentally unreal" utopian spaces that have a "relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society." Instead, Foucault devotes full attention in this one brief essay to what he defines as "heterotopia," "other spaces" that simultaneously represent, contest, and invert "the other real sites that can be found within the culture" (3). On reading Ngũgĩ's essay, "A Globalectic Heterotopia," I was struck by the uncanny appropriateness of Foucault's concept as a model for this special issue as a whole, as, that is, a single collection of essays, each of which explains how different novels represent, challenge, and invert the "real sites that can be found within the culture."

Let us briefly consider in Foucault's account of these "other spaces" the par-allels between the relation of real spaces to their heterotopic doubles and the relation of the land occupied by historically situated readerships to the land that becomes visible in the novels of their respective moments. By drawing this comparison, I want to suggest that the novel is not inherently any more hetero-topic than the mirror but that this dimension of both phenomena depends on the eye of the reader/beholder to determine what is visible. "In the mirror," Foucault explains, "I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent" (4). By putting one in a space that simply does not exist, the world of the mirror should qualify as utopian. But the mirror also exists in reality the moment that we take up the gaze coming toward us from the other side of the glass and reconstitute ourselves in the place where we are actually situated invisibly before the mirror. The mirror makes the real space we occupy in order to look in the mirror at once absolutely real, in continuity with the spaces that surround it, and unreal and imperceptible until it "pass[es] through this virtual point which is over there" (4). To my eye, this fascinating illustration of the interaction of real and heterotopic space refreshes the tired image of the novel as a mirror of society.

It does so by rearticulating the traditional notion of the mirror as a passive reflection of reality by means of the logic embodied in the Lacanian figure of "the mirror phase," the process of reflection by which a child is compelled by his image

in the mirror to misrecognize that image as its true self, a self-contained whole. In doing this to the child, the image in the mirror also significantly alienates the nascent individual from the partial self supported by the environment on which it actually depends. Does the novel, like the mirror, provide the means of locating ourselves within a similarly inverted world in which we occupy the front and center? If so—and the concept of reader identification, whose history corresponds exactly to that of the novel, seems to suggest as much—then what happens to the background for the image of humanity as both undergo historical change?

Karl Marx had insisted that to address this question one could not think in terms of gradual or progressive change. To the contrary, one must confront a complete inversion of the very ground on which humanity has planted its collective image. In chapter 19 of volume 1 of *Capital*, Marx began turning the corner from critiquing the practice of wage labor to imagining a positive alternative to what he saw as a dehumanizing exchange, when he proposed that to refer to "the value of labour-power" is to invert the concept of "value." As the result of the inversion, "'the value of land' becomes its [own] contrary." That is to say, the value of land becomes the quantitative value assigned to property. According to this well-known argument, the phrase "the value of labour-power" substitutes an abstraction, in the form of the amount of money a person can demand in exchange for labor, in place of the quality of human effort that it takes to produce something. This substitution does no end of harm when it encourages people to imagine the cost of a given product without regard for the extraction of vital energy that put it in our hands.

It is at this moment in his account of surplus value that Marx traces this inversion of vital human energy and inanimate objects back to the concept of property, the principle by which "the value of land" had once displaced "the land" on which people lived in common, just as "the value of labour" was, during his moment, displacing human energy. "The value of labour" was, as he put it, "an expression as imaginary as the value of the earth" (677). From this, it would seem to follow that the novel written with this inversion in mind would use an account of the impossible event to expose the fundamentally fictional character of property. Virtually all the essays in this collection demonstrate the ingenious means by which different novels do so. If property appropriates for the few the resources once available to everyone, then the world made of property cannot provide a solid basis for the self, much less for social relationships. Arriving at this point, we must read the novel with this question in mind: once it exposes this inversion of real for imaginary space, can the novel imagine alternative ground for human beings to stand on?

The two keynote addresses suggest that novels not only can but do exactly that. Ngũgĩ's paper offers an Alice-through-the-looking-glass explanation of what it was like to write a novel that reflects on everyday cultural experience from the perspective of the unreal space of prison as well as how that society starts to resemble the prison and the prison, the world. Heise's concept of "terraforming for urbanists" argues that the inversion Foucault describes is now actually happening and, as Ngũgĩ's experience suggests, is well on its way to inverting the phantasmic and the real. Thus, it would seem, to put ourselves front and center as the image of man (in

Bakhtin's sense),[1] human beings have since the Industrial Revolution (perhaps even as far back as the beginning of agriculture) been reshaping the planet to supply the material and serve as the appropriate background for the lives they imagine themselves to be living on a mass scale. By means of this process, the space in the mirror has materialized.

The essays that follow are arranged in chronological order. But rather than understand this sequence as a record of changing relations between land and the novel, I would prefer that readers see them as a fractured and here artificially reassembled mirror, more like a museum or a cemetery than a developmental process. As such, they show that the pieces of the mirror form a fundamentally composite object of knowledge. If successful, such a way of reading the essays that follow would be very much in keeping with the present moment in the history of the concept of land when, as Foucault describes it, "our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein" (1).

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[1]   In the literary chronotope, Mikhail Bakhtin explains, "[t]ime, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible" (84). Time, in other words, becomes what Georg Lukács calls "description," while space—or what might be called spacing—"becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (Bakhtin 84). As such, the literary chronotope "determines to a significant degree" not only distinctions between literary genres but also a specific "image of man" that inhabits it (85).